

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of Humanities

"In Quiet Remembrance"?

The Allied Air War and Urban Memory Cultures

in

Kassel and Magdeburg, 1940-1995

by

Jörg Arnold

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
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"IN QUIET REMEMBRANCE"? THE ALLIED AIR WAR AND URBAN MEMORY
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The study examines the long-term impact of World War II bombing on city memory in Kassel and Magdeburg in the period of 1940 to 1995. It investigates contemporary responses to the experience of area bombing, traces the emergence of public memory cultures and assesses their trajectory against the backdrop of political, cultural, and generational change. Drawing on a wide range of source material, the study makes use of Pierre Nora's notion of a *lieu de mémoire* or 'memory place' in order to sketch the narrative contexts and to map the discursive fields in which stories about World War II bombing circulated; to identify their carriers and to assess their social uses. To this end, the study distinguishes between different 'vectors' of memory that revolved around different legacies of aerial warfare: mass death; material destruction; and the confrontation with events outside the range of usual human experience.

Going beyond the dichotomy of 'too little' vs. 'too much' memory that characterises the present debate about the place of the strategic air offensive in the mnemonic landscape of Germany, this study makes contemporary experiences an integral part of the study of memory. It argues that the resident populations of Kassel and Magdeburg experienced the air war as members of a brutalised society whose hegemonic voice was Nazism. They responded to events that were without precedent in living memory by drawing on the repertoire of tropes, significations and practices that were available to them. In short, they used traditional languages in order to integrate catastrophic rupture into a continuum.

The post-war enunciation of memory was not solely determined by considerations of present 'usability' but was situated within longer-standing narrative traditions as well as dense memory milieus. As a consequence, the protagonists of public discourse were not free to construct any narrative they saw fit but had to address, throughout the period, a set of recurring themes such as loss, causation, and meaning.

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List of Abbreviations

AfS	<i>Archiv für Sozialgeschichte</i>
AHR	<i>American Historical Review</i>
AKPS	<i>Archiv der Kirchenprovinz Sachsen</i>
APuZ	<i>Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte</i>
B.Arch	<i>Bundesarchiv</i>
BHE	<i>Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten</i>
CDU	<i>Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands</i>
CEH	Contemporary European History
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DNVP	<i>Deutschnationaler Volksgruppe</i>
DRZW	<i>Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg</i>
FDP	<i>Freie Demokratische Partei</i>
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GG	<i>Geschichte und Gesellschaft</i>
GWU	<i>Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht</i>
HA	<i>Hessische Allgemeine</i>
HN	<i>Hessische Nachrichten</i>
HNA	<i>Hessische, Niedersächsische Allgemeine</i>
HZ	<i>Historische Zeitschrift</i>
IWM	Imperial War Museum
JCH	Journal of Contemporary History
KHM	<i>Kulturhistorisches Museum</i>
KLZ	<i>Kurhessische Landeszeitung</i>
KP	<i>Kasseler Post</i>
KPD	<i>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</i>
KZ	<i>Kasseler Zeitung</i>
KZ	<i>Konzentrationslager</i>
LA	<i>Landesarchiv</i>
LDP	<i>Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands</i>
LDZ	<i>Liberal-Demokratische Zeitung</i>
LHA	<i>Landeshauptarchiv</i>
LKA	<i>Landeskirchenarchiv</i>
MNN	<i>Mitteldeutsche Neueste Nachrichten</i>

NA	National Archives
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NL	<i>Nachlass</i>
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i>
NSV	<i>Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt</i>
OUP	Oxford University Press
POW	Prisoner of War
PWG	<i>Partei Freie Wählergemeinschaft</i>
RAF	Royal Air Force
SB	<i>Sekretariat Bischof</i>
SD	<i>Sicherheitsdienst</i>
SED	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i>
SPD	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i>
StAK	<i>Stadtarchiv Kassel</i>
StAM	<i>Stadtarchiv Magdeburg</i>
StMK	<i>Stadtmuseum Kassel</i>
SVZ	<i>Sozialistische Volkszeitung</i>
TRE	<i>Theologische Real-Enzyklopädie</i>
UCaP	University of California Press
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
USSBS	United States Strategic Bombing Survey
VB	<i>Völkischer Beobachter</i>
VfZ	<i>Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte</i>
V & R	<i>Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht</i>
ZfG	<i>Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft</i>

Introduction

A Poem and an Image

The municipal archive of the North Hessian city of Kassel keeps a small file that mainly consists of different versions of a long poem. The piece is alternatively called, "Thus died my hometown" (*So starb meine Heimatstadt*), "Thus died my hometown of Kassel", or simply "Thus died Kassel".¹ Some versions also add a year or even a precise date to the title, thus locating the 'death' of Kassel in time. The various titles refer to the bombing of the city on 22nd October 1943 when Royal Air Force (RAF) Bomber Command made an indiscriminate area attack against Kassel's densely populated old town. On that night, a fleet of 528 bombers dropped 1,800 tons of high explosives and incendiaries, producing a catastrophic conflagration that destroyed 60% of the built-up environment, rendered 150,000 residents homeless and claimed the lives of at least 5,830 people.² According to a British post-war estimate, the raid also resulted in the production loss for the German war economy of 150 Tiger tanks, 400 to 500 locomotives and 300 heavy guns.³

The attack did not, of course, strike the city out of the blue: it occurred four years into an aggressive war of conquest and annihilation in which the (non-Jewish German) residents of Kassel, as citizens of the German Reich, had played an active part from the very beginning.⁴ The area bombardment of 22nd October 1943 formed part of a strategic

¹ Stadtarchiv Kassel (StAK), S8 C53. *Weltkrieg II. Luftangriff vom 22.10.1943. Literarische Verarbeitung*. For the text plus translation see appendix 1.

² Figures taken from Werner Dettmar, "Kassel im Luftkrieg", in: *Leben in Ruinen. Kassel 1943-1948*. Ed. Magistrat der Stadt Kassel (Marburg: Jonas, 1993), pp. 11-32, here: pp. 18-20. 5,830 is the official figure of the local Chief of Police in his *Erfahrungsbericht* of 7 December 1943. Copy in: StAK S8 C40. An United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS) report from the summer of 1945 puts the death toll for the October raid at 7,000 (plus 500 missing). In: National Archives II (NA II), RG 243 E-6 # 64 (b) k 21 (box 563). A British report of October 1945 speaks of 8,500 fatal casualties on 22nd October 1943. Copy in: StAK S8 B13. Locally, none of these figures have ever been accepted and the death toll is usually put at around 10,000. On the raid see Olaf Groehler, *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1990), pp. 140-7; Werner Dettmar, *Die Zerstörung Kassels im Oktober 1943. Eine Dokumentation* (Fuldabrück: Hesse GmbH, 1983). Compare also David J. Irving, *Und Deutschlands Städte starben nicht. Ein Dokumentarbericht* (Zurich: Schweizer Druck- und Verlagshaus AG, 1963), pp. 194-209.

³ Operational Research Section Bomber Command, report no. s.242: "The Effect of Air Attack on the City and District of Kassel" (Oct., 1945), p. 5. Copy in: StAK S8 B13.

⁴ For the importance of the town as an armaments centre in the eyes of British military planners see the entry on Kassel in *The Bomber's Baedeker*, part I (1944), pp. 381-385. For the impact of bombing on production see the USSBS case studies: USSBS, Munitions Division, Motor Vehicles and Tanks Plant Report no. 7: *Henschel & Sohn A.G.* (Oct, 1945), NA II RG 243 E-6, # 85 (box 704); Ordnance Section, Munitions Division, Plant report no. 3, *Henschel & Sohn G.m.b.H: plant no. 1: gun shops* (Sep., 1945), ibid., # 104 (box 762); Aircraft Division, Aero Engine Plant Report no. 5, *Henschel Flugmotorenwerke* (Sept., 1945), ibid., # 19; Aircraft Division, Air Frames Report no. 8, *Gerhard Fieseler Werke GmbH* (Oct., 1945), in: ibid., # 13 (box 239).

air offensive that was waged by the Western allies to help bring this war to an end.⁵ Nor was the raid the only one against Kassel. Between 1940 and 1945, the city was subjected to 40 air strikes, half of which involved the dropping of several hundred tons of bombs.⁶ But as the one attack that claimed an exceptionally high number of lives and changed the familiar cityscape beyond recognition, the raid of 22nd October has taken pride of place in private as well as public recollections of the 'bombing war', and indeed, World War II as a whole. The very existence and preservation in the local archive of the poem, "Thus died my hometown", is testimony to this telescoping effect.⁷

Following the conventions of popular *Heimat* verse, the poem is of limited interest as a work of art. As a cultural artefact, however, the text offers a fascinating insight into processes of memory formation under the dual impact of the totalising claims of Nazism and the exigencies of total war.⁸ Conceiving of the air raid as a cataclysmic event, the text fuses elements of primary experience with the conceptual frames of Nazism and longer-standing narrative traditions. In so doing, it develops a number of themes that are crucial to local memories of the air war, as this study shall argue.

The different copies of the poem show an astonishing degree of textual variation, while they are evasive about the question of authorship. One copy remarks in an annotation that the piece was written by "an unknown member of the Labour Service (*Reichsarbeitsdienst*)

⁵ The literature on the strategic air war is vast. While the importance of the campaign as a whole is not in doubt, the relative contribution of area bombing to the defeat of the German *Reich* is still a matter of controversy. For concise evaluations see: Thomas Childers, " Facilis decensu averni est': The Allied Bombing of Germany and the Issue of German Suffering", *CEH* 38/1 (2005), pp. 75-105; Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), pp. 101-33; Roger Beaumont, "The Bomber Offensive as a Second Front", in: *JCH* 22,1 (1987), pp. 3-19; Williamson Murray, "The Combined Bomber Offensive", in: *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 51 (1992), pp. 73-94. For recent accounts of the campaign see Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Der Bombenkrieg 1939-1945* (Berlin: Christian Links Verlag, 2004); the contributions of Horst Boog, Klaus A. Maier and Ralf Blank in the official German history of World War II, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, ed. by Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, 9 vols. (Stuttgart: DVA, 1979-2005); Groehler, *Bombenkrieg*; Mark Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars. A New History of Bomber Command in World War II* (London / New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001); Max Hastings, *Bomber Command* (London: Joseph, 1981); Robin Neillands, *The Bomber War. Arthur Harris and the Allied Bomber Offensive* (London: Murray, 2001); Richard J. Overy, *The Air War 1939-1945* (London: Europa Publ., 1980); Roland S. Schaffer, *Wings of Judgement. American Bombing in World War II* (New York: OUP, 1988). On the legal and ethical debate see Earl R. Beck, "The Allied Bombing of Germany, 1942-1945, and the German Response: Dilemmas of Judgement", in: *German Studies Review* (1982), pp. 325-37; Manfred Messerschmidt, "Strategic Air War and International Law", in Horst Boog ed., *The Conduct of the Air War in the Second World War. An International Comparison* (Oxford: Berg, 1992), pp. 298-309; W. Hays Parks, *Air War and the Laws of War*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 310-372; Stephen A. Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower in World War II: The British Bombing of German Cities* (New York, 1997); Roland S. Schaffer, "American Military Ethics in World War II: The Bombing of German Civilians", in: *Journal of American History* 67 (1980).

⁶ See the compilation in Dettmar, "Kassel im Luftkrieg", in: *Leben in Ruinen*, here: pp. 18-20.

⁷ When referring to the poem in general, I shall use the most common title, "Thus died my hometown". When speaking of individual versions, I shall give the title as indicated.

⁸ This attempt to treat popular fiction as a historical document is indebted to Peter Fritzsche, "Volkstümliche Erinnerung und deutsche Identität nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg", in: Konrad H. Jarausch, Martin Sabrow eds., *Verletztes Gedächtnis. Erinnerungskultur und Zeitgeschichte im Konflikt* (Frankfurt / M.: Campus, 2002), pp. 75-97.

who survived the raid of 22nd October".⁹ In 1953, the local *Kasseler Zeitung* credited an "unknown *Kasselner*", i.e. a locally born resident of Kassel, with the composition of the text.¹⁰ Remarkably, of the twenty or so copies deposited in the archive, no two exactly match each other, with variations ranging from minor modifications to the replacement of key semantic elements. Both circumstances indicate that this is a cultural artefact whose mode of dissemination was rather unusual. While there is no evidence to indicate that the poem was reprinted in the Nazi-controlled media during the war, the multiple textual variations point to informal modes of circulation. This is confirmed by a post-war statement of a local resident who, in a letter addressed to the municipal bureau for cultural affairs [*Kulturamt*], declared that she had first learned of the text when staying at an evacuation camp just outside of Kassel in 1943/44. "Many of us copied it out", she wrote.¹¹

Although the date of composition cannot be established with certainty, there are strong indications to believe that the poem was written in close temporal proximity to the events of 22nd October, possibly as early as the following day. One hand-written copy, signed "Kassel, 23rd October 1943", appears to come close to the original version as put into circulation by the poet, as several circumstantial factors, such as the regularity of rhyming couplets and the absence of textual corruption, indicate.¹² There is some evidence to suggest that the poem was composed by the journalist and poet Willi Lindner (1891-1968), who regularly published *Heimat* verse, reports and opinion pieces in the regional Nazi press during the war.¹³

The poem is an elegy of some 81 lines at whose centre stands the notion of death. As the "paradigm of irretrievable loss", the term is employed both metaphorically and descriptively, in relation to the impact of the air raid on the socio-topographical environment as well as in relation to the fate of many residents.¹⁴ On one level, the lyrical I conceptualises the urban environment in the affective category of the *Heimatstadt* or 'hometown', postulating its 'death' in the air raid. On another level, the text also uses the term in its literal sense, emphasising that the area attack of 22nd October 1943 violently terminated the lives of several thousand people. In focusing on the notion of death, the poem points to a central category of the wider memory culture as well. As the "prototype

⁹ StAK, S8 C53. "So starb Kassel"

¹⁰ *Kasseler Zeitung* No. 272 (22-10-53), p. 3: "So starb Alt-Kassel".

¹¹ StAK, S8 C53. Letter of Ms. B. N. to Werner Dettmar, *Kulturamt*, 22-9-83.

¹² Ibid., "So starb meine Heimatstadt Kassel" (version A1). This version will be used as the textual basis for the following discussion. See appendix 1 for a full transcript and translation.

¹³ Compare StAK S8 C51. Elisabeth Lindner to HNA Lokalredaktion, 24-10-2003; Personal correspondence E. Lindner, daughter in law of W. Lindner, with author, 31-8-04; 20-8-04.

¹⁴ Entry, "death", in: Nicolas Pethes / Jens Ruchatz eds., *Gedächtnis und Erinnerung. Ein interdisziplinäres Lexikon* (Hamburg: Reinbeck, 2001), p. 579-82, here: p. 597.

of cultural memory" (Jan Assmann), the commemoration of death occupies centre stage in the local discourse on area bombing in World War II.¹⁵

Structurally, the poem is made up of three parts, an exposition, main body, and conclusion. The exposition puts the events of the night of 22nd October in context. Here, the dominant frame of reference is neither World War II nor National Socialism but local history. Kassel is introduced as an allegorical female being, "Frau Chasalla", who wears a mourning dress on account of the "unspeakable pain" that she "harbours in her walls" (l. 1f.). In anthropomorphising the city, the text not only employs a conventional trope of *Heimat* poetry but also alludes to a local frame of reference that was familiar to many readers. Far from traditional, the allegorical representation of the city as a youthful girl was in fact a late 19th-century invention, which gained wide popularity in the city's millennial celebration of 1913.¹⁶ Likewise, the emphasis on a "thousand years" of urban history in line 5 invoked a whole set of ideas that associated Kassel with beauty, harmony, and continuity.¹⁷ In the poem, this *longue durée* is contrasted with the "annihilation" of a single night—annihilation suffered despite the valiant efforts of "German youths" eager "to protect the *Heimat*" (ll. 3-24).

While the exposition sets the elegiac tone, the main body of the text recounts harrowing scenes of death, agony and crushed hope. In lines 34ff. the reader learns of the fate of three children who have lost sight of their mother. Taking each other by the hand, they look for her in "smoke and fire" only to fall victim to the flames themselves. "Still holding each other, the blond curls scorched / The little feet charred; thus they were later pulled from the rubble", the story concludes. Remarkably, individual scenes offer very little in terms of solace even when dealing with successful rescue. On the contrary, the survival of some is presented as a mere prelude to the death of close kin. Lines 42 to 48 tell the story of a man who rejoices at having saved a woman and a child he takes to be his family. "But woe, not the familiar voice reaches his ear / a stranger he has carried to life", the text continues. When the protagonist turns back he finds that the building has collapsed in the meantime, burying "his dearest, his happiness".

While the main body of the text relates fictionalised episodes from the centre of the conflagration, the concluding section professes to express collective fears and feelings, as the use of the impersonal "one" [*man*] indicates (l. 65). In addition, the conclusion also passes moral judgement and draws lessons from the events. The early versions are

¹⁵ Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 4th ed., 2002), p. 61.

¹⁶ Stefan Schweizer, *Geschichtsdeutung und Geschichtsbilder. Visuelle Erinnerungs- und Geschichtskultur in Kassel 1866 – 1914* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004), p. 239; pp. 15-20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

unequivocal in their moral stance. They blame the disastrous events on "England" and speak of the "hatred" and thirst for "retaliation", which is said to unite "us", the collective:

"The phosphorous flames have destroyed human happiness
As flames of hatred they will fall back on England
The hatred born out of this night
Has finally united us as one community"
(ll. 66-69).

Re-shifting the focus from the experiences of *Kasseler* in the firestorm to the fate of the city as a built-up space, the conclusion ends on a note of unmitigated despair. In the last two lines, the sun is said to rise in "eternal beauty", looking "for a city that she cannot find" (l. 81f.).

The poem accentuates motifs that stand at the centre of many contemporary responses to the experience of area bombing: loss, despair, and fear. Remarkably, the text makes few attempts to mitigate the negativity of the events it describes: dwelling on death, the narrative rarely contemplates the possibility of survival. On a different level, the poem is typical of public recollections of the air war in yet another respect: it substitutes the disparate experiences and memories generated by the area attack with one story about a collective disaster and its consequences. The protagonists of the poem's central section, the three children, the "strong man", the officer, are not individuals but types designed to illustrate a common experience. Closely related to this process of homogenisation is a tendency towards substitution: the most severely affected areas and the worst individual fates stand in for the experience of the city and the urban community as a whole.

While a close reading of the text can help to identify themes in the public conversation on the air war, the archival record also allows for some tentative remarks about the shelf life of this memory artefact and its changing social uses. At least three distinct phases can be distinguished, which offer a first point of orientation to the temporal evolution of the broader discourse as well: the immediate aftermath of the air raid as phase one; the institutionalisation of a post-war memory culture in the 1950s as phase two; and finally, the revival of interest in the air war from the 1980s to the present.

During the weeks and months following the raid of 22nd October 1943, the text appears to have functioned as an alternative source of information and counter-memory to the National Socialist information policy. To be sure, echoes in the poem of certain strands of Nazi propaganda are unmistakable, such as the emphasis on 'hatred', 'retaliation' and 'community'. As such they provide evidence of the extent to which the public sphere of the time, as controlled by the National Socialist regime, interfered with and structured the narrative frames of semi-public views. Arguably more important, however, are the striking

differences between the official emphasis on war, allied crime and perseverance and the poem's focus on death, loss, and despair. "Thus died my home town" gives expression to a sense of disaster and finality that Nazi propaganda sought to avoid at all costs.

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the raid in 1953, the elegy appeared in print for the first time—an indication of the extent to which the semi-public counter narrative of the war years had achieved public recognition under the changed socio-political conditions of the 1950s. When, however, the daily *Kasseler Zeitung* published the poem under the title of, "Thus died Old-Kassel", in its edition of 22nd October 1953, the newspaper did not reproduce the original text but printed a version that was marked by significant omissions and alterations. Leaving out all references to the "hatred of England" and the "thirst for retaliation", the published version ended on a lamentation of the "cruelty" of "this war". Within the context of the overall press coverage of the anniversary, the poem served as a sober antidote to the celebratory rhetoric of 'rebirth', and at the same time affirmed a claim to the status of 'victim of war' for the entire community.

Although the local media did not reprint the text in the following years, the poem gradually attained the status of a historical document worthy of preservation. Starting in the 1960s, dozens of citizens sent private copies to the city archive or the local newspaper, often on the occasion of the remembrance day of 22nd October.¹⁸ Finally, in 1983, the text returned from the archive to the public sphere when it was prominently displayed in a historical exhibition on "The destruction of Kassel", which met with an overwhelming popular response.¹⁹ However, even then, the variant on display did not reproduce the poem as it had circulated during the war but a cleansed version, which replaced the key terms of 'hatred' and 'retaliation' with 'pain' and 'need'.

¹⁸ The first such letter dates from 1963. See StAK S8 C53, Karl K. to city administration, 21-10-63.

¹⁹ StAK S8 E9 [Textvorlagen]. See chapter eight below.



FIGURE. 1: "Magdeburg in Mourning" in the ruins of the *Johanniskirche* at war's end. (Photo: Puhle, "Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot...", p. 7).

Whereas in Kassel, narratives of aerial warfare were expressed in the medium of lyrical poetry, 250 kilometres to the northeast, in the city of Magdeburg, similar functions were fulfilled by a different cultural artefact, a photograph showing a sculpture in the ruins of a church (fig. 1). The sculpture, "Magdeburg in Mourning" (*Trauernde Magdeburg*), allegorised the city as a female being with a bowed head and a lowered sword. It formed part of a 19th century monument on the German Reformation, which commemorated the destruction of medieval Magdeburg at the hands of Catholic troops at the height of the Thirty Years' War in 1631.²⁰

²⁰ On the revival of public interest in the city's destruction of 1631 in the 19th century see Maren Ballerstedt, "Die Zerstörung der Stadt am 10. Mai 1631 im öffentlichen Bewusstsein Magdeburgs", in: *Sachsen-Anhalt. Beiträge zur Landesgeschichte* (2000), pp. 34-55. For the Thirty Years' War in German collective memory: Hans Medick and Benigna von Krusenstjern, "Die Nähe und Ferne des Dreißigjährigen Krieges", in: idem eds., *Zwischen Alltag und Katastrophe. Der Dreißigjährige Krieg aus der Nähe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), pp. 13-38.

Situated in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from 1945/49 to 1990, and since unification, in the province of Saxony-Anhalt, Magdeburg offers a fascinating comparison with Kassel. Here too, in public discourse, the experience of dozens of air raids has been telescoped into the memory of a single cataclysmic event, the bombing of 16th January 1945. In an indiscriminate area attack, a fleet of 348 RAF bombers dropped 1,066 tons of high explosive and incendiary bombs that created extensive fires, destroying 77.3 % of the built environment in the target area. 190,000 residents were made homeless in the raid while at least 1,930 people lost their lives.²¹ A post-war investigation by the United States Strategic Bombing Survey spoke of a "solar plexus blow" that served "to cut down total factory production indirectly by keeping large numbers of workers away from their work and smashing many essential city services."²²

The photograph of the sculpture in the devastated church was taken in the immediate post-war period, possibly in 1946.²³ It shows a frontal view of the undamaged figure, which is framed by an arch that gives the impression of a halo. The arch forms part of the ruins of the city's oldest parish church, the *Johanniskirche*, which was destroyed in the air raid of 16th January 1945. In the immediate post-war period, the motif appears to have been popular with a number of local photographers.²⁴ In their press campaigns and public exhibitions, the post-war city administrations likewise made repeated use of the image. While the emphasis on mourning may account for the popular appeal of the photograph, the Socialist press pointed to the survival of the statue amidst the devastation, turning the motif into a symbol of tenacious resilience.²⁵

²¹ This is the official figure of the chief of police in his experience report of 5 March 1945. See NA II RG 243 E-6 # 39 9. "Erfahrungsbericht über den schweren Terrorangriff". As in Kassel, the precise number of deaths is heavily contested. The statistical yearbook of 1947 gives a figure of 6,000. Groehler, *Bombenkrieg*, p. 396, puts the death toll at "circa 4,000" while the SED elites insisted on a figure of 16,000. See *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Magdeburg für die Jahre 1945 und 1946* (Magdeburg, 1947), p. 49. On the air raid see Groehler, *Bombenkrieg*, p. 396; Manfred Wille, "Tod und Zerstörung durch Luftbombardements im zweiten Weltkrieg", in: Matthias Puhle ed., *"Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot..." Die Zerstörung Magdeburgs am 16. Januar 1945* (Magdeburg: Calbe, 1995), pp. 38-73. On the importance of Magdeburg for the German war economy in the eyes of the allies see the entry in the *Bomber's Baedeker*. Copy in: NA II RG 243 E-6 # 39 5 (box 383).

²² NA II RG 243 E-6 # 39 4 (box 383), "Physical Damage to Magdeburg as a whole", p. 5. The same report, however, also considered the effects of the area raid negligible on the output of the city's four major industrial concerns, two of which had already been effectively bombed out of operation by US Air Force precision raids. See *ibid.* # 39 12 (box 384), "Report on Magdeburg", p. 3. These industrial concerns were the *Junkers* Aircraft and Aero Engine works (rated 1+ in the Bomber's Baedeker), the *Krupp-Gruson* Engineering and Armaments works (rated 1+), the *Polte* gun manufacturer (rated 1), and the *BRABAG* synthetic oil works (rated 2). For the effects of various types of bombing on production see NA II RG 243 E-6 # 39 3 (*Junkers*), # 39 2 (*Krupp*), 39 1 (*Polte*), # 39 10 (*BRABAG*).

²³ Stadtarchiv Magdeburg (StAM), Rep.18/4. Ra 4. "Niederschrift über die Dezernentenbesprechung am 2.1.1946. Pkt. 1.a".

²⁴ See the different versions in StAM, N 754; NG 75; NG 737. According to Puhle ed., *"Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot..."*, p. 216, a Gerhard Potratz holds the copyright of the most frequently reproduced image.

²⁵ E.R. Müller, "Magdeburg, die Arbeitsstadt am Elbstrom", in: *Freiheit* of 7-6-47, p. 4. See also, "Memento: Magdeburg, 16. Januar 1945", *Volksstimme* of 15-1-48.

While the photograph stressed the elegiac—although, perhaps, with a stronger emphasis on survival than death—, the artefact differed from the poem in Kassel both in its time of inception and in its referential frame. As a post-war document, the image incorporated more strongly the knowledge of a lost war, foregoing the Nazi references to 'retaliation' and 'hatred' that had characterised the poem in its early variants. Equally important, the photograph harked back to a historiographical tradition that differed significantly from Kassel. Whereas the poem juxtaposed a thousand years of continuous development to sudden 'annihilation', the image stressed continuity by drawing on representations of Magdeburg's destruction in 1631.

Remarkably, the motif retained a hold on the popular imagination despite the fact that the dominant agent of public memory in the GDR, the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED)*, marginalised the *Trauernde Magdeburg* for close to 40 years. With the Stalinisation of local self-government and the escalation of the Cold War in 1948, the *SED* lost interest in an image of passive suffering with distinctly Christian overtones.²⁶ No more visual representations of the motif were published in the papers, while the sculpture itself was removed from the church ruin and deposited in the backyard of the local museum. There were, however, limits to the extent to which the *SED* was able to reshape the visual canon. In the context of the state-sponsored agitation against the Euro-missiles in the early 1980s, many *Magdeburger* remembered a motif that, like no other, appeared to symbolise the destruction of their city in war. Writing in 1980, the curator for the preservation of historic monuments, Heinz Gerling, lobbied for a return of the statue to the *Johanniskirche* by pointing to popular opinion, "The number of petitions shows that the citizens stand in a special relationship to this sculpture", he asserted and continued, "Like hardly any other object [...] the sculpture symbolises the hard fate of a total destruction twice over as a direct consequence of inhumane wars."²⁷ Although the Socialist council harboured serious reservations, fearing the potential of "Magdeburg in Mourning" to become a popular symbol of pacifist sentiment,²⁸ the authorities eventually gave in, and in the summer of 1989, agreed to have the sculpture re-moved to the *Johanniskirche*, where it has remained to the present day.²⁹

²⁶ The image was reproduced in the local press for the last time on 15-1-48. See *Volksstimme* No 12 (15-1-48), p. 4. On the context see: Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann, "Magdeburg als Stadt des Schwermaschinenbaus 1945-1990: Politische Geschichte und Gesellschaft unter der SED-Diktatur", in: *Magdeburg. Die Geschichte der Stadt*. Matthias Puhle and Peter Petsch eds., (Dössel: Janos Stekovics, 2005), pp. 811-852, here: pp. 817-822.

²⁷ StAM, 80/4696n. *Beauftragter für Denkmalpflege der Stadt Magdeburg an Rat der Stadt Magdeburg, 30.09.1980. Betr.: Plastik "Trauernde Magdeburg"*, p. 1.

²⁸ Memorandum by Werner Nothe, deputy mayor of 17-12-87, in: StAM Rep. 41/604, fol. 16f.

²⁹ The sculpture was relocated on 12 August 1989. See Maren Ballerstedt, "Daten zur Magdeburger Stadtgeschichte", in: *Magdeburg. Portrait einer Stadt*. Ed. by Landeshauptstadt Magdeburg and

Both the poem and the image are cultural artefacts of local memory cultures that formed around the experience of area bombing. The exploration of the wider cultures in which these artefacts sit and through which they moved is the subject matter of this study.

Mapping the territory: Subject matter and approach

This study asks about the long term cultural impact of area bombing on urban societies. It approaches the subject by comparing two cities, Kassel and Magdeburg, in the half-century between 1940 and 1995. It is interested in the formation of public memory cultures of the air war—defined as spaces that encompass "all conceivable forms of active remembrance"—³⁰ and their trajectories against the backdrop of political, socio-cultural and generational change. Taking Peter Burke's classic question of "who wants whom to remember what, and why?" as a point of departure,³¹ the study seeks to identify the social frames and map the discursive fields in which various agents of social memory operated; to reconstruct the ways in which these agents utilised different resources, power and media in order to remember and stress various aspects of the allied air war; to elucidate their motivation in doing so; and finally, to analyse the consequences, which, as Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan point out, can be quite different from the original intentions.³² The goal is to unravel the processes by which different formats of memory interacted and affected the society and culture that produced them. In so doing, the project aims to engage with and make a contribution to three fields of study: firstly, to a history of the long-term cultural impact of area bombing on local communities; second, to a cultural history of the lingering presence of a common violent past in the two post-war German societies;³³ and third, to the field of empirical memory studies.

Landesheimatbund Sachsen-Anhalt e.V. (Halle an der Saale: Janos Stekovics, 2004), pp. 161-224, here: p. 218.

³⁰ This inclusive definition of the term 'memory culture' follows Christoph Cornelissen, "Was heißt Erinnerungskultur? Begriff - Methoden - Perspektiven", in: *GWU* 10/54 (October 2003), pp. 548-563, here: p. 555. See also Hans Günter Hockerts, "Zugänge zur Zeitgeschichte: Primärerfahrung, Erinnerungskultur, Geschichtswissenschaft" in: Jarausch / Sabrow eds., *Verletztes Gedächtnis*, pp. 39-73.

³¹ Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory", in: Thomas Butler ed., *Memory. History, Culture, and Mind* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), pp. 97-113, here: p. 107.

³² Winter and Sivan speak of "inconsequent intentions" and "unintended consequences". Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, "Setting the Framework", in idem eds., *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), pp. 6-40, here: p. 30.

³³ For such a perspective see Klaus Naumann ed., *Nachkrieg in Deutschland* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001); Hans-Peter Schwarz, "Die ausgebliebene Katastrophe. Eine Problemskizze zur Geschichte der Bundesrepublik", in: Hermann Rudolph ed., *Den Staat denken. Theodor Eschenburg zum Fünfundachtzigsten* (Berlin: Siedler, 1990), pp. 151-174.

Like most work interested in the processes by which the past is brought to bear onto the present,³⁴ this study is both indebted to and troubled by Maurice Halbwachs' pioneering work on the *cadres sociaux* of memory.³⁵ It derives from Halbwachs the insight that memory is about reconstruction rather than recovery. Remembrance is a process that, while drawing selectively on past experiences, occurs under the impact of the exigencies of the present.³⁶ It follows that the study of memory is not about the past as it 'really happened' but about the past as it was "really read", that is, about the ways in which the past has been interpreted, used, and passed on by different groups at different moments in time.³⁷ Furthermore, Halbwachs has shown that remembrance—both of the individual and of the group—is a social act, a process that is fundamentally influenced by the referential frames and the social milieu in which it takes place: "In truth, we are never alone", as Halbwachs states boldly, and, one might add, with a characteristic tendency towards dogmatism, in his posthumously published, *La Mémoire Collective*.³⁸

It is this tendency towards overstatement that has been deeply troubling to students of cultural history, who, while acknowledging their debt to the great sociologist, have raised questions about the role of the individual, and more generally, about causality and agency, in the concept of 'collective memory'.³⁹ In order to avoid the pitfalls of hypostatizing a heuristic metaphor, one does well to call to attention the common sense observation that "individuals 'remember' [...], not societies".⁴⁰ Although Halbwachs insists, in his *Cadres Sociaux*, that to ascribe a collective memory to a social group is more than just a

³⁴ Pierre Nora, "Das Abenteuer der *Lieux de mémoire*", in: Etienne François / Hannes Siegrist and Jakob Vogel eds., *Nation und Emotion. Deutschland und Frankreich im Vergleich 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), pp. 83-92, here: p. 91.

³⁵ I have used the German translation of *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925): Maurice Halbwachs, *Das Gedächtnis und seine sozialen Bedingungen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1985). See also the posthumously published, *Das kollektive Gedächtnis [La Mémoire Collective]* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1967) as well as, *Stätten der Verkündigung im Heiligen Land. Eine Studie zum kollektiven Gedächtnis [Topographie légendaire des Evangiles en Terre Sainte]*. édition discours, vol. 21 (Konstanz: UVK, 2003). For an English translation of key texts see Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. Edited, translated and with an Introduction by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992). The following discussion has benefited enormously from the superb introduction by Astrid Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen. Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart / Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2005), in particular pp. 13-19; 95-112.

³⁶ Halbwachs, *Gedächtnis*, p. 22.

³⁷ Klaus Große Kracht, "Gedächtnis und Geschichte: Maurice Halbwachs – Pierre Nora", *GWU* 47/1 (1996), pp. 21-31, here: p. 21; Peter Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung. Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*. Revised edition (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1999), p. 16.

³⁸ Halbwachs, *Das Kollektive Gedächtnis*, p. 2; Burke, "History as Social Memory", p. 98.

³⁹ See Wulf Kantsteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory. A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies", in: *History and Theory* 41,2 (2002), pp. 179-197; Susan A. Crane, "Writing the Individual back into Collective Memory", in: *AHR* 102,5 (1997), pp. 1372-1385; Winter & Sivan, "Setting the Framework", in: idem. eds., *War and Remembrance*, pp. 6-40.

⁴⁰ Joanna Bourke, "Introduction: 'Remembering' War", *JCH* 39(4), pp. 473-485, here: p. 473. See also Reinhart Koselleck, "Gebrochene Erinnerung? Deutsche und polnische Vergangenheiten", in: *Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung Jahrbuch 2000* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000), pp. 19-32, here: p. 20; Kerwin Lee Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse, *Representations* 69 (Winter 2000), pp. 127-150, here: p. 136.

metaphor,⁴¹ even he acknowledges that acts of remembrance are performed by individuals, albeit always as "members of the group". To Halbwachs, "every individual memory" functions as a "signpost" for the collective memory.⁴² In resorting to the fussy metaphor of the 'signpost', the sociologist arguably does more to obfuscate than to illuminate the very real conceptual problems of the differences, overlaps and interferences between group memories and personal memories, their various modes of expression in society and the possible scholarly approaches to their study.

In view of these problems, some critics have suggested that the concept of 'collective memory' best be dropped altogether,⁴³ whereas others have attempted to refine the idea while retaining Halbwachs' controversial coinage as an "umbrella term".⁴⁴ In order for memory to become at all accessible to the analytical grasp of the historian, the categories of agency and narration are surely crucial. As Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan have argued, representations of the past in society are inextricably linked up with human agency. As a dynamic faculty, memory is sustained by the emotional and material efforts of individuals, groups and institutions.⁴⁵ Put in a much-used phrase derived from psychoanalysis, memory requires "work".⁴⁶ This applies both to social memories and personal memories. In order to stop the process of forgetting, endeavours must be made to remember, to narrate and to communicate. Material memory artefacts, for example, retain their relevance as "memory aids" only insofar and as long as there are human agents who continue to invest them with meaning.⁴⁷ And although cognitive psychology is well aware of the phenomenon of intrusive memory, i.e., the involuntary recall of memory traces,⁴⁸ even here the social relevance of the phenomenon rests to a large degree on the willingness and ability of the individual to share their experiences. For the historian to study memory, therefore, is to study the stories that people tell about the past, the narratives they develop

⁴¹ Halbwachs, *Gedächtnis und seine sozialen Bedingungen*, p. 203.

⁴² Halbwachs, *Das kollektive Gedächtnis*, p. 31.

⁴³ Noa Gedi & Yigal Elam, "Collective Memory – What Is It?", in: *History & Memory* 8,1 (1996), pp. 30-50.

⁴⁴ Erl, *Kollektives Gedächtnis*, p. 96. Within the German-speaking world, the distinction of Jan Assmann between 'communicative memory' and 'cultural memory' has been most influential. See J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, pp. 48-66. See also the special issue of, *Erwägen, Wissen, Ethik - Deliberation, Knowledge, Ethics* 13/2 (2002).

⁴⁵ Winter & Sivan, "Setting the Framework", in: idem eds., *War and Remembrance*, pp. 6-40, here: p. 9f.

⁴⁶ Sigmund Freud, "Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten" (1914), in: *Studienausgabe*.

Ergänzungsband: Schriften zur Behandlungstechnik. Ed. by Alexander Mischerlich, Angela Richards & James Strachey (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1975), pp. 207-15. Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance. The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick & London: Transaction Publishers, 1994), p. 115; Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche eds., *The Work of Memory. New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Winter & Sivan, "Setting the Framework", p. 16.

⁴⁸ Compare Clemens Hausmann, *Handbuch Notfallpsychologie und Traumabewältigung* (Vienna: Facultas, 2003), p. 85.

in order to make sense of events that have their experiential basis either in personal or socially mediated, "secondary" memories.⁴⁹

The treatment of memory in terms of discourse and agency has tangible benefits: it throws into relief power relationships in society, providing answers as to why certain stories of the past reach hegemonic status at any given moment in time while others are marginalised.⁵⁰ Yet, as Alon Confino has recently observed, such an analytical focus runs the danger of "sever[ing] the representation of the past from the experience of the past".⁵¹ In other words, the emphasis on narrative representations threatens to give short shrift to the very past whose memory it professes to analyse. In so doing, the analysis loses sight of a central characteristic that distinguishes mnemonic discourses from discourses on any other subject matter: the impact of the past on the social "experiential space" (Reinhart Koselleck) in which memories circulate.⁵² Modifying a famous dictum by Karl Marx, one might argue that men (and women) construct their own representations but they do not make them just as they please; they do not make them under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.⁵³ This link between past experiences and present memories is particularly relevant to the study of the stories that were told in the two post-war Germanys about the nation's catastrophic course during the first half of the twentieth century.⁵⁴

This project focuses on one aspect on the margins of the broader discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or of "coming to terms with the (Nazi) past": the memory of allied bombing as the memory of a sustained campaign which, like no other event of World War II, confronted millions of ordinary Germans with the violence of total war, or put in moral categories: 'brought home' the violence they had unleashed upon the peoples of Europe.⁵⁵ One way to study the legacy of the air war for German society is to focus on the

⁴⁹ Koselleck, "Gebrochene Erinnerungen", p. 21.

⁵⁰ See the groundbreaking study by Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 2001).

⁵¹ Alon Confino, "Telling about Germany: Narratives of Memory and Culture"; in: *The Journal of Modern History* 76 (June 2004), pp. 389-416, here: p. 402.

⁵² Reinhart Koselleck, "'Erfahrungsraum' und 'Erwartungshorizont'—zwei historische Kategorien", in: idem, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), pp. 349-375. Compare also Confino's observations with regard to studies of the memory of the Holocaust, which tend to leave "the unfolding of the Holocaust as a historical event [...] outside the interpretative framework". In: Confino, "Telling about Germany", pp. 396f.

⁵³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, is paraphrased according to John H. Arnold, *History. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 85.

⁵⁴ For recent historiographical attempts to link the "pain" in German society of the first half of the century to the "prosperity" of the second, see Paul Betts and Greg Eghigian eds., *Pain and Prosperity: reconsidering twentieth-century German history* (Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 2003); Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past. Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁵⁵ The United States Strategic Bombing Survey estimated in 1947 that "almost one third of the Germans were subjected to [strategic bombing] while all lived in the shadow of its threat", in: USSBS, Morale Division, *The Effects of Strategic Bombing on German Morale*, vol. I (May 1947), p. 1. See also Olaf Groehler, "The

"places"⁵⁶ where "memory crystallizes and secretes itself", on the "realms of memory" or *lieux de mémoire*.⁵⁷ Divested of its baggage of "cultural melancholia",⁵⁸ Pierre Nora's famous concept offers a helpful analytical tool for unravelling the memory culture of the air war, for delineating the stories told about allied bombing, identifying their carriers, and investigating continuity and change in diachronic perspective. The concept corresponds closely to a central structural element of a culture which has found pre-eminent expression on the sub-national level in cities such as Kassel and Magdeburg. In both, public memories of the strategic air offensive—a protracted process lasting several years and involving hundreds of alarms and dozens of raids—tend to cluster around a single day of remembrance, which in turn refers back to the experience of one particularly destructive air attack. Although both cities have developed a landscape of memory, the primary locus of allied bombing is situated not in space but in time: it recurs annually as a calendrical *lieu de mémoire*.

The choice of cities was largely determined by the location of Kassel and Magdeburg on opposite sides of the post-1945 east/west divide. It allows for representations of allied bombing to be studied within the context of the "interweaving and delimitation" that characterized the history of the two Germanys between 1949 and 1989.⁵⁹ Yet, in employing a time frame that goes beyond the history of German division, setting in around the year of 1940 and extending to 1995, the study asks as to how important the ideological confrontations of the Cold War really were for the trajectory of memory, especially on a sub-national level. To what extent can one speak of a shared experience of allied bombing for the period of 1940 to 1945 when both urban societies still formed part of the German Reich? How were the memory cultures propelled onto different trajectories by the rupture of 1945 and the emergence of antagonistic political cultures that followed? And finally, was there a convergence of memory after unification, or did differences persist? If so, were there perhaps also other factors at work in influencing the shape of the memory places, such as local traditions or religious ways of seeing the world?

Above and beyond the location of Kassel and Magdeburg on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain for much of the second half of the twentieth century, a good case can be made for

Strategic Air War and its Impact on the German Civilian Population", in: Boog ed., *Conduct of the Air War*, pp. 279-309.

⁵⁶ Lawrence D. Kritzman, "In Remembrance of Things French", foreword to: *Realms of Memory: rethinking the French past, vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions*. Under the direction of Pierre Nora (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. ix-xiv, here: p. ix.

⁵⁷ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Lex Lieux de Mémoire*", in: *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), pp. 7-25, here: p. 7.

⁵⁸ Lawrence D. Kritzman, "In Remembrance of Things French"; in: *Realms of Memory*, p. ix.

⁵⁹ Christoph Kleßmann, "Verflechtung und Abgrenzung. Aspekte der geteilten und zusammengehörigen deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte", in: *APuZ B* 29-30 (1993), pp. 30-41.

the heuristic value of comparing the two cities.⁶⁰ Roughly similar in size, both formed important regional administrative and industrial hubs serving largely rural areas. In 1940, Kassel had 216,141 inhabitants, Magdeburg 337,000; some half-century later, there were 187,288 *Kasseler* and 290,579 *Magdeburger*.⁶¹ Kassel, the long-time residence of the Hessian landgraves, was made capital of the Prussian Province of *Hesse Nassau* after the annexation of the territory by Prussia in 1866. During the Third Reich, the city was seat of the *Gauleiter* of *Kurhesse*, but after 1945, lost its position as a state capital to South-Hessian Wiesbaden. Magdeburg, which had fallen under the government of Brandenburg-Prussia in the wake the Thirty Years' War in the 17th century, was made capital of the newly-created Prussian province of Saxony in 1814/15. The city did not attain the status of a *Gau* capital during the Third Reich but after the war, with the dissolution of the *Länder* in 1952, was made provincial capital of an administrative district. With the incorporation of the territory of the former GDR into the Federal Republic in 1990, the city became capital of the reconstituted state of *Saxony-Anhalt*. Throughout the period under consideration, Protestantism was the dominant religious denomination, impregnating local traditions and reverberating beyond the religious sphere to the wider culture.⁶²

During the Weimar republic, the political cultures of Kassel and Magdeburg were characterised by a socio-political rift between a strong working-class milieu on the one hand—supporting the *SPD*—and an equally strong national-conservative middle class tradition—represented by the *DNVP*—on the other. This was a reflection of rapid industrialisation alongside the presence of military garrisons and a strong civil-service sector in both cities.⁶³ The rise to power of the *NSDAP* followed the national pattern, with the Reich elections of September 1930 marking a breakthrough in both cities, although in Magdeburg, "the Red City in the Red Country",⁶⁴ the *SPD* remained in charge of the civil

⁶⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, the following has been gleaned from *Magdeburg. Die Geschichte der Stadt 805-2005*. Commissioned by the *Landeshauptstadt Magdeburg* and ed. by Matthias Puhle and Peter Petsch (Dössel (Saalkreis): Janos Stekovics, 2005), *passim*; Frank-Roland Klaube, *Chronik der Stadt Kassel. 2500 Ereignisse in Wort und Bild* (Gudensberg-Gleichen: Warthberg, 2002), *passim*.

⁶¹ Kassel is one of the very few West German cities that never recovered her pre-war population figure. In Magdeburg, a dramatic population loss followed unification, declining from 290,579 on 31-12-1988 to 257,656 in 1995 and 231,450 in 2000.

⁶² In 1953, 80% of the 175,000 residents of Kassel claimed (formal) allegiance to the *Evangelische Landeskirche of Kurhessen-Waldeck*. See *Evangelisches Gemeindebuch der Kirchengemeinden Kassel*. Ed. by Dekanat (Suttgart: Ev. Verlagswerk, 1953), p. 12.

⁶³ Mathias Tullner, "Modernisierung und Scheinblüte - Magdeburg zwischen den Weltkriegen", in: "Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot...", pp. 9-32; idem, "Modernisierung und mitteldeutsche Hauptstadtpolitik – Das 'neue Magdeburg' 1918-1933", in: *Magdeburg. Geschichte der Stadt*, pp. 729-764; Dietfrid Krause-Vilmar, "Hitlers Machtergreifung in der Stadt Kassel", in: *Volksgemeinschaft und Volksfeinde*, vol 2, pp. 13-36, here: p. 14.

⁶⁴ *Die rote Stadt im roten Land* (Magdeburg, 1929) was the title of a *SPD*-sponsored publication about the history of the regional Social Democratic Party.

administration until the end of the Weimar Republic.⁶⁵ In the Third Reich, both Kassel and Magdeburg benefited from the armaments-driven economic boom while a substantial number of local businesses and individuals profited from the persecution and expropriation of the local Jews, and—during the war—of forced labour.⁶⁶ After 1945, the *SPD* attained a leading position in municipal politics in Kassel, providing all successive mayors from 1945 to 1993.⁶⁷ In Magdeburg, meanwhile, the post-war revival of Social Democratic influence was only broken with the removal from office, in 1950, of the second post-war mayor, Rudolf Eberhard, and his replacement by the Communist functionary, Philipp Daub.⁶⁸

With regard to their fortunes in World War II, both cities showed a similar pattern. Indeed, by the spring of 1945, a visitor to Kassel and Magdeburg would have been hard pressed to discern any differences between the respective experiences of the two cities in the war. He or she would have been confronted with a picture of overwhelming devastation, in particular in those areas that used to form the historic old towns. "I did not see what and how much was destroyed; I saw destruction itself", wrote the poet Rudolf Hagelstange in a retrospective account on his first return to Kassel after the war.⁶⁹ In a similar way, the writer Heinz Glade, in his *Diary from Magdeburg*, spoke of a "ravaged city" when he returned to Magdeburg in 1947.⁷⁰ Most of this devastation was due to the air war. Although neither Kassel nor Magdeburg ever attained the iconic status of Hamburg or Dresden, both in terms of loss of life and material destruction, they ranked among the most seriously affected of Germany's cities.⁷¹ This was despite the fact that, on paper, both were

⁶⁵ In the elections of September 1930, the Nazi-Party gained 25% of the vote in Kassel, making her the second largest party behind the *SPD* with 32% of the vote. In the July elections of 1932, the *NSDAP* reached 42% of the vote in Kassel. See Krause-Vilmar, "Hitlers Machtergreifung", in: *Volksgemeinschaft und Volksfeinde*, vol 2, pp. 13-36; here: pp. 22f; Wilhelm Frenz, "Organisation, Mitglieder und Wähler der NSDAP in Kassel", in: *ibid.*, pp. 47-57. In Magdeburg, the *NSDAP* finished second in the September 1930 elections, with 38,089 votes, as compared to 75 347 votes for the *SPD*. From the elections of July 1932, the *NSDAP* emerged as the strongest party in the city. See Mathias Tullner, "Modernisierung und mitteldeutsche Hauptstadtpolitik – Das "neue Magdeburg" 1918-1933", in: *Magdeburg. Geschichte der Stadt*, pp. 729-764, here: pp. 753, 759; Maik Hattenhorst, "Stadt der Mitte: Zentrum der Aufrüstung und zweite Zerstörung", in: *ibid.*, pp. 779-810.

⁶⁶ Wilhelm Frenz, "NS-Wirtschaftspolitik und die soziale Lage der arbeitenden Bevölkerung", in: *Volksgemeinschaft und Volksfeinde*, vol 2, pp. 255-290; Dietfrid Krause-Vilmar, "Ausländische Zwangsarbeiter in der Kasseler Rüstungsindustrie (1940-1945)", in: *ibid.*, pp. 388-414; Wolfgang Prinz, "Die Judenverfolgung in Kassel", in: *ibid.*, pp. 144-222; Tullner, "Modernisierung und Scheinblüte – Magdeburg zwischen den Weltkriegen", in: "Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot", pp. 9-32; Tobias Bülow and Franka Bindernagel, *Ein KZ in der Nachbarschaft: Das Magdeburger Außenlager der Brabag und der "Freundeskreis Himmler"* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003).

⁶⁷ Klaube, *Chronik der Stadt Kassel*, pp. 81ff.

⁶⁸ Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann, "Magdeburg als Stadt des Schwermaschinenbaus 1945-1990: Politische Geschichte und Gesellschaft unter der SED-Diktatur", in: *Magdeburg. Geschichte der Stadt*, pp. 811-852, here: pp. 819-822; Gerda Meyer-Eberhard, *Ein sozialdemokratischer Oberbürgermeister in der Diktatur: Rudolf Eberhard* (Wiesbaden: Selbstverlag, 2000).

⁶⁹ Rudolf Hagelstange, "Das Beispiel", in: *MERIAN* 4/10: *Kassel* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1952), pp. 49-52, here: p. 52.

⁷⁰ Heinz Glade, *Magdeburger Tagebuch* (Berlin: Kongress-Verlag, 1957), p. 10.

⁷¹ See the discussion, together with tables, in Uta Hohn, *Die Zerstörung deutscher Städte im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Regionale Unterschiede in der Bilanz der Wohnungstotalschäden und Folgen des Luftkrieges*

comparatively well prepared to absorb air attacks. Kassel, as the site of important armament industries, most notably the *Henschel* tank and *Fieseler* aeroplane works,⁷² was given official priority in anti-aircraft defence, so was Magdeburg, one of the principal "armouries" of the Third Reich.⁷³ Nonetheless, Kassel suffered at least 9,202 civilian fatal casualties in the air raids, which translated into a mortality rate of 4.3% of the pre-war population of 216,000, ranking the city even above Hamburg (2.4%) in terms of the death rate.⁷⁴ Moreover, Kassel lost 60% of its pre-war residential flats as a result of the air war.⁷⁵ Magdeburg, likewise, suffered considerably, although not quite to the same extent. At least 5,653 people or 1.7% of the pre-war population died in the air raids,⁷⁶ while 50% of the residential flats were destroyed.⁷⁷

Historiographical Overview

Since the late 1990s, the air war has become something of a "collective obsession" in Germany,⁷⁸ playing a prominent role in a burgeoning discourse on German wartime suffering, which, according to some observers, is reconfiguring the wider mnemonic landscape. In a scathing critique, Norbert Frei has warned that the re-emergence, in public discourse, of a focus on German victimhood threatens to marginalise once again the victims of the Germans, and thus to undo thirty years of self-critical engagement with Nazism, genocidal war, and Judaeocide.⁷⁹ While it is probably too early to assess the ramifications of a trend that treats the experiences of ordinary Germans in World War II with new empathy, one of the most interesting aspects of this development is the erosion of the entrenched battle lines of the Cold War. As Mary Nolan has pointed out, the public torchbearers of this discourse self-consciously belong to a generation that is widely

unter bevölkerungsgeographischem Aspekt (Dortmund: Dortmunder Vertrieb für Bau- und Planungsliteratur, 1991), pp. 271; 286.

⁷² *The Bomber's Baedeker* (21944), pp. 383ff.

⁷³ Hattenhorst, "Stadt der Mitte", in: *Magdeburg. Geschichte der Stadt*, pp. 796-800, here: p. 796; Groehler, *Bombenkrieg*, p. 243.

⁷⁴ Figures according to *Statistischer Bericht der Stadt Kassel 1/1952* (Kassel, 1952), p. 30. The report also mentions 5,480 *Wehrmacht* casualties plus 5,000 "approximately not yet identified". With a pre-war population of 1,711,877 residents, Hamburg suffered 41,053 deaths in 213 air raids. Compare Hans Brunswig, *Feuersturm über Hamburg. Die Luftangriffe auf Hamburg im Zweiten Weltkrieg und ihre Folgen* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch, 1987), pp. 448-457. I would like to thank Malte Thießen for pointing my attention to this source.

⁷⁵ Hohn, *Zerstörung deutscher Städte*, table 42, Kassel (7).

⁷⁶ Death toll according to the findings of the USSBS, which were based on the records of the City Air Raid Police. See NA II RG 243 E-6 # 39 12 (box 384), "Physical Damage to Magdeburg as a whole", p. 7.

⁷⁷ Hohn, *Zerstörung deutscher Städte*, table 60, Magdeburg (7).

⁷⁸ Mary Nolan, "Air Wars, Memory Wars", in: *CEH* 38/1 (2005), special issue: *Germans as Victims During the Second World War*, pp. 7-40, here: p. 8.

⁷⁹ Norbert Frei, "1945 und wir. Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit", in: idem, *1945 und wir. Das Dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen* (Munich: Beck, 2005), pp. 7-22, here: p. 21.

credited with breaking the silence on the criminal complicity of much of German society with the racial-utopian goals of Nazism, the generation of '68'.⁸⁰ Although the contemporary renaissance of the trope of 'German victimhood' owes to a set of intersecting political, cultural and generational developments,⁸¹ it is worth pointing out that the public controversy on the air war—a subject long colonised by the likes of David Irving—was set in motion not by conservative revisionists but by two self-avowed 68ers, the novelist W. G. Sebald and the historian and journalist, Jörg Friedrich (both born in 1944).⁸²

In his 1999 essay, "On the Natural History of Destruction", Sebald argued that German post-war fiction had failed to produce any substantial body of literature that engaged with the "true extent of the material and moral annihilation" of the nation by the end of the war.⁸³ The pamphlet caused a minor stir, leading to a largely misguided search for fictional treatments of the "bombing war" that all but ignored Sebald's central question about the long-term impact of a violent past on post-war German society.⁸⁴ Three years later, Jörg Friedrich, in a history suggestively called *Der Brand*, treated the strategic air war as a "narrative of loss" and indicted allied bombing as a deliberate "massacre".⁸⁵ A spectacular popular success, the book triggered a broad public debate that revolved around the legality, efficacy, and consequences of Allied area bombing in World War II, and above all, the place of the air war in the memory culture of the Berlin Republic.⁸⁶ On the local level, the book also provided a stimulus for a wave of picture books, documentary accounts, and

⁸⁰ Nolan, "Air Wars, Memory Wars", p. 9. On the treatment of the Nazi past by the generation of '68' see Bernd-A. Rusinek, "Von der Entdeckung der NS-Vergangenheit zum generellen Faschismusverdacht – akademische Diskurse in der Bundesrepublik der 60er Jahre", in: Axel Schildt / Detlef Siegfried / Karl Christian Lammers eds., *Dynamische Zeiten. Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften* (Hamburg: Christians, 2000), pp. 114-147.

⁸¹ Nolan, "Air Wars, Memory Wars", p. 8. On the long tradition of the trope of 'German victimhood', see Rudy Koschar, *From Monuments to Traces. Artifacts of German Memory 1870-1990* (Berkely / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 2000), p. 293.

⁸² Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940-1945* (Munich: Propyläen, 11th ed., 2002).

⁸³ W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Random House, 2003). I have used the German edition, *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2002), here: p. 17.

⁸⁴ Stephan Braese, "Bombenkrieg und literarische Gegenwart. Zu W.G. Sebald und Dieter Forte", in: *Mittelweg* 36 1/02, pp. 4-24. See also Klaus Naumann, "Leerstelle Luftkrieg. Einwurf zu einer verqueren Debatte", in: *Mittelweg* 36 2/98, pp. 12-15. Typical for a response that focuses on the level of fiction only is Volker Hage, *Zeugen der Zerstörung. Die Literaten und der Luftkrieg. Essays und Gespräche* (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer, 2003).

⁸⁵ Jörg Arnold, "A Narrative of Loss". Review of Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940-45*, H-German, H-Net Reviews, November, 2003. URL: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=280291070845163>; Klaus Naumann, "Bombenkrieg – Totaler Krieg – Massaker", in: *Mittelweg* 36 4/03, pp. 49-60.

⁸⁶ For thorough scholarly critiques of *Der Brand*, see Dietmar Süß, "'Massaker und Mongolensturm'. Anmerkungen zu Jörg Friedrichs umstrittenem Buch 'Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg', in: *Hist. Jahrbuch* 124 (2004), pp. 521-543; Ralf Blank, "Jörg Friedrich: Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg. Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung", in: *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift* 63 (2004), pp. 175-186; Angelika Ebbinghaus, "Deutschland im Bombenkrieg – Ein missglücktes Buch über ein wichtiges Thema", in: *Sozial. Geschichte* 18,2 (2003), pp. 101-122. The debate has been collected in Lothar Kettenacker ed., *Ein Volk von Opfern? Die neue Debatte um den Bombenkrieg 1940-45* (Berlin: Rowolth, 2003).

eyewitness reports, which were published between 2003 and 2005 to coincide with the 60th anniversaries of heavy air raids on German cities.⁸⁷

Two antagonistic positions emerged during the course of the discussion, which can be labelled the 'too little' and the 'too much' thesis. Echoing the psychoanalytical vocabulary so common in the mnemonic discourse on Nazism, those hailing *Der Brand* as a major breakthrough argued that the memory of the bombing had long been 'suppressed' and shrouded in 'taboo'. The position was prefigured by Sebald, who spoke in his essay of "individual and collective amnesia".⁸⁸ Several reasons were given for this alleged absence of the air war from collective memory. Some critics put forward psychological explanations and argued that the experience of saturation bombing had been too traumatizing to be recalled in the radically changed conditions of the post-war world.⁸⁹ More commonly, though, the explanations focused on the politics of memory. According to this argument, the public enunciation of memories of wartime bombing had been suppressed in the interests of reconciliation with the former adversaries, Britain and the United States.

In an ironic twist on Hermann Lübbe's controversial thesis of 1983 about the beneficial effects of the incomplete confrontation with Nazism in the Adenauer years,⁹⁰ Wolfgang Sofsky, among others, has argued that the temporary *Beschweigen* or 'silencing' of the experience of allied bombing was a necessary prerequisite to the process of 'coming to terms' with the criminal legacy of the Third Reich.⁹¹ While such an explanation is popular among left-liberal critics who speak out in defence of the new emphasis on German wartime suffering, the (nationalist) Right asserts that Germans have been *verboten* or 'forbidden' to talk about the air war lest they should draw comparisons between German and allied 'war crimes'.⁹² Taken to extremes, this line of reasoning not only implies a relativist stance towards the unique nature of Nazi crimes but also tends to substitute the

⁸⁷ On this see Jörg Arnold, "Sammelrezension Bombenkrieg", in: *Historische Literatur* 2/2 (2004), pp. 17-38. On the tradition of the genre see Winfried Mönch, "Städte zwischen Zerstörung und Wiederaufbau. Deutsche Ortsliteratur zum Bombenkrieg seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg", in: *Die alte Stadt* 3/2003, pp. 265-289.

⁸⁸ W.G. Sebald, *Luftkrieg*, p. 17.

⁸⁹ Compare for example, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Der Weltuntergang kann nicht schlimmer sein", in: *SZ* (14.12.02): "[The bombing war] has indeed been a neglected subject of German contemporary history. For one, the adults and children that survived the air raids and could have turned into their historians were apparently too traumatised to tackle the subject." The review is reproduced with a different title in Kettenacker ed., *Ein Volk von Opfern?*, pp. 140-44, here: p. 140. For a serious attempt to understand the legacy of the air war in psychoanalytical terms see Thomas W. Neumann, "Der Bombenkrieg. Zur ungeschriebenen Geschichte einer kollektiven Verletzung", in: Naumann ed., *Nachkrieg*, pp. 319-342.

⁹⁰ Hermann Lübbe, "Der Nationalsozialismus im deutschen Nachkriegsbewusstsein", in: *HZ* 236 (1983), pp. 579-599.

⁹¹ Compare Wolfgang Sofsky, "Die halbierte Erinnerung", subtitle, "Die eigene Täterschaft ist im Bewusstsein der Deutschen tief verankert, es gibt keinen Grund, sie nicht der Opfer des alliierten Bombenkrieges gedenken sollten." *SZ* (5-12-02). Reproduced in Kettenacker ed., *Ein Volk von Opfern?*, pp. 124-6.

⁹² See, for example, Klaus Rainer Röhl, *Verbotene Trauer. Die vergessenen Opfer* (Munich: Universitas, 2004).

allied air war for the Shoah altogether, speaking of "genocide", "greatest war crime ever committed" or "Bombing Holocaust".⁹³ By contrast, traditional left-wing critics tend to dismiss the idea of suppression wholesale. "Friedrich is breaking a taboo that does not exist", Ralph Bollmann claimed emphatically in a review in the *tageszeitung*.⁹⁴ Far from too little, this position holds, there has been too much memory of the bombing, all too often serving as an exculpatory device for the war crimes and the genocide committed by the Germans. "Long before I even heard of the name of Auschwitz, I learned that 200,000 people had died in the bombardment of Dresden", Göz Aly is quoted in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.⁹⁵

The above summary of key positions reveals characteristic boundaries of the debate as a whole. Although ostensibly about German suffering rather than the suffering meted out by the Germans, the analytical categories, the vocabulary, and the sensationalist rhetoric are borrowed from the public discourse on 'coming to terms' with Nazism as it was played out in the Federal Republic in the 1980s and 1990s. Writing in 1994, Ulrich Brochhagen described the contours of this debate thus: "*Too much has happened!*", says the one group. [...] *Too little has happened!*", says the other.⁹⁶ Observing the prescriptive character of most publications on the subject, Brochhagen noted the curious deficit in empirical knowledge: "as a historical phenomenon", he maintained, the post-history of Nazism had received little attention.⁹⁷ This has changed in the meantime, of course, but the parallel is unmistakable: While both sides in the debate on the 'bombing war' carry strong normative overtones—being more interested in what, according to their proponents, should have been than in what was—, neither the 'repression' nor the 'too much memory' thesis can claim to have a solid basis in empirical research. As a memory place, the air war is still largely uncharted territory.

Since the emergence of memory as a guiding paradigm of contemporary history in the late 1980s, an impressive body of empirical literature on the legacy of Nazism has been produced.⁹⁸ For historiographical as well as moral reasons, this kind of research has

⁹³ The first two terms are used in Helene Grenzendörfer, *Wie ich die Zerstörung der Stadt Magdeburg am 16. Januar 1945 erlebt habe* (Munich: UNI-Druck, 1979), editor's introduction. "Bombing Holocaust" has become a favourite term of the right-wing extremist *National Demokratische Partei (NPD)*, which holds seats in two state parliaments in 2006. Compare "List und Tücke", *DER SPIEGEL* 6/2005, p. 41.

⁹⁴ Ralph Bollmann, "Im Dickicht der Aufrechnung." *taz* Nr. 6926 (10-12-02), p. 14. Reproduced in Kettenacker ed., *Volk von Opfern?*, pp. 137-39.

⁹⁵ Quoted according to Joachim Günther, "Der Bombenkrieg findet zur Sprache." *NZZ* (7.8.12.02), p. 33.

⁹⁶ Ulrich Brochhagen, *Nach Nürnberg. Vergangenheitsbewältigung und Westintegration in der Ära Adenauer* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1999 [Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1994]), pp. 7f.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 9. Similar observations are made by Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich: Beck, 1996), pp. 7f.

⁹⁸ 1989 saw the publication of the first issue of *History & Memory. Studies in the representation of the past*, the most important journal for the study of memory. For scholarly reflections on the genealogy and trajectory of the memory boom see Jay Winter, "Die Generation der Erinnerung. Reflexionen über den 'Memory-Boom'

focused on the defining crime of the twentieth century, the Holocaust, and on the ways in which the victims of Nazi genocide were forgotten and commemorated in the two post-war Germanys, their stories marginalised and re-appropriated, their sites of suffering demolished and reconstructed, and their restitution demands denied and partially met.⁹⁹ In the course of this research, the initial emphasis on 'collective amnesia' has given way to a much more nuanced understanding of the ways in which different memory groups in post-fascist German society, drawing on their Weimar-era understandings of Nazism, selectively appropriated certain aspects of the Nazi past while marginalising others.¹⁰⁰ As Robert Moeller has shown in a seminal study on "the search for a usable past" in the Adenauer years, the twin themes of German suffering and victimhood took centre stage in public discourse, serving as a powerful integrating myth for West-German society. At the same time, the preoccupation with German suffering effectively silenced dissenting voices that called for empathy with the victims of Nazism and a confrontation with German culpability.¹⁰¹ Only towards the end of the 1950s, intersecting with wider socio-cultural transitions from reconstruction to modernisation,¹⁰² did the paradigm of victimhood gradually become eroded by a growing recognition that Germans of all walks of life were victimizers long before they turned into victims.¹⁰³ In the 'second' Germany of the GDR, meanwhile, the SED-regime sought to derive legitimacy from the antifascist struggle of German communists during the Third Reich, casting "resistance fighters" as the victors of history while writing the vast majority of the victims of Nazism out of history.¹⁰⁴

in der zeithistorischen Forschung", in: *Werkstatt Geschichte* 30 (2001), pp. 5-16; Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory", *Representations* 69, pp. 127-150; Charles S. Maier, "A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial", in: *History and Memory* 5/2 (1993), pp. 136-51.

⁹⁹ For an evaluation of the literature see Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche, "Introduction: Noises of the Past", in: idem eds., *The Work of Memory*, pp. 1-21; Confino, "Telling about Germany", in: *The Journal of Modern History* 76 (June 2004), pp. 389-416; Thomas Kühne, "Der nationalsozialistische Vernichtungskrieg im kulturellen Kontinuum des Zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts. Forschungsprobleme und Forschungstendenzen der Gesellschaftsgeschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Zweiter Teil", in: *AfS* 40 (2000), pp. 440-486, here: pp. 475-486; Edith Raim, "Coping with the Nazi Past: Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich", in: *CEH* 12,4 (2003), pp. 547-560; Kay Schiller, "The Presence of the Nazi Past in the Early Decades of the Bonn Republic", in: *JCH* 39/2 (2004), pp. 285-294.

¹⁰⁰ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1997).

¹⁰¹ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories. The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: UCP, 2001).

¹⁰² See Arnold Sywottek, "Wege in die 50er Jahre", in: Axel Schildt, Arnold Sywottek eds., *Modernisierung im Wiederaufbau. Die westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 50er Jahre* (Bonn: Dietz, 1993), pp. 13-39.

¹⁰³ Compare Detlef Siegfried, "Zwischen Aufarbeitung und Schlussstrich. Der Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten 1958 bis 1968", in: Schildt / Siegfried / Lammers eds., *Dynamische Zeiten*, pp. 78-113.

