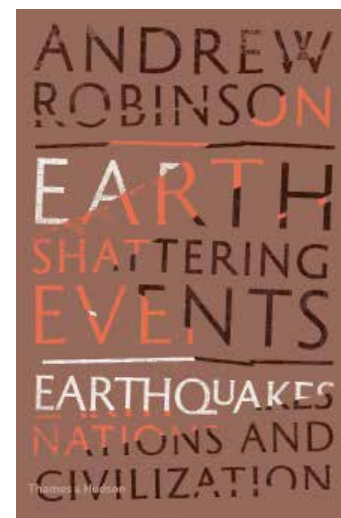


BEHIND THE BOOK

Andrew Robinson's recent book about earthquakes benefited greatly from titles across a wide range of the Library's collections, from Horace Walpole's letters to Japanese government reports



Andrew Robinson's *Earth-Shattering Events: Earthquakes, Nations and Civilization* (2016).

The complex impact of earthquakes on nations – the subject of my book 'Earth-Shattering Events' (Thames & Hudson, 2016) – involves not only history and archaeology, but also economics, philosophy, literature and art, as well as science and technology. I was surprised – and pleased – to find books in the Library relevant to every one of these fields and to all parts of the world, including even earthquakes in London

◆ **The Voyage of the Beagle** by Charles Darwin (London 1839). S. Science (Gen.). In Darwin's classic account of his global researches on HMS Beagle in 1831–6 the naturalist notes, remarkably, that an earthquake in Chile in 1835 was the most 'deeply interesting' sight of his entire journey. It led him to speculate graphically that a similar earthquake in Britain would inevitably destroy the nation's prosperity. This set me thinking about whether or not Darwin was right.

◆ **Apocalypse: Earthquakes, Archaeology, and the Wrath of God** by Amos Nur with Dawn Burgess (Princeton 2008). T. Archaeology (Gen.).

Amos Nur, born and brought up in Israel, became a professor of geophysics at Stanford University, located on top of the San Andreas Fault. Fascinated by the geological evidence for ancient earthquakes at sites such as Jericho and Mycenae, and biblical references to earthquakes, he aims to persuade sceptical archaeologists of seismicity's cultural importance in this original book.

◆ **The Letters of Horace Walpole, vol.2**, ed. Peter Cunningham (9 vols., Edinburgh 1906). Biog. Walpole.

In early 1750, London experienced a significant earthquake, followed by a mildly destructive one. A rumour then spread

of a third earthquake that would destroy the city. Many Londoners decamped to the country or spent the night outdoors; preachers called for repentance; natural philosophers started the science of earthquakes. The most reliable witness – and the most entertaining – was Horace Walpole in his letters to a country friend from his house near St James's Square.

◆ **The Lisbon Earthquake** by T.D. Kendrick (London 1956). S. Volcanoes &c. For a century or so after the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 – which provoked Voltaire to write *Candide* – the catastrophe was as resonant an image as the destruction of Pompeii by Vesuvius. Then memories of it began to fade. This book, written by the director of the British Museum for the earthquake's bicentenary, is still the most informative account.

◆ **Writings 1902–1910** by William James (New York 1987). Philosophy. The world's most famous earthquake, in San Francisco in 1906, started a fire that destroyed three-quarters of the city. Yet within a decade San Francisco made an extraordinary recovery. This resilience and creativity is not easy to explain, but I think a clue lies in the writings of psychologist William James, an east coaster who experienced the earthquake by chance. Instead of fear, '[My] emotion consisted

wholly of glee and admiration ... "Go it," I almost cried aloud, "and go it *stronger!*"

◆ **The Great Earthquake of 1923 in Japan** by the Bureau of Social Affairs, Home Office, Japan (Tokyo 1926). S. Volcanoes &c.

The devastation of Tokyo and Yokohama by earthquake and fire in 1923 was comparable with that caused by the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. But, like San Francisco, Tokyo was rebuilt within about a decade. This official report poignantly documents the disaster and the recovery, while also offering ominous hints of Japan's path to war in the 1930s.

◆ **The Death of Mao: The Tangshan Earthquake and the Birth of the New China** by James Palmer (London 2012). H. China. In China, the appalling Tangshan earthquake in 1976 literally shook the death-bed of Mao Zedong in Beijing. Mao's death about a month later prepared the way for the economic transformation of China. Although his death was the proximate cause, the earthquake was the catalyst, as the government's incompetence in dealing with the earthquake catastrophe exposed Mao's Cultural Revolution as a sham. China-based Palmer's pioneering research includes interviews with earthquake survivors.



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