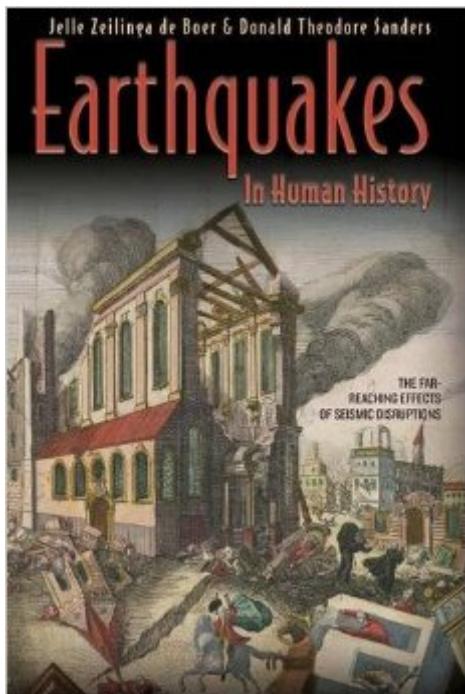


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Earthquakes In Human History: The Far-Reaching Effects Of Seismic Disruptions



Synopsis

On November 1, 1755--All Saints' Day--a massive earthquake struck Europe's Iberian Peninsula and destroyed the city of Lisbon. Churches collapsed upon thousands of worshippers celebrating the holy day. Earthquakes in Human History tells the story of that calamity and other epic earthquakes. The authors, Jelle Zeilinga de Boer and Donald Theodore Sanders, recapture the power of their previous book, Volcanoes in Human History. They vividly explain the geological processes responsible for earthquakes, and they describe how these events have had long-lasting aftereffects on human societies and cultures. Their accounts are enlivened with quotations from contemporary literature and from later reports. In the chaos following the Lisbon quake, government and church leaders vied for control. The MarquÃ¡s de Pombal rose to power and became a virtual dictator. As a result, the Roman Catholic Jesuit Order lost much of its influence in Portugal. Voltaire wrote his satirical work *Candide* to refute the philosophy of "optimism," the belief that God had created a perfect world. And the 1755 earthquake sparked the search for a scientific understanding of natural disasters. Ranging from an examination of temblors mentioned in the Bible, to a richly detailed account of the 1906 catastrophe in San Francisco, to Japan's Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, to the Peruvian earthquake in 1970 (the Western Hemisphere's greatest natural disaster), this book is an unequaled testament to a natural phenomenon that can be not only terrifying but also threatening to humankind's fragile existence, always at risk because of destructive powers beyond our control.

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Customer Reviews

Despite prior knowledge, historical or projected, an earthquake is an unexpected, hence, immediate experience for which most people are unprepared. I've been through a couple myself and can say I really didn't know what was going on in the first few seconds. And the after-shocks can go on for several days. Hollywood has made great use of this element of surprise to create some visually sensational though at times silly movies: "San Francisco" (1936), "The Ten Commandments" (1956), "Earthquake" (1974), to name a few. The real stories of earthquakes and their immediate as well as lasting impacts on the course of human events is fascinating and worth your time to understand. That is the focus of the 2005 collaborative work, "Earthquakes in Human History," by Jelle Zeilinga de Boer and Donald Theodore Sanders. Not only is the book entertaining reading but is still very much relevant to current global events. The first premise of the book is that throughout human "recorded" history earthquakes have had both immediate disruptive effects but, as time has passed by, have also had social and cultural impacts. After a fairly basic explanation of the underlying causes of earthquakes as the results of plate tectonic movements, i.e.

I have a baccalaureate degree in geology with an emphasis in paleontology, and although I have never actually used the degree, I enjoy reading about various aspects of geology. Earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunamis, all of which are interrelated phenomena, are particularly intriguing as they so often impact human society where ever they occur. Probably one of the most poetic and stirring artifacts of this very fact are the ancient footprints of two of what are believed by some to be our prehistoric ancestors, preserved in the ash of a volcanic eruption at Leotoli in Tanzania, Africa. De Boer and Sanders' book, Earthquakes in Human History goes a long way to pulling together the geology and sociology of various seismic events through recorded time. Without a doubt the frailty and vulnerability of the human being is graphically demonstrated in the face of these catastrophic events. The authors begin by examining ancient literature for evidence of earthquakes and earthquake damage in human terms. They look to the authors of the Biblical narrative for evidence of seismic activity in the Levant, and its effects on the course of history there. Although many of the stories they analyze are very likely to have seismic components irrespective of their ultimate cause, I think that some might well be attributable to volcanic explosions as well. Although not familiar with the geologic activity in the area beyond its part in the rifting activity in the Afar triangle in Africa, I believe that volcanoes are customarily associated with such rifts. Certainly they are in the mid-Atlantic system of which Iceland is a part and in the Rift Valley in Africa itself. Although the Levant/Dead Sea portion is considered a "failed" arm of the rifting system, it might still partake of volcanism.

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