¹⁰⁴ Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge / Oxford / Malden: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 28-36; Martin Sabrow, *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs. Der Umgang mit der Vergangenheit in der DDR* (Cologne / Weimar / Potsdam: Böhlau, 2000), pp. 9-35; Jürgen Danyel, "Die Opfer- und Verfolgtenperspektive als Gründungskonsens? Zum Umgang mit Widerstand und Schuldfrage in der DDR", in: idem ed., *Die geteilte Vergangenheit: Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), pp. 31-46; Olaf Groehler, "Antifaschismus –

Within the literature on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the cultural ramifications of the allied air war have generally received little attention. Operating with a psychoanalytical vocabulary, early studies, such as Wolfgang Benz' essay on "Post-War Society and National Socialism", tend to subsume post-war narratives of the air war under the label of "screen memories".¹⁰⁵ According to a standard dictionary definition, a 'screen memory' is a "seemingly insignificant memory" of a "harmless nature" whose obtrusive presence in the mind of the patient indicates a denial of other, more substantial memories.¹⁰⁶ Applied to post-war German society, the concept posits a functional relationship, arguing that Germans talked so much about their own suffering in order to deny their complicity in the crimes of Nazism. While evidence can indeed be adduced of Germans pointing to the air war when confronted with visual and other representations of genocide, the notion of the 'screen' does seem reductionist.¹⁰⁷ Far from 'harmless' or 'insignificant', the air war, as a series of cataclysmic events, has spawned original memory cultures that were profoundly influenced by the trajectory of the wider mnemonic parameters, but that cannot be explained solely in reference to the history of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Although second generation memory studies tend to paint a more subtle picture of the memory landscape in post-war Germany, here too, the air war has been treated in passing only. In his study of "war stories", Robert G. Moeller claims that the air war—unlike the expulsion of the Germans from the East—played no role in the post-war construction of a myth of collective victimhood. According to Moeller, the ideological battle lines of the Cold War precluded the (public) enunciation of stories about the impact of a campaign that had been waged by the adversaries-turned-allies, Britain and the United States.¹⁰⁸ Taking the point further, Klaus Naumann has argued that the "air war took place in the East" whereas the history of the expulsions was endlessly retold in the West.¹⁰⁹ In pointing to the Cold War as an important context, both demonstrate the benefits but also the limits of an approach that conceives of public memory in terms of its present usability. As an emergent body of case studies is beginning to show, the thesis does not hold up to empirical scrutiny. Memory cultures of the air war developed east and west of the Iron Curtain, profoundly

"Vom Umgang mit einem Begriff", in Ulrich Herbert / Olaf Groehler, *Zweierlei Bewältigung* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verl., 1992), pp. 29-40.

¹⁰⁵ Wolfgang Benz, "Nachkriegsgesellschaft und Nationalsozialismus. Erinnerung, Amnesie, Abwehr", in: *Dachauer Hefte* 6 (1990), pp. 12-24, here: p. 13.

¹⁰⁶ "Deckerinnerung", in: *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 113f.

¹⁰⁷ Compare, for example, the remarks by Gerhard Zumbach, "Todesmühlen und öffentliche Meinung", *HN* no. 21 (13-3-1946).

¹⁰⁸ Moeller, *War Stories*, p. 5. In more recent work, Moeller has moved towards acknowledging the importance of the air war for West-German constructions of victimhood. Compare *idem*, "Germans as Victims? Thoughts on a Post-Cold War History of World War II's Legacies", *History & Memory* 1/2 (2005), pp. 147-194, here: p. 159.

¹⁰⁹ Naumann, Leerstelle Luftkrieg, in: *Mittelweg* 36 2/98, pp. 12-15.

influenced but not solely determined by the ideological confrontations of the Cold War. In some respects, Moeller and Naumann have simply looked in the wrong place: the city, not the nation is the place to study the post-history of allied bombing.¹¹⁰

"In truth, no other historic event [...] has left a more persistent tradition", Malte Thießen writes in an important article on the post-war commemoration of "operation Gomorrha" in Hamburg, the firebombing of July 1943 that destroyed much of the city.¹¹¹ Thießen distinguishes three phases: the emergence of a set of collective representations in the 1950s, thematic continuity in the 1960s and 1970s, and differentiation together with an upsurge of public interest since the 1980s. In synchronic perspective, he identifies a number of coexisting and partially conflicting tropes which, each in its own way, integrated the cataclysmic event into a wider interpretive framework: air war as catharsis; as (natural) disaster; as trial of resilience; and finally, as pacifist parable.¹¹² While Thießen rejects the tabuisation-thesis completely in his conclusion, Klaus Naumann argues for a more differentiated approach with reference to Dresden. Analysing the mnemonic practices surrounding the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing in 1995, he distinguishes between commemoration and discourse as two different modes of engagement with the past.¹¹³ According to Naumann, the memory of the air war—unlike the memory of the concentration camps on German soil, for example¹¹⁴—is still characterised by a set of liturgical formulae derived from mourning ceremonies which curtail any dispassionate, critical engagement with the subject matter.

Whereas Naumann is interested in the fire-bombing of Dresden as a post-unification memory place, Gilad Margalit traces the pre-1989 politics of memory of this only national *lieu de mémoire* of the air war.¹¹⁵ Building on earlier work by Olaf Groehler,¹¹⁶ Margalit shows up the ways in which the ruling elites of the SED and its affiliated organisations adapted the Nazi propaganda narrative about the area attack of 13-14 February 1945 for the

¹¹⁰ Peter Reichel, "Das Gedächtnis der Stadt. Hamburg im Umgang mit seiner nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit", in idem ed., *Das Gedächtnis der Stadt* (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 1997), pp. 7-28. But see Dietmar Süß who posits a "German master narrative of the air war". Idem, "Erinnerungen an den Luftkrieg in Deutschland und Großbritannien"; in: *APuZ* 18-19 (2005), pp. 19-26, here: p. 20.

¹¹¹ Malte Thießen, "Gedenken an 'Operation Gomorrha'. Zur Erinnerungskultur des Bombenkrieges von 1945 bis heute", in: *ZfG* 1/2005, pp. 46-61, here: p. 47. Compare also idem, *Das Gedächtnis der Stadt. Hamburgs Gedenken an Luftkrieg und Kriegsende 1943 bis 2005*. PhD diss. (Hamburg: Ms., 2006).

¹¹² Ibid., p. 50f.; 53.

¹¹³ Klaus Naumann, *Der Krieg als Text. Das Jahr 1945 im kulturellen Gedächtnis der Presse* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998), pp. 68-71. Naumann draws on Wolfgang Essbach, "Gedenken oder Erforschen. Zur sozialen Funktion von Vergangenheitsrepräsentation", in: Nicolas Berg, Jess Jochimsen and Bernd Stiegler eds., *SHOAH. Formen der Erinnerung. Geschichte, Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1996), pp. 131-144.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 112.

¹¹⁵ Compare also the inclusion of Dresden in the collection of German *lieu de mémoire*: Olaf B. Rader, "Dresden", *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, vol. III. Ed. by Etienne François and Hagen Schulze (Munich: Beck, 2001), pp. 451-470.

¹¹⁶ Olaf Groehler, "Dresden: Kleine Geschichte der Aufrechnung", in: *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 2/95, pp. 137-41.

purposes of the Cold War.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Margalit speculates about the ways in which the emphasis on the allegedly criminal nature of the air raid might have interfered with the emergence of a critical discourse on Nazi war crimes and genocide in the Federal Republic. Noting the appearance, in 1965, of visual representations of mass death in the national print media of the FRG, Margalit argues that the discourse on Dresden carried a "hidden element"—a subtext that revolved not about the air war at all but about the question of German guilt for Nazi genocide.¹¹⁸

Thesis and Chapter Outline

For the level of city memory, the claim that the air war was placed under a taboo simply does not hold up to empirical enquiry. Malte Thießen's findings on Hamburg are borne out by the evidence adduced in this study. As *lieu de mémoire*, the air war played an integral part in the memory cultures of both Kassel and Magdeburg throughout the period of the 1940s to the 1990s. Although the modes of public expression were profoundly shaped by the socio-political context, the subject retained an important place regardless of the regime changes that both urban communities experienced in the twentieth century. In Kassel, the air war was no less important during the Federal Republic than during the Third Reich; in Magdeburg, the same held true for the transition from Nazism to the GDR and again from the GDR to unified Germany. At the same time, the public enunciation of memory did not remain static but was influenced by the impact of political, socio-cultural and generational change. Over time, new agents emerged, employing new media and modifying received narratives to new purposes. The amount of time, energy, and resources devoted to the subject vis-à-vis other aspects of World War II and the Nazi past varied as well. There were, in other words, discernible cycles of memory. While the air war played an important—and at times pre-eminent—role in local discourse from the 1940s to the 1960s and again from the 1980s to the 1990s, it was less prominent—although by no means absent—in the 1970s.

¹¹⁷ Gilad Margalit, "Der Luftangriff auf Dresden. Seine Bedeutung für die Erinnerungspolitik der DDR und die Herauskristallisierung einer historischen Kriegserinnerung im Westen", in: Susanne Düwell & Matthias Schmidt eds., *Narrative der Shoah. Repräsentationen der Vergangenheit in Historiographie, Kunst und Politik* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002), pp. 189-207. On Dresden, see also Matthias Neutzner, "Vom Alltäglichen zum Exemplarischen. Dresden als Chiffre für den Luftkrieg der Alliierten", in: Oliver Reinhard, Matthias Neutzner, Wolfgang Hesse eds., *Das rote Leuchten. Dresden und der Bombenkrieg* (Dresden: Druckhaus Dresden, 2005), pp. 110-127; idem, "Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern", in: ibid., pp. 128-163; Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Craig eds., *Firestorm. The Bombing of Dresden, 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2006).

¹¹⁸ Margalit, "Luftangriff", p. 205.

Yet, despite the importance of the subject in city memory, one can hardly escape the impression that the public treatment of aerial bombing was characterised by a peculiarly formulaic quality, by a surfeit of "stereotypical phrases", as Sebald has noted with reference to eyewitness accounts.¹¹⁹ Naumann's observation of a preponderance of 'commemoration' over 'discourse' in the memory of the Dresden raids equally applies to the memory cultures of Kassel and Magdeburg. In both cities, certain liturgical formulas, visual representations and turns of phrase emerged, which were reproduced over and over again in public commemorations, commemorative articles, picture books and exhibitions. Any approach that is content with merely rebutting the tabuisation-thesis thus goes only so far in elucidating the public memory culture of the air war, in identifying the discursive fields in which the air war mattered and in understanding the emphases and silences that characterised the treatment of the subject.

This study attempts to go beyond the dichotomy of 'too little' vs. 'too much' memory and the underlying notions of 'taboo' and 'screen' that stand at the centre of the present debate on the "bombing war". It takes contemporary perceptions seriously that framed the experience of aerial warfare in terms of catastrophe,¹²⁰ and argues that local communities tried to come to terms with the cataclysm of indiscriminate area bombing—an event that was, in many ways, unprecedented in local history—by drawing on the repertoire of the tropes, significations and practices available to them. In short, this study argues that locally, the catastrophic experience of World War II area bombing was enunciated in "traditional languages".¹²¹ When Theodor W. Adorno famously claimed, in 1949, that "to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric", he was no doubt justified in positing a crisis of cultural representation in view of the "killing field[s]" left all across Europe by the German war of conquest and extermination.¹²² Yet, on the margins of the pivotal event of the twentieth century,¹²³ and below the level of high culture, people did just that: they produced sentimental *Heimat* verse to mourn the 'death' of their 'hometown'; they re-

¹¹⁹ Sebald, *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, p. 32.

¹²⁰ Compare Neil Gregor, "Is he still alive, or long since dead?: Loss, Absence and Remembrance in Nuremberg, 1945-1956", in: *German History* 21/2 (2003), pp. 183-203, here: p. 185.

¹²¹ Jay Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning. The Great War in European cultural history* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), p. 8.

¹²² Michael Geyer, "There Is a Land Where Everything is Pure: Its Name is Land of Death": Some Observations on Catastrophic Nationalism", in: Greg Eghigian and Matthew Paul Berg eds., *Sacrifice and National Belonging in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Texas: Texas A & M University Press), pp. 118-147, here: p. 121; Adorno quoted according to Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, p. 228. In the dictum, first formulated in the essay, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* ([1949] 1951), lyric poetry stands in for culture as a whole. It is less of a prescription than a reflection on the dialectic of enlightenment and barbarism. See Rolf Tiedemann, "Nicht die Erste Philosophie sondern eine letzte". Anmerkungen zum Denken Adornos", in: Theodor W. Adorno, "Ob nach Auschwitz sich leben lasse". *Ein philosophisches Lesebuch*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), pp. 7-27, here: p. 11f.

¹²³ Alon Confino, "Introduction: Histories and Memories of Twentieth-Century Germany", in: *History and Memory* special issue 1/2 (2005), pp. 5-11, here: p. 9.

appropriated a 19th century sculpture in order to posit continuity amidst catastrophic rupture.

While the cultural enunciation of the violence, death and destruction encountered in aerial warfare drew on traditional modes of expression, these traditions—and this is the second overarching thesis running through the chapters that follow—were first applied to the experience of urban catastrophe by a brutalised society whose hegemonic voice was Nazism, the very agent who had been responsible for the unleashing of total war in the first place.¹²⁴ Or put differently: the traditional languages with which urban communities tried to make sense of the cataclysmic event were far from innocent but bore, to a greater or lesser degree, the ideological imprint of Nazism. Wherever the post-war agents of public discourse turned in their articulation of the experience of aerial warfare, they encountered the sites, practices and narratives of their Nazi predecessors: the dead lay buried in mass graves that had been laid out by the Nazi administration during the war; the framing of urban destruction in terms of *Kultur* and *Heimat* had first been explored by Nazi propaganda; and the very documents with which journalists and lay historians tried to reconstruct the catastrophic events had originally been produced for the information of higher Nazi authorities. The elegiac poem from Kassel, while emphasising catastrophic rupture rather than heroic perseverance, was infused with the concepts and idioms of Nazism, positing a 'community of fate' united in hatred against the enemy. Even the artefact from Magdeburg, although a post-war creation, not only incorporated a 19th century imagination of the city's role in German history but also the claims of Nazi wartime propaganda, which had first paralleled the events of 10th May 1631 to the firestorm of 16th January 1945.¹²⁵

In order to untangle the complex relationship between tradition and innovation, continuity and rupture, it is helpful to reflect not just on the temporal dimension of a memory culture but also on its spatial structure. For the purposes of analysis, this study breaks down the edifice into three separate discursive fields or 'vectors', each of which not only prioritized one particular aspect of the experience of area bombing but also brought forth typical media in which this experience was conveyed.¹²⁶ Each of these vectors was embedded in a distinct cultural tradition that prescribed the discursive boundaries and limited the choices available to the agents who operated in this area. This study proposes to structure the analysis of urban memory cultures thematically around the themes of death,

¹²⁴ On German society during World War II see Jörg Echternkamp, "Im Kampf an der inneren und äußeren Front. Grundzüge der deutschen Gesellschaft im Zweiten Weltkrieg", in: idem ed., *DRZW*, vol. 9/1, pp. 1-98.

¹²⁵ See chapter one below.

¹²⁶ I have borrowed the term from Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory. Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe* (Oxford / New York: Berg, 1999), p. 5f.

destruction, and history. While chapter one sketches the emergence of *lieux de mémoire* in both cities, chapters two to eight make up the main part of this study. They fall into three sections, each of which traces the trajectory of one vector of memory from the 1940s to the mid-1990s. Chapters two, three, and four look at the evolution of the public commemoration of mass death, whereas chapters five and six examine the ways in which urban communities tried to come to terms with the legacy of destruction. Finally, chapters seven and eight analyse the peculiarities of local history writing on the air war.

As the "prototype of cultural memory",¹²⁷ the experience of death stood at the centre of the first of these discursive fields, and in many ways, of the urban memory culture as a whole.¹²⁸ Without death under the bombs, no memory of the bombing, one may state pointedly. Local memory of the air war was indistinguishable from the memory of violent mass death, and the cultural practices that urban communities developed in order to commemorate the dead formed the backbone of public memory cultures. Chapters two, three, and four trace the evolution of public commemorations from their inception as Nazi funeral ceremonies in the 1940s to the 50th anniversary commemorations in the 1990s. In paradigmatic fashion, the diachronic study of public commemoration shows up the extent to which the cultural and political concerns of the present interacted with traditional forms of public mourning in order to answer a set of recurring questions: Why so much death and suffering? Who are the dead, and who are 'we', the commemorators? What 'lessons' do the dead hold for 'us', the living?

While the experience of violent mass death was crucial to local memory cultures, indiscriminate area raids not only killed people in their thousands but also transformed the familiar cityscape beyond recognition, robbing the residents of their homes, their familiar grid of orientation marks, and frequently, also their social environment. The confrontation with urban destruction formed the second vector of memory, interwoven with the commemoration of mass death, but revolving around a different set of questions: What were the reasons for the destruction of the cityscape? Was it the result of a criminal act, or of a (Divine) judgement? How to look upon the devastated city: as an end or a new beginning; as a catastrophe or an opportunity? And finally: how should the urban space be rebuilt: as a continuation of the old or as a conscious new departure? As chapters five and six argue, local communities drew on the idea of *Heimat* in order to conceptualise the material and social devastation of airborne catastrophe and to articulate notions of belonging and alienation. The rebuilding effort of the 1950s and 1960s was framed in terms of *Heimat* lost and *Heimat* re-gained, while from the 1970s, a post-modern critique

¹²⁷ J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, p. 61.

¹²⁸ See Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*, pp. 17-20.

of the contemporary city started to look to the pre-war *Heimat*—visualised as *Alt-Kassel* and *Alt-Magdeburg*—as a place of longing.

Finally, there was history, the attempt at (re-)constructing stories that conveyed the experience of ordinary residents in the firestorm and at explaining how 'it really was' and why. The third discursive field revolved around the efforts of local journalists, lay historians and eyewitnesses to produce authoritative accounts of the iconic events. Here too, different actors in various socio-cultural contexts produced alternative answers to a recurrent set of questions: what was the relationship between local catastrophe and wider developments? Why 'me', why 'us'? How did urban communities experience the cataclysmic events? And finally, who was responsible? As chapters seven and eight argue, local histories rarely attempted to provide a critical perspective on the events in question, but generally buttressed up popular notions about the air raid, its causes and consequences. Rather than functioning as a corrective to memory, (local) historiography formed an integral part of the wider memory culture.¹²⁹

In order to analyse continuity and change in space and time, this study draws on a wide range of sources and makes use of various methodological approaches. The material analysed extends from the speeches held at funeral ceremonies to the rituals enacted at commemorations; from lyrical *Heimat* poetry to the specialist discourse of urban planning; from the anniversary coverage in the local press to public exhibitions that took the air war as their subject matter. In addition, diaries, letters, and other ego-documents are used in order to tease out similarities and differences between public representations of the bombing and semi-public or private undercurrents. Most of the sources presented in the following chapters were collected in local archives or gleaned from the local press but some were also made available by private individuals.¹³⁰ Their analysis requires a flexible approach that takes cognizance of the specific narrative genres in which they were situated. Thus, the methods of literary criticism will be used in order to analyse self-consciously fictional narratives, whereas the study of rituals calls for an alternative approach that is indebted to social anthropology. In a similar way, the analysis of visual material and memorials will draw on the methods of art history, whereas the interpretation of council minutes relies on historical source criticism.

¹²⁹ See Konrad H. Jarausch, "Zeitgeschichte und Erinnerung. Deutungskonkurrenz oder Interdependenz", in: Jarausch / Sabrow eds., *Verletztes Gedächtnis*, pp. 9-39; Hans Günter Hockerts, "Zugänge zur Zeitgeschichte: Primärerfahrung, Erinnerungskultur, Geschichtswissenschaft", in: ibid., pp. 39-73.

¹³⁰ For the central role of the local press for the constitution of a public sphere see Norbert Jonscher, *Lokale Publizistik: Theorie und Praxis der örtlichen Berichterstattung; ein Lehrbuch* (Opladen: Westdt. Verl., 1995); and more generally, Axel Schildt, "Das Jahrhundert der Massenmedien. Ansichten zu einer künftigen Geschichte der Öffentlichkeit", *GG* 27 (2001), pp. 177-206. Compare also Jürgen Wilke ed., *Mediengeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Bonn: bpb, 1999); Norbert Frei / Johannes Schmitz, *Journalismus im Dritten Reich* (Munich: Beck, 1999).

From Experience to Memory

The Emergence of *Lieux de Mémoire*, 1943 to 1946

Introduction: What Makes a Memory Place?

In Kassel and Magdeburg, the memory cultures of strategic bombing revolve around days of remembrance that denote devastating fire raids.¹ With Pierre Nora, the commemoration days of 22nd October and of 16th January may be understood as *lieux de mémoire* or realms of memory in which memory has been "condensed, embodied or crystallised".² Recurring annually, they furnish the pre-eminent discursive space in which urban societies return to the experience of aerial warfare, commemorate the dead, remember the destruction, and reconstruct the cataclysmic events. They provide an occasion to endow the past with symbolic meaning and to draw lessons for the present. As such, they also serve a function for the formulation of qualities and traits that ascribe collective identities to different memory groups.³

How did this happen? Why the air war? Why 22nd October and 16th January? How were the multiple experiences of six years of war and a two-digit number of air raids telescoped into the memory of a single day? Why did certain stories about the bombing become entrenched in public discourse while others played a marginal role only or were not told at all? To ask such questions is to address the continuities and discontinuities between experience and memory, between individual perceptions and collective representations.⁴ This chapter argues that as *lieu de mémoire*, the air war emerged within the course of several months after the fire bombings. In Kassel, 22nd October attained the

¹ See Peter Gray and Kendrick Oliver eds., *The Memory of Catastrophe* (Manchester & New York: MUP, 2004), pp. 1-18.

² Pierre Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, [1990] 1998), p. 7. Hue-Tam Ho Tai makes a similar point in relation to Verdun, in: idem, "Review Essay: Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory", *AHR* (June 2001), pp. 906-922, here: p. 919f.

³ Nora ascribes a material, symbolic and functional meaning to a *lieu de mémoire*. Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis*, p. 32. On the problem of 'identity' see Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 4th 2002), pp. 130-144; Jürgen Straub, "Personale und kollektive Identität. Zur Analyse eines theoretischen Begriffs", in: Aleida Assmann / Heidrun Friese eds., *Identitäten* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a.M.: 1998), pp. 73-104.

⁴ Compare Alon Confino, "Telling about Germany: Narratives of Memory and Culture", in: *The Journal of Modern History* 76 (June 2004), pp. 389-416, here: p. 402.

status of a collective memory place between October 1943 and the summer of 1944, whereas in Magdeburg, the time period of January 1945 to the summer of 1946 was crucial for the establishment of 16th January as a *lieu de mémoire*. In this process, at least three factors played a critical role: experience, volition, and context.

Firstly, there was personal experience. The disruptive impact of indiscriminate area bombings as carried out by the RAF against Kassel and Magdeburg was such that tens of thousands of people were confronted with circumstances, sense-impressions and perceptions "outside the range of usual human experience", that is, with experiences that had a potentially traumatic impact.⁵ Even when making allowance for the high degree of day-to-day violence in a brutalised society that was engaged in a total war against the enemy within and without,⁶ the experience of massive loss of life and wide-scale devastation left indelible traces in the minds of many contemporaries, as ego-documents from the period testify.⁷ Collective representations of the air war thus emerged within a multi-layered web of personal memories.⁸ While the resulting narratives did not remain static, they were also not malleable at will. Oscillating between the poles of death and survival, rupture and continuity, loss and gain, they revolved around a set of themes that changed little over time.

Although primary experience played an important role, this was not, in itself, sufficient for the emergence of calendrical memory places. Despite the impact of the events on the daily lives of a great number of local residents, there was nothing inevitable about the telescoping of six years of war into a single day.⁹ "At first, there must be a will to commit something to memory", Pierre Nora observed in his reflections on realms of memory.¹⁰ In order to stop the process of forgetting, individuals and/or institutions must make a conscious effort to remember, be this through the writing down of personal memories or the organisation of commemorative events. Agency and volition may thus be considered the second factor in the formation of *lieux de mémoire*.

⁵ Alice Förster and Birgit Beck, "Post-Traumatic stress Disorder and World War II: Can a Psychiatric Concept Help Us to Understand World War II?" in: Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann eds., *Life after Death. Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s* (Cambridge: German Historical Institute & CUP, 2003), pp. 15-35, here: p. 15; Clemens Hausmann, *Handbuch Notfallspsychologie und Traumabewältigung* (Vienna: facultas, 2003), pp. 47-96.

⁶ See Jörg Echternkamp, "Im Kampf an der inneren und äußeren Front. Grundzüge der deutschen Gesellschaft im Zweiten Weltkrieg", in: *DRZW* 9/1 (Munich: DVA, 2004), pp. 1-92.

⁷ Compare, with a view to the victims of Nazi extermination politics, Reinhart Koselleck, "Formen und Traditionen des negativen Gedächtnisses", in: Volkhard Knigge and Norbert Frei eds., *Verbrechen erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord* (Munich: Beck, 2002), pp. 21-32, here: p. 23.

⁸ Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis*, p. 11.

⁹ For an explanation that prioritizes experience over any other factor see, for example, the leaflet by magdeburger museen, "Magdeburg den 16. Januar" (Magdeburg, [1995]): "The horrific images left such strong traces on the minds of the survivors that subsequent events or impressions found hardly any place in their memories."

¹⁰ Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis*, p. 32.

Finally, there was the specific nature of pre-existing interpretive frames.¹¹ As Reinhart Koselleck has argued, the experience of World War II was neither uniform nor independent of the mental structures with which people tried to make sense of the myriad sense-impressions and perceptions that they encountered.¹² Nor were these impressions and perceptions immune to the nature of the society that engendered them. In one way or another, they bore the imprint of National Socialist propaganda and reflected the racial, social and gender hierarchies of the Nazified *body politic*.¹³ In the locality, traditional conceptions of municipal history played an important role as well. In this respect, a crucial difference existed between the two cities under consideration here. Whereas in Kassel, urban destruction was without parallel in local history, *Magdeburger* could draw on a well-established precedent, the town's near-total destruction in the Thirty Years War of the 17th century.

This chapter reconstructs the emergence of collective memory places of the air war. As section one will argue, the difference in time between the big raids on Kassel and Magdeburg had important consequences for memory formation. Whereas in Kassel, local catastrophe occurred within the context of a seemingly still stable national framework, in Magdeburg, local disaster formed part of the death throes of Nazi Germany, whose pursuit of a lost war was producing a "vast zone of death and destruction" all across Europe.¹⁴ In Kassel, the air raid of 22nd October 1943 was followed by a long respite in which individuals and local institutions found the time to document primary experiences and to rework memories into narratives.¹⁵ As a consequence, 22nd October 1943 was firmly established as a collective *lieu de mémoire* before the war was over. In Magdeburg, by contrast, the raid of 16th January 1945 occurred against the backdrop of a broader cataclysm that left little time for the work of memory. In early 1945, the date denoted just one—albeit particularly terrifying—episode in a quick succession of events that was transforming the familiar environment beyond recognition.

¹¹ On the concept of the 'frame' see Erving Goffmann, "Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience", in: Charles Lemert & Ann Branaman eds., *The Goffman Reader* (Malden, Massachusetts & Oxford, 1997), pp. 149-166.

¹² Reinhart Koselleck, "Erinnerungsschleusen und Erfahrungsschichten. Der Einfluss der beiden Weltkriege auf das soziale Bewusstsein", in: *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 265-284.

¹³ For an instructive comparison of German soldiers' perceptions in World War I and World War II see Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten – nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebns – Kriegserfahrung 1939-1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998).

¹⁴ Michael Geyer, "There Is a Land Where Everything Is Pure: Its Name Is Land of Death". Some Observations on Catastrophic Nationalism", in: Greg Eghigian and Matthew Paul Berg eds., *Sacrifice and National Belonging in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), pp. 118-147, here: p. 121.

¹⁵ Hausmann, *Handbuch*, stresses the importance of narrative in coping with traumatic experiences. See *ibid.*, p. 88.

Looking at the two cities separately, section two focuses on Kassel while section three deals with Magdeburg. Section two argues that in the aftermath of the fire bombing of Kassel, pre-existing frictions between the official reading of events and a semi-public conversation reached a critical point, which led to the emergence of the memory place of 22nd October by the summer of 1944. While Nazi propagandists stressed continuity and the resilience of the racial community in the face of adversity, many residents emphasised rupture and loss. In Magdeburg, some fifteen months later, this tension between state propaganda and popular responses was discernible as well but it took until the summer of 1946 before the date of 16th January 1945 had attained the status of a *lieu de mémoire*.

The Difference in Time

The time-lag of some fifteen months between the heavy raids on Kassel and Magdeburg led to significant differences in the trajectories of the two memory cultures. The attack on Kassel occurred at a time when the destructive impact of the combined bomber offensive was causing considerable alarm among the Nazi elites and was among the primary concerns of popular opinion.¹⁶ In 1943, the incineration of entire city districts by single raids was still a recent development, and nobody knew what the consequences for morale and war industry would be. Hamburg in July 1943 had shown what area bombing was capable of; Kassel in October 1943 proved that such destructions were repeatable despite strengthened air defences. Locally, the air raid of 22nd October 1943 was followed by a period of respite. The city itself was not attacked again until mid-March 1944, when the RAF carried out two small raids that caused no casualties. While there was a single heavy raid by the USAAF on 19th April 1944, strategic bombing against Kassel did not recommence in force until September 1944.¹⁷ Equally important, the overall military and political situation was not marked by any dramatic changes over the course of some seven months following the raid. The German army throughout the period was retreating on all fronts, but was doing so in an organised fashion without suffering any decisive defeats until the summer of 1944.

¹⁶ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*. Translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Avon, 1971), pp. 363-379, here: p. 370. On popular opinion see the confidential mood reports compiled by the SS, reprinted in *Meldungen aus dem Reich. Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938-1945*. Heinz Boberach ed., 17 vols. (Herrsching 1984), here: vols. 13-15.

¹⁷ A British post-war study divides the air attacks on Kassel in two phases, the Bomber Command raids of October 1943 and the succession of raids by both air forces from September 1944 until the end of the war. See Operational Research Section Bomber Command, "The Effect of Air Attack on the City and District of Kassel (21st October, 1945)", p. 2, copy in: StAK S8 B13. Compare also Dettmar, "Kassel im Luftkrieg", in: *Leben in Ruinen*, pp.18-20.

The combination of the timing of the attack together with its extraordinarily destructive impact made sure that the bombing of Kassel attracted an unusual degree of attention, not just locally but also at Reich leadership level. The response by Joseph Goebbels, the Reich propaganda minister and chair of the inter-ministerial committee on air raid damage, was a case in point. In his diary, he devoted no less than fifteen entries to the raid and its aftermath, registering the unfolding catastrophe and recording his personal impressions.¹⁸ At the beginning of November, he visited the city, where he attended a conference of the crisis committee and gave a speech in front of local party officials.¹⁹ His was the first visit of a high functionary of the Nazi leadership to Kassel since Hitler's appearance at the "Greater German Warrior Day" in June 1939.²⁰

While the raid received very limited coverage in the national press, the regional *Kurhessische Landeszeitung* reported extensively on the attack for a period of about four weeks. The articles were written by Nazi propagandists, who sought to integrate the catastrophic events into the wider Nazi world view. They denounced the air raid as a 'Jewish crime', celebrated the rescue efforts by the party, and generally extolled the 'resilience' and 'sacrifice' of the local population. The same journalists who popularised Nazi ideology were, however, also local residents, whose shock over the devastation resonated even in their propaganda pieces. After 1945/49, some of them would continue to play important roles in local journalism and publishing, and perpetuate slightly altered versions of narratives which they had developed in the immediate aftermath of the air raid in the service of the Nazi regime.²¹ Equally important was the contribution of the Protestant Church. Some three weeks after the attack, the leadership of the church of *Kurhesse-Waldeck* published a statement. The text was called, "Light is shining in the darkness", and was intended to be read from all pulpits in the bishopric on Christmas Day 1943. It sought to console the survivors and express hope in the promise of Christ. At the same time, the statement was resonant with motifs of Nazi rhetoric, speaking of "murder"

¹⁸ *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, ed. by Elke Fröhlich, part II, vol. 10 (Oct. – Dec. 1943), entries of 23-10-43; 24-10-43; 25-10-43; 26-10-43; 2-11-43; 3-11-43; 6-11-43; 7-11-43; 8-11-43; 20-12-43; 23-12-43; 31-12-43.

¹⁹ On the visit see *Kurhessische Landeszeitung* (KLZ) 14/260 (5-11-43), p.1, "Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels in Kassel"; KLZ 14/261 (6-11-43), p.1, "Terror wird uns zu keiner Zeit beugen". For the text of the speech see Helmut Heiber ed., *Goebbels-Reden*, vol. 2: 1939-1945 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1972), pp. 259-285.

²⁰ On Hitler's visit see *Großdeutscher Reichskriegertag* 1939. Ed. by Propagandaabteilung des NS-Reichskriegerbundes (Berlin: Kyffhäuser, 1939), passim; *Großdeutscher Reichskriegertag* 1939 in Kassel vom 2.-5. Juni. Ed. NS-Reichskriegerbund (Kassel: Reichskriegertag, 1939).

²¹ See, for example, G.M. Vonau, "Bomben auf 1000 Jahre. Terror vernichtete das historische Gesicht Kassels", KLZ 14/266 (12-11-43), p. 1; G.M. Vonau, "Zusammenrücken", KLZ 14/256 (1-11-43), p. 3; German M. Vonau, "Zehn Jahre danach", in: Rudolf Helm ed., *Kassel vor dem Feuersturm* (Kassel: Schneider & Weber, 1953); Willi Lindner, "Stilles Heldenamt im Kampf mit dem Tode", KLZ 14/258 (3-11-43), p. 4; Willi Lindner, "Gegen die Unken", KLZ 14/272 (19-11-43), p. 4; Willi Lindner, "Kassel, Leben zwischen Ruinen", *Marburger Presse* 13 (14-2-47).

and "terror" while praising the "willingness to give, care, and serve" as a "light from the kingdom of God".²²

Contemporary coverage of the attack was not restricted to the (local) Nazi press and the Churches. The air raid also spawned a number of internal reports and private correspondence. This was not unusual in itself, since many agencies were required to do so by official regulations, while the desire to inform friends and relatives seems only too understandable. What was remarkable, however, was the extraordinary care and attention that often went into the creation of these documents, resulting in a wealth of detailed official accounts, private letters, poetry and photographs. Between 22nd October 1943 and the summer of 1944, local party and state functionaries as well as private individuals produced a set of visual and narrative representations of the raid which formed a repertoire on which 'memory workers' of subsequent years would draw.²³

The response of Dr. Karl Paetow (1904-1993) to the raid was certainly extraordinary but not altogether untypical. Paetow was an art historian who worked for the city administration following his dismissal from the army due to war injuries. In the aftermath of the raid, Paetow was put in charge of the newly created Enquiry Office for Missing Persons, a department that was frequented by thousands of concerned *Volksgenossen* who enquired about missing relatives and loved ones. Paetow seized on the opportunity to engage in what was an early exercise in oral history. "As a writer, I realised immediately that this presented an opportunity to record the terrible events of the bombing night and its aftermath for history", he wrote some forty years later in a letter to a prospective publisher. He instructed his employees to refer to his desk people who had told of "particularly harrowing events": "I asked them to tell their stories and wrote everything down as they spoke."²⁴ Paetow's efforts resulted in some 130 reports by 'ordinary' *Kasselner*, copies of which he deposited with the city archivist, Dr. Robert Friderici. By the time Paetow (unsuccessfully) tried to have the accounts published in 1981, they had long functioned as memory artefacts and selectively been drawn upon by journalists and local historians as 'authentic' "survivors' reports".²⁵

Ordinary residents, too, engaged in memory work. They carefully filed away letters and postcards which they had received from friends and relatives in the aftermath of the raid. Some would secretly take photographs of the burning city and the smouldering ruins,

²² "Das Licht scheint in der Finsternis", *Kirchliches Amtsblatt* 58/10 (15-12-43), p. 66.

²³ See StAK S8 C40-48 for official situation reports; S8 C51 for private correspondence; S8 C53 for fictional representations; StAK photo archive & IWM London. Photograph Archive, GSA 387 for photographs.

²⁴ BGM Kassel. NL Paetow. Mappe LXII, fol. 1. "Paetow an Lektorat Motorbuch Verlag [1981]".

²⁵ This was also the title of the 1993 publication: *Überlebenberichte. Der 22. Oktober 1943 in Protokollen der Vermisstensuchstelle des Oberbürgermeisters der Stadt Kassel*. Eine Publikation zum 50. Jahrestag der Zerstörung Kassels. Hrsg. Magistrat der Stadt Kassel, Kulturamt. Bearbeitet von Frank-Roland Klaube (Marburg: Jonas, 1993).

while the bereaved erected makeshift crosses on the ruins in order to commemorate the loss of their loved ones.²⁶ One anonymous *Kasselner* cut out thousands of death notices from the regional daily, the *Kurhessische Landeszeitung*, and put them in a Nazi propaganda book about the 'time of struggle' of 1918 to 1934. Was this a pragmatic decision, or was the person making a subtle comment on the 'glory' of the Thousand Year Reich?²⁷ Even more remarkable, perhaps, was the popular success of the anonymous poem, "Thus died my hometown", which circulated among the local population in the aftermath of the raid.

When Magdeburg was subjected to an area attack in January 1945 on the scale suffered by Kassel fifteen months earlier, the overall military and political context was much less conducive to the production of memory artefacts. By January 1945, hundreds of cities had been levelled by the RAF Bomber Command, with devastating fire attacks a frequent occurrence. Nor was the raid followed by a respite in air warfare that would have allowed people to reflect on their experiences and rework them into narratives. On the contrary, the area attack of 16th January 1945 was followed by a continuous string of alarms and thirteen further raids until the end of the war. Moreover, and perhaps even more importantly, the local disaster coincided with the *Vistula* offensive by the Red Army, which marked the decisive breakthrough on the Eastern front, ushering in the collapse of an organised defence and the downfall of the Third Reich. As Rüdiger Overmans has shown in a careful study of German military losses, January 1945 was the deadliest month of the entire war for the Reich, leaving a staggering death toll of no less than 450,000 *Wehrmacht* casualties.²⁸ Only three months after the raid of 16th January 1945, the main parts of the city had been occupied by American troops, who were replaced by British occupation forces in May, who in turn made way for the Soviets in July.²⁹

In the light of the dramatically deteriorating military situation, it was no surprise that the air raid of 16th January attracted very limited attention from outside the region. In his diary, Joseph Goebbels mentioned the raid only twice.³⁰ Neither he nor any other high

²⁶ Private pictures of the raid and its aftermath were taken, amongst others, by Kurt W.L. Mueller (1901-77), the Marburg fireman Friedrich Unkel, and the pilot Anton Riediger. For examples of sites of memory erected on the rubble see StAK. Fotoarchiv. *Gedenkstätten auf Trümmern*.

²⁷ "Die Nachkriegszeit 1918-1934. Todesanzeigen Terrorangriff 22. Oktober 1943", in: StAK S8 C62. Compare *Leben in Ruinen*, p. 115, exhibit no. 322.

²⁸ Rüdiger Overmans, *Deutsche militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999), pp. 238f.

²⁹ Compare Alfred Heidelmayer, "Magdeburg 1945. Zwischen Zerstörung und Kriegsende – Ein Bericht", in: Matthias Puhle ed., "Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot..." *Die Zerstörung Magdeburgs am 16. Januar 1945*. Exhibition catalogue (Magdeburg: Calbe, 1995), pp. 112-144; Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann, "Magdeburg als Stadt des Schwermaschinenbaus 1945-1990: Politische Geschichte und Gesellschaft unter der SED-Diktatur", in: *Magdeburg. Geschichte der Stadt*, pp. 811-852, here: 812f. For contemporary responses to the Soviet offensive see Walter Kempowski, *Das Echolot. Fuga furiosa. Ein kollektives Tagebuch Winter 1945*, vol. I-III (Munich: Knaus, 1999).

³⁰ *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, ed. by Elke Fröhlich, part II, vol. 15. Entries of 18-1-45; 21-1-45.

functionary from the *Reich* leadership paid a visit to the devastated city. While the internal reports on Kassel in October 1943 had been marked by extraordinary attention to detail, Magdeburg in January 1945 elicited no more than routine responses. The summary 'experience report' by the Kassel chief of police of December 1943 consisted of 51 pages; the 'final report' by his Magdeburg counterpart of March 1945 numbered only two.³¹ The regional Nazi press, too, showed nothing of the interest which it had taken in Kassel fifteen months earlier. While there was the obligatory stock-in-trade of National Socialist propaganda—the denunciation of the air raid as a crime, public praise for the 'proud bearing' of the population and promises of party assistance—, the press depicted the raid as an unexceptional, almost ordinary occurrence. As a leader's comment put it in the regional daily, *Der Mitteldeutsche*, on 18th January 1945:

"Life goes on, even if the worries have become bigger. Recently we reported on a trip to the West. What we are going through over here right now has been happening over there every day for months and years."³²

A comparison of the confidential mood reports of the judiciary on Kassel and Magdeburg gives an indication of the extent to which the radically altered military context influenced processes of memory formation. In his report of 9th December 1943, the provincial high court judge of Kassel emphasised emphatically that "the impact of the heaviest terror raid on any German city so far overshadows everything else."³³ Two months later, the situation was not much changed, according to a report by the provincial attorney general, "In comparison to the two terror raids and their far-reaching effects on the population and the administration, other events in my district have naturally taken a back seat."³⁴ By contrast, the provincial attorney general for Magdeburg wrote in a report despatched only a fortnight after 16th January 1945: "The recent military events on the Eastern front have created a situation against which all previous difficulties and crises recede in the background and fade."³⁵ On the bombing, all the attorney general had to say was that "life and work go on as normal, even in places like Dessau and Magdeburg, where the recent heavy terror raids have caused considerable damage and disruption."³⁶

Considering the dramatically altered context in the spring of 1945, it is little surprise that comparatively few contemporary records survive from Magdeburg. Despite the efforts of several generations of local historians, no more than a couple of letters, reports and some diary entries have been discovered. The first collection of some forty eyewitness

³¹ For a copy of the report see NA II RG 243 E6 # 39(9) (box 383). The summary report does contain a lengthy appendix with a list of damaged buildings and industries.

³² "Zupacken", *Der Mitteldeutsche* (18.1.45), p. 1.

³³ B.Arch. R 3001/ 3371, *Lagebericht des Oberlandesgerichtspräsidenten vom 9. Dezember 1943*, fol. 130.

³⁴ Ibid., fol. 138.

³⁵ B.Arch. R 3001/3380, fol. 131f. *Lagebericht des Generalstaatsanwalts vom 29. Januar 1945*.

³⁶ Ibid., fol. 131.

accounts was not put together until the autumn of 1950, at a time when the SED regime was discovering the propaganda value of the air war in the new global confrontation of the Cold War.³⁷ The evidence suggests that by the spring of 1945 the memory cultures of the air war stood at different developmental stages. In Kassel, the air raid of 22nd October 1943 was well established as a local *lieu de mémoire*. In Magdeburg, by contrast, the raid of 16th January 1945 had not yet spawned its own memory culture but was just one—albeit particularly terrifying—episode in the upheavals that engulfed the local community in the final phase of the war. What, however, was the experiential foundation of memory, and what was the relationship between individual experiences and collective narratives? Whose stories mattered in the construction of memory places, and whose voices were marginalised? The following sections will analyse the immediate responses to the big air raids and reconstruct the emergence of a set of themes that stood at the centre of the evolving memory cultures.

Kassel and the Air Raid of 22nd October 1943

During the war, the most powerful agent of memory was the National Socialist regime. With control over the official channels of information, Nazi propagandists were in a unique position to influence the public conversation on the air war. Not only did they provide an interpretive framework for structuring experiences, they also furnished the very vocabulary with which to talk about an event that, in many ways, was without precedent in history. The National Socialist authorities had a variety of media at their disposal to underline their interpretation of the air war, including the press, rallies, exhibitions and commemorations, not to speak of the coercive means to suppress dissenting voices. Yet, even before the escalation of strategic bombing in the summer of 1943, official propaganda did not go unchallenged. It was contested by a semi-public narrative that drew heavily on pre-war apocalyptic fantasies of airborne catastrophe and was steadily fed by a trickle of rumours and personal accounts from individuals who had been subjected to area bombardment elsewhere.³⁸ This section briefly identifies the main themes of Nazi propaganda. It then

³⁷ StAM ZG 55.3. *Akte 16. Januar*

³⁸ On the pre-war imagination see Peter Fritzsche, "Machine Dreams: Airmindedness and the Reinvention of Germany", in: *AHR* 98/3 (June 1993), pp. 685-709; idem, *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Bernd Lemke, *Luftschutz in Großbritannien und Deutschland 1923 bis 1939* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005), pp. 141-44. On the impact of eye witness accounts on 'morale' as registered by the SD reports see Heinz Boberach, "Die Auswirkungen des alliierten Luftkrieges auf die Bevölkerung im Spiegel der SD-Berichte", in: Klaus-Jürgen Müller / David N. Dilks eds., *Großbritannien und der deutsche Widerstand 1933-1944* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1994), pp. 229-241; and, more generally, on popular opinion: Marlis G. Steinert, *Hitlers Krieg und die Deutschen. Stimmung und Haltung der deutschen Bevölkerung im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Düsseldorf / Vienna: Econ, 1970).

focuses on the local evolution of the counter narrative under the impact of the devastating fire bombing of 22nd October 1943.

National Socialist Propaganda and the Air War

The war in the skies over the *Reich* was not a war that the National Socialist regime wanted to fight; it was a war that was forced upon it. Not only did the air war swallow up vast material and human resources that were desperately needed elsewhere.³⁹ Exposing the vulnerability of the German homeland and the helplessness of the regime, strategic bombing also posed something of a dilemma for propaganda, as Joseph Goebbels himself on occasion acknowledged.⁴⁰ Nazi propagandists responded to the challenge in a haphazard fashion, oscillating between dramatisation, moral exasperation, and denial.⁴¹ Throughout the second phase of the war, three themes dominated the official coverage of the allied air campaign, which may be labelled 'air war as crime', "*Heimat*" as front, and 'air war as war'.⁴²

With the onset of indiscriminate area bombing in the spring of 1942, National Socialist propaganda focused on the allegedly criminal nature of the allied conduct of the air war.⁴³ The air raids were labelled *Terrorangriffe* or "terror attacks", which were said to be of no military value, serving no other purpose than the destruction of German (and indeed, European) *Kultur* and the slaughter of women and children.⁴⁴ Accordingly, National Socialist propaganda denied allied pilots the status of soldiers, denouncing them as "gangsters", "pirates of the air" [*Luftpiraten*] and "arsonists" [*Mordbrenner*].⁴⁵ While the general outline of this theme is well known, the specifically anti-Semitic component has been noted less often.⁴⁶ In Nazi propaganda, the strategic air war did not just constitute an

³⁹ Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995). I have used the German edition, *Die Wurzeln des Sieges. Warum die Alliierten den Zweiten Weltkrieg gewannen* (Stuttgart, Munich: DVA, 2001), pp. 136-174; Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, p. 363.

⁴⁰ Compare Willi A. Boelcke ed., „Wollt ihr den totalen Krieg?“ *Die geheimen Goebbels-Konferenzen 1939–1943* (Stuttgart 1967), p. 231.

⁴¹ See the quantitative analysis compiled by the USSBS, "Percentage of space (or time) given by German newspapers (or radio) to air war", in: NA II RG 243 E 6 # 64b g (2) (box 580).

⁴² See the post-war analysis by the USSBS, *The Effects of Strategic Bombing on German Morale*, vol. 1 (1947), pp. 73-79: "Attempts to maintain morale by propaganda".

⁴³ Compare B.Arch. R 55/20898, fol. 43-51. *Pressekonferenzen im Reichspropagandaministerium vom 30-3-42 & 31-3-42* (Propagandistic treatment of the air raid on Luebeck of 28/29 March 1942).

⁴⁴ B.Arch. NS 18/1058, fol. 110: *Propagandistische Auswertung des Angriffs auf Köln*; B.Arch. NS 18/772. *Behandlung des Luftkriegs in der Propaganda* [1943]. See also the booklet by Toni Winkelkemper, *Der Großangriff auf Köln. Englands Luftkrieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung. Ein Beispiel* (Berlin: Frz. Eher NF., 1942)

⁴⁵ Compare for example *Völkischer Beobachter* (Berlin edition) of 3-3-43; 14-3-43; 31-3-43; 7-4-43; 11-4-43; 30-4-43; 18-5-43; 27-5-43; 30-5-43; 2-6-43; 8-6-43; 9-6-43; 19-6-43; 20-6-43; 30-6-43; 2-7-43; 7-7-43; 20-7-43; *Magdeburgische Zeitung* of 24-1-44; *Der Mitteldeutsche* of 23-1-44; 6-2-44.

⁴⁶ But see Nicholas Stargardt, "Opfer der Bomben und Opfer der Vergeltung", in: Lothar Kettenacker ed., *Ein Volk von Opfern? Die neue Debatte um den Bombenkrieg 1940 – 45* (Berlin: rowolth, 2003), pp. 56-71;

atrocity but was seen as corroboration of a central plank of the Nazi world view, namely the ultimate responsibility of 'International Jewry' for the war and its conduct. "Without doubt, the irreconcilable Jewish hatred against German life stands behind the bombing terror of our enemies", as the *Gauleiter* of *Magdeburg-Anhalt*, Rudolf Jordan, wrote in typical fashion in a programmatic article, "The bombing war", in January 1944.⁴⁷ The term 'terror attack' thus carried more than the *prima facia* connotation of an '(air) attack aimed at terrorizing the population'—it formed the semantic bridge between the allied air war and the phantasm of 'the Jew'.⁴⁸

While the overall intention of the theme of 'air war as crime'—the vilification of the enemy as a reinforcing bond for the racial 'community of fate'—seems clear enough, three points are worth noting. Firstly, Nazi propaganda pursued the theme with great confidence, engaging and dismissing the argument that the *Luftwaffe* had initiated area bombing by its raids on Warsaw and Rotterdam in 1939/40. Second, in day-to-day propaganda, a curious discrepancy developed between the theme's overall content on the one hand and the prioritisation of the cultural over the human costs of the air war on the other. Finally, Nazi coverage was anti-cyclical: the impact of comparatively minor raids of the early years was dramatized whereas the devastating area attacks of later years went comparatively underreported. This was most pronounced in the sphere of visual representations of bomb damage, which became more infrequent and selective the more actual damage escalated.⁴⁹

The theme of 'air war as crime' played an important role in domestic propaganda, but it was not the only contextualisation. The second theme can be labelled '*Heimat* as front'. This frame conceptualised the air war as a supreme test of resilience, as a chance for the local community 'to prove its worth' and show itself equal to the example of the military fighting at the front.⁵⁰ It was expressed in characteristic fashion by the *Gauleiter* of *Kurhesse*, Karl Weinrich, on the occasion of a party-organised funeral service in early August 1943,

"If, however, we prove worthy in this hour and counter the brutal will of annihilation of our enemies with a defiant 'in spite of everything', then we will

Jeffrey Herf, "Der Krieg und die Juden. Nationalsozialistische Propaganda im Zweiten Weltkrieg", in: *DRZW* 9/2 (Munich: DVA, 2005), pp. 159-202.

⁴⁷ Gauleiter Rudolf Jordan, "Der Bombenkrieg", *Der Mitteldeutsche* (23-1-44); *Magdeburgische Zeitung* (23-1-44).

⁴⁸ See also Hans Schlitzberger, "Der jüdische Terror", *Kurhessische Landeszeitung* of 13-10-43;

⁴⁹ On visual representations see Jörg Arnold, "In stummer Klage". Visual Representations of the air war and urban memorial culture. The case of *Kassel*, 1943-1968." Paper presented at the Contemporary German History Workshop, University of Southampton, February 2004 (Unpublished Ms., 2004).

⁵⁰ "Magdeburg bestand die erste Probe der Bewährung", *Magdeburgische Zeitung* 24-1-44, p. 3;

"Magdeburgs Bevölkerung hat sich bewährt", *Der Mitteldeutsche* 23-1-44; "Heimat in höchster Bereitschaft", *Magdeburgische Zeitung* 12-5-44, p. 1.

overcome these difficult hours and harvest after victory the sweetest fulfilment of our being."⁵¹

As the conditional sentence structure indicates, there were inscribed in this theme echoes of the deep suspicion of the Nazi movement towards the civilian in war—the trauma of November 1918. Far from undermining morale, the indiscriminate nature of the bombing war served to draw regime and people closer together, or so the propagandists wanted to make their audience (and themselves) believe.⁵² The ability, and indeed, the willingness of the individual to sacrifice possessions and life for the "interests of the *Reich* and the entire *Volksgemeinschaft*" became the measuring rod for the commitment to the war effort.⁵³

Finally, propaganda was at pains to point out that there was still a war being fought in the skies over the *Reich*, a war which German fighter planes and flak were winning by causing the enemy bomber planes insufferable losses; and a war whose course would change dramatically once the fabled secret weapons were ready to wreak 'retaliation' on Britain.⁵⁴ As late as February 1945, for example, the regional daily, *Der Mitteldeutsche*, still produced a headline which claimed that no less than 1389 enemy "terror bombers" had been shot down in the past month.⁵⁵

The propagandistic treatment of 22nd October 1943

With regard to the area attack on Kassel of 22nd October 1943, National Socialist propaganda made a distinction between the supra-local and the local response. In the national media, the event received very limited coverage.⁵⁶ The raid was mentioned in the daily communiqué by the German High Command, which, on 23rd October, spoke in formulaic language of a "heavy terror raid against the city of Kassel", emphasising the destruction in "residential areas" and admitting to "losses" among the population.⁵⁷ Three days later, a short article emphasised the relative success of the air-defences, claiming that

⁵¹ "Durch Opfer zum Sieg", *KLZ* of 5-8-43, p. 1.

⁵² Compare Rudolf Jordan, "Der Bombenkrieg", *Der Mitteldeutsche* (23-1-44), p. 1; Rudolf Jordan, "Warum das alles? Gedanken über die Möglichkeit der Luftschutzbereitschaft in der Heimat", *Der Mitteldeutsche* 6-2-44, p. 1f. On the 'trauma' of November 1918 see the classic treatment by Timothy W. Mason, "Die Erbschaft der Novemberrevolution für den Nationalsozialismus", in: idem, *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft. Dokumente und Materialien zur deutschen Arbeiterpolitik 1936–1939* (Opladen: Westdt. Verl., 1975), pp. 1–17.

⁵³ Compare Hans Hertel, "Die größere Opferfähigkeit", in *KLZ* of 16-8-43, p. 1f.

⁵⁴ Compare for example *KLZ* 238/14 of 11-10-43, p. 1; 239/14 of 12-10-43, p. 1; 243/14 of 16 & 17-10-43, p. 1. On retaliation propaganda see Gerald Kirwin, "Waiting for Retaliation—A Study in Nazi Propaganda Behaviour and German Civilian Morale", in: *JCH* 16 (1981), pp. 565–83.

⁵⁵ *Der Mitteldeutsche*, 6-2-45, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Compare the press clippings compiled by the British intelligence service. Copy in: StAK S8 B2. *Britische Geheimdienstberichte über Kassel*

⁵⁷ "Das Oberkommando der Wehrmacht gibt bekannt..." *Der deutsche Wehrmachtbericht*. Vollständige Ausgabe von Günter Wegmann, 3 vols. (Osnabrück: Biblio-Verl. 1984), vol. 2: 1942-1943, p. 588.

48 heavy bombers had been shot down.⁵⁸ That was all. Locally, however, ignoring an air raid that had destroyed 60% of the built-up environment and made 150,000 people homeless was not an option. For about one month, the attack and its aftermath dominated the local press coverage.

During the autumn of 1943, Nazi propagandists acknowledged the extent of the physical devastation but made no announcement on the number of deaths. Unlike Hamburg in July 1943, there was no party intervention to prevent the use of the term 'disaster' in relation to the air raid, which was used on occasion even by Nazi functionaries.⁵⁹ The emphasis of the coverage, however, rested elsewhere. Local propaganda sought to convey a sense of continuity. To that end, frantic efforts were taken to ensure that the local paper was published without interruption, in the form of a "joint emergency edition" of the local *Kasseler Neueste Nachrichten* and the regional *Kurhessische Landeszeitung*. The publication of a newspaper was not only crucial in providing vital information about the improvised arrangements for the maintenance of urban life but also in demonstrating to the population that the Nazi authorities were coping and in control.⁶⁰

A closer look at the front page of the first joint emergency edition of 23/24th October 1943 provides insights into the content of the coverage. The page contained a proclamation by the *Gauleiter*, plus two leaders' comments. In addition, the front page carried the High Command communiqué and an article on the Eastern Front. The headline was borrowed from the communiqué and read, "The heavy terror raid on Kassel—48 enemy bombers shot down last night". Collectively, the articles employed all of the three propaganda themes explored above. While the headline stressed the relative success of the air defences, the *Gauleiter*, in his proclamation, denounced the "vileness" of the enemy and spoke of the "serious trial" that the population was bearing "earnestly and with pride". Meanwhile, the leader, "In spite of everything!", insisted that "our courage and our will are unbroken—there is no end there is only a beginning". The second article, "The bombed-out", spoke mainly to the party faithful, drawing comfort from the 'time of struggle' by comparing the bombing war to the mass unemployment of the Weimar Republic.

Three days later, another official proclamation furnished what would become the official reading of popular reactions to the area attack. The text paraphrased the *Gauleiter* to the effect that the *Kasseler Volksgenossen* had shown themselves "worthy of the spirit of the front" during the air raid.⁶¹ In the leader of the following day, "Madmen" [Amokläufer], this interpretation was fleshed out and integrated into the Nazi worldview. The author,

⁵⁸ "London gibt 44 Verluste beim Angriff auf Kassel zu", VB of 26-10-43.

⁵⁹ Compare, for example, the proclamation by the *Gauleiter*, "Kasseler Volksgenossen!", which admonished the population to be patient in view of the "extent of the disaster". Published in: *KLZ* of 25-10-43, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Compare *KLZ* of 25/10/43, p. 1.; *KLZ* of 28/10/43, *passim*.

⁶¹ "Sitzung beim Reichsverteidigungskommissar", in: *KLZ* of 26-10-43, p. 1.

Hans Schlitzberger, conceded that the fire raid had succeeded in devouring "bodies [...], apartment flats, churches, castles and monuments" but was adamant that it had failed to exterminate "the spirit out of which all of this has grown". On the contrary: the experience had welded together "us Kasseler" to a "community (*Gemeinschaft*) [...] that can never be broken". According to Schlitzberger, the newly enforced community of fate was not just held together by mutual need and help but also by "flames of hatred" towards the enemy: "Nobody knew one week ago how much he hated the enemy. Now everybody knows." Employing the 'air war as crime' paradigm, Schlitzberger went on to claim that 'England' stood accused of "atrocities that bear no comparison in world history". It was not England, however, for which he reserved his most venomous comments, but the phantasm of 'the Jew':

"About the true aims of our enemies others might be deceived; but they won't deceive us, for we have looked in the true face of our enemy, we have looked in the despicable grimace of the Jew."⁶²

"Kassel is no more!"—The Emergence of a Counter Narrative

What was the impact of this kind of rhetoric on the city population of Kassel? To what extent did the narrative frames of Nazi propaganda, which after all dominated the public sphere, structure the experience of allied bombing, and survive, perhaps in slightly altered form, into the post war years? In order to answer these questions one needs to turn to documents that provide insights into the ways in which ordinary *Kasseler* recorded and communicated their experiences: contemporary diaries, letters, eyewitness accounts, and internal reports. The following section argues that (local) propaganda did have repercussions on popular perceptions, providing in a substantial number of cases not only the vocabulary but also an interpretive framework for the expression of personal experiences. However, there was a fundamental difference in emphasis between the Nazi narrative on the one hand and semi-public and private stories on the other. While propaganda stressed continuity, the semi-public undercurrent or counter narrative stressed rupture; while the papers spoke of hatred, many private communications spoke of loss.

Within the semi-public discourse, the conceptualisation of the area attack as a 'disaster' was widespread, but disaster could come in many forms and mean different things to different people. Four factors were crucial in shaping individual sense-impressions, perceptions and responses: space, political function, gender, and race. Firstly, there was the

⁶² Hans Schlitzberger, "Amokläufer", *KLZ* of 27-10-43, p. 1.

spatial dimension: the relative proximity of the individual to the centre of the area attack. Second, the functional role within the Nazi state was important, in particular with regard to the anti-aircraft defence organisation. The assumption of roles created expectations, both by the environment and by the self, putting the individual under pressure to justify their actions in the categories of "proving one's worth" and "failure". Closely related were gender issues, which assigned different roles and demands to able-bodied men from women and children. Finally, there was the racial dimension, the place of the individual in the racial hierarchy of the Third Reich.

The view from the outside

One of the most revealing contemporary ego-documents is a detailed war diary by a 16-year-old, middle class *Flak* auxiliary by the name of Gebhard Niemeyer, who was stationed near the village of *Niedervellmar* just outside of Kassel.⁶³ The adolescent did not question the war, which he regarded as a mixture of adventure and personal rite of passage into adulthood. His diary contained daily notes, which were supplemented by press cuttings and lengthy excerpts from the Nazi press. On several occasions, Niemeyer fleshed out his notes by entering upon detailed reflections on events deemed of particular importance. One such event was the air raid of 22nd October 1943 and its aftermath, to which he devoted no less than 32 pages. The raid constituted something of a personal triumph for the young auxiliary, who for the first time participated in an enemy engagement as a soldier on active duty. His pride and elation at the successful 'baptism of fire' echoed strongly in his diary, where he diligently noted the number of ammunition rounds fired by his battery and described the sight of burning enemy-aircraft as "the proudest moment".⁶⁴

Initially, Niemeyer watched the spectacle of the reddening night sky over the city with a mixture of awe and fascination, without being overtly worried about the fate of his parents and sister who lived in the Upper New Town (*Oberneustadt*). A sense of unease, however, rose in him the following morning when he heard rumours about an impending visit of *Reichsmarschall* Goering to Kassel, which prompted him to draw a parallel between the raid on his hometown and the devastating attacks on Hamburg the previous

⁶³ StAK, S8 B6. Tagebuch des Flakhelvers Niemeyer. Excerpts have been published in Dettmar, *Zerstörung*, pp. 210-13.

⁶⁴ Compare, "I was so proud that I was allowed to act as B5 during the raid [...]. In the first half-hour, we also saw many planes that were shot down! Again and again there could be heard the joyful shout: the plane's burning! Then you looked up quickly, and indeed, the plane was burning! That was the proudest moment!" A British operational analysis attributed the loss of 42 aircraft to fighter interception rather than to flak. See NA, Kew AIR 14/413. Operational Research Section, report no. 89: "Analysis of Navigation—Raid Against Kassel October 22/23rd, 1943"

July. When a fellow *Flak* auxiliary informed Niemeyer of the scale of the destruction in his immediate neighbourhood, he became alarmed and applied for special leave to look after his parents. Together with his friend, Niemeyer embarked on a journey into the city, entering from the north and travelling south-westward on the periphery of the zone of devastation before crossing into the epicentre of the attack, where he found his home burnt out but his family alive and well.

Niemeyer's account of this journey, of what he saw, smelt and felt, is worth looking at in some detail, for it contains key themes and motifs of a semi-public counter narrative whose emphasis differed markedly from the official press coverage. As the young man approached the city on a country road, the first thing that struck his eye was the sight of a trail of refugees coming in his direction, "dishevelled, the eyes reddened", "a terrible sight", as he remarked. This was followed by disbelief at what his senses recorded as he entered the city. With obsessive detail Niemeyer chronicled the material destruction that he encountered, diligently recording every devastated street and every ruined landmark:

"I only mention these single buildings by name because they used to be familiar landmarks, but don't believe that they are the only sites of destruction, no, everything! [...] I pass through the *Untere Königsstraße*, and my blood runs cold: death and destruction! More and more I reach the conclusion: Kassel is no more! In a single dreadful night, Kassel has been razed to the ground!".⁶⁵

This sense of rupture, almost finality, expressed by Niemeyer in the phrase, "Kassel is no more", was echoed in many private accounts of the time. Two letters addressed to a young soldier may serve to illustrate this point. The first letter was written by the addressee's father in law and carried the date of 22nd October 1943. It spoke of the "annihilation" [*Vernichtung*] of "our beautiful city of Kassel", which the writer had witnessed from the distance of a nearby village. The second letter, written by the soldier's father, opened with the line, "Kassel was [sic] a beautiful little town—we must say today. Dear Karl, Kassel has been annihilated".⁶⁶ Interestingly, another writer invoked the devastation in the Soviet Union as a point of comparison to underline her claim that 90% of Kassel had been "annihilated, a dead city": "Soldiers on leave from Russia all said that they had not seen a single town in Russia which was as devastated as Kassel." Without noticing the apparent contradiction, she added emphatically, "a second Stalingrad".⁶⁷

The conviction that Kassel had been 'annihilated' by the RAF was not just communicated privately but also found expression in cultural artefacts that were disseminated semi-publicly. The elegiac poem "Thus died my hometown" was the most

⁶⁵ StAK S8 B6, entry of 22-10-1943.

⁶⁶ StAK S8 C51. *Abschrift vom Original Schreiben v. 22. Oktober 1943. Karl H.*

⁶⁷ StAK S8 C51. *Terrorangriff! 23.10.1943. Frau Asta R.*

prominent example. The text appears to have circulated in many different social contexts, the work place, the youth evacuation camps, and according to one memory, it even appeared on a leaflet.⁶⁸ At around the same time, another commemorative artefact appeared, of which far fewer traces have survived. It was a four stanza poem set to a popular melody that was variously called "*Kasseler Heimat Song*" (*Kasseler Heimat Lied*) or "The Song of the sorely afflicted Kassel" (*Das Lied vom leidgeprüften Kassel*).⁶⁹ The song differed in intonation from the poem in being sarcastic rather than elegiac, as the first lines show, "Where the roofs are lying on the streets / [...] / there is my hometown, there I am at home". Like the poem, the song focused on human and material loss in its local dimension, implying that the (air-)war was destroying the very assets for whose preservation the war was allegedly fought, the *Heimat*,

"Where the wicked Tommy murders wife and child
Where so many victims are lamented
[...]
Where great pain cries out to heaven
Where everything for miles around has been reduced to rubble
Where I have sacrificed all my possessions
Kassel, my home, I love like my blood."⁷⁰

The excerpt illuminates two important aspects about the semi-public 'disaster' narrative. Firstly, the lamentation of death, although in a state of tension with official propaganda, could be made irrespective of political persuasion and was not by itself indicative of nonconformity with the Nazi regime. Indeed, frequently the opposite was true. Lamentation could go hand in hand with a passionate denunciation of allied 'crime', as in the lines on the "wicked Tommy" committing "murder". Even propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, by all measures an unlikely candidate for political nonconformity, spoke in his diary of the "shattering" impression that Kassel had made on him when he visited the city. On 6th November, he dictated the following:

"The entire centre and the greatest part of the suburbs have been completely destroyed. [The city] offers a terrible sight to the beholder. The scale of devastation can only be compared to Hamburg. A fire disaster [*Brandkatastrophe*] of the greatest order has raged here."⁷¹

⁶⁸ Compare StAK S8 E5. Letter by Margarete L. to Amt für Kulturpflege, 8th October 1983; *ibid.*, S8 E3. Letter by by Alwin K. to Werner Dettmar, 28th April 1983.

⁶⁹ "Kasseler Heimatlied"; "Das Lied vom leidgeprüften Kassel", in: StAK S8 C53. For the text plus translation see appendix 2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, part II, vol. 10 (Oct. – Dec. 1943), entry of 6-11-43, p. 238.

Since Goebbels blamed *Gauleiter* Weinrich for mishandling the situation and intervened with Hitler to have him removed,⁷² it is indeed possible that the propaganda minister emphasised the destruction in order to justify his actions in the light of history, to which his diaries were tailored. Nonetheless, there is little reason to doubt that Goebbels' entry also recorded a genuine sense of shock at what he had seen in Kassel.

Second, even for the outside view, 'death' was not just a metaphor for widespread material destruction but also a reality which came in the view of rows of corpses, charred bodies and body parts. Indeed, too little attention has been paid to the extent to which the dead were visible in the aftermath of area attacks.⁷³ Niemeyer first came upon dead bodies on his first visit to the city on the afternoon of 23rd October, when he saw about fifty corpses arranged in a row on the *Friedrichsplatz*, Kassel's traditional parade ground. He noted that men, women, children, soldiers and POWs lay next to each other, all "very dirty" and "making for a sorry sight since it was the first time I saw so many dead bodies!"⁷⁴ This was not a singular occasion. The diary entries of the following days mentioned rows of corpses repeatedly, ten in one place, one hundred in another.⁷⁵ On one occasion Niemeyer saw rescue workers recover corpses from an air raid shelter and transfer them to a waiting lorry. "The lorry was half-filled already! A dreadful sight", he commented.

It was not only the number of deaths that exercised the young man's imagination but also the terrible condition of the corpses, to which he reacted with a mixture of revulsion and curiosity. On the sight of twenty-five burned bodies in the main shopping street, the *Untere Königstraße*, he wrote in his notes,

"I do not want to turn away; I want to apprehend the misery in its full scale. This sight will make me bitter and make me hard!! Then the stench of the corpses hits me so I need to turn away."⁷⁶

In his detailed account of the day's events, Niemeyer revealed just how closely he had examined the mutilated corpses, describing in detail their various states of decomposition.

Niemeyer's experience was shared, to various degrees, by many, perhaps most visitors to the city in the first week or so after the air raid, according intense sense impressions and

⁷² Compare diary entry of 27th October 1943: "At dinner I get the chance to talk to the *Führer* about a number of personnel matters. I make him aware of the complete failure of Weinrich during the catastrophe in Kassel", in: *Tagebücher*, vol. 10, p. 189. See also entries of 23rd – 26th of October, 2nd, 3rd, 6th-8th November, and 20th, 23rd, & 31st December 1943. On Weinrich's 'temporary suspension' on the grounds of 'ill health' see *KLZ* of 22-11-43, p. 1.

⁷³ Elizabeth Heinemann, "The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's 'Crisis Years' and West German Identity", in: *AHR* 101 (1996), pp. 354-395.

⁷⁴ StAK S8 B6, entry of 23rd October 1943.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, entry of 28th October 1943.

leaving memory traces that would be communicated again and again in private letters and resurface in future eyewitness accounts.⁷⁷ The presence of the dead in Kassel was such that even the local branch of the *NSDAP* grew alarmed. In a letter to the lord mayor, dated 25th October 1943, a local party functionary wrote:

"I know how much work we all have to do. But please do everything within your power to remove the corpses from the streets and squares. The sight is shocking and dreadful scenes occur in front of the uncovered corpses."⁷⁸

Although the responsible authorities tried to speed up the process of removal and burial, even ordering mass burial in double layers, the chief of police, in his experience report, defended the practice of leaving the dead at the site of recovery on the grounds of facilitating their identification.⁷⁹

Whatever the merits of the chief of police's reasoning, the sight of hundreds of corpses lent credibility to stories that vastly inflated the number of deaths. While on 3rd November, the local press published an insipid disclaimer, asserting that the death toll was not as high as might have been feared, no precise figure was given.⁸⁰ The *SD* in its summary report of 18th November 1943 acidly commented that "just like in Hamburg [...] exaggerated rumours" circulated in Kassel that spoke of "40,000, 60,000 and more victims" of the recent air raids. Given that the city only had a pre-war population of 220,000 people, these figures were indeed remarkable.⁸¹ They were echoed in some contemporary accounts, as in a letter to a concerned acquaintance of 25th November 1943, in which the writer claimed, "One generally expects 40,000 dead and 150,000 homeless". He added, "Please do not speak publicly about those figures. You well know how easily this can be used against one."⁸² Another writer put the death toll at 20,000 while Niemeyer in his diary spoke rather more realistically of "at least 10,000" but added that much higher figures were in circulation.⁸³

So far, this section has concentrated on those impressions and perceptions that were made irrespective of personal involvement, the view from the outside onto the devastated city. Such a perspective helps to illuminate important contours of the counter narrative. Great as the actual destruction was with the loss of 60% of the overall living space, and high as the mortality rate was at 2.7%,⁸⁴ in the view of many an eyewitness, Kassel had been 'annihilated' while as much as one quarter of the population were thought to have

⁷⁷ Compare the collection of retrospective eyewitness accounts in StAK S8 C51.

⁷⁸ StAK S8 C50. *Opfer Diverses*. Letter of NSDAP Kreisleitung Kassel to Schimmelpfeng, 25-10-43.

⁷⁹ StAK S8 C40, p. 29.

⁸⁰ "Die Opfer in Kassel", *KLZ* 258/14 (3-11-43).

⁸¹ Boberach (Hg.), *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, vol. 15, p. 6024. *SD-Berichte zu Inlandsfragen vom 18. November 1943 (Grüne Serie). Einzelmeldungen*.

⁸² StAK. S8 C53. "Terrorangriff 23.10.1943".

⁸³ StAK S8 C53. "Abschrift vom Originalschreiben v. 22.Oktober 1943"; S8 B9. Entry of 26-10-43.

⁸⁴ Figures based on Groehler, *Bombenkrieg*, p. 144.

died. Fed on personal sense impressions that, in effect, grossly overestimated the impact of the air raid on the city, a narrative emerged at whose centre stood the attempt to come to terms with a (partly imaginary) level of devastation that appeared beyond comprehension. An analysis of the view from the outside misses, however, a crucial dimension: for many local residents, the grotesquely mutilated bodies that Niemeyer considered with such a mixture of revulsion and curiosity were not corpses but the mortal remains of family members, friends and neighbours. Likewise, the collapsed buildings were not just evidence of one crime or another, but former homes, while the devastated city as a whole was what was left of the spatial and social environment.

Views from the Centre

Recent scholarship has shown an increased readiness to describe aspects of the German war experience as 'traumatic'.⁸⁵ If one employs the definition proposed by Alice Förster and Birgit Beck of trauma as an event "outside the range of usual human experience [...] that would be markedly distressing to almost anyone", then the term is without doubt applicable to the exposure to area bombing.⁸⁶ The heuristic value of the concept, however, remains limited as long as it is used as a label rather than a tool. In the early 1950s, the German physician, Friedrich Panse, examined the experience of "dread & terror" on the basis of some one hundred eyewitness accounts.⁸⁷ As typical physiological reactions he identified tremor and loss of tonus, sometimes in the form of a "terror stupor". As typical psychosomatic consequences he listed a narrowing of perspective, emotional paralysis, a sharpening of instinctive impulses and a heightened suggestibility as well as a change in the subjective sense of time.⁸⁸ According to Panse, air raids were usually followed by apathy, occasionally also by euphoria, with increased sensitisation as a long-term effect. While the study needs to be considered within the context of post-war indemnity claims,⁸⁹ Panse's findings on the physiological and psychological impact of area bombing can nonetheless offer a key to the narrative structure of many local accounts from Kassel.

⁸⁵ Compare Neil Gregor, "Is he still alive, or long since dead?": Loss, Absence and Remembrance in Nuremberg, 1945-1956", in: *German History* 21, 2 (2003), pp. 183-203; Klaus Naumann ed., *Nachkrieg in Deutschland* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001); Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann eds., *Life after Death. Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003).

⁸⁶ Alice Förster & Birgit Beck, "Post-Traumatic stress Disorder and World War II: Can a Psychiatric Concept Help Us to Understand World War II?", in: Bessel and Schumann eds., *Life after Death*, pp. 15-35, here: p. 15.

⁸⁷ Friedrich Panse, *Angst und Schreck in klinisch-psychologischer und sozialmedizinischer Sicht. Dargestellt an Hand von Erlebnisberichten aus dem Luftkrieg* (Stuttgart: Georg Thieme, 1952).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-185.

⁸⁹ On the context of Panse's study see Angelika Ebbinghaus, "Deutschland im Bombenkrieg – Ein missglücktes Buch über ein wichtiges Thema", in: *Sozial.Geschichte* 18 (2003) 2, pp. 101-122, here: pp. 119f.

In his study, Panse identified the need to talk about the threat and experience of airborne attacks as the most "conspicuous mass-psychological phenomenon" of the war years.⁹⁰ Interestingly, this observation stands in direct contrast to the subjective feeling of many survivors of area bombing that their experiences were, in essence, not communicable. "You simply cannot imagine what we have gone through", is perhaps a typical way of phrasing this sentiment, as here expressed in a letter of an adolescent boy to his older sister three days after the raid.⁹¹ Despite a widespread feeling of incommunicability, there were, however, many social contexts in which the survivors of area bombardment talked about their experiences, and indeed, were required to do so. Each of these contexts had important repercussions for the way in which the myriad sense impressions and perceptions were accentuated and communicated. Although all contemporary accounts bore the imprint of the society in which they were produced, the categories of gender, position, and race may help to illuminate different viewpoints.

Gender, Position, Race

When the chief of police, in his summary report of 7th December 1943, tried to explain the high number of casualties suffered during the area attack, he employed a highly gendered argument. He informed his readers that in the most heavily affected areas, the residents' only chance of survival had lain in leaving the air raid shelters before the fires had engulfed their environment. Given that the "right time" for escape had still fallen within the period of attack, he thought it "understandable" that "many people, in particular women and children [...] had not found the courage to leave the air raid shelter at this point in time".⁹² He added that in many cases "husbands neither managed by means of persuasion nor by brute force to induce their wives to leave the air raid shelters".⁹³ As a lesson for future attacks, the chief of police recommended the strengthening of the 'air raid community' through the retention of able-bodied men with strong leadership qualities. He emphasised that "only in exceptional circumstances will a woman be capable of such a thing".⁹⁴

While the strong misogynistic attitude was unmistakable, the underlying assumptions were apparently shared by many people in the city, creating highly gendered demands and expectations of other people's behaviour during an air raid. These demands and expectations were in turn inextricably linked up with the different functions assigned to the

⁹⁰ Panse, *Angst und Schreck*, p. 175.

⁹¹ StAK, S8 C51. "Mein liebes gutes, heiliges Kind.".

⁹² StAK S8 C40, p. 18.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 17.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

sexes within the air defence organisation. The account given by a *Frau* Elfriede N. to Dr. Paetow of the Enquiry Office for Missing Persons may serve to illustrate this point.⁹⁵ At the time of reporting, four months after the raid, *Frau* N. was still desperately trying to locate the whereabouts of her only daughter from whom she had been separated on the night of 22nd October. In her account, the woman was scathing about the men she had encountered during the attack: they "had been complete failures", as she told Paetow. *Frau* N. singled out the air raid warden, a *Herr* K., for special criticism and in effect blamed him to have selfishly left the children behind.⁹⁶

Whatever the justification for *Frau* N.'s harsh verdict, her report was informed by a gendered perspective. The same applied to many male eyewitness accounts. Able-bodied men frequently wrote from a defensive position, in particular when they were among the sole survivors from a particular 'air raid community'. The semantic poles of "proving one's worth" [*Bewährung*] and "failure" formed the binary opposition that structured many male accounts. The language was borrowed from the war experience at the front, or rather, from the Nazi jargon that professed to communicate that experience to the 'home front'. An account by Willi H., air raid warden at *Franziskusstraße* 1 in the centre of the old town, is perhaps an extreme but not altogether untypical example. H. praised the "discipline" of his own "air raid community" while denigrating the "community" from the adjacent house for their signs of nervousness. Likewise, he contrasted the "cowardice" and "panic" of some of the men surrounding him with his own superior reasoning and orders, which were given in the face of extreme adversity for the benefit of a passive "community" that was putting their trust in him.⁹⁷

Next to gender and position, race was crucial. This was no surprise given that Kassel in late 1943 was not just an urban community at total war but also a hierarchically structured racial society in which 22,300 foreigners were forced to live and work, mainly in the armaments industries.⁹⁸ By that time, Kassel had largely completed the extermination of the local Jewish community of 3,157 people with the deportation to the ghettos and concentration camps of Riga, Majdanek and Theresienstadt in 1941 and 1942, which left only a small number of Jews behind.⁹⁹ Unfortunately, the scanty evidence only allows for a few tentative remarks on the ways in which the racial victims of National Socialism experienced the air raids.

⁹⁵ *Überlebensberichte*, report no. 10, pp. 25-28.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁹⁷ Compare STAK S8 C51. "Memento Mori".

⁹⁸ Dietfrid Krause-Vilmar, "Ausländische Zwangsarbeiter in der Kasseler Rüstungsindustrie (1940-1945), in: *Leben in Ruinen. Kassel 1943-1948*, pp. 57-72, & 73-88 (catalogue), here: p. 73.

⁹⁹ Wolfgang Prinz, "Die Judenverfolgung in Kassel", in: *Volksgemeinschaft und Volksfeinde. Kassel 1933-1945*, pp. 144-222, here: pp. 149 & 207.

Without doubt, their lives became more difficult in the short run. Whatever hopes they might have put in bombing as a means to hasten allied victory, area bombing increased their vulnerability in two respects. The inadequate air raid provisions of the communal barracks left them very exposed to airborne attacks. Moreover, as a perceived threat to internal security they also became vulnerable to arbitrary measures by the local authorities. In an intermediate report dated 25th October, the chief of police informed his superiors that 10,000 forced labourers had been made homeless by the area attack, adding that "that they will not receive any provisions if they do not work".¹⁰⁰ Altogether, seven slave labourers were hanged for the alleged offence of plundering while three were deported to a concentration camp.¹⁰¹ In addition, the forced labourers, too, had to cope with loss in its myriad forms, as for example the Dutch worker, Jan B., who not only lost his accommodation but also two Dutch friends in the air raid.¹⁰²

The category of race also informed many eyewitness accounts by members of the urban *Volksgemeinschaft*. The observations of *Frau Else D.*, who worked for the Enquiry Office for Missing Persons, offer a case in point. The woman described in detail the pain and agony that was mirrored in the faces of the people who called in to find out about the fate of missing loved ones, which she felt "gave nobility and dignity even to non-distinguished physiognomies". Significantly, *Frau D.* did not invoke universal categories to explain her observation but found confirmed a dictum by the 19th century poet, Wilhelm Raabe, that ascribed to the "pensive" German *Volk* a special quality of coping with death, adding that "this [...] is confirmed by the bearing [*Haltung*] of the searchers."¹⁰³

For Kassel in the autumn of 1943, there survives little evidence to support Nick Stargardt's controversial thesis that the experience of bombing led to a hardening of attitudes towards racial outsiders, a "nazification of mindsets".¹⁰⁴ If anything, the available evidence points in the opposite direction. Quite a few semi-private accounts mentioned with approval the rescue efforts by Dutch and French POWs, who seem to have been considered by many as fellow sufferers.¹⁰⁵ The same, however, did not apply to POWs and forced labourers of Soviet, Polish or Italian origin, who were either ignored or treated with

¹⁰⁰ StAK S8 C40. "Zusammenfassender Lagebericht zum Luftangriff vom 22.10.1943 auf den LS.-Ort I. Ordnung Kassel".

¹⁰¹ StAK S8 C40. "Lagebericht zum Luftangriff am 22.10.1943. 5. Ergänzung zum Lagebericht zum 25.10.43"

¹⁰² *Überlebensberichte*, report no. 20, pp. 39f.

¹⁰³ BGM Kassel: Nachlass 7: "Stiftung Karl Paetow (Bad Oeynhausen)", 57. Mappe, fol. 47-50, here: fol. 48.

¹⁰⁴ Nicholas Stargardt, "Opfer der Bomben und Opfer der Vergeltung", in Kettenacker ed., *Ein Volk von Opfern?*, pp. 56-71.

¹⁰⁵ Compare for example the reports no. 1; 29; 31; 36; 39; 61; 108; 87; 89; 92 & 100 for favourable mentions of French and Dutch POWs and forced labourers. In: *Überlebensberichte*, passim. Similar reactions were recorded by the SD in its report on the 'Battle of Berlin'. See "SD-Berichte zu Inlandsfragen vom 6. Dezember 1943 (Blaue Serie)", in Boberach, *Meldungen*, Vol. 15, p. 6103.

suspicion and disapproval. What the accounts do reflect, therefore, is the impact of the hierarchical nature of Nazi racial policy.¹⁰⁶

Loss

Despite their differences, the texts originating from the centre of the area attack negotiated, in one way or other, the individual dimension of urban catastrophe. The disaster took many forms, both feared and real, threatening the physical and mental integrity of the individual no less than the social and physical environment. The degree to which elements of the threat materialised differed considerably, depending on a combination of individual, social and institutional factors on the one hand and chance and coincidence on the other. The view from the centre shared with the view from the outside the emphasis on rupture and loss, but explored both themes in their personal dimension, occasionally balancing loss with survival. In so doing, the accounts in no small degree reflected the narrowing of perspective that Panse identified as a typical reaction to the extreme pressures of area bombardment. The realisation that the personal disaster formed part of a wider catastrophe was frequently delayed, and could either be experienced as a shocking epiphany or alternatively as a consolation.¹⁰⁷

A close reading of a letter dated 26th October 1943 can help to illuminate important aspects of the 'disaster'-narrative in its individual dimension.¹⁰⁸ Written by a woman, the letter was addressed to her daughter who had just embarked on a year of compulsory social service somewhere out of town. The letter was not the first communication between mother and child since the air raid. It was preceded by a telegram in which the mother informed the daughter of the survival of the entire family of four. Rather, it was intended as a private report on the family's fortune during the air raid.

The account opened by emphasising a sense of rupture: a scene of ordinary day-to-day activity was juxtaposed to a vivid description of the family's panic-stricken flight through air raid cellars filling with smoke and burning streets hit by high-explosive bombs. In a similar vein, the stillness of the first few minutes in the air raid cellar was contrasted with the noise of exploding bombs and frantic screams. At the time of writing, survival amidst the chaos and destruction still appeared like a miracle to the writer, "oh, it was terrible, hardly conceivable that we escaped alive". Not until the following day did the family grasp the full dimension of the air raid's impact on the city—a realisation described as a shocking

¹⁰⁶ Compare Himmler's *Runderlass* of 7/12/42, paraphrased in Krause-Vilmar, "Ausländische Zwangsarbeiter", p. 59f.

¹⁰⁷ Compare reports no. 65 & 98 for the second perspective. In: *Überlebensberichte*, pp. 90; 146-48, here: p. 148.

¹⁰⁸ StAK S8 C51. Letter of 26th October 1943, addressed to 'Mein liebes gutes, heilige Kind', signed 'Mama'.

epiphany: "then the horror: everything *kaput* in Kassel [...] in the old town nothing but death". Significantly, the general description of urban devastation and mass death was immediately linked to the social and spatial environment. The nineteen casualties found in the cellar of a nearby grocer were listed by name: the dead were not just abstract entities but individuals with whom the writer and her addressee used to interact regularly, as was made clear by identifying some of them by their first names. In contrast to the detailed description of mass death, the loss of "our beautiful happy home" was mentioned in passing only. This was followed by the rationalisation, "it does not matter: the hand of God has preserved us and kept us together". The letter closed with a passionate plea for the daughter to be granted special leave. Clearly, this family tried to compensate for the destruction of their social environment by a strengthening of familial ties.

Just as two-thirds of the urban population, the family had been made homeless by the air raid. While they could draw comfort from the fact that that they had survived without any serious physical harm, for many inhabitants, the dimensions of the disaster went considerably further. According to the summary police report of 7th December 1943, 11,671 residents were physically injured in the area attack, 800 of them seriously.¹⁰⁹ One case is documented of a 19-year-old woman who incurred such severe burns to her knees, hands, and face that she was left permanently disabled. According to a letter written by her husband 50 years after the raid, the woman became clinically depressed, contributing to what her husband considered her premature death in 1993.¹¹⁰

Next to injury, there was death. The official death toll of 6,000 casualties not only meant that 2.7% of the population were killed in a single night but also that thousands of individuals were left behind having to cope with the violent death of their loved ones. The encounter with death could come in many forms but was frequently experienced as an intensely painful and personal affair. One woman in her thirties recalled how her sister-in-law was struck dead by burning debris in front of her eyes while they tried to escape from an air raid cellar. The same woman later found herself waking up in another shelter among scores of dead bodies and dying occupants.¹¹¹ Others were haunted by memories of having been powerless to prevent the death of spouses or children while being forced to witness. In an undated letter to an acquaintance, a *Frau* Sch. told of how she, her husband, and one of her children had been buried alive in their air raid cellar on *Wilhelmshöher Allee* 29. She recalled how she had heard her son cry out, "help, mom, help". *Frau* Sch. was rescued, but the bodies of her son and husband were not recovered until three weeks later. To her

¹⁰⁹ StAK S8 C40, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Compare *Überlebensberichte* no. 92, pp. 136f., annotation 4.

¹¹¹ Report No. 74, in: *Überlebensberichte*, pp. 103-5. See also reports No. 68 & 81, in: *ibid.*, pp. 93f. & 117-9.

acquaintance, *Frau Sch.* confided, "It is horrible. I always hear my dear son cry for help".¹¹²

The death of loved ones appears to have been particularly hard to accept when there was no body to mourn over. In his report to Paetow, the 44-year-old police constable L.B. detailed how he had searched for traces of his family by sieving through the rubble of several burnt-out air raid cellars.

"I have found many wedding rings, but not the one of my wife. I have held in my hand children's vertebrae and skulls [...]. But I have found no trace of my family."¹¹³

In a letter to the mayor, dated 20th January 1944, a Karl G. inquired on behalf of his mother about the memorial provisions for those local residents who were confirmed dead but whose bodies had not been found. He explained that his mother had been hard hit by the loss of her son, daughter in law and grandson, but simply "cannot understand that nothing has been found of my brother and his relatives".¹¹⁴ Bereaved families often preferred to have their loved ones buried separately or in family graves whenever possible. Sometimes, relatives would go as far as to intervene with the authorities in order to reverse burial procedures, as is documented for the electrician L.S., who turned to the head of the administrative district (*Regierungspräsident*) to negotiate on his behalf with the local authorities to have his wife reburied in the nearby town of Fritzlar.¹¹⁵ The request was refused but around the same time the *Gauleiter* himself ordered that in principle families be allowed to bury their relatives privately.¹¹⁶

While thousands were confronted with the death of loved ones, a significant number of people had to live for months with the uncertainty of missing relatives. As of 7th December, the Enquiry Office for Missing Persons was dealing with 3,000 cases while 1,800 bodies had been buried without proper identification.¹¹⁷ In the first few months after the raid, thousands called in to the office to inquire about the fate of missing relatives, friends, and acquaintances, sometimes several times a week. One case is documented of a mother who carried on the search for her 9-year-old daughter for years, following up every spurious lead that presented itself.¹¹⁸

¹¹² BGM Kassel: Nachlass 7: "Stiftung Karl Paetow (Bad Oeynhausen)". 59. Mappe, fol. 20.

¹¹³ Report No. 63, in *Überlebensberichte*, pp. 88f.

¹¹⁴ BGM Kassel, Nachlass Paetow. 61. Mappe, fol. 29f.

¹¹⁵ StAK S8 C 50. *Opfer Diverses*. Letter of Regierungspräsident to Lord Mayor of 28-10-43; letter of Lord Mayor to Herrn S. of 28-10-43.

¹¹⁶ Report No. 75, in: *Überlebensberichte*, pp. 105-9, here: p. 108.

¹¹⁷ StAK S8 C40, p. 2f.

¹¹⁸ BGM Kassel, Nachlass Paetow. 58. Mappe, fol. 47-50; *Überlebensberichte* No. 10, pp. 25-29; "Ein Schicksal des 22. Oktober 1943: Eine Mutter weiß: Mein Kind lebt!", *Hessische Nachrichten* of 22-10-52.

Accountability

Who then did the citizens of Kassel hold responsible for the urban catastrophe that had come upon their city? Equally, important, who did they credit with their personal survival? Did they accept the official rationalisation of the raid as a 'crime', perhaps even in its anti-Semitic form of a 'Jewish crime', or did they consider the area attack a legitimate act of war? Did the rescue effort lead to a strengthening of the affective bonds between the Nazi regime and the local population, to a second 'seizure of power' by the *NSDAP*, as is sometimes claimed?¹¹⁹ Or did, on the contrary, the inability of the Nazi regime to defend the *Heimat* erode the consensual spheres between regime and ordinary citizens, as Ian Kershaw and others have argued?¹²⁰

The evidence from Kassel in late 1943 suggests that the nation state constituted only one of several levels to which the question of accountability was addressed, and arguably not even the most important one. The available data further supports the thesis that Nazi propaganda provided a language that was readily accepted by many, perhaps most local residents as a way of talking about the air war, not least because it appeared to be confirmed by personal experience. There are, however, few indications that the adoption of National Socialist idiom translated into a strengthening of the consensual spheres between Nazi regime and local population as a whole. Rather, the loss of the *Heimat*, family and friends appears to have raised fundamental questions about the individual's prospects in life that went considerably beyond party and state loyalties.

The most important sphere of accountability was the local sphere. Survivors credited courageous individuals with their rescue, be they an air raid warden, a soldier, a POW, a forced labourer, a civilian or a member of their own family.¹²¹ Likewise, they blamed members of their own community for the death of relatives, either because they had prevented them from leaving the air raid shelters, led them in the wrong direction, abandoned them in the hour of need, or refused shelter.¹²² Next to this micro-level, people credited a supernatural being—God—or simply a miracle with their survival.¹²³ By

¹¹⁹ Compare Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg* (Munich: Propyläen, 2002), p. 442; Hans Mommsen, "Wie die Bomber Hitler halfen", in: Stephan Burgdorff and Christian Habbe eds., *Als Feuer vom Himmel fiel. Der Bombenkrieg in Deutschland* (Munich: DVA, 2003), pp. 115-121.

¹²⁰ Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth'. Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 200-25; Ursula Büttner, 'Gomorrha': *Hamburg im Bombenkrieg. Die Wirkung der Luftangriffe auf Bevölkerung und Wirtschaft* (Hamburg, 1993); Neil Gregor, "A Schicksalsgemeinschaft? Allied Bombing, Civilian Morale, And Social Dissolution in Nuremberg, 1942-1945", in: *The Historical Journal*, 43, 4 (2000), pp. 1051-1070.

¹²¹ Compare reports no. 29 & 49, in: *Überlebensberichte*, pp. 48f; 71-73.

¹²² Compare reports no. 4, 18, & 62, in: *Überlebensberichte*, pp. 17f.; 37f.; 85-87.

¹²³ Compare reports no. 3 & 81, in: *Überlebensberichte*, pp. 15-17; 117-19.

contrast, the efforts of the local and national state and party authorities were acknowledged and sometimes commended, but they also corresponded to widespread expectations.¹²⁴

Contemporary ego-documents made frequent use of the vocabulary provided by official propaganda. Next to the emotive phrase, the 'night of horror' [*Schreckensnacht*], 'terror raid' became the generic term to describe the area attack of 22nd October 1943, as is borne out by an analysis of the obituaries published in the local paper. While certain statements clearly would have been inadmissible in a newspaper controlled by the *NSDAP*, the leeway for the wording of private death notices appears to have been considerable. One widow spoke in her obituary of the "air raid on Kassel" which had caused their house to collapse, "burying all my loved ones." Next to her husband and her three children the woman also remembered their 18-year-old Polish worker who had died as well, referring to her as "our loyal and dear housemaid".¹²⁵ At the other end of the spectrum, a widow thought it appropriate to announce the death of her husband and eight other family members by quoting the Nazi dictum of "Germany must live even if we have to die!" and insisting that her kin had died "a sacrificial death for an eternal Germany".¹²⁶ While these two examples illustrate the range of possibilities, the vast majority of obituaries referred to the attack as a "terror raid" without explicitly invoking the Nazi rationale for violent death.¹²⁷

Some private accounts also employed the propaganda trope of 'air war as crime', denounced the RAF raid as 'murder' and expressed feelings of hatred. The *Flak* auxiliary Niemeyer, for example, spoke in his diary of his hatred "towards the murderers that bombed Kassel into rubble and ruins",¹²⁸ while the *Kasseler Heimatlied* contained the line, "where the wicked Tommy murders wife and child". Likewise, the elegy *Thus Died My Hometown* mentioned "flames of hatred" that "will fall back on England". By contrast, not a single contemporary document survives that specifically blamed the Nazi regime. Unlike the previous summer, when the *SD* in a special report registered across the *Reich* an upsurge in critical comments and small gestures of nonconformity, in Kassel, in the autumn of 1943, several party faithful commented on the absence of public or semi-public grumbling.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Compare reports no. 54, 62, 73 & 77, in: *Überlebensberichte*, pp. 78, 85-7, 101-03, 113f.

¹²⁵ StAK S8 C50. *Opfer Diverses*.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ See StAK S8 C62, which consists of an album containing thousands of obituaries. A sample suggests that about 80% of the obituaries used the term 'terror raid' to describe the air raid of 22nd October.

¹²⁸ StAK S8 B 6. Entry of 24th October 1943.

¹²⁹ Compare "SD-Berichte zu Inlandsfragen vom 8. Juli 1943 (Rote Serie): Auflockerungerscheinungen in der Haltung der Bevölkerung", in: Boberach ed., *Meldungen*, vol. 14, pp. 5445f.; BGM Kassel Nachlass Paetow. Mappe 61, fol. 138: Hitler Youth functionary G.W.: "In comparison to Hamburg, the pleasant circumstance was remarkable that I did not meet a single person who grumbled about our government." Compare also report no. 90 in: *Überlebensberichte*, pp. 132-135, here: p. 134.

It would certainly be rash to infer from the lack of documentary evidence that there was indeed nobody among all the residents of Kassel who held the Nazi regime responsible. The absence attests to a social climate in which critics proceeded with caution and kept their thoughts to themselves. If a reminder of the necessity of such an approach was needed, then this was furnished by the new *Gauleiter*, Gerland, who in his inaugural speech of 21st November 1943 spoke of his determination to "exterminate all inferior elements", among whom he explicitly included "the bearers of foolish rumours."¹³⁰ What some documents did express was a sense of war weariness. In her letter to an acquaintance, *Frau Sch.* spoke of war in general as 'murder', professing the hope that "this murder will someday come to an end".¹³¹ The elegy "Thus died my hometown" circulated most widely in a variant that concluded with the line, "war is madness", while the *Kasseler Heimat Song* in one version contained the verse, "Kassel, my home, say, it is enough".¹³² In his last interview before his suspension, even *Gauleiter* Weinrich spoke of a "just peace" as the most desirable outcome of the war—an indication, perhaps, of the extent to which the highest local representative of the regime had been demoralised by the air raid and the allegations levelled against him.¹³³

With hatred of the enemy and war weariness expressed in approximately equal measure, the evidence on the impact of the air raid on morale remains inconclusive. While there are few signs that the Nazi authorities benefited from the area raid politically, there can equally be no question that the regime remained firmly in control despite the widespread devastation. It must, however, be open to doubt if an interpretive framework that implicitly adopts the evaluative categories of Nazism can do justice to the emotional impact of area bombardment. The assumption that political loyalties stood at the centre of the repercussions of air raids seems questionable. Rather, the scale of the material, social and emotional disruption was such that some residents—temporarily at least—appear to have despaired of life altogether, while others refocused their energies on day-to-day survival and their immediate social environment, above all the family.¹³⁴ In the letter to her daughter analysed above, the woman wrote, "we promise to keep our heads down and lead a modest life if only we can have life, because we have you children."¹³⁵

As the discussion has shown, two powerful agents of memory operated in Kassel in the aftermath of the air raid of 22nd October 1943. The first was Nazi propaganda, which

¹³⁰ "Und nun Kopf hoch! Wir gehören dem Leben!", *KLZ* of 23rd November 1943., pp. 1f.

¹³¹ BGM Nachlass Paetow, 61. Mappe, fol. 20. Letter of *Frau Scharmann* to Rektor Leinius, undated.

¹³² StAK S8 C53. *Literarische Verarbeitung*. "Das Lied vom leidgeprüften Kassel", line 16.

¹³³ "Stark im Ertragen – Mutig im Kämpfen. Eine Unterredung mit dem *Gauleiter*", *KLZ* 264/14 of 10-11-43, p. 1.

¹³⁴ Compare reports no. 35, 60, 83, 97, in: *Überlebensberichte*, pp. 57, pp. 83f, 121f., 144f. See also BGM Kassel. Nachlass Paetow. *Mappe 58, fol. 47-50; Mappe 61, fol. 20.*

¹³⁵ StAK S8 C51. "Mein liebes, gutes, heiliges Kind", letter of 26-10-43.

produced a narrative that dominated the public sphere. Conceptualising the attack as a *Terrorangriff* or "terror raid", the official narrative emphasised continuity, the alleged criminality of the raid, and extolled the resilience of the racial community in the face of adversity. The second agent was the local population, whose personal experiences engendered a semi-public undercurrent that focused on rupture and loss, as was captured in the term *Schreckensnacht* or "night of horror". Initially, this counter narrative comprised many different voices, which were structured by the factors of space, gender, position, and race.

The hold of the catastrophic event on the collective imagination was such that two-thirds of the residents left the city by the autumn of 1944 for fear of a repeat of the air raid on its first anniversary.¹³⁶ Gebhard Niemeyer, meanwhile, wrote on 22nd October 1944, "The first anniversary of the dreadful destruction of Kassel. With the help of my diary entries, I again relived the events of the night of horror."¹³⁷ In the light of this evidence, the decision by the regional *NSDAP* to mark the first return of the day of 22nd October by way of a small commemoration may thus be considered less of an attempt to foster the creation of a memory place than a tacit acknowledgement of the extent to which the date had already attained such a status in collective consciousness.¹³⁸ In Magdeburg, the situation was rather different, as the following section will show.

Magdeburg and the Air Raid of 16th January 1945

In Magdeburg, the subject of aerial warfare occupied a prominent place in local propagandistic activity throughout the year of 1944, reaching a climax with the organisation of an air raid precaution week, "Fight the terror!", in May.¹³⁹ By the time of the fire bombing of 16th January 1945, however, the dramatic development on the Eastern Front, where the Red Army had launched a major offensive on 12th January, was overshadowing all other events, relegating the air war into the background. The extent to which the regional party leadership was preoccupied with other issues in the winter of 1945 may be gauged from the curious circumstance that in his post-war memoirs, the *Gauleiter* of Magdeburg-Anhalt, Rudolf Jordan, misdated the big raid by several weeks. Using the iconic bombing of Dresden of 13th February 1945 as a point of reference, Jordan

¹³⁶ NA II RG 243 E6 # 64b k21. Background reports of German cities (Kassel), p. 18 (evacuation).

¹³⁷ StAK Gebhard Niemeyer, *Kriegstagebuch*, entry of 22 Oct. 1944.

¹³⁸ See the coverage of the ceremony in the local press, "Das Vermächtnis der Toten", *KLZ* 15/249 (23-10-44), p. 4. See also chapter two below.

¹³⁹ "Kampf dem Terror! Aufruf des Gauleiters und Reichsverteidigungskommissars Rudolf Jordan zur Luftschutzwocche im Gau Magdeburg-Anhalt vom 11. bis 18. Mai 1944", *Magdeburgische Zeitung* 12-5-44, p. 1.

made no mention of the date of 16th January and claimed that Magdeburg was destroyed "a few days after" Dresden.¹⁴⁰

Despite the wider shock of the winter of 1945, however, the evidence does not support the assumption that the *lieu de mémoire* was wholly a post-war invention. As contemporary ego-documents make clear, many individuals perceived the fire bombing as marking a rupture in their personal lives as well as in the history of the city at large. "As long as we may live, we'll never forget what we've gone through in the past week", wrote a young nurse a few days after the attack in a letter to her parents.¹⁴¹ True, the population had experienced heavy raids throughout 1944, some of which had caused considerable damage and exacted hundreds of casualties, but the raid of 16th January 1945 was different in transforming a city into a "heap of rubble", as the woman remarked in the same letter. "You'll be speechless about the way it looks [here]; there's no city left", wrote another *Magdeburger* in a letter to a relative on 18th January 1945.¹⁴² Within the body of private documents produced in the months following the attack, estimates of the death toll were put between 5,000 and 40,000, that is, between 1.5% and 12% of the pre-war population.¹⁴³ As in Kassel fifteen months previously, the view from the outside communicated the impression that the destructive impact of the air raid had, in effect, annihilated the city as a built-up environment and social space.

Likewise, the view from the inside negotiated, in one way or another, the individual dimension of urban catastrophe. This could take the form of deep gratitude, elation almost, at unexpected survival in desperate circumstances, as in the case of an anonymous writer who managed to escape from a collapsed shelter and found his relatives alive and well amidst the death and devastation surrounding him. Written in December 1945, the account concluded on a hymnal praise of God.¹⁴⁴ At the other end of the spectrum, personal accounts could convey a deep sense of despair at the loss of loved ones, combined with feelings of self-reproach and guilt at having failed them in their hour of need. In a number of letters written to a confidant, a woman recounted how her adolescent daughter had gone missing in the air raid while she was out of town. Called back by a relative, the mother not only was confronted with the realisation that her daughter had been killed but also had to

¹⁴⁰ Rudolf Jordan, *Erlebt und erlitten. Weg eines Gauleiters von München bis Moskau* (Leoni am Starnberger See: Druffel, 1971), p. 232.

¹⁴¹ KHM Magdeburg A 5499 b. Letter of Erna to her parents, dated 21-1-45.

¹⁴² StAM Rep. 41/481, Letter, dated 18-1-45.

¹⁴³ In a letter of 28-1-45, L.P. put the death toll at 5,000, in: KHM, "Erinnerungen an die Magdeburger Bombennacht". The nurse E., in her letter of 21-1-45, gives a figure of 14,000, in: KHM A 5499 b; anonymous, writing in December 1945, puts the death toll at 40,000, in: KHM, "16. Januar 1945. Vernichtungsangriff der anglo-amerikanischen Luftwaffe auf Magdeburg".

¹⁴⁴ KHM, "16. Januar 1945. Vernichtungsangriff".

cope with the ostracism of her environment, who threatened to report her to the police on the charge of criminal neglect.¹⁴⁵

While the immediate responses of ordinary *Magdeburger* to the big air raid were broadly similar to the reactions in Kassel in the autumn of 1943, the quick succession of catastrophic events in the spring of 1945 forestalled the creation of a dense web of interrelated stories that would single out the event of 16th January 1945. More important for the emergence of a calendrical site of memory than immediate experience was something else: the pre-existence of a well-established *lieu de mémoire* denoting urban catastrophe, and the active parallelisation of this memory place with 16th January by the post-war civil administration as a means to foster a civic identity among the dispirited population.

Rupture as Continuity: 10th May 1631 and 16th January 1945

In a post-war text, the Protestant cathedral preacher, Ernst Martin, tells of a visual reminder of urban catastrophe that he kept in his study: "memento! 10. V. 1631 / 16. I. 1945", read a sheet of paper that his secretary had put in a picture frame and hung up on a wall opposite his desk.¹⁴⁶ In reflecting on the impact of World War II bombing, the preacher drew a historic parallel that in all likelihood occurred to many *Magdeburger*. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the name of Magdeburg was associated, in the minds of Protestant middle-class intellectuals, with the so-called "marriage of blood", the burning of the city and slaughter of its population by Imperial Catholic troops at the height of the Thirty Years War.¹⁴⁷ In typical fashion, a 1920s art guide set out by emphasising the catastrophic rupture of 10th May 1631. In his contribution to the popular series, "German Lands / German Art", Ernst von Niebelschütz wrote,

"Indeed, there is an event that interrupts violently the succession of the historic development of this city, forcing every biographer to drop the narrative thread at a distinct moment [...]. There exists a Magdeburg before the destruction and a Magdeburg after the destruction."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ StAM Rep. 41 / 481.

¹⁴⁶ Ernst Martin, "Memento", in: Herbert Martin ed., *Aus seinem Leben* (Bad Harzburg: Ms., 1979), pp. 57-61, here: p. 57. On the role of Martin in the Third Reich see Ralf Czubatynski, "Domprediger Ernst Martin (1885-1974) im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Kirchenpolitik in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik und des Nationalsozialismus", *Sachsen-Anhalt. Beiträge zur Landesgeschichte* 15 (1999), pp. 101-124.

¹⁴⁷ Manfred Köppe, "Die 'Magdeburgische Hochzeit' im Spiegel der Literatur", in: *Magdeburg. Portrait einer Stadt*, pp. 287-304; Maren Ballerstedt, "Die Zerstörung der Stadt am 10. Mai 1631 im öffentlichen Bewusstsein Magdeburgs", in: *Sachsen-Anhalt. Beiträge zur Landesgeschichte* (2000), pp. 34-55.

¹⁴⁸ Ernst von Niebelschütz, *Magdeburg* (Deutsche Lande / Deutsche Kunst, ed. Burkhard Meier) (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, [1929]), p. 6.

For generations, the events of 10th May 1631 occupied a prominent place in the local school curriculum, leading scores of school boys to relive the past as a dramatic adventure, to identify with the 'tragic hero' of the story, the Swedish town commander, and "to shed tears over 10th May", as a newspaper article expressed it.¹⁴⁹

By the time of the tri-centenary of the disaster in 1931, the *lieu de mémoire* had been invested with strong Protestant-nationalist connotations. As the speakers at the two official commemorative ceremonies emphasised, the citizens of Magdeburg had, in 1631, heroically sacrificed their lives and possessions for the cause of 'German' Protestantism against 'foreign' Catholicism. "There can be no doubt that the Protestant form of piety for which they fought [...] was born out of the Germanic spirit", as a history professor told his audience at the city-sponsored celebration in the city hall.¹⁵⁰ At the commemorative event of the Protestant Church the previous night, a Protestant pastor extolled Magdeburg's destruction as a "heroes' song of faith and *Heimat*" and held up the past as an example to the crisis-ridden present, "Remember 10th May 1631! Out of the past, this song [of faith and *Heimat*, JA] speaks to the bitter misery of our days—to the pain out of which the German soul cries for uprising and salvation".¹⁵¹

Meanwhile, the Social-Democratic city administration invoked the day of remembrance in order to stress the resilience of the city in the face of extremely adverse circumstances. Just as the murder and destruction had failed to "deliver a fatal blow to the city" in the 17th century, so had two-hundred years of authoritarian Prussian rule in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Social Democratic mayor, Hermann Beims, argued in 1927. In order to legitimise his ambitious project of making the city into the secret capital of "middle Germany", Beims repeatedly drew on history, and asserted that the "young" and "new" Magdeburg of the Weimar Republic was claiming her rightful place amidst Germany's big cities.¹⁵²

With the tri-centenary celebration less than fifteen years past in 1945, Nazi propagandists, too, made an attempt at drawing on the historic precedent of 10th May 1631 in order to put present devastation into context. In an article published a week after the bombing in a provincial edition of the regional daily, the anonymous author emphasized the suffering of Magdeburg by drawing a comparison with the city's iconic destruction in the Thirty Years War, "On 16th January, [the Cathedral] witnessed worse things [than on

¹⁴⁹ "Magdeburger Jungen weinen um den 10. Mai", *Magdeburger General-Anzeiger* 10-5-1931.

¹⁵⁰ "1631 – Magdeburgs Schicksalstag – 1931. Die Gedenkstunde in der Stadthalle", *Magdeburger Generalanzeiger*, special supplement of 12-5-1931.

¹⁵¹ Alfred Frantz, "Das Magdeburger Heldenlied von Glauben und Heimat", in: *General-Anzeiger* of 10-5-1931.

¹⁵² *Magdeburg*. Magistrat der Stadt Magdeburg ed. (Berlin, 1927), pp. 5f; Matthias Tullner, "Modernisierung und mitteldeutsche Hauptstadtpolitik – Das 'neue Magdeburg' 1918-1933", in: *Magdeburg. Geschichte der Stadt*, pp. 729-764, here: p. 754.

10th May 1631]", he maintained. Employing Christian imagery, the author claimed that the city had been made to wear a "crown of thorns" more painfully than most other German cities. Despite this, he alleged, the residents did not despair but persevered, living up to the example of their medieval forefathers, when Emperor Otto I., "the greatest Magdeburger", had thrown back the "wolves of the steppe". "Our millennium, at whose beginning stands Adolf Hitler, must not see us less valiant", he continued and concluded,

"This is the eternal admonition of Magdeburg: the way that the city has gloriously risen from the rubble over and over again is a symbol and admonition for the Reich".¹⁵³

Initially popularised by the Social Democratic city administration in the time of the Weimar Republic but first applied to the air raid of 16th January 1945 by Nazi propaganda, the motif of phoenix-like rebirth played a prominent role in the politics of memory of the early post-war period. In the process, the air raid of 16th January 1945 was transformed from a particularly horrifying episode in the city's recent catastrophic past into a memory place. This creation of a *lieu de mémoire* owed in large measure to the initiative of the second post-war administration under Rudolf Eberhard (1891-1965), a pragmatic Social Democrat in an emerging Socialist dictatorship.¹⁵⁴ Appointed as successor to Otto Baer (SPD) on 28th January 1946, Eberhard looked for inspiration to the work of his Social Democratic predecessors in the time of the Weimar Republic, Hermann Beims and Ernst Reuter. He adopted their visionary element as well as their integrationist approach to municipal politics. In Eberhard's view, the creation of a civic community spirit formed a necessary precondition for the civil authorities to stand any chance of success in overcoming the daunting legacy of the war.¹⁵⁵ To this end, the civil authorities repeatedly organised large public rallies and exhibitions in which they sought to rally the population to the tasks at hand.

The first such event was held on 12th May 1946—chosen deliberately to coincide with the 315th anniversary of Magdeburg's destruction in the Thirty Years War. Complete with classical music and recitations of lyrical poetry, the mass rally, "The rebuilding of Magdeburg", took its format from the bourgeois festive culture of the 19th century rather than distinctly Socialist traditions. At the centre of the event stood two speeches by the mayor and his municipal building officer, Erich Koß. Whereas Koß spoke on the technical details of organised rubble clearance, Eberhard drew a broad sketch of municipal history.

¹⁵³ "Magdeburg im Januar 1945", *Der Mitteldeutsche Haldensleber Tageszeitung – Wolmirstedter Tageszeitung* of 24-1-45, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ On Eberhard see the study by his daughter, Gerda Meyer-Eberhard, *Ein sozialdemokratischer Oberbürgermeister in der Diktatur* (Wiesbaden: Selbstverlag, 2000).

¹⁵⁵ Compare Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann, "Magdeburg als Stadt des Schwermaschinenbaus 1945-1990: Politische Geschichte und Gesellschaft unter der SED-Diktatur", in: *Magdeburg. Geschichte der Stadt*, pp. 811-852, here: p. 814.

"On 16th January 1945 [...] a building was destroyed on the *Breite Weg* that bore the inscription, 'remember 10th May', a sign in memory of 10th May 1631, the day of Magdeburg's destruction three hundred years ago", Eberhard told his audience. In opening thus, he linked Magdeburg's iconic fate in the Thirty Years War, "the biggest catastrophe in the Occident since the downfall of the cities of antiquity", to the recent devastation in World War II.¹⁵⁶ Although the mayor was adamant that he had no intention to compare "our misfortune" to the "calamity of 10th May 1631", he still insisted that the past held out consolation for the present, for "despite great misery [...] new life" had always prevailed.

In a press release prepared for the big dailies of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, the *Neue Deutschland* and *Tägliche Rundschau*, the parallelisation of the two events was made even more explicit. To a supra-local audience, the municipal press office tried to distinguish Magdeburg as "the city that had been destroyed twice over".¹⁵⁷ "Comparable to the calamity of 10 May 1631 is the catastrophe that befell Magdeburg on 16th January 1945", the text read. This "special position [...] among Germany's war-torn cities", the authors claimed, would be interpreted by the resident population as a "call of fate" to double their efforts for the reconstruction of the city and the renewal of Germany. In the local daily, *Freiheit*, meanwhile, an article appeared that was headed, "The rebuilding of Magdeburg is at stake" (fig. 2).¹⁵⁸ Written by the local workers' poet, Alfred Weber, the article consisted of two parts, whose content was mirrored in two accompanying images. The first was a reproduction of a 17th century engraving depicting the pillaging of Magdeburg on 10th May 1631. The second image showed burnt-out facades together with a billboard reading, "Hitler the prophet and his success". While part one gave a historical description of the destruction of the city in the Thirty Years War, part two described the "second destruction" on 16th January 1945.

In his article, Weber insisted on the historical and moral differences between the first and second event,

"How different, how much more horrifying and violent was the destruction of Magdeburg on 16th January 1945. [...] The second destruction of our city occurred in the course of a criminal war that had been instigated by the Nazis."¹⁵⁹

The events of 1631 were not invoked in order to downplay the responsibility of Nazism for the present malaise but in order to integrate rupture into the continuum of local history: the destruction of the old carried the seeds of the new. Just as the city had overcome the

¹⁵⁶ Rudolf Eberhard, "Magdeburg in Kriegsnot und erfolgreicher Arbeit", in: "Was Wahnsinn vernichtet hat, wird wieder errichtet", *Freiheit* 14-5-46, p. 5.

¹⁵⁷ "Die Stadt die zweimal zerstört wurde", StAM Rep. 41/112. *Aufbau kriegszerstörter Städte*, fol. 18-21.

¹⁵⁸ Alfred Weber, "Es geht um Magdeburgs Neuaufbau", *Freiheit* (12.5.46), p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

disaster of the Thirty Years War, so it would overcome the legacy of fascism and be rebuilt as a new city in a new society.



FIGURE 2. Magdeburg's 'first' and 'second' destruction, *Freiheit* 12-5-46.

In the summer of 1947, the theme of death-as-rebirth was developed further in an elaborate exhibition, "Magdeburg is alive!", in which the mythical bird of Greek mythology, the phoenix, figured as the official symbol. The city administration did not just intend the event as a showcase for the first architectural designs for reconstruction. The administration also sought to foster a civic community spirit, to "replant in the hearts of the *Magdeburger* the love of their city", as a leaflet put it.¹⁶⁰ One way to achieve this was to integrate the present into the past: Eight of the 23 exhibition rooms were devoted to Magdeburg's history, creating a colourful tapestry of local events from pre-historical times to the present. One room was devoted to the 17th century *burghermaster* and scholar, Otto von Guericke, who in local historiography was widely credited with saving the city from

¹⁶⁰ StAM Rep. 41/92. *Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Ausstellung "Magdeburg lebt", 1947*, leaflet, "Magdeburg lebt".

ruin after the disaster of the Thirty Years War. By contrast, local socialist traditions played only a subordinate role.

While the Third Reich itself was passed over altogether, an entire room was devoted to the representation of the air raid of 16th January 1945. In the party paper of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), *Der Neue Weg*, there appeared a vivid description of the setup of this "chamber of horror",

"The sound of sirens leads the way to a darkened room which symbolises through the use of optical and acoustic effects the second day of horror in Magdeburg's history: a hand of death built from bombs, a glowing iron girder, the crackle of fire and the drone of planes recall memories of the horrors that the population of our cities suffered in the days and nights of the air raids."¹⁶¹

In an accompanying event, the city council organised a festive commemoration called, "Magdeburg's day of fate as reflected through art". The event ostentatiously dealt with literary representations of Magdeburg's first destruction. Its real subject, however, was not the past but the present, as mayor Eberhard made clear in his address, "10th May 1631 and 16th January 1945". The destruction of the city in the recent war found its parallel in the Thirty Years War. And just as Magdeburg was reborn in the 18th Century, so it would be again in the 20th.¹⁶² In telescoping the multiple experiences of six years of war, mass death and destruction into a single day, the post-war civil administration played a pre-eminent role in creating a *lieu de mémoire* of allied bombing, 16th January 1945.

Conclusion

The resident populations of Kassel and Magdeburg did not experience the area raids of 22nd October 1943 and 16th January 1945 in a vacuum but made sense of the events by drawing on the mental structures and referential frames available to them. Nor were the air raids experienced in isolation from their respective political and military contexts. In the minds of many *Kasseler*, the date of 22nd October 1943 denoted the city's 'death' or 'annihilation' despite the frantic efforts of Nazi propaganda to demonstrate continuity in rupture. Many *Magdeburger*, by comparison, did not initially single out the air raid of 16th January 1945 but viewed it as one particularly harrowing episode in a string of cataclysmic events that was transforming their environment in the spring of 1945.

The dominant agents of public memory in the two cities—the local Nazi elites during the war and the civil administrations after 1945—were not free to construct present-centred

¹⁶¹ "Magdeburg lebt", *Der Neue Weg* 2/54 (4-7-47), p. 1.

¹⁶² StAM Rep. 41/92, fol. 56-63: "Der 10. Mai 1631 und der 16. Januar 1945".

lieux de mémoire as they saw fit but had to engage with *milieux de mémoire* that fed on a dense web of primary experiences. As a consequence, public memory in both cities came to revolve around a set of recurring motifs and themes: death, destruction, and history. Given the impact of larger referential frames on processes of memory formation, there emerged, however, also significant differences. Whereas the post-war Magdeburg civil-administration under Rudolf Eberhard (SED) actively promoted—one could go further and say, 'invented'—the memory place of 16th January in order to construct a historical analogy with the city's infamous destruction in the Thirty Years War, the Kassel administration under Willi Seidel (SPD) saw little benefit in institutionalising a memory place that denoted nothing but unprecedented catastrophe.

VECTORS OF MEMORY

DEATH

"Soldiers of the Heimat"

Commemorating the Dead, 1940 to 1945

Introduction

"Why such a terrible fate, why so many victims?", asked the Nazi *Gauleiter* of *Kurhesse*, Karl Gerland, during a public rally on 22nd October 1944.¹ One year after the RAF area raid on the *Gau* capital, uniformed members of the Nazi party, *Wehrmacht*, labour service and civilians stood assembled in an open space in order to commemorate the dead. When a brass band struck up the tune of "The Song of the Good Comrade" (*Das Lied vom Guten Kameraden*), the flags were lowered and ceremonial words spoken "in honour of the fallen". This was followed by the *Gauleiter's* speech, which climaxed in a vow that "none of the dead of this war will have brought their sacrifice in vain."² Finally, the *Hitler* greeting and the departure of the flags marked the closure of a commemoration in which different groups of participants took part in a publicly enacted performance.³ Through music, ritual and speech, the ceremony spoke to the emotions just as much as to the mind,⁴ acknowledging emotional needs among the audience while seeking to channel and to control them.⁵

Public commemorations are one medium through which urban memory cultures of allied bombing have found historic expression. As the example illustrates, they are not celebrated in a socio-political vacuum but reflect the distribution of power in society. The

¹ "Das Vermächtnis der Toten. Gedenkfeier für die Terroropfer der Gauhauptstadt – Der Gauleiter über den Sinn des Opfers", *KLZ* 15/249 (23.10.44), p. 4.

² Ibid.

³ Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden. Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole 1923 bis 1945* (Vierow bei Greifswald: SH-Verlag, 1996), p. 276.

⁴ On Nazi rituals and the attendant hero myth see Behrenbeck, *Kult*, passim; on the centrality of the cult of the fallen warrior for the Nazi world view Meinhold Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland. Vol. 5: Drittes Reich* (Heidelberg: Esprint, 1986); Jay W. Baird, *To Die for Germany. Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: IUP, 1990); and more generally on the connection between nationalism and death in war George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers – Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: OUP, 1990); idem, *The Nationalisation of the Masses* (New York: New American Library, 1975).

⁵ Wolfgang Eßbach, "Gedenken oder Erforschen. Zur sozialen Funktion von Vergangenheitsrepräsentation", in: Nicolas Berg, Jess Jochimsen and Bernd Stiegler eds., *SHOAH. Formen der Erinnerung. Geschichte, Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst* (Munich: Funk, 1996), pp. 131-144, here: p. 135.

organisation of commemorative events requires a degree of organisational skill, financial resources, and social influence which tends to make them the preserve of those agents who possess most of these assets, powerful interest groups and above all the political and religious elites. By way of commemorations, hegemonic narratives are developed and popularised through verbal as well as non-verbal modes of communication. In order to invoke feelings and to convey meaning, music, symbols and rituals are just as important as the spoken word. Commemorative addresses can therefore not be interpreted in isolation from their rich non-verbal context. They are not scholarly inquiries into a historical subject matter but part of a cultural practice of public remembrance.⁶ While the formal repertoire is limited, the rites, symbols and tropes are still subject to historical change.⁷

In their violent cessation of life, the civilian casualties of the air war shared an important characteristic with soldiers killed in battle. In contrast to soldiers, however, they had neither volunteered nor been called upon to fight. Despite the rhetoric and reality of 'total war', they were commonly understood to belong in a different category from combatants, as the antonym 'non-combatants' illustrates.⁸ Just as other European societies, Nazi Germany initially lacked commemorative practices to endow the violent death of civilians with meaning. Such modes of representation as had been developed since the beginning of the 19th century revolved around the citizen-soldier who was said to have given his life for the greater cause of the nation.⁹ But could the same be said of civilians killed in war?

The answers that German society developed to this problem during the war were first and foremost the answers of the National Socialist regime. Although the affective bonds between 'ordinary' Germans and the Nazi regime may have been weakening by the time the question posed itself with urgency in 1943,¹⁰ the regime still commanded sufficient

⁶ Compare Insa Eschbach, *Öffentliches Gedenken. Deutsche Erinnerungskulturen seit der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt / New York: Campus, 2005), pp. 9-59.

⁷ Compare Reinhart Koselleck, Introduction, in: Reinhart Koselleck / Michael Jeismann eds., *Der politische Totenkult. Kriegerdenkmäler in der Moderne* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994), pp. 9-20.

⁸ In German, the word 'civilian' in the meaning of 'non-soldier' came into use in the early 19th century, often carrying a pejorative connotation. See *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 31 (Leipzig, 1956), p. 1736 (entry, '2 zivilist'). The foreign office in its propaganda campaign against Great Britain explicitly drew on the civilian status of the German casualties of air warfare. See *Auswärtiges Amt, Dokumente über die Alleinschuld Englands am Bombenkrieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung* (Berlin: Franz Eher Nachf. GmbH, 1943). In societies victimised by Germany the problem of representing civilian death posed itself in different ways but generally with much greater urgency, not to speak of the Jewish community. For a comparative approach see Pieter Lagrou, "The Nationalisation of Victimhood. Selective Violence and National Grief in Western Europe, 1940-1960", in: Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann eds., *Life after Death. Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s* (Cambridge: German Historical Institute & CUP, 2003), pp. 243-57.

⁹ Koselleck / Jeismann eds., *Der politische Totenkult*; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995).

¹⁰ Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth'. Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 169-225; Neil Gregor, "A Schicksalsgemeinschaft? Allied Bombing, Civilian Morale, And Social Dissolution in Nuremberg, 1942-1945", in: *The Historical Journal*, 43, 4 (2000), pp. 1051-1070. For a different

authority to establish a cultural framework that integrated German air raid casualties into the Nazi cult of death. This chapter argues that the origins of post-war commemorative traditions can be traced to the public funeral ceremonies of the local Nazi elites. Memory cultures of allied bombing originated from the public commemoration of death in war.¹¹ While the cultural enunciation of death had long antecedents,¹² it was Nazism who first applied these practices and traditions to mass death in aerial warfare. Any examination of the trajectory of public commemorations must therefore begin with a close reading of the narrative tropes and cultural forms that the local Nazi authorities employed in order to integrate catastrophic rupture into the National Socialist world view.¹³

While the Nazi elites laid total claim to the public expression of loss and bereavement suffered in war, their factual dominance, however, remained precarious. Throughout the period of 1940 to 1945, they had to contend with the rivalry of the Christian churches, which had been curtailed in their ability of public expression but not been eliminated as an autonomous voice.¹⁴ As a "societal group" to which over 90% of the German population owed at least formal allegiance, the Churches had long developed a complex set of rituals, symbols and meanings that accompanied the life cycle of the individual, boasting special expertise on dealing with the anthropological certainty of death.¹⁵ With the Catholic All Souls' Day and the Protestant Memorial Sunday, both denominations also possessed well-established remembrance days on which to commemorate death as a collective phenomenon—a practice that was easily adapted to the problem of premature mass death

perspective see Nicholas Stargardt, "Opfer der Bomben und der Vergeltung", in: Lothar Kettenacker ed., *Ein Volk von Opfern? Die neue Debatte um den Bombenkrieg 1940-45* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2003), pp. 56-71.

¹¹ Compare also the remarks by Andreas Ranft & Stephan Selzer eds., *Städte aus Trümmern. Katastrophenbewältigung zwischen Antike und Moderne* (Göttingen: V & R, 2004), pp. 9-25. Neither in Kassel nor in Magdeburg were there any public rallies during the period of 1940 to 1945 in order to mark air raids that had caused no casualties, whatever the degree of material destruction.

¹² On the tradition of public funeral ceremonies in Germany see Volker Ackermann, *Nationale Totenfeiern in Deutschland. Von Wilhelm I. bis Franz Josef Strauß. Eine Studie zur politischen Semiotik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990); on death as a social phenomenon Norbert Fischer, *Geschichte des Todes in der Neuzeit* (Erfurt: Sutton, 2001); Klaus Feldmann, *Tod und Gesellschaft. Sozialwissenschaftliche Thanatologie im Überblick* (Wiesbaden: VS, Verl. für Sozialwiss., 2004); Lewis R. Aiken, *Dying, Death, and Bereavement* (Mahwah, NJ / London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 4th ed., 2001); and the pioneering work by Philippe Ariès, *Geschichte des Todes* (Munich: dtv, 8th ed., 1997).

¹³ For a methodological plea to integrate the experience of death into studies of military history see Michael Geyer, "Eine Kriegsgeschichte, die vom Tod spricht", in: Thomas Lindenberger & Alf Lüdtke eds., *Physische Gewalt. Studien zur Geschichte der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), pp. 136-161.

¹⁴ For a balanced summary of the role of the Churches in the Third Reich see, Ulrich von Hehl, "Die Kirchen in der NS-Diktatur. Zwischen Anpassung, Selbstbehauptung und Widerstand", in: Karl Dietrich Bracher / Manfred Funke / Hans-Adolf Jacobsen eds., *Deutschland 1933-1945. Neue Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft* (Bonn: bpb, 1993), pp. 153-181.

¹⁵ Compare the accid comment in a SD summary report of October 1942, "It has been pointed out that from a psychological point of view the preacher has an easier task than the political functionary. The Church can attend to the personal pain of the afflicted by pointing to eternal life and the reunion in the afterlife, whereas the political functionary must appeal to the inner bearing and provide consolation to the bereaved by drawing on the idea of sacrifice for the nation." *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, p. 4313 (no. 325 of 12-10-1942).

in war.¹⁶ Indeed, the very decision of the Nazi party to extend the Nazi cult of death to the casualties of World War II reflected concern over the rising influence of the Church on the cultural enunciation of death.¹⁷

This chapter examines the commemorative activity of the local elites of Church and state between 1940 and 1945 as a practice in which power relationships were brought to bear on the cultural enunciation of death. According to the hegemonic narrative of the Nazi regime, the dead were both victims of a criminal deed and sacrificers for a higher goal. Their fate did not call for mourning but for intensified hatred of the enemy and the commitment to follow their example. By contrast, the Christian churches put the notion of affliction at the centre of their interpretation of the air war. Through the death and destruction, God had spoken and revealed himself both as wrathful and merciful, or so they claimed.

"Never Has a Sacrifice been more Worthwhile"¹⁸—Civilian Death as Heroic Sacrifice

Between the summer of 1940 and the spring of 1945, the *Gau* capital of Kassel was subjected to forty air raids, at least half of which caused losses among the population.¹⁹ Yet throughout the period, the regional *NSDAP* organised only four funeral services in order to commemorate the dead, one in 1940, 1941, 1943, and 1944 respectively.²⁰ In Magdeburg, too, there was a discrepancy between the number of air raids on the one hand and party activity on the other. Eight out of 28 attacks were publicly marked through

¹⁶ See Karin Hausen, "The 'Day of National Mourning' in Germany", in: Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith eds., *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations* (Toronto / Buffalo / London: UTP, 1997), pp. 127-46, here: p. 131. For examples from Magdeburg see AKPS Rep. J1. Evangelische Domgemeinde No. 3290. *Kanzelabkündigungen* 1936-49: entries of 9-11-41; 16-11-41; 1-3-42; 8-3-42; 1-1-43. For examples from Kassel: Franz Preger, *Aus meiner Kasseler Amtszeit 1908-1945*, in: Hans-Dieter Stolze, *Lutherkirche in der 1. Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts: Zwei Pfarrer berichten* (Kassel: Ms., 2005), p. 31. See also Archiv der Lutherkirche Kassel. Paul Velbinger, *Predigten*, no. 23: "So tröstet Euch nun mit diesen Worten untereinander –Gedächtnis für die Gefallenen-", pp. 128-132.

¹⁷ Behrenbeck, *Kult*, pp. 492-502. See also *Meldungen aus dem Reich* of 29-7-40: "Unklarheiten in der Durchführung von Gedächtnisfeiern für Gefallene"; 4-11-40: "Immer noch Unklarheiten in der Durchführung von Gedächtnisfeiern für Gefallene"; 20-11-41: "Haltung der Bevölkerung und der Kirchen zur Frage der Durchführung von Gedächtnisfeiern für Gefallene"; 15-6-42: "Aufnahme und Auswirkungen der Heldenehrungsfeiern der NSDAP in der Bevölkerung"; 12-10-42: "Heldenehrungsfeiern: Zunehmende Aktivität der Kirche"; 1-3-43: "Weiterentwicklung der kirchlichen Gefallenenehrung".

¹⁸ Kreisleiter Hans Tichy in his Magdeburg commemorative address of 28th January 1944, in: "Sie starben, damit Deutschland lebt", *Magdeburgische Zeitung* No. 23 (28/1/44), p. 1.

¹⁹ Figures taken from Werner Dettmar, "Kassel im Luftkrieg", in: *Leben in Ruinen*, pp. 11-32, here: pp. 18-20.

²⁰ The funeral ceremonies in numerical order: 22th August 1940 in response to the first air raid casualties among the population; 14th September 1941 after the first heavy raid on the city that killed 15 people; 4th August 1943 in response to a double attack by the USAAF that caused 188 casualties; 22th October 1944 to commemorate the first anniversary of the RAF area raid of 22nd October 1943. Behrenbeck is wrong when she implies that the *NSDAP* did not get involved in the organisation of 'funeral services' for air raid casualties until the summer of 1944. See Behrenbeck, *Kult*, p. 525, footnote 329.

commemorations, all but one in 1944.²¹ In neither city was there a positive correlation between severity of the raid and propagandistic investment on the part of the local *NSDAP*. If anything, the opposite was the case. The apparent inconsistencies appear to reflect shifting realities on the ground as well as sudden changes in direction from above. Throughout the period, Nazi propaganda never found a consistent approach to the challenges of the air war, oscillating between exaggeration, 'realism', and denial. While official silence flew in the face of the primary experience of millions of *Volksgenossen*, any attempt at exploiting the propagandistic potential of indiscriminate aerial warfare ran the danger of admitting the regime's helplessness in preventing the progressive destruction of Germany's industrial and economic potential.²²

Despite the inconsistencies, a pattern emerges which indicates an inverse relationship between the escalation of the air war on the one hand and the commemorative practice of the party on the other. Without doubt, the devastating area attacks of 22nd October 1943 and of 16th January 1945 marked a turning point in both cities. In Kassel, until that night, the party had marked every air raid through public commemorations except one.²³ The biggest funeral ceremony of the entire war was organised on 4th August 1943 in order to celebrate the death of some 188 *Volksgenossen* and forced labourers in two USAAF daytime raids. By contrast, no special ceremony was held to commemorate the victims of the RAF area attack of 22nd October, which cost the lives of thirty to forty times as many people. Instead, the local party representatives tried to demonstrate continuity by integrating mass death into the existing commemorative framework. The occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the failed *Hitler* putsch of 9th November 1923 was used to commemorate the casualties and incorporate them into the Nazi hero cult, as was, to a lesser extent, 'heroes' day' of March 1944. After the October raid, the local *NSDAP* ceased to commemorate individual raids altogether. Instead, they used the first anniversary in 1944 in order to stage a public commemoration as part of a propaganda drive that accompanied the swearing-in of the first *Volkssturm* detachments.

²¹ Funeral ceremonies were held following the air raids of 18-4-41 (12 fatal casualties); 21-1-44 (112 deaths); 28-5-44 (24 deaths); 20-6-44 (48 fatal casualties); 29-6-44 (92 fatal casualties); 5-8-44 (683 deaths); 11-9-44 (136 fatal casualties); 7-10-44 (50 deaths). List compiled from the press reports of *Der Mitteldeutsche* and of *Magdeburgische Zeitung*.

²² A history of the air war as a propaganda war remains to be written. On the central theme of 'retaliation' see Gerald Kirwin, "Waiting for Retaliation – A Study in Nazi Propaganda Behaviour and German Civilian Morale", in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 16 (1981), pp. 565–83; for recent scholarship on propaganda in general see Jeffrey Verhey, "Neuere Arbeiten zur Propagandageschichte", in: *AfS* 40 (2001), pp. 624–632.

²³ For reasons that are not clear the *Gau* leadership of Kassel restricted its commemorative activity on the heavy RAF raid of 27/28-8-42 to the publication of an official proclamation in the local press. See for example "Der Dank des Gauleiters", *Kasseler Sonntagsblatt* 64/36 (6-9-42), p. 5. This was despite the fact that the raid cost the lives of 43 local residents.

In Magdeburg, the commemorative activity of the *NSDAP* reached its climax a year later than in Kassel. In the summer and autumn of 1944, six public commemorations were staged in quick succession. Two commemorations in June responded to two comparatively insignificant attacks, and followed in the wake of a party-driven "week of anti-aircraft defence" of mid-May 1944. Thus, it appears that the regional leadership seized on the raids as propagandistic support of its efforts to evacuate the densely populated inner city. In August, another public funeral ceremony was organised in order to commemorate the most destructive and deadly attack thus far, which claimed some 683 lives. After this, the commemorative interest of the local *NSDAP* declined and appears to have ceased altogether with the indiscriminate area attack of 16th January 1945. No evidence survives of a public funeral service to commemorate the roughly 2,000 casualties of that night, nor of any of the raids that followed.²⁴

The Semiotics of Commemoration

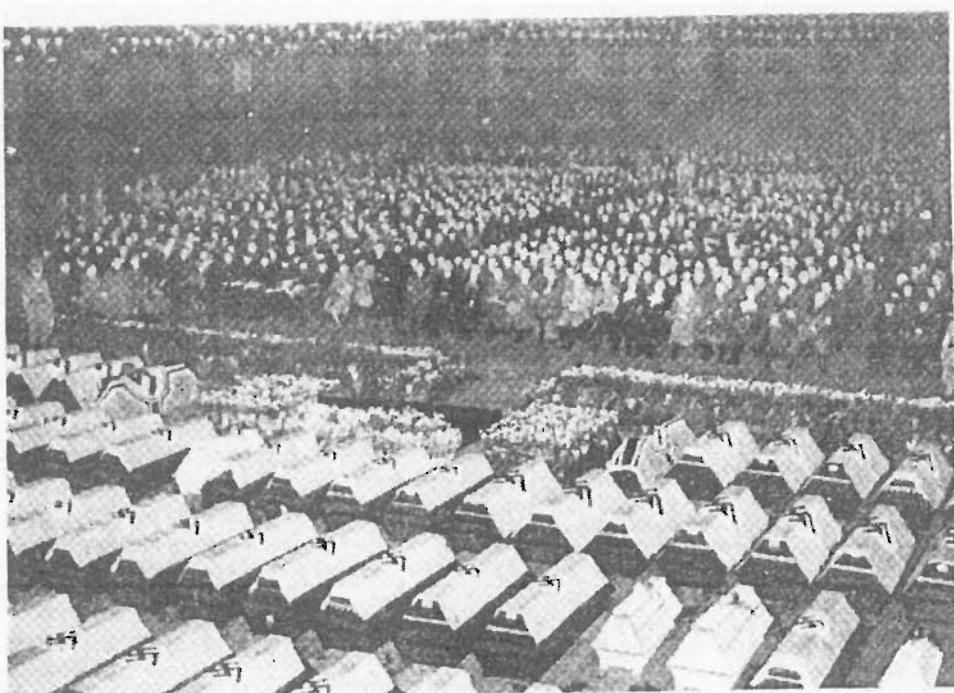
As a cultural practice, the official "funeral ceremonies" in honour of the casualties of allied bombing combined elements of the two most important events of the Nazi calendar, "Heroes' Memorial Day" in March and the anniversary celebrations of the failed Munich putsch of 1923 in November. Both events in turn drew on the bourgeois festive culture of the 19th century, military ceremonial and above all the liturgy of the (Catholic) Christian church, although they differed in their emphasis. The commemorations of 9th November re-enacted the founding myth of the Nazi movement, emphasising death and sacrifice. Replete with references to the Nazi trauma of the German revolution of November 1918, they revolved around the 'martyrs' of the *NSDAP*. By contrast, "Heroes' Memorial Day" was dedicated to the memory of the fallen soldiers of World War I, and was celebrated not as a day of mourning but of rebirth and triumph. It was thus no coincidence that Hitler chose the symbolic date to announce the re-introduction of general conscription in 1935: the new *Wehrmacht* was placed in the tradition of the old *Reichswehr*.²⁵

The official funeral ceremonies brought together four groups of participants in a public space, demonstrating to a wider public the close connection between all of them: the dead, the bereaved, the *NSDAP*, and the people. First of all, there was the group around whom the celebration ostensibly revolved: the dead. Their presence could either be real or symbolic. In Magdeburg, the *NSDAP* generally placed great importance on the physical

²⁴ The files of the *Gaupropagandaleitung* Magdeburg-Anhalt have not been preserved. Worse, the issues of September 1944 to April 1945 of *Der Mitteldeutsche*, the only local daily in the final phase of the war, survive in fragmentary form only.

²⁵ This paragraph is based on Behrenbeck, *Kult*, pp. 195-447.

presence of the dead. A photograph taken at the commemoration of 27th January 1944 shows long rows of coffins lined up in the ball room of the city hall (fig. 3).²⁶ The arrangement recognised certain distinctions but generally aimed at the creation of a homogenous victim group. The great majority of coffins were draped in the swastika flag; two were covered in the naval ensign [*Reichskriegsflagge*]. The arrangement and decoration of the coffins de-individualised the victims, suggesting that the 122 casualties had not died as individuals but as members of a group united in a common purpose. In Kassel, the *Gau* leadership pursued a slightly different approach although the goal was identical. It generally refrained from the physical presence of the corpses and preferred symbolic ways of representation instead. In the commemoration of 13th September 1941, for example, the dead were symbolised through a catafalque on which a sacrificial bowl was placed. The arrangement was completed by a giant silver swastika on the wall behind the catafalque.²⁷ When the number of casualties reached several hundred, practical necessities forced a shift in Magdeburg as well. In the funeral ceremony of 10th August 1944, the audience faced a black makeshift memorial bearing a silver laurel wreath with an iron cross.²⁸



„In ihren Särgen haben wir es geschworen: „Auch der feige Wölf an euch wird gerichtet!“

FIGURE 3: Coffins draped in swastika flags at a funeral ceremony in Magdeburg, 27-1-1944 (photo: *Der Mitteldeutsche* 17-6-1944). The image was reproduced to coincide with the launching of the first V1 rockets in June 1944.

²⁶ For the photograph see "Der Mitteldeutsche" no. 165 (17-6-44), p. 5. Coffins were also present at the ceremonies of 31-5-44 and 24-6-44.

²⁷ See the photograph in *KP* of 15-9-41; *KNN* 216 (15-9-41), p. 1.

²⁸ "Sie sind unsterblich geworden...", *Magdeburgische Zeitung* 10-8-44, p. 4.

Next to the dead, the bereaved stood at the centre of the formal arrangement of the funeral ceremonies. They attended by special invitation and were generally seated in front, facing the podium and the dead.²⁹ They were at one and the same time central and marginal to the ceremony. Dressed in black, they were the recipients of condolences by the local political elites and the addressees of the commemorative address by party functionaries.³⁰ Without them, no "funeral ceremony" could have been staged with any claim to credibility. Yet, they did not speak but were spoken to. Their grief was expressed, interpreted and channelled by others while they were publicly visible and highly vulnerable in their emotional expressions.³¹ Just as much as they might have drawn comfort from the presence of a large mourning congregation, they became instrumental to an official narrative of racial community and paternalistic care which they may or may not have shared.

In contrast to the passivity of the bereaved, the third group of participants assumed an active role. The formal delegations from party, state, and army were the genuine bearers of the ritual action such as the ceremonial entry and exit or the lowering and raising of the flag during the honouring of the dead. Equally central was a representative from the local party elite, usually the regional or district leader [*Gau* or *Kreisleiter*], who assumed the role of pastor, devolving the official interpretation of events to the congregation and—via the local media—to a wider public. Often, the "guards of honour" were placed around or behind the bereaved and the dead, symbolically enacting a role which they were less and less able to provide in the real world: party and army as shield and protector of the racial community and upholder of the values for which the dead were said to have given their lives.³² Finally, there were the private citizens, who were generally informed about the funeral ceremony and urged to attend via appeals in the local press. The local press reported attendance figures ranging from several hundred to several thousand. While these figures cannot be taken at face value, surviving photographs support the assumption that the obsequies were generally well-attended.

²⁹ Compare *Der Mitteldeutsche* no. 13/25 (26-1-44), p. 3 and 13/27 (28-1-44), p. 1; *KLZ* 14/180 (4-8-43), p. 1 and 14/181 (5-8-43), p. 1.

³⁰ On colours of mourning see Hannes Stubbe, *Formen der Trauer. Eine kulturanthropologische Untersuchung* (Berlin: Reimer, 1985).

³¹ "Sie starben, damit Deutschland lebt", *Magdeburgische Zeitung* 28-1-44, p. 1.

³² See for example "Sie starben im Gesetz, das Deutschland heißt", *Der Mitteldeutsche* no. 172 (24-6-44), p. 5. For a visual representation see, "Die Trauerfeier für die Gefallenen des Luftangriffs vor dem Kasseler Rathaus", *KLZ* 14/181 (5-8-43), p. 1.

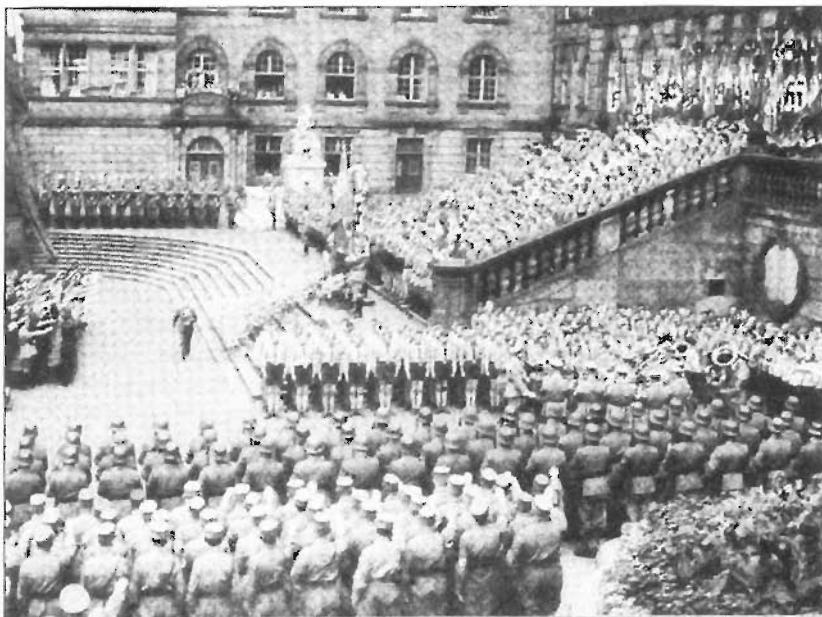


FIGURE 4: Delegations from party and army as shield and protector of the racial community. Public commemoration for the casualties of the air war in front of the Kassel town hall, 4-8-43 (photo: Siemon / Dettmar, *Horizont in hellen Flammen*, p. 31).

The *NSDAP* certainly wanted the commemorations to be well-attended, and was prepared to subordinate considerations of public safety to the propagandistic benefits of large public gatherings. Despite the constant risk of new bomb attacks, the commemorations were generally held in central urban spaces, rarely at the resting place of the dead, the cemetery. The organisers preferred large halls such as the ballroom of the city hall [*Stadthalle*], or even more so, central public squares such as the *Alte Markt* in Magdeburg or the space in front of the town hall [*Rathaus*] in Kassel. The choice of location is indicative of central themes of the party-organised events. "This was not a funeral ceremony in the usual sense of the word. Beyond pain and suffering, it demonstrated the will and determination to draw new strength from their sacrifice for the struggle for victory", as the local *Magdeburgische Zeitung* commented in an article on 28th January 1944. The ceremonies were neither about individual death nor mourning, but ostentatiously about the life of the racial community. The trope was kept even after the events of 22nd October 1943 had demonstrated the ability of aerial warfare to put not just the survival of individuals in danger but of the local community as a whole. The regional daily, the *Kurhessische Landeszeitung*, commented on the ceremonial closure of the ceremony of 9th November 1943 in Kassel thus, "The guards of honour march off with drums beating through the devastated streets in which all life seems to have died but which are still full of life."³³

³³ *KLZ* 14/262 (8-11-43), p. 1.

In all ceremonies, spatial and acoustic markers were used to delimitate the 'sacred' sphere of the ceremonial space from the 'profane' sphere of the everyday. This was a common practice, which derived from the bourgeois festive culture of the 19th century and the liturgy of the Christian churches alike.³⁴ In their choice of music pieces, the local *NSDAP* in Kassel and Magdeburg clearly sought to distinguish the secular commemoration from a typical Christian funeral service. The church bells remained silent during the ceremonies; and only once, in August 1940, was a hymn performed.³⁵ The organisers preferred serious music from the German romantic tradition that tempered mourning with the heroic. Very popular was Beethoven's symphony no. 3, "Sinfonia Eroica" [Heroic Symphony], extracts of which were performed in half of the ceremonies under consideration here.³⁶ Beethoven's "Egmont" was also used. Next to Beethoven, Richard Wagner featured prominently, in particular his "Twilight of the Gods" and "Rienzi". Even more important, however, were the two official national anthems, the *Deutschlandlied* and the *Horst-Wessel-Lied*, and the "Song of the Good Comrade", which were intoned at every commemoration. While the national anthems established a link between local events and the National Socialist nation, the military tune of the "Good Comrade" identified the civilian casualties of bombing as combatants.³⁷

Just as with music, the *NSDAP* sought to emphasise the non-Christian, heroic character of the ceremonies by means of symbols. Prominent were the national flag bearing the swastika, the iron cross, and pylons. Wreaths played a role as well but appear to have been less important than might be assumed. The swastika flag was crucial. Not only did it demonstrate the official character of the commemoration. The lowering during the ceremony of the "honouring of the dead" also indicated a reciprocal relationship between the dead and the living: just as they were said to have died for the Third Reich, the nation acknowledged their death as a binding sacrifice.³⁸ As the national ensign of the armed

³⁴ Compare Behrenbeck, *Kult*, pp. 313-25.

³⁵ *Kasseler Sonntagsblatt* 62/34 (25-8-40), p. 12. This early ceremony was unusual in the participation of pastor Wüstemann, the first post-war bishop of the *Landeskirche* of Kurhessen-Waldeck. It was held at the open graves at the cemetery of *Kassel-Wehleiden*. The hymn was "Da unten ist Frieden".

³⁶ Compare entry 'Eroica Symphony', *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, rev. ed. (Oxford / New York: OUP, 1997), p. 278; Peter Schleuning, "3. Symphonie Es-Dur Eroica op. 55", in: Albrecht Riethmüller, Carl Dahlhaus, Alexander L. Ringer, *Beethoven. Interpretation seiner Werke*. vol. 1 (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges., 1996), pp. 386-400. On the political uses of Beethoven see David Dennis, *Beethoven in German Politics, 1870-1989* (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1996); on music and German national identity in general Celia Applegate & Pamela Potter, *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004). Composers mentioned once include Franz Schubert (1797-1828) (Kassel, 21-8-40); J.S. Bach (1685-1750), Max Bruch (1838-1920), Harald Genzmer (* 1909), Stürmer (?) (all Kassel, 14-9-41).

³⁷ The "Lied vom guten Kameraden" was based on the poem by Ludwig Uhland, "Ich hatt' einen Kameraden" (1809), and composed by Friedrich Silcher. By the time of World War II, the song had become a traditional element of military funeral ceremonies. See Hans-Peter Stein, *Symbole und Zeremoniell in deutschen Streitkräften vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Herford & Bonn: Mittler, 1984), p. 283.

³⁸ The symbol goes back to 1813 when the Prussian king, William III., founded a medal awarded for bravery in the form of an iron cross. See Stein, *Symbole und Zeremoniell*, pp. 48-50; 54-63.

forces, the iron cross identified the dead as soldiers, "symbol of the times, but above all symbol that those resting in the coffins have given their lives as soldiers of the *Heimat*", as the *Magdeburgische Zeitung* of 28th January 1944 put it.³⁹ The pylons, meanwhile, once more underlined the sacrificial aspect of violent death under the bombs.⁴⁰

While the party-organised ceremonies stressed their independence from the Christian church service through the use of music and symbols, they also adopted crucial elements from the Christian model. This was most obvious in the formal arrangement. Typically, the reading of a *Führer* proclamation [*Vorspruch*] was followed by a speech of the *Gauleiter*, which was succeeded by a proclamation of faith in the *Führer* and German victory. This was the psalm reading, the sermon and the creed of the Christian liturgy. At the centre of the ceremony stood the formal tribute to the dead [*Totenehrung*], which the Nazi party also took over from the example of the Christian churches, where special intercessory prayers for fallen soldiers had been introduced since the beginning of the war.⁴¹ If the casualty figure was in the range of several dozens, the name of each person was read out to lowered flags and to the tune of "The Song of the Good Comrade", which sometimes was followed by a minute of silence. After 22nd October 1943 in Kassel, the sheer number of fatalities—an exact figure was never officially acknowledged—necessitated a change in procedure: on 9th November 1943, the names of the 'martyrs' of the failed 1923 putsch stood in for the thousands of local residents, while on 22nd October 1944 a speaker referred in general terms to the "fallen soldiers of this war" and the "women, men and children of the city of Kassel who have fallen victim to the bombing terror of our enemies".⁴²

Themes

If the interpretation of the Nazi funeral ceremony as a secularised church service is valid, then the party functionary may be said to have assumed the role of high priest.⁴³ By virtue of his calling, he acted as a mediator between the dead and the living, the '*Führer*' and his

³⁹ "Sie starben, damit Deutschland lebt", *Magdeburgische Zeitung* 23 (28-10-44), p. 1.

⁴⁰ On the popularity of pylons in the Third Reich see Behrenbeck, *Kult*, p. 409.

⁴¹ Compare Behrenbeck, *Kult*, pp. 492-501. For Magdeburg, see the example of the Protestant *Domgemeinde*. AKPS Rep. J1 Nr. 3290. *Kanzelabkündigungen. 1936-49*; for Kassel the example of the Protestant congregation of Kassel-Wilhelmshöhe. See Karl Apel, *In Memoriam. Gefallene und Vermisste 1914-1918 und 1939-1945. Ev. Kirchengemeinde Kassel-Wilhelmshöhe. Die Gedenkstätte in der Christuskirche. Ev. Kirchengemeinde Kassel-Wilhelmshöhe* ed. (Kassel: Hausdruckerei Bruderhilfe, 1995).

⁴² *KLZ* 14/262 (8-11-43), p. 1; *KLZ* 15/249 (23-10-44), p. 4.

⁴³ Attempts to understand Nazism as a 'political religion' go back to Erich Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen* [1938] (Munich: Fink, 1993). See also the classic treatment by Klaus Vondung, *Magie und Manipulation. Ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: V & R, 1971), and more recently, Michael Burleigh, *Die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus. Eine Gesamtdarstellung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2000), pp. 13-41. For a critique see Neil Gregor, "Nazism—A Political Religion? Rethinking the Voluntarist Turn?", in: idem ed., *Nazism, War and Genocide. Essays in Honour of Jeremy Noakes* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), pp. 1-21.

people, and finally, the *Heimat* and the front. He claimed to possess special authority to put catastrophic local events in context and endow violent death with meaning. The trope of the 'living dead' stood at the centre of this practice. The speech by the regional leader of the *Gau* of *Kurhesse*, Weinrich, on 4th August 1943 may serve as a good example. "We believe that the dead are not dead but live with and amongst us", he proclaimed. The dead were not dead but still alive, and the *Gauleiter* was the mouthpiece through which they spoke, "They call upon us [...] to grow hard and strong in this period of trial before fate".⁴⁴ The claims of the National Socialist regime on the local population were thus couched in the terms of a personal obligation of the living to the dead, that is, their very own deceased acquaintances, relatives and loved ones, and not the regime. Likewise, failure to live up to those demands was presented as treason towards the community of the dead present and past alike, i.e. towards history. "The failure of our nation would be treason towards the meaning of our history", as Weinrich put it.

By the same token, the functionary acted as an intermediary between the local population and the *Führer*, bestowing praise and censure. "The *Gauleiter* instructed Dr. Goebbels to tell the *Führer* that the population of Kassel [...] has shown exemplary and heroic bearing in this hardest night of the city's history", as the local Kassel paper reported on the occasion of the *Reich* minister's visit to Kassel in November 1943.⁴⁵ One year later, the new *Gauleiter*, Karl Gerland, used the anniversary commemoration of 22nd October 1944 to insinuate that the people of Kassel themselves were partly to blame for the high loss of life. Their suffering was punishment for a double sin of omission: just as "some amongst us" had failed to grasp the nature of this war as a war of annihilation, "far too many" had been disobedient to the party "admonition" to be evacuated. "The 22nd October has taught Kassel that there is no humanity and chivalry in the conduct of war by our supposedly civilised enemies", as the *Gau* leader summed up the official lesson of the air raid.⁴⁶ Modern notions of the chain of responsibility were thus reversed: the population was accountable to the leadership, not vice versa.

In 1940 and 1941, representatives from the party and the army also seized on air raids to remind the 'home front' of its moral obligation to the soldiers fighting at the front. In an undated speech of 1940 or 1941, the *Gauleiter* of Magdeburg-Anhalt, Rudolf Jordan, came close to welcoming the loss of life in the *Heimat* as some kind of educational measure,

⁴⁴ "Deutschland muss sein, trotz Sorgen und Not", *KLZ* 14/181 (5-8-43), p. 4; "Die Rede des Gauleiters bei der Gefallenenfeier am 4. 8. vor dem Rathaus in Kassel", *Soldatenbrief der Gauleitung Kurhessen der NSDAP* (September 1943), pp. 4f.

⁴⁵ "Terror wird uns zu keiner Zeit beugen! Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels sprach in Kassel / Kundgebung eines unerschütterlichen Siegeswillens", *KLZ* 14/261 (6/7-11-43), p. 1.

⁴⁶ *KLZ* 15/249 (23-10-44), p. 4.

"And this is why I maintain—and I ask not to be misunderstood—that it is good that in this war life is sacrificed on the home front as well. It is good that in this war the home front can likewise say that tonight someone may be hit, and tonight myself, and tonight the neighbour, and tonight somebody else. It is good that Germany's front will thus be united in common endeavour through blood".⁴⁷

In a similar vein, the commanding general of the 9th army district [*Armeekommando*] proclaimed on the commemoration of November 1941 in Kassel, "The events of this night direct our eyes to the front where the soldier fights under much harder conditions and continual willingness to die."⁴⁸ The spectre of a repeat of 'November 1918' was never far from the minds of the National Socialist elites, and resonated through their attempts to bestow meaning on the death of non-combatants in aerial warfare.⁴⁹

Next to the trope of the 'living dead' and the theme of 'personal obligation'—towards the dead, the *Führer* and the front—, contextualisation was a crucial strategy in the official attempts at making sense of localised urban destruction and mass death. "There is no need to elaborate on the misfortune to you who have become not just witnesses but sufferers. [...] I will [therefore] confine myself to the definition and explanation of the *fundamental principles* governing the present situation", propaganda minister Goebbels declared during his speech of 5th November 1943.⁵⁰ Three months earlier, *Gauleiter* Weinrich had explained the present war with reference to "two thousand years of our struggle for the creation of a *Reich* and *Volk*", while the bombing of the home town served him as evidence of a "Jewish will of annihilation" towards the German people.⁵¹ However much the enemy had demonstrated his ability to destroy the locality, however many individual lives had been lost, the nation had become stronger and the racial *Volk* more united, this was the mantra of the official interpretation of the air war. The individual, the local and the present were thus subordinated to the *Volk*, the national and the eternal. "Our enemies can destroy cities and kill Germans, but our people will live forever if we do not become unfaithful to ourselves", Weinrich declared on 4th August 1943.⁵²

At the centre of the National Socialist treatment of the violent death of non-combatants in the air war stood a process of double identification that was inherently paradoxical: the civilian casualties of allied bombing were identified as "defenceless civilians" who had

⁴⁷ Rudolf Jordan, *Wir und der Krieg. Gedanken aus Reden in diesem Krieg* (Dessau: Trommler, 1941), p. 21.

⁴⁸ "Tod und Trauer, doch stärker ist der Ruf des Lebens", *KP* 15-9-41.

⁴⁹ On the importance of the myth of "1918" for the Nazi world view see the classic treatment by Timothy Mason, "Die Erbschaft der Novemberrevolution für den Nationalsozialismus", in: *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft. Dokumente und Materialien zur deutschen Arbeiterpolitik 1936–1939* (Opladen: Westdt. Verl., 1975), pp. 1–17.

⁵⁰ Goebbels' speech of 5.11.43 is reprinted as speech no. 21 in Helmut Heiber ed., *Goebbels-Reden*, vol. 2: 1939-1945 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1972), pp. 259-285, here: p. 259f.

⁵¹ *KLZ* 5-8-43, p. 4

⁵² *KLZ* (5-8-43), p. 4.

fallen victim to a (war) crime and at the same time lauded as active "soldiers of the *Heimat*" who had sacrificed their lives for a greater cause.⁵³ Early in the war, in August 1940, the local *Kasseler Neueste Nachrichten* acknowledged something of this tension in an article on the death of the first two local residents in a British air raid. Writing of "senseless murder", the writer still maintained that the casualties had died a "sacrificial death". He continued, "As meaningless as it may seem that the [...] father and the daughter [...] had to lose their lives by the blind hatred of enemy fliers, their death has strengthened the community of those for whom they have died." As much as the Nazi regime sought to exploit the death of German civilians in order to denounce the allied conduct of the war, the underlying distinction between combatants and non-combatants ran counter to the National Socialist understanding of the war. In the self-proclaimed 'total war', there was no space for civilians standing aside.⁵⁴

Thus the tension between the non-combatant status of the majority of air raid casualties on the one hand and the official hero cult of voluntary sacrifice on the other remained unresolved. The calling out of the names of the dead in the funeral ceremonies to the tune of "The Song of the Good Comrade"—borrowed from military ceremonial—clearly identified them as "comrades" and "soldiers of the *Heimat*". On this reading, the allied air war was a supreme and necessary trial on the way to redemption through victory: "Never has a *Volk* achieved victory without sacrifice. [...] The death of those men, women and children fulfils the eternal law of nature that only death brings forth new life", the Magdeburg district leader, Tichy, said in his address of 27th January 1944.⁵⁵ In a similar vein, party functionaries urged the populace to consider the destruction of the home town as a mark of distinction. "When the few remaining church bells [...] will ring to victory, you will happily walk through the ruins of this city [...]. At any rate, nobody will be able to say of this city that victory has been earned undeservedly", Goebbels told his Kassel audience on 5th November 1943, which responded with "heavy applause".⁵⁶

The second strand of interpretation coexisted uneasily and to some extent contradicted the trope of 'death as sacrifice'. Just as the civilian casualties of allied bombing were

⁵³ "Mord-, Brand- und Vernichtungswillen", in: *KLZ* 15/249 (23.10.43), p. 4. The phrase "soldiers of the *Heimat*" was used at a Magdeburg funeral service on 9th August 1944. See "Sie sind unsterblich geworden ..." *Magdeburgische Zeitung* of 10-8-44, p. 4. Compare also LA Magd. -LHA-, Rep. C 127 Oberlandesgericht Naumburg (Saale). Rep. C 127 Nr. 1291. *Luftschutz, Bd. 2 1941-45*, fol. 140: "Betrifft: Änderung der Bezeichnung für "getötete" und "verletzte" Zivilpersonen bei Luftangriffen" (15-6-43).

⁵⁴ See the brilliant introductory essay by Jörg Echternkamp, "Im Kampf an der inneren und äußeren Front. Grundzüge der deutschen Gesellschaft im Zweiten Weltkrieg", in: *DRZW* 9/1. Echternkamp ed., *Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939 bis 1945*. Erster Halbband: Politisierung, Vernichtung, Überleben (Munich: DVA, 2004), pp. 1-92.

⁵⁵ "Magdeburg nahm Abschied von seinen Gefallenen", *Der Mitteldeutsche* (28-1-44), p. 1. Compare also *Magdeburgische Zeitung* 23 (28-1-44), p. 1. "Sie starben, damit Deutschland lebt".

⁵⁶ "Appell der Kasseler Amtswalter", in: Heiber ed., *Goebbels-Reden*, vol. 2, pp. 259-285, here: p. 285.

praised as "soldiers of the Heimat", they were identified as victims of a (war) crime. Their death was interpreted as 'evidence' of a 'Jewish' war of annihilation being waged against the German people as a whole, not just Nazism. "This night in which English planes destroyed large parts of our city and murdered many German men, women and children has shown us that the hatred and will of annihilation of our enemies is not just directed against the National Socialist leadership, the National Socialist idea but against German life as a whole, against every family and kinship group. This attack [...] was deliberate murder of German life", the *Gau* leader of *Kurhesse*, Weinrich, declared on 7th November 1943, to give just one example of this line of interpretation.⁵⁷ From 1943 onwards, allied air raids were summarily referred to as "terror raids", allied strategy denounced as "flying murder" and "air terror" while the pilots themselves were labelled "arsonists" and "gangsters of the air". Such vocabulary was common to Nazi propaganda as a whole, featuring most prominently in the press. While the commemorative ceremonies employed denunciatory rhetoric as well, the linguistic efforts of speakers and reporters were arguably directed elsewhere: at the creation of an aural atmosphere in which to affirm the Nazi ethical canon of struggle, sacrifice, and racial communalism.⁵⁸

The Vocabulary of Commemoration

The language of the official commemorations was the language of the Third Reich as famously described by Victor Klemperer in his *Lingua Tertii Imperii*.⁵⁹ The rhetoric of the funeral ceremonies was marked by the incessant use of superlatives, metaphors, qualifying adjectives, and fixed expressions. It made use of sudden changes between the archaic and the contemporary, the vulgar and the literary. The language was expressive and appellative, striking a heroic tone and addressing the emotions. The press invariably described the various ceremonies as "edifying" [*erhebend*], "moving" [*ergreifend*] and "dignified" [*würdig*].⁶⁰ The most revealing term was "solemn" [*weihevoll*], the adjectival form of "to consecrate" [*weihen*], "to make holy" [*heilig machen*], evoking associations of the sacred, holy, and eternal. Through the use of such attributes, the press reports endowed

⁵⁷ KLZ 14/262 (8-11-43), p. 1: "Wir hüten das Erbe unserer Gefallenen".

⁵⁸ Compare Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, MA, & London: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 4-16.

⁵⁹ Victor Klemperer, *LTI. Notizbuch eines Philologen* (Leipzig: Reclam, 15th ed., 1996). See also Werner Bohleber / Jörg Drews eds., "Gift, das du unbewusst eintrinkst..." *Der Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Sprache* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 1991); Cornelia Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin / New York: de Gruyter, 1998).

⁶⁰ *Erhebend*: Kasseler Sonntagsblatt 65/32 (8-8-43), p. 5; Magdeburgische Zeitung (10-8-44), p. 4; *Ergreifend*: KLZ 14/181 (5-8-43), p. 1; *Würdig*: Kasseler Sonntagsblatt (25-8-40); KP (15-9-41); Kasseler Sonntagsblatt 63/38 (21-9-41), p. 5; Der Mitteldeutsche (28-1-44), p. 1; Magdeburgische Zeitung 23 (28-1-44), p. 1; *Weihevoll*: KNN 30/197 (22-8-40), p. 4; KLZ 14/181 (5-8-43), p. 4.

party-organised funeral rallies with a semi-religious aura, providing a spiritual frame in which the morale-boosting slogans of the local party functionaries took on the meaning of ontological truths and eternal laws.

To emphasise the heroic, the commemorative language of Nazism made frequent use of archaisms and literary expressions. The brass band marched "with drums beating" [*mit klingendem Spiel*], delivering "airs" [*Weisen*] instead of "tunes".⁶¹ Meanwhile, armed conflict was described as a "struggle" [*Ringen*] in which the Germans responded to the challenge of the bombing attacks with an "obstinate" [*trutzig*] attitude and commemorated their dead on a "field of honour" [*Ehrenstätte*]. In a similar vein, stock phrases from the *völkisch* tradition stressed timeless heroism. The daily *Der Mitteldeutsche*, for example, invoked the popular maxim of the *Edda*, "The glorious deeds of the dead last forever" [*Ewig ist der Toten Tatenruhm*], even for the non-combatant casualties of the air war, whose only 'glorious deed' had been to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The same article also employed a variation on the famous citation from Heinrich Lersch's poem of 1914, *Soldatenabschied*, "they died so Germany can live".⁶²

The casualties of allied bombing had died in accordance with a "natural law" that was invariably prefixed by the adjective "brazen" [*ehern*]. The term derived from the Old German *ērīn* which described the quality of bronze but was also used figuratively to denote toughness and the eternal.⁶³ Their death commanded an attitude of collective "reverence" [*Ehrfurcht*] from the congregation, stressing the awe-inspiring aspect of their alleged heroism.⁶⁴ Here as elsewhere, the commemorative language made frequent use of the superlative. On 7th November 1943, *Gau* leader Weinrich, for example, spoke of the air raid as the "hardest stroke of fate" that obligated the living to the "deepest gratitude" and "highest performance of duty".⁶⁵ The "legacy" [*Vermächtnis*] of the dead was described in terms of the Nazi ethical canon of "faith, volition, deed", or, in a variation on Benedict of Nursia's famous 6th century dictum of 'ora et labora', by means of the injunction "to work, fight, and believe".⁶⁶ The emotional extremes of love and hatred played an important role in this canon. While the term 'love' carried positive connotations and was usually reserved

⁶¹ KLZ 14/262 (8-11-43), p. 1

⁶² *Der Mitteldeutsche* (28.1.44), p. 1. On the popularity of these slogans see Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler*, vol. 5, pp. 15-19 & p. 210.

⁶³ Compare *Trübner's Deutsches Wörterbuch*, ed. by Alfred Götze, vol. 2: c-f (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1940), p. 133 (entry *ehern*); *Duden. Das Herkunftswörterbuch. Etymologie der deutschen Sprache* (Mannheim / Leipzig / Wien / Zürich: Dudenverlag, 3rd ed, 2001), p. 170.

⁶⁴ Compare *Trübner's Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2, p. 133f (entry *ehre*); *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, vol. 3: e – forsche (Leipzig, 1862), p. 67 (entry *ehrfurcht*).

⁶⁵ KLZ 14/262 (8-11-43), p. 1.

⁶⁶ "To work, fight, and believe—be this our will and oath in this hour before the fallen soldiers at the front and at home." *Gauleiter* Weinrich on 4th August 1943. The speech is reprinted in *KLZ* (5-8-43), p. 4.

for the *Führer*, hatred could be positive or negative depending on the attribute. In the words of *Gauleiter* Weinrich,

"We devote all our love to him [i.e., Hitler, J.A.] ... The passion of all our hatred, however, will be directed against the enemy. Our love and our hatred must match the importance of the historic hour".⁶⁷

Allied bombing was described as an expression of "blind hatred", whereas the racial community would respond with "glowing" or "flaming" hatred. While the enemy's emotions were thus directionless and benighted, the *Volksgemeinschaft* was enlightened and purposeful.

The commemorative language revolved around a binary opposition of 'them' and 'us' that was expressed in moral categories. The ceremonial language was the language of moral righteousness: 'Chivalry' and 'humanity' were said to be lacking from the allied conduct of the (air) war just as 'honour' and 'dignity' were said to characterize the "bearing" [*Haltung*] of the German population. References to the allied "air terror" were frequently prefixed by the adjective "wicked" [*ruchlos*] rather than the more common "criminal" [*verbrecherisch*]. A literary term, "wicked" did not just denounce the air war in legal terms but carried connotations of sacrilege and desecration, of a violation of the sacred.⁶⁸ In the same vein, every mentioning of England was preceded by the adjective "hypocritical" as the term that was said to characterise the Western adversary. By contrast, Germany was fighting for a "social people's state which honours faith, honour, a sense of duty and comradeship".⁶⁹

The language of the speeches oscillated between paternalistic praise that ostentatiously used the first person plural of "us" as the signature of community and open and veiled threats against "them", the enemies without and within. "Let us hate our enemies in the belief that one day we will take merciless revenge for all the suffering they have brought upon us", *Gau* leader Weinrich declared with reference to the Western powers on 4th August 1943. In no less unmistakable terms, Goebbels on 5th November 1943 directed his attention to those *Volksgenossen* who might be having second thoughts about the heroism of death under the bombs, "All I can say is this: A person who lends an ear to the catchwords of the enemy in such a situation lacks in esprit de corps. [...] We will cut off his head", to which the audience reacted with applause.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *KLZ* 14/262 (8-11-43), p. 1.

⁶⁸ *Trübner's Deutsches Wörterbuch*, ed. by Walther Mitzka, vol. 5: o – r (Berlin, 1954), p. 458f. (entry *ruchlos*).

⁶⁹ Collated from *Gauleiter* Weinrich's speeches of 14th September 1941 and 4th August 1943. *KP* 15-9-41; *KLZ* 14/181 (5-8-43), p. 4.

⁷⁰ *Appell der Kasseler Amtswalter*, in: Heiber ed., *Goebbels-Reden*, p. 282.

"Come, and let us return unto the Lord"⁷¹—Catastrophic rupture as affliction

While the secular sphere—the public square, the assembly hall and the news media—was firmly controlled by Nazism, the spiritual sphere of the Church provided a space in which pastors rather than party functionaries expounded the meaning of death in war. Although this difference held for the commemoration of the war dead in general, it was particularly relevant to the treatment of non-combatant death in aerial bombing, as a post-war statement by a representative from the Protestant Church of *Kurhesse-Waldeck* indicates. In a summary mood report of July 1945, the unnamed cleric described an inverse relationship between Nazi commemorative activity and the severity of the air war,

"Until 1943, the Party claimed a special place in funeral ceremonies for the victims of bombing. Later, this activity declined and ultimately ceased altogether".⁷²

While the second part of the comment was clearly an overstatement, the observation correctly expressed a perception that many *Kasseler* will have shared: As the propaganda activity of the local Nazi functionaries decreased in the aftermath of 22nd October 1943, the voice of the Church gained in audibility, contributing to the remarkable revival of ecclesiasticism that was to become a characteristic feature of the early post-war period.⁷³

To some extent, the rise in importance of the Church vis-à-vis the Nazi state was a question of logistics. With two-thirds of the city population made homeless by the air raid, Kassel-based ceremonies such as the commemorations of 9th November 1943 and of 22nd October 1944 reached a limited number of people only. By contrast, the church of *Kurhesse Waldeck* could rely on individual pastors to conduct decentralised commemorative services. In addition, the Church leadership could draw on the intact organisation of the surrounding countryside in order to reach out to the church-going evacuee population. For the Protestant Church, evidence survives of a range of memorial and funeral services held by pastors in the half-year or so following the air raid of 22nd October 1943. On 14th November 1943, pastor Paul Velbinger of the severely affected parish of the *Lutherkirche* conducted a special service for the Kassel evacuees in the town

⁷¹ Hosea 6,1. Bible text in: Archiv der Lutherkirche Kassel, Paul Velbinger, *Predigten*. No. 35: "Erster Gottesdienst nach dem Unglück für die Kasseler Bombengeschädigten am 14. November 1943".

⁷² StAK A.1.10. Nr. 70. Police Situation Report of July 1945.

⁷³ Christoph Kleßmann, "Kontinuitäten und Veränderungen im protestantischen Milieu", in: Schildt / Sywottek eds., *Modernisierung im Wiederaufbau*, pp. 403-17, here: p. 403. Compare also the comment by pastor D: Johannes Steinweg in 1953: "As a factor in public life, the Church is held in higher regard than at any time during the past 200 years." In: *Evangelisches Gemeindebuch Kassel* (Stuttgart: Ev. Verlagswerk, 1953), p. 19.

of *Hannover'sch Münden*.⁷⁴ On 22nd February 1944, Velbinger's colleague at the *Lutherkirche*, Dr. Preger, commemorated the dead from the parish in a funeral service at the *Diakonissenhaus* in Kassel, to which the congregation had temporarily moved after the destruction of the church building.⁷⁵ The equally affected parishes of the *Freiheiter Gemeinde* and *Altstädter Gemeinde* likewise held special commemorative services, on 30th January 1944 and 12 March 1944, respectively.⁷⁶ For the territory of the state church of *Kurhesse Waldeck* as a whole, the church leadership [*Landeskirchenausschuss*] published a special announcement to be read from all pulpits on Christmas Day 1943.⁷⁷

By means of home visits, blessings and memorial services, the Church assumed its customary role as dispenser of pastoral care, offering consolation, orientation and meaning to a population that had been subjected to the disruptive effects of extreme violence.⁷⁸ In so doing, the Church also demonstrated its own survival amidst catastrophic rupture: the places of worship may have been destroyed in the air raid but as a social network, the Church had survived, ready to assemble the dispersed parishioners around the word of God. This was the message that the commemorations communicated to the bombed-out and bereaved above and beyond the content of the individual sermons.⁷⁹ Continuity in rupture was underlined further by formal elements. While the memorial services were usually held on Sunday, the customary day of worship, their liturgy followed the traditional service, with the sermon at the centre, communal hymn singing and prayer.

Themes

"Why? Why does God allow for such a misfortune to happen? Why do we have to suffer so much?" asked Lutheran pastor Paul Velbinger in his first sermon after the air raid, conducted for the evacuees of Kassel in the small town of *Hannover'sch Münden* on 14th

⁷⁴ Archiv der Lutherkirche Kassel, Paul Velbinger, *Predigten*, pp. 192-197: "Erster Gottesdienst nach dem Unglück Für die Kasseler Bombengeschädigten in der St. Blasienkirche zu Hannover'sch Münden am 14. Nov. 1943".

⁷⁵ Hans-Dieter Stolze, "...es soll uns doch gelingen" *Lutherkirche Kassel 1897-1997. Festschrift* (Kassel: Ev. Informationszentrum, 1997), p. 53.

⁷⁶ August Schwab ed., *Kreuz und Krone. Gedenkschrift zur Einweihung der wiederaufgebauten Martinskirche in Kassel* (Kassel, 1958), p. 23; Archiv Altstädter Gemeinde Kassel, *Sitzungsprotokolle Kirchenvorstand*: "Erste Sitzung der Altstädter Kirchengemeinde nach dem Terrorangriff auf Kassel (22.10.1943)".

⁷⁷ *Kirchliches Amtsblatt. Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt der Evangelischen Landeskirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck* 58/10 (15-12-43), p. 66.

⁷⁸ See the post-war accounts by Protestant pastors from Kassel: Johannes D. Steinweg, "Die evangelische Kirche Kassels in den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten", in: Dekanat ed., *Evangelisches Gemeindebuch Kassel*, pp. 12-21, here: p. 15; Werner Buchenau, *Aus dem Schatz einer Kirchenchronik (1943-1949)* (Kassel: Kasseler Dr.- u. Verl. Haus, 1949), pp. 18-20; 27-34; Franz Preger, *Aus meiner Kasseler Amtszeit 1908-1945*, in: Hans-Dieter Stolze, *Lutherkirche in der 1. Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts: Zwei Pfarrer berichten* (Kassel: Ms., 2005), p. 33.

⁷⁹ Compare the pamphlet, *Zerstörte Kirchen – lebende Gemeinde* (Berlin: Heliand, 1944).

November 1943.⁸⁰ Faced with catastrophic rupture, clerics struggled to give answers to a question that was on the minds of many residents, the question about the ultimate reason for the catastrophe. It is indicative of the force of this disaster that clerics and Nazi functionaries alike wrestled with the same issue. Focusing on the Protestant clergy of Kassel, this section will show that the Church did not prove immune to the interpretive frames of Nazi propaganda, adapting phrases and concepts of the secular propaganda narrative to a spiritual context. Yet, the emphasis of the spiritual narrative rested elsewhere: whereas Nazi propaganda oscillated between the denunciation of the air raid as a crime and the extolling of death under the bombs as a sacrifice, the Church put the notion of *Heimsuchung* or 'affliction' at the centre of its attempt at explaining catastrophic rupture. Carrying strong transcendental connotations, the term described an intervention by God in worldly affairs. Although the nature of this "visit" could be graceful and benevolent, more commonly, it was not. Grimm's German Dictionary defined *Heimsuchung* as a "visit by the punishing God", making the word into a synonym of "punishment" or "(divine) judgement".⁸¹ Through the air raid, God had spoken to the population of Kassel—this was the common thread running through otherwise disparate utterances by representatives of the Protestant Church in the aftermath of 22nd October 1943.

Partial adaptation of the Nazi propaganda narrative was most pronounced in a statement that was both widely accessible and vulnerable to state censorship: a proclamation on the air raid by the Church leadership of 15th December 1943, published in the church gazette and to be read from all pulpits on Christmas Day 1943.⁸² The text, "Light shines in the Darkness", referred to the air raid in the interpretive categories of official propaganda, employing the propaganda term "terror raid" and representing the casualties of allied bombing as victims of a crime. "In deep sorrow we remember those who were murdered in the terror raid on Kassel of 22nd October 1943, and their bereaved families", the statement read. On a surface level, the text thus appeared to corroborate the official propaganda: allied bombing was not an act of war but a criminal deed pure and simple. Yet, there was an inter-textual dimension to the statement that subtly subverted this surface meaning. In order to give expression to the emotion of sorrow, the text invoked quotations from the Old Testament prophets of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Jer. 9,1), the text read. In so doing, the statement not only provided a language of mourning to the congregation but also shifted the emphasis

⁸⁰ Archiv der Lutherkirche Kassel, Paul Velbinger, *Predigten*, pp. 192-197, here: p. 195.

⁸¹ *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 10 (1877), column 883, entry *HEIMSUCHUNG*.

⁸² *Kirchliches Amtsblatt. Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt der Evangelischen Landeskirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck* 58/10 (15-12-43), p. 66.

from the character of the deed to the question of agency, offering an alternative reading of the catastrophic event that was decipherable by regular churchgoers. In the Old Testament, the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel predict the destruction of Jerusalem as divine punishment for the wilful violation of God's Law.⁸³ By analogy, the destruction of Kassel might therefore not just be understood as the result of a criminal deed at the hands of the enemy but as a (divine) affliction brought unto the city by the residents themselves.

In the pulpit proclamation, the interpretive frame of Divine punishment was not spelled out explicitly but required an inter-textual exegetic effort in order to be recognised. On the whole, faith in transcendental salvation played a larger role than any deliberation on the ultimate causes of the disaster. While the reasons for this restraint may or may not have owed to fears about state repression, the internal correspondence of the signatory of the text, *Kirchenrat* D. Happich, showed a marked difference in emphasis. Not only did Happich explicitly use the term 'affliction', he also refrained from adopting the idiom of Nazi propaganda. In a circular letter to the heads of the state churches in the *Reich* dated 27 October 1943, Happich used the phrase "horrible bombing night" rather than "terror raid" in order to refer to the attack, while entreating his addressees to pray for the "heavily afflicted *Gau*".⁸⁴

A close reading of two commemorative sermons by Lutheran pastor Paul Velbinger may help to delineate further the ways in which Protestant clerics employed the concept of *Heimsuchung* in order to provide consolation in distress and to explain the disaster to the parishioners. As the analysis will show, the notion served less to explore the causal nexus between an aggressive foreign policy and domestic destruction but to stabilise a spiritual world view that was in danger of being eroded by the extent of the catastrophe. Born in 1882, Velbinger was in many respects a typical representative of German Protestantism in the early twentieth century.⁸⁵ Socialised in a middle class background in Wilhelmian Germany, Velbinger had enthusiastically welcomed the demise of the Weimar Republic and the advent of the Third Reich.⁸⁶ In May of 1933, he joined the Nazi party and became involved with the German Christians, serving briefly on the board of the *Kommissarische Kirchenregierung*, the organisational spearhead of the ill-fated attempt to install a pro-Nazi

⁸³ Compare Siegfried Herrmann, entry "Jeremia / Jeremiabuch", *TRE* 16, pp. 568-586.

⁸⁴ LKA Kassel, Sammlung Kirchenkampf No. 24. Letter of D. Happich to the Members of the Church Council, 27 October 1943.

⁸⁵ On the context see: Clemens Vollnals, "Der deutsche Protestantismus: Spiegelbild der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft", in: Gottfried Niedhart / Dieter Riesenberger, *Lernen aus dem Krieg? Deutsche Nachkriegszeiten 1918 und 1945* (Munich: Beck, 1992), pp. 158-177.

⁸⁶ See Hans-Dieter Stolze, *Lutherkirche in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Zwei Pfarrer berichten* (Kassel, Ms., 2005), pp. 38-41.

church leadership in the church of *Kurhessen-Waldeck*.⁸⁷ Although a process of gradual disillusionment with Nazism set in by late 1933, Velbinger remained strongly nationalist in his outlook, conceiving of the Christian faith in *völkisch* categories.⁸⁸

In his preaching on the air raid, Velbinger sought to reassure his parishioners in their Christian faith by emphatically reasserting the omnipotence of God in the face of the catastrophic event. The pastor conceived of the air raid as an *Anfechtung* or "trial of faith" that put the believer to the test and exposed popular misconceptions about God. In his sermon of 14th November 1943, Velbinger declared,

"The worst that could happen to us is to lose faith in God because of all the horror that we have gone through. If we turned away from God now, we would have failed in our trial of faith. We would be deserters to the flag. The deserter, however, has lost his right to live."

As the excerpt shows, there were clear echoes of both the idiom and the interpretive frame of Nazi propaganda: the analogy between the believer / apostate and the soldier / deserter; the notion of the air raid as a *Bewährungsprobe* or "opportunity to prove one's worth"; and the threat of annihilation should the individual fail this test. Yet, as a Lutheran pastor, Velbinger was not concerned foremost with shoring up the 'home front' against the corrosive impact of the air war but with salvaging a Christian understanding of the world from the rubble and death that surrounded him. God was still in charge, reigning well, Velbinger maintained emphatically. If God ruled the world omnipotently, then the catastrophe of the air raid must be of God as well. "Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?", Velbinger asked his audience by way of an inter-textual reference to Lamentations 3,37 in his remembrance service of 22 October 1944. The suffering of the present, Velbinger argued, could not be explained with reference to categories such as 'coincidence' or 'fate' but must be understood as an 'affliction' sent by a God who was not only the benevolent father of the New Testament but also the stern judge of the Old Testament.⁸⁹

As will be readily apparent, there was enormous critical potential in a reading of events that identified the misdeeds of the 'we-group' as the ultimate cause for the disaster. In his anniversary sermon of October 1944, Velbinger invoked the Lamentations of Jeremiah 3, 22-32, in order to draw an analogy between the biblical past and the present. He declared, "The prophet admonished the people with great seriousness, but it was in vain. They

⁸⁷ Dieter Waßmann, *Evangelische Pfarrer in Kurhessen und Waldeck von 1933 bis 1945* (Kassel: Ev. Medienverband Kassel, 2001), p. 336. On the local 'church struggle' see Hans Slenczka, *Die evangelische Kirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck in den Jahren von 1933 bis 1945* (Göttingen: V & H, 1977).

⁸⁸ Compare Velbinger's comments in a sermon of 18-11-1936, "We carry three proud names. We are Germans [...]. We are Christians [...]. And we are Protestants." In: Velbinger, *Predigten*, pp. 221-225, here: p. 223.

⁸⁹ Velbinger, *Predigten*, p. 195.

listened to the words of false prophets and seducers. This was their undoing.⁹⁰ To quote from the Lamentations of Jeremiah in the autumn of 1944, at a time when the Nazi regime made a frantic last-ditch effort at total mobilisation of the 'home front', certainly bespoke of an erosion of affective ties between the speaker and the National Socialist regime. More importantly, the analogy offered up a way to think of the catastrophe in terms of agency rather than in the propaganda categories of sacrifice and victimhood.

The main function of this argument, however, was theological rather than political. The notion of *Heimsuchung* shored up the idea of an omnipotent and benevolent higher being against the problem of theodicy. Although unfathomable, God's judgement was just, as Velbinger maintained in his sermon of 14th November 1943. The extent to which even Protestant clerics could struggle with the problem of 'making sense' of an unparalleled catastrophe is well illustrated by a prayer that pastor Brien of the *Altstädter Gemeinde* spoke at the first post-raid meeting of the parish council in January 1944. "Distressed we stand before you because you have spoken to us", he declared in order to continue, "How unfathomable are your ways, how unfathomable are your judgements. Help us so we may not despair".⁹¹ In contrast to this helpless admission of confusion, Velbinger took recourse to the notion of God's ultimate benevolence. However much the congregation had been punished, the promise of salvation still held. To underline this idea, Velbinger based his first post-raid sermon on Hosea 6,1, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up".⁹² On this reading, the suffering incurred in the air raid fulfilled a near-eschatological function, strengthening the congregation in their faith. However much Velbinger challenged the interpretive frame of Nazi propaganda, in practical terms, he advocated a kind of quietist patience in the face of adversity that undoubtedly played into the hands of the Nazi regime.

Conclusion

In the period of 1940 to 1945, the public commemoration of civilian death in aerial warfare was expressed through the cultural repertoire of Nazism. Just like the *Reich* leadership, the local political elites never developed a consistent approach to the challenge of allied bombing, oscillating between propagandistic overstatement of minor raids and silence in the face of unprecedented urban destruction. Generally speaking, however, the

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁹¹ Archiv der Altstädter Gemeinde Kassel, *Sitzungsprotokolle Kirchenvorstand*: "Erste Sitzung der Altstädter Kirchengemeinde nach dem Terrorangriff auf Kassel (22.10.1943)".

⁹² Velbinger, *Predigten*, p. 192.

commemorative activity decreased in the same measure as the severity of the raids escalated. By way of public commemorations, the regional *NSDAP* leadership enacted through ritual what it was ever less able to provide in the real world: the protection of the racial community against the consequences of the self-proclaimed total war. Likewise, the local Nazi elites employed verbal and non-verbal modes of communication in order to reaffirm the myth of a "community of fate" in the face ever intensifying social disruption and dissolution. They did so by drawing on the standard tropes of the mythical world view of Nazism, seeking to incorporate the mostly civilian casualties of strategic bombing into the "cult of heroic death": Having fallen victim to a sacrilegious crime, the dead had also heroically sacrificed their lives and obligated the survivors to imitate them.

To the post-war world, Nazism left a commemorative tradition that was shot through with the rhetoric of heroism and hatred while firmly identifying the casualties of allied bombing as "soldiers of the *Heimat*" in an eschatological struggle of annihilation. Yet, the discursive power of the Nazi regime started to get eroded well before the war was over. As the commemorative activity of the *NSDAP* declined in the face of unprecedented urban disaster, the Church gained in influence, resuming its customary role as the dispenser of care and consolation in times of distress. From the pulpit, pastors devolved a reading of events that put the notion of Divine affliction at the centre. While eschewing the identification of the dead as either victims of crime or voluntary sacrificers, the Church interpreted the air war as a punishment for sins against God. At the same time, the Church held out the Christian promise of salvation to the bereaved.

"In Quiet Remembrance"?

Post-War Memory Cultures, 1945 to 1975

Introduction: A Usable Past?

"Today, we remember all the dead who had to go so suddenly. We remember the dead whose graves we can adorn; we remember those who vanished without a trace and whose graves nobody knows. We remember the mourning relatives of those who were swept away by the storm of fire."¹

On 22 October 1950, seven years after the devastating air raid and six years after his first commemorative service, Lutheran pastor Velbinger returned to the subject of death under the bombs. In a memorial service held in a makeshift building erected on the ruins of the late 19th century church, Velbinger conceptualised the air raid as an affliction, taking the rubble as evidence of God's judgment as well as his grace.² The parish of the *Lutherkirche* was not the only one to mark the day by means of a special commemoration but was joined by other Christian congregations across the city of Kassel.³ In the afternoon, the *Bund der Fliegergeschädigten* or League of Air Raid Victims had held a secular memorial celebration at the main cemetery in which 5,000 residents took part. Wreaths were laid and words of commemoration spoken by a Catholic priest and his Protestant colleague.⁴ Across the Iron Curtain, in the city of Magdeburg, the parish of the *Domgemeinde* also commemorated the fifth anniversary of the bombing night of 16th January 1945 by way of an "hour of commemoration", while the Socialist Unity Party (SED) convened a "mass rally" to mark the return of the "Anglo-American destruction of Magdeburg".⁵

¹ Archiv der Lutherkirche, Paul Velbinger, *Predigten*, no. 37: "Gedächtnisgottesdienst zur Erinnerung an den Bombenangriff auf die Stadt Kassel, 22-10-1950", pp. 202f.

² For the context see: Hans-Peter Stolze ed., "...es soll uns doch gelingen" *Lutherkirche Kassel 1897-1997* (Kassel: Ev. Informationszentrum, 1997), pp. 56-66.

³ The first post-war commemorative service was held the previous year, on 22nd October 1949, by pastor Buchenau of the *Auferstehungsgemeinde*. See *Ev. Sonntagsbote*, 6-11-49, p. 405; *Kasseler Sonntagsblatt*, 30-10-49. For evidence of commemorative activity in 1950 see Archiv Christuskirche, Kassel, *Abkündigungen 1945-1950*, entry of 22 October 1950.

⁴ *Kasseler Sonntagsblatt*, 29-10-50.

⁵ AKPS Rep. J 1. No. 3291. "Kanzelabkündigungen 1950-54", entry of 15-1-50. The first post-war commemorative service was held on 16 Jan. 1948. See *ibid.*, No. 3290, "Kanzelabkündigungen 1936-49", entry of 11-1-48. For the secular mass rally see *Volksstimme*, 17-1-50: "In der nationalen Front dem Frieden dienen. Großkundgebung am 5. Jahrestag der Zerstörung Magdeburgs".

About half a decade after the last bombs had fallen, different groups and institutions in Kassel as well as Magdeburg took up a commemorative practice that had been initiated by the National Socialist elites and discontinued after the defeat of the Third Reich in 1945, the celebration of funeral ceremonies for the casualties of allied bombing. While the dead of World War II were commemorated on various occasions and in different ways in the years of the "Nuremberg interregnum" as well, the singling out of the victims of allied bombing was a novel development for the post-war commemorative landscape.⁶ The practice (re-)commenced at a historical juncture when influential agents of public memory in both German states turned to constructing selective narratives of World War II that were designed to be 'usable' in the struggles of the day: As West-Germans reversed the results of allied denazification in a process that has been described as a "politics of the past",⁷ an emphasis on German suffering replaced the earlier debate on the suffering occasioned by the Germans.⁸ The emerging myth of German victimhood served both to integrate the one-time supporters of Nazism into the West German state and to dissociate the nascent Federal Republic from her 'totalitarian' predecessor as well as the 'other Germany' east of the Iron Curtain. Meanwhile, the rapidly Stalinizing GDR extended the antifascist credentials of her ruling elites to the population at large, stressing the heroic and ultimately victorious struggle against a dictatorship that had held the German people 'captive'.⁹

To some extent, the institutionalisation of a memory culture of allied bombing in the 1950s can be accounted for in terms of its usability as well. After all, the death and destruction wrought by allied bombing comprised an aspect of World War II in which Germans stood at the receiving end of organised violence. The bombs appeared to kill, injure, and scar regardless of the individual's political persuasion and involvement in the crimes of the Nazi regime, thus turning potentially all Germans into victims. In other respects, however, the subject matter of aerial warfare was far from usable. Deeply disruptive, touching on primary experiences of a generally traumatic nature and burdened with the semantic, topographical and interpretive frames of Nazism, mass death under the bombs was not easily adapted to the political confrontations of the post-war world. For the

⁶ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1997), p. 69. For similar developments in Hamburg see Thießen, "Gedenken", p. 49.

⁷ Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich: Beck, 1996), pp. 7-24; Ulrich Brochhagen, *Nach Nürnberg. Vergangenheitsbewältigung und Westintegration in der Ära Adenauer* (Hamburg: Junis, 1994), pp. 19-172; Edgar Wolfrum, *Die geglückte Demokratie. Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006), pp. 169-186.

⁸ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories. The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: UCP, 2001); Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, pp. 133-306.

⁹ Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge / Oxford / Malden: Polity Press / Blackwell, 1999), pp. 28-36; Herf, *Divided Memory*, pp. 162-200; Olaf Groehler, "Antifaschismus—Vom Umgang mit einem Begriff", in: Ulrich Herbert / Olaf Groehler, *Zweierlei Bewältigung* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1992), pp. 29-40.

mainstream elites of West Germany, there was no political advantage to be gained from reviving memories of the uncompromising ways in which the Western allies had pursued their fight not just against Nazism but against the German Reich as a whole. Moreover, the legal and moral problems raised by indiscriminate bombing appeared to furnish arguments for *tu quoque* or 'you did it too' apologetics, which rested uncomfortably with the "anti-Nazi foundation consensus" of the Federal Republic.¹⁰ At the same time, the partial adaptation of the Nazi 'terror raid'-narrative by the East German Socialist Unity Party made the subject suspicious to the 'anti-totalitarian' mainstream of West-German political opinion.¹¹ Meanwhile, even the Communist elites of East Germany, while eager to exploit the propaganda potential of the air war, had to be cognizant of the uncontrollable effects of stoking up emotions that had their experiential basis in deeply disturbing primary experiences.

In the light of these observations, the institutionalisation of commemorative practices east and west of the border cannot be explained solely in terms of the battle lines of the Cold War. Any analytical approach that exclusively conceives of public memory in terms of its usability runs the danger of overlooking the complex interplay between experience and memory, private and public narratives. While the geo-political confrontation certainly had an important impact on local commemorative cultures, the evidence presented in this chapter does not support the claim that the memory of the air war was the exclusive preserve of the East.¹² In Kassel no less than in Magdeburg, the casualties of allied bombing were publicly remembered with great intensity and a high degree of popular participation throughout the 1950s and 1960s, making them into one of the most visible victim groups of World War II. In a social environment in which thousands of residents mourned the death of loved ones and tens of thousands personally remembered the terror of aerial warfare, the agents of public memory were not free to construct any narrative they

¹⁰ Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, p. 23. For an example of *tu quoque* apologetics compare the remarks by Bernhard Ramcke, ex-Wehrmacht general, at a meeting of Waffen SS veterans in 1952: "Who are the real war criminals? [...] those who destroyed entire cities for no tactical reasons, who dropped the bombs on Hiroshima and are producing new Atomic bombs [today]." Quoted according to Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, pp. 282f. For the use of this argument by the German defence in the Nuremberg trials see Donald Bloxham, *Genocide on Trial: War Crimes Trials and the Formation of Holocaust History and Memory* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), pp. 149-153. For Kassel see Gerhard Zumbach, "Todesmühlen und öffentliche Meinung", *HN* 21 (13-3-1946), p. 1.

¹¹ Compare Olaf Groehler, "Dresden: Kleine Geschichte der Aufrechnung", in: *Blätter für deutsche & internationale Politik*, 2/1995, pp. 137-41. In Kassel, bishop Wüstemann opened his commemorative address of 22nd October 1951 with the following disclaimer: "Here in Kassel, so close to the zonal border, we have no intention whatsoever at this commemorative hour to become political in the wrong sense ". In: LKA Kassel. SB Wüstemann. No. 22. "Ansprache am 22. Oktober".

¹² Klaus Naumann, "Leerstelle Luftkrieg. Einwurf zu einer verqueren Debatte", *Mittelweg* 36 2/98, pp. 12-15, here: p. 13. Compare also the remarks by Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories*, p. 5: "In that decade, descriptions of German suffering focused mainly on the losses inflicted by the Red Army, not on cities destroyed by American and British bombers; in a world divided between East and West, attacking the Soviet Union—past and present—was far easier than recounting the sins of former enemies who were now allies."

saw fit but were forced to address a set of recurrent themes such as loss, responsibility and meaning. As this chapter shall argue, opinion makers in both cities attempted to channel and control the public enunciation of memory but had to contend with primary experiences as well as long-standing interpretive frames in their attempts to give meaning to mass death under the bombs.

In Kassel, the initiative for the institutionalisation of a public memory culture originated from below, from the special interest group of the League of Air Raid Victims, who repeatedly approached the Church and the City Council with the demand to grant greater visibility to the casualties of aerial warfare. The political and religious elites responded by pursuing a policy of semantic pacification. Acknowledging the validity of a war-time counter-narrative that had conceptualised the air raid as an unprecedented disaster, they attempted to de-politicise and de-contextualise the memory of 22nd October 1943 while Re-Christianising the format of the commemorations. To that end, they put forward a set of consensus-formulae that were just as noteworthy for their blind spots as for their emphases: the lamentation of a (natural) disaster; the mercy of silence; the admonition of 'never again'. Although politicians and church leaders were united in their efforts to wrest control of the public enunciation of death from the League of Air Raid Victims, the Churches put a stronger emphasis on exploring the relationship between cause and effect. Within an overall context that conceptualised the air raid as an affliction for past wrongdoings, individual representatives also raised the issue of a causal link between the treatment of the Jews in the Third Reich and the destruction of the home town in World War II. Challenges to the consensus narrative were mounted by the radical Left, who attempted to re-politicize the iconic event and turn the memory of allied bombing into a weapon in their fight against the re-armament of the Federal Republic.

In Magdeburg, the political elites remembered the air raid less as a disaster than as a (war) crime—a crime not of World War II but of the Cold War. Strongly influenced by the national *lieu de mémoire* of Dresden, official remembrance re-contextualised and re-politicised the air war while making heroes of its victims. The political elites produced a set of formulae that were designed to foster the active identification with the new social order and to cultivate a culture of hatred towards the old and new enemy.¹³ The prime mover was the SED, which employed the party press, the City Council, the Regional Peace Council (*Kreisfriedensrat*) and the National Front as agents of dissemination while seeking selectively to tap the pool of private memories. Refusing to lend their support to the official narrative, the Churches kept their distance from the commemorative activity of the

¹³ For the context compare Richard Bessel, "Hatred after War. Emotion and the Postwar History of East Germany", *History and Memory* 1/2 (2005), pp. 195-216.

SED and its subsidiaries,¹⁴ and put forward an alternative reading of events that differed little from their Western counterparts. Above all, the Churches, together with the bloc Christian Democratic Party (*CDU*), attempted to re-shift the commemorative focus from the field of political agitation to the field of mourning.

Focusing on the memory of mass death, this chapter examines the institutionalisation of local *lieux de mémoire* in the formative period of the 1950s. It looks at the ways in which the dead were identified and commemorated by the protagonists of public memory in the two cities. In both Kassel and Magdeburg, the chapter argues, the emergence of a mnemonic topography and of annual commemorations resulted in the stabilisation of public narratives about allied bombing. In Kassel, the political elites pursued a policy of semantic pacification that was characterised by a tendency towards de-politicisation, de-contextualisation and Re-Christianisation. In Magdeburg, by contrast, the *SED* and her subsidiaries re-politicised and re-contextualised the subject matter while De-Christianising the format of the commemorations. Whereas in Kassel, the casualties of the air war were remembered as victims of a (natural) disaster, in Magdeburg, they were commemorated as victims of a crime. This chapter traces the emergence of these narratives and assesses the extent to which they reached hegemonic status in the memory cultures of Kassel and Magdeburg.

Identifying the Dead

The retrieval and identification of thousands of corpses was one of the most arduous tasks facing the local authorities in the wake of indiscriminate area raids. Requiring the active participation of the population, this was also a task that brought thousands of local residents face to face with mass death.¹⁵ Recognizing the potentially devastating impact on popular morale, the Kassel chief of police demanded to give precedence to quick burial over identification. Some seven days after the air raid of 22nd October 1943, he ordered that the dead on the main cemetery be buried in a double layer rather than shoulder to shoulder.¹⁶ As a consequence, 30% of the 5,830 recovered bodies were buried without

¹⁴ See *Berichte der Magdeburger Kirchenleitung zu den Tagungen der Provinzialsynode 1946-1989*, ed. Harald Schultze (Göttingen: V & R, 2005), pp. 64; 73; 77; 97; AKPS Rep A gen. 3026. *Kirche und Staat. Nationale Front. Generalia und Einzelfälle*; ibid., 3600. *Kirche und Staat. Volksbefragungen am 3.-5. 6. 1951 und 27.-29.6.1954*.

¹⁵ Compare StAK S8 C40, pp. 27-33, in particular p. 28; StAK S8 C50. *Opfer Diverses. Kreisleitung Kassel* to mayor Schimmelpfennig of 25th October 1943. See also BArch. R 55/447, fol. 132. "LK-Mitteilung Nr. 72. Betr.: Leichenbergung".

¹⁶ *Überlebensberichte. Der 22. Oktober 1943 in Protokollen der Vermisstensuchstelle des Oberbürgermeisters der Stadt Kassel*. Ed. by Magistrat der Stadt Kassel, Kulturamt. Bearbeitet von Frank-Roland Klaube (Marburg: Jonas, 1993), report no. 55, pp. 105-109.

prior identification.¹⁷ In Magdeburg, meanwhile, 3,591 people were still considered 'missing' some seven weeks after the raid of 16th January 1945, whereas the bodies of 1,930 persons had been found.¹⁸ While the retrieval of the bodies and the individual identification of the dead was thus fraught with difficulties, their collective identity was more straightforward. In their experience reports, the chiefs of police distinguished between 'Germans' and 'foreigners', subsuming both groups under the label of *Gefallene* or "soldiers killed in action". Nazi propaganda, meanwhile, identified the German casualties both as victims of a crime and as sacrificers who had given up their lives for the fatherland.

Graves

With the military defeat of Nazism, the plans of the local authorities to turn the sites of mass burial into "fields of honour" that would convey something of the Nazi conceptualisation of death came to a standstill.¹⁹ Throughout the years of the 'Nuremberg interregnum', the work of memory was left largely in the hands of bereaved families and friends. While the provisional arrangements of the war years were superficially denazified by the local authorities,²⁰ the bereaved commemorated the dead not as members of a collective—be this as 'soldiers of the *Heimat*' or as 'victims of crime'—but as individuals: as deceased brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers. To this end, they erected personal sites of memory that functioned as sites of mourning, adorning real and imagined graves of their loved ones with wooden crosses, wreaths and flowers. Drawing on the well-established Christian tradition of tending the graves of the deceased, this practice was most commonly performed at the local cemeteries but was also employed to mark the places of death in the city itself. Indeed, makeshift memorials erected on collapsed buildings constituted one of the most conspicuous features in the memory landscape of the rubble years.

Sometimes, these private sites of mourning consisted of a simple wooden cross that still bore the insignia of a militarised people's community. At other times, they could also come in the form of elaborate and highly personal memorial slabs. In the old town of Kassel, for example, a wooden gravestone had been erected that bore the following inscription,

¹⁷ StAK S8 C40, p. 2.

¹⁸ NA II RG 243 E-6 # 399 (box 383). "Erfahrungsbericht über den schweren Terrorangriff".

¹⁹ On these plans see StAK 41 No. 1. *Neugestaltung von Ehrenfriedhöfen auf dem Hauptfriedhof, den Friedhöfen Kassel-Bettenhausen und -Rothenditmold, 1943-1944*.

²⁰ StAM Rep. 18/4, Ra 4. *Dezernentenbesprechung am 28.1.1946, top 12:* "Entfernung der Hakenkreuze an den Grabkreuzen der Gefallenen auf dem Westfriedhof"; Rep. 18/4. *Ausschusssitzungen 1945 – 1953. Ausschuss für Garten- und Friedhofsangelegenheiten*, As 4, fol. 360-62; As 5, fol. 482-484; As 6, fol. 125-28; 137.

"In the unforgettable night of October, our dear loved ones [...] moved towards an inexplicable fate / Your future lies in darkness but we will not forget you."

To this was added the poem, "The sound of angels' tears / quietly blows around the tomb / Ghostlike ruins stare into the empty air".²¹ In another example, a family had put up a placard on the rubble, showing Kassel before the destruction, together with a wreath that commemorated "17 fallen comrades [*Hausgenossen*] in "quiet remembrance" (fig. 5).²² Although a phrase such as "fallen comrades" testified to the lasting impact of Nazism on the enunciation of loss and mourning in the post-war world, private sites of memory may still be read as an attempt to detach the memory of the killed from the total claims of the National Socialist regime or any other state authority. As sites of mourning, the makeshift memorials reaffirmed the civilian and personal identity of the deceased against their subsuming under a group label.

With the institutionalisation of a post-war memorial culture in the 1950s, this re-individualising process was brought to an abrupt end.²³ Just as the private sites of mourning were cleared from the cityscape with the onset of the reconstruction, so were the burial sites on the cemeteries subjected to redevelopment measures that, in effect, curtailed the ability of relatives to tend the graves of loved ones in a way they saw fit. As the Christian weekly, *Kasseