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“... which will not have been more
terrible at Sodoma and Gomorra.”

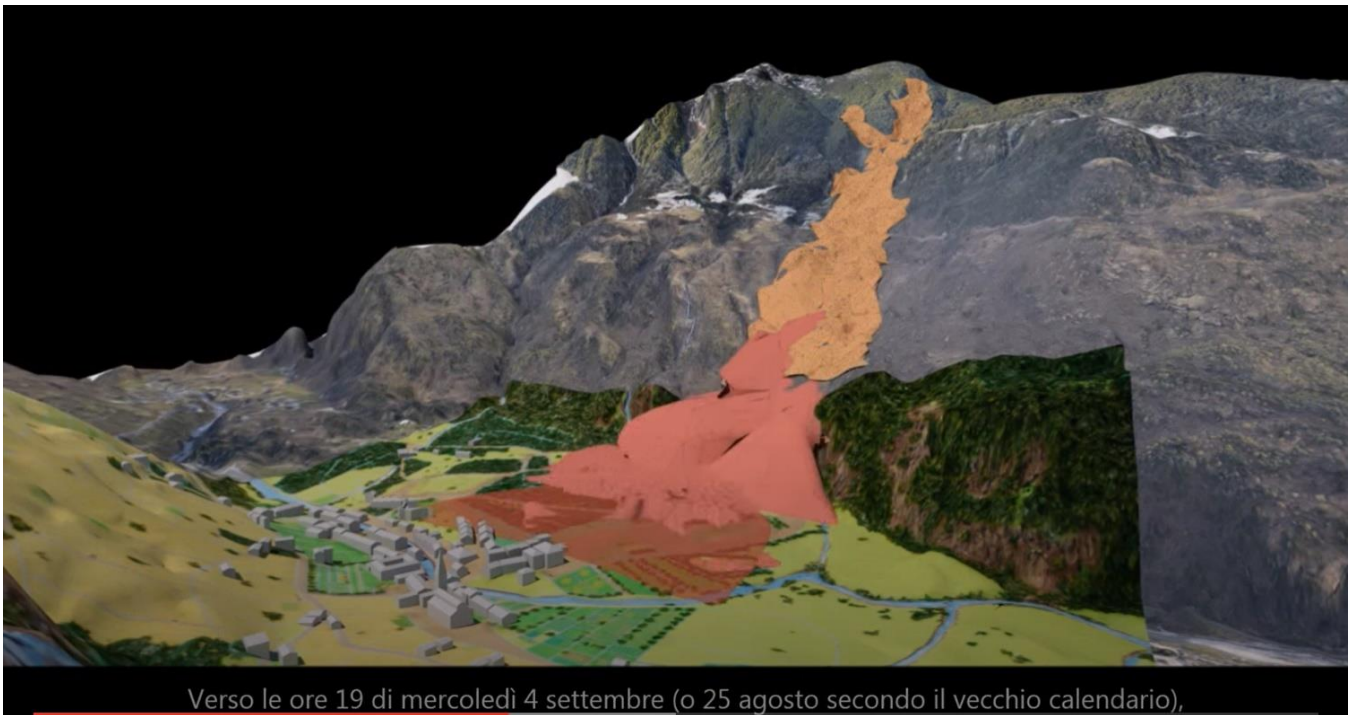
—Unknown (1618) [Editor added]



History of Geology

September 4, 1618: The landslide of Plurs

- By [David Bressan](#) on September 4, 2011
It's not possible to describe/



Verso le ore 19 di mercoledì 4 settembre (o 25 agosto secondo il vecchio calendario),

Figure 1: Piuro Frana, population 2,500 souls (est.) September 4, 1618 (old calendar August 25, 1618) [Plurs] <https://youtu.be/c54iqxAeg10>. Commune Piuro. [Added by the editor from the video depiction.]

*The unspeakable power of god/
So he on the evening of the 25 August/
Terrible has done in this valley to the place of Plurs/
Where a part of the mountain was taken down/
Just on target of Plurs/*

(Anonymous, Chiavenna 26 August 1618)

The 25 August 1618, after our modern calendar the 4 September, was the first sunny day after a rainy period from the 15 to 20. August, and the inhabitants of the [village of Plurs](#) (former Swiss city, today Italian, near present day Piuro) in the shadow of the Monte Conto, enjoyed the weather.

[[See video](#) describing the avalanche by the present-day town of Piuro.]



Figure 2: Piuro Frana, population 2,500 souls (est.) September 4, 1618 (old calendar August 25, 1618) [Plurs] <https://youtu.be/c54iqxAeq10> . Commune Piuro. [Added by the editor from the video depiction.]

The mining for talcum, by locals called Lavazzi [stone] and appreciated for its fire resistance, found in the flanks of Monte Conto had brought for centuries a humble wealth to the region. 500m above the village the horizontally disposed talcum layers in the gneiss were excavated in a very careless way - no boles were used in the mines, and no material was relocated in the tunnels to support the overlying mountain, even the authorities never controlled the security of these improvised quarries.

Instabilities, like fissures in the rocks and rumours coming from the mountain were noted during the last years, but not considered threatening. Local chronicles tell that before July 25, 1618 *"the mountain [is] always torn [apart], its even open and 10 years ago [it was] fissured."*

The 25 August strange phenomena's were reported, the soil shacked and fissure opened just under standing persons, from the inside of Monte Conte loud "bangs" were heard, bee swarms flee from the forest or felt dead from the sky, cows left their pastures and in some places an intensive stench of sulphur laid in the air.

Fortunat Sprecher zu Bernegg, commissar of the nearby village of Claven (modern Chiavenna) reported after the catastrophe: *"After midday there began rock falls and debris flows went down, destroying some vineyards at Chilan"* (located southeast of Plurs).

Bartholomäus Anhorn, pastor of Claven: *"At 4 o'clock in the afternoon a rock fall of the mountain of Conte happened, from the side were the Lavazzi are mined."*



Figure 3: September 4, 1618: The Landslide of Plurs, a man-made disaster, kills up to 2,500 townspeople due to negligent talc mining practices. [Added by the editor from the video depiction.]



Figure 4: Xylographic print by Jeremias Gath, Augsburg 1618 (figure from HAUER 2009).

At midnight the landslide occurred, smashing the entire village of Plurs and killing estimated 1.000 to 2.500 people, there were only six "survivors", being the fatal night not in the affected area.

Anhorn: *"It was torn out [the mountain], but not so much, until the beginning of the dark of night. Then from the mountain the greatest part broke out with great rumour, and has buried completely the beautiful place with the small village of Chilan."* Eyewitnesses' stories report the terrible sound, a large dust cloud with "lighthenings" and a "strange, stinking vapour".

Sprecher mentions regarding the dust cloud *"even if I was at a half of hour distance of Plurs, my hat become covered by the raised dust. The river Mara was dammed by the Rufi [landslide] landslide for one and a half hours. The landslide at many places is 5 Spiess [ca. 30m, modern thickness estimates range between 8 to 10m] thick and you can't see any spire of a church."*

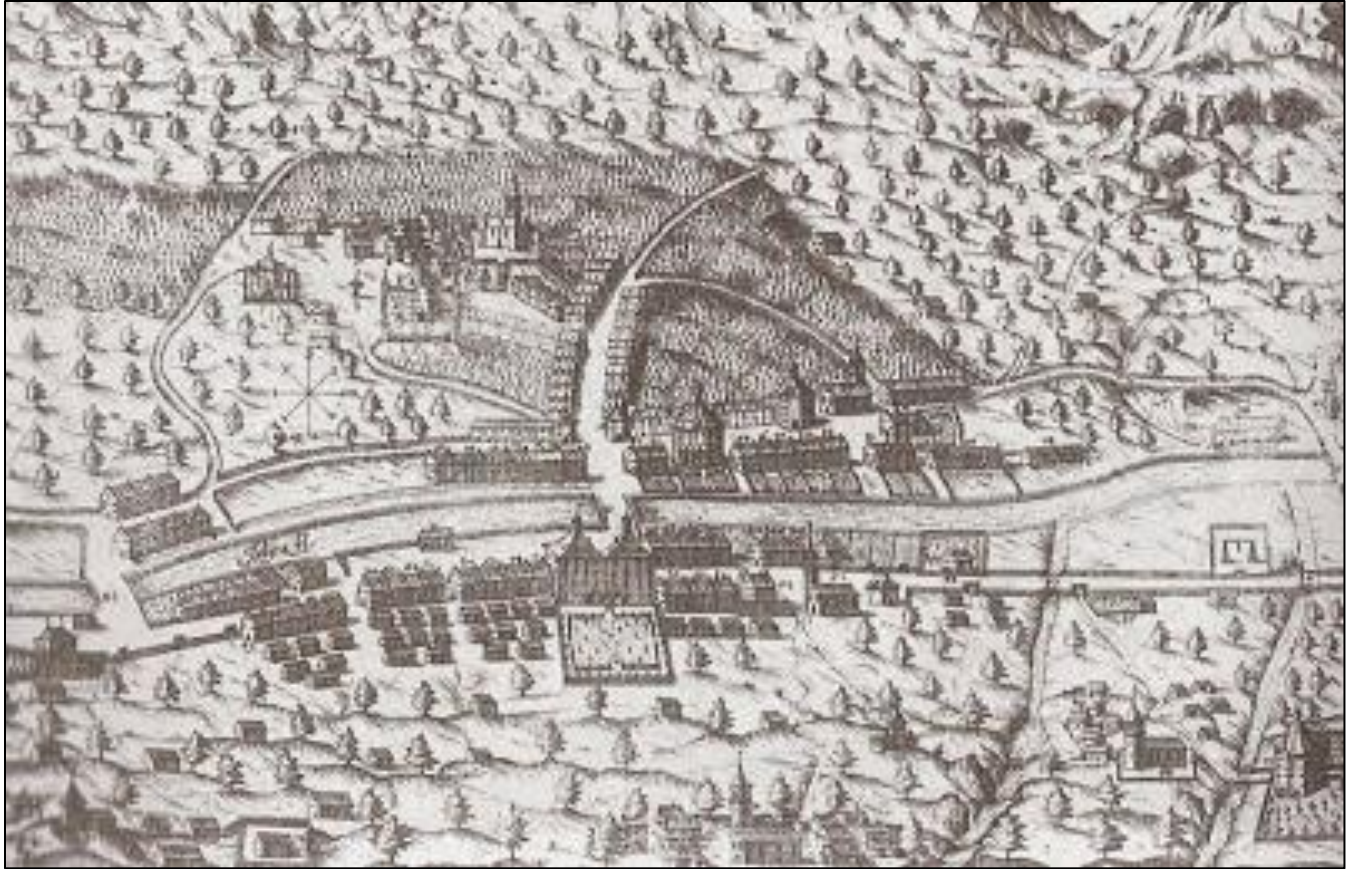


Figure 5: Print by Johann Hardmeyer, Zurich 1618, depicting Plurs **before** and after the landslide (figure from HAUER 2009).



Figure 6: Figure 3: Print by Johann Hardmeyer, Zurich 1618, depicting Plurs before and **after** the landslide (figure from HAUER 2009).

It's interesting to note that after the disaster rumours were put in circulation, depicting the inhabitants of Plurs corrupted by their wealth.

The clergyman Francé tells the story "*of an earthly paradise with all sorts of lusts*", and the disaster is "*an example of the fury of god above sins*", then "*the peaks of the mountains, who raised behind Plurs, felt down and the entire place [...] with all people became buried in night and terror.*"

A more naturalistic approach is tried by E.G. Happel in his *"Größte Denkwürdigkeiten der Welt"* (The greatest wonder on world, 1683-1689):

"What a large earthquake can do, the small city of Pleurs can testimony [...] it laid under a steep rock wall and there were much rich and noble people. In the year 1618, the 25. August on the old calendar, with sunset, that great overhanging rock was torn apart by a might sub terrestrial force and thrown on the city, the greatest part of it buried and destroyed with all churches, houses and palaces which were abundant.

It was such a rock piece, that thousand of people couldn't possibly move it and so Pleurs was beaten in the earth, nothing as some houses and a small church, so near, and yet untouched, could be seen after the fall.

No living soul could escape from it, and it's impossible to see were the city once was situated. But it was situated on the river called Mera, who was so obstructed by the fallen boulders that the water grow in height and so another city - named Claven - was threatened with doom. But God finally showed to the water a way nearby the mentioned city - so it was saved."

Today nothing reminds the old Plours, still buried under the landslide - the area today is used for pasture and agriculture use. Only chronicles tell of two recuperated items in 1767 and 1861: the bells of a church were found in the debris.

Bibliography:

HAUER, K. (2009): Der plötzliche Tod. Frühneuzeitliche Bergstürze in den Städten Salzburg und Plurs kulturhistorisch betrachtet, LIT Verlag: Münster-Hamburg-Berlin-Wien-London-Zürich: 241

HÖFLER, H. & WITT, G. (2010): Katastrophen am Berg - Tragödien der Alpingeschichte. Bruckmann Verlag: 144



Figure 7: Eberhard Werner Happel. (1683, 1689). Of the sudden change in the well-known place of Plurs in the mountain, two volumes. Printed for Augspurg / by Lucas Schultes / In laying Daniel Mannesser copper engraver.

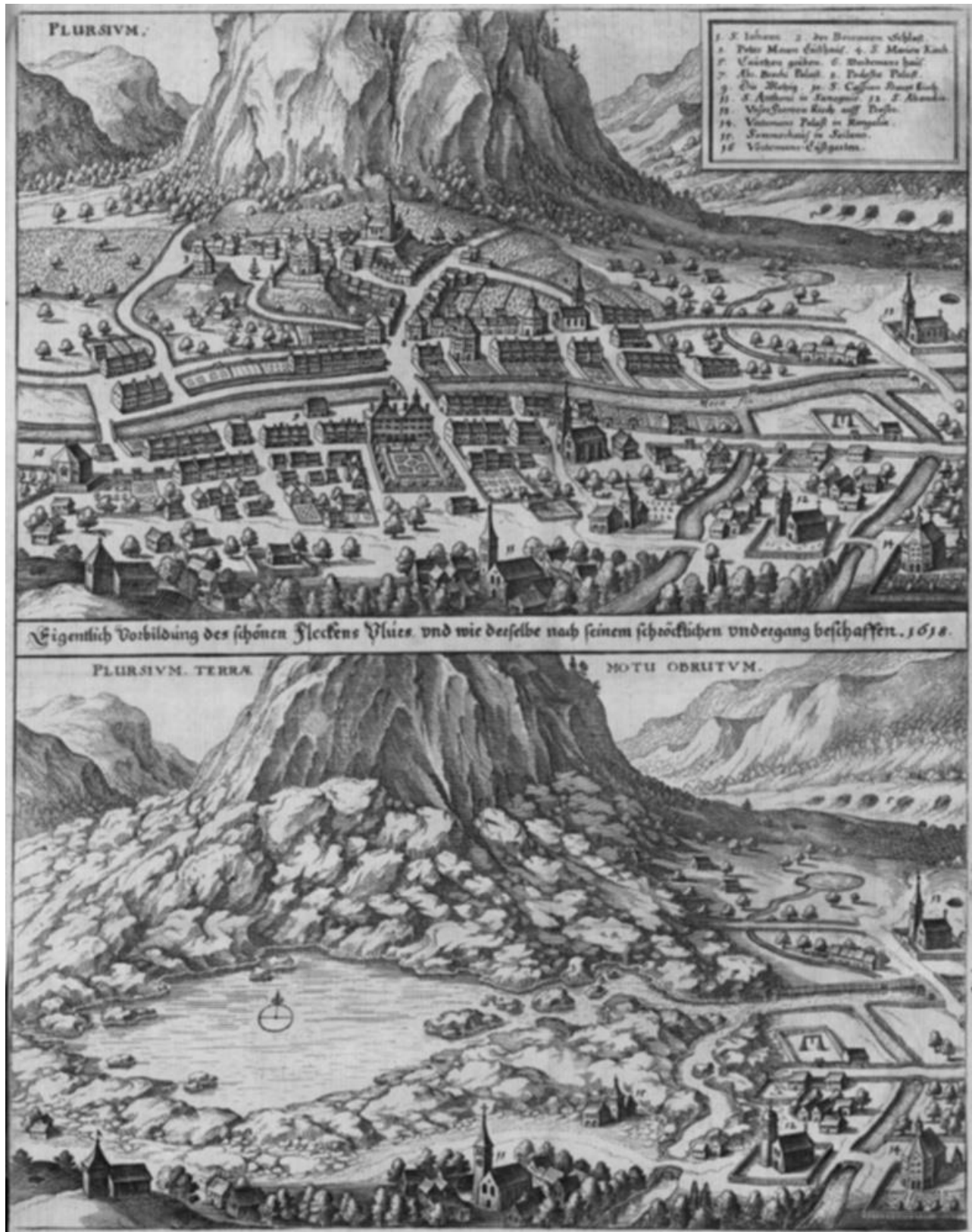


Figure 8: Matthäus Merian. (1642, 1654). Plurs before and after the landslide. Illustration from Martin Zeiller, *Topographia Helvetiae*. [Added by the editor for a fuller record of these events.]



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Of the sudden change in the well-known place of Plurs in the mountain

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Great and terrifying news newspaper / Of the sudden change / deß
 well known patches of Plurs ^[1] in Bergel / and common three Bünnten / Like a sudden ruina
 Anderseytes deß Berges surrendered / and completely covered the whole spot in an instant
 repealed / covered / discarded and executed / happened in this 1618th year.



D On August 25th old or
 Sep. November Newes Calenders
 Evenings between day and night
 / Almighty God has demonstrated
 his great power and violence /
 and wanted to demonstrate his
 great power and violence in the
 rich spot of Plurs / in which he
 forgave and allowed a ruina to

come down from a mountain on the other hand / even
 more secure than a Boltz of a longing / attacked the whole
 patch in an instant / yes completely lifted / covered /
 discarded / and thus added / which will not have been
 more terrible at Sodoma and Gomorra / then such huge
 buildings of churches / palaces and other houses / when it
 was erbawt / just not some ground / stone or footsteps /
 that one would see / this or that building was standing
 there or there / yes someone / who had not previously
 seen this place / the spot / was not to be discussed / that
 ever a lot Buildings stood there who / then on the Seyten /
 since the churches of Sant Johann stood and was built on
 a mountain / it is lower than elsewhere / so that the water
 or the river / the Mera facing its course there / that it all
 opens up the same

seyten / thrown over from the
 ground up on the other beings
 / and burying everything / that
 at this moment / man / Weyb /
 and child at 1500. souls / when
 one may be in danger / are
 miserably depraved / and at
 the same time one started to
 dig on top / and to search for
 the dead bodies / which one
 can find ready at the same
 time / so it is not possible / that
 in many years one would like
 to get the smallest part / and
 will never for ever / in this
 place can be bawted / So now
 through this from pale vnd
 Ruina the water / so through
 this that the Mera was closed /
 closed / and remained for two
 hours.

All of this at Cleuen has arisen
 in a very big way / and the
 whole night was expected and
 worried for the rest of the night
 / but praise God / has made
 the water by itself / so that God
 never wants to tighten / there
 is more danger of not worrying
 / God Almighty forbade that we
 should be converted and
 moved to redeeming his
 terrible anger / so that we fall
 into his hands / do not realize
 that he suddenly appeals to us
 in the same his fierce anger /
 for the sake of Christ his dear
 Son / amen.

Esaias on the 5th of Capittel.

E In Volck that according to the Lord's word /	As God speaks in the Prophet /	Yes suddenly die from earth both
Wandelt auff earth in every place /	By Esaiam vns report /	Oh that we don't spoil
God forbids vil misery / But a people who eat	God's wrath is kindled / About a people who sin	So last and this terrible beyspil / Carefully look at often vnd vil /
Live safely Have no sin for the penance	In your sake do continue / Without fear they die years ago.	O LORD vmb your grace we ask Turn away the vbel in front of the door /
Whether their happiness is great Will not be released from his punishment /	He will pay her in his grim That over them the mountain invade	And that today we raise the day / Surrender to you with Leyb and Seel.

Printed for Augspurg / by Lucas Schultes / In laying Daniel Mannesser copper engraver.

Text and factual comment (Wikisource)

1. Piuro

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**Von dem plötzlichen vndergang / deß
wol bekandten Flecken Plurs im Bergel
/ vnd gemeinen dreyen Bünnten gelegen /**

unbekannt



Daniel Mannesser, Augsburg, 1618

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Warhafftige vnd erschröckliche Newe Zeittung / Von dem plötzlichen vndergang / deß

wol bekandten Flecken Plurs^[1] in Bergel / vnd gemeinen
dreyen Bünten gelegen / Wie ein blötzlich Ruina
anderseytes deß Berges sich herab gelassen / vnd den gantzen
Flecken in einem Augenblick vberfalen / von grund
auffgehebt / verdeckt / verworffen vnd hingerichtet hat /
geschehen in disem 1618. Jahr.



En 25. seyten / von
August grund an
i Altes hinnüber auff
oder 4. die ander
Septem Seyten
ber geworffen /
Newes vnnnd alles
vergraben / das

D

Calenders Abendts also in disem
zwischen Tag vnd Nacht / Augenblick /
hat der Allmächtig Gott Mann / Weyb /
seine grosse Macht vnd vnd Kind bey
Gewalt erweisen / vnd an 1500. Seelen /
dem reichen Flecken zu als man
Plurs erzeugen wollen / in ohngefahr
dem er verhenget vnd schetzen mag /
zugelassen das sich ein jämmerlich

Ruina andertheils von verdorben sind
einem Berg herab gelassen // vnd man
wellicher als ein Boltz von gleichwol
einer sehnen / in einem angefangen
Augenblick den gantzen obenhero zu
Flecken vberfallen / ja von graben / vnnd
grund auffgehebt / verdeckt die Todten
/ verworffen / vnnd also Körper zu
zugericht / das zu Sodoma suchen / deren
vnnd Gomorra schier nit man gleichwol
schröcklicher wirdt haben allbereit
sein künden / dann solche gefunden / so
gewaltige Gebäw von ist es doch nicht
Kirchen / Palesten vnd möglich / das in
andern Häusern / als es vilen Jahren
erbawt gewesen ist / nur man möchte
nicht einiger grund / stein den geringsten
oder füßstapffen / das man theil bekommen
sehen künde / da oder dort / vnd wol zu
ist das oder jehnes Gebäw ewigen zeitten
gestanden / ja einer / der nimmermehr /
zuvor nicht dises Ort / den an disem Ort
Flecken gesehen hette / kan gebawt
wurde nicht zu bereden sein werden / Also
/ das jemals einiges Gebäw nun durch disen
dort gestanden wer / dann vnfahl vnd
auff der Seyten / da die Ruina das
Kirchen zu Sant Johann Wasser / so
gestanden vnd auff einem durch dises thal
Berglen erbawt ward / ist es die Mera
nidriger als anderstwo / also genandt /

das das Wasser oder der verschlossen
Fluß / die Mera genandt worden / vnd
dasselbst seinen lauff gericht bey zweyen
/ das es alles auff Stunden
derselbigen verharret.

Allhie zu
Cleuen ist sehr
grosser
schröcken
entstanden /
vnd die gantze
Nacht ander
vnglück
erwartet vnd
besorget
worden / aber
Gottlob / hat
solliches
Wasser selbst
den weg
gemacht / also
das Gott ferner
nimmer straffen
will / allhie
mehrs gefahr
nicht zu
besorgen / Gott
der Allmächtig
verleyhe das
wir sollichem

seinem
 erschröcklichen
 Zoren / mögen
 zu warer Büß
 bekehrt vnd
 bewegt werden
 / darmit wir
 jhm in die
 Ruthen fallen /
 auff das Er vns
 nicht in der
 gleichen seinem
 grimmen
 blötzlich
 auffraffe / vmb
 Christi seines
 lieben Sohns
 willen / Amen.

Esaias am 5. Capittel.

EIn Volck das nach deß Herren Wort /	Wie Gott in dem Propheten spricht /	Ja durch Erdtbidem blötzlich sterben /
Wandelt auff Erdt an allem Ort /	Durch Esaiam vns bericht /	Ach das wir nit also verderben /
Das bewart Gott vor vil	Gottes Zoren wird angezündt /	So last vnd diß schröcklich beyspil /

Vnfahl /	Vber ein	Hertzlich
Aber	Volck	betrachten
ein	das sich	offt vnd
Volck	versünd	vil /
welches	/	O HErr vmb
zu mahl	In eygnem	dein Gnad
/	willen thut	bitten wir /
In sicherheit	fortfahren /	Wend ab
Lebet dahin /	Ohn	das vbel
Haben	forcht	vor der
zu der	die	Thür /
Büß	sterben	Vnd das wir
keinen	vor den	heut den tag
sin /	Jahren.	anheben /
Ob denen	Er wird sie in	Vns dir
schwebt das	seim grimm	mit Leyb
Vnglück	bezalen /	vnd Seel
groß /	Das	ergeben.
Werden	vber sie	
auch	der Berg	
seiner	einfallen	
Straff	/	
nicht		
loß /		

Gedruckt zu Augspurg / bey Lucas Schultes / In verlegung
Daniel Mannesser Kupfferstecher.

Text- und Sachkommentar (Wikisource)

1. [↑ Piuro](#)

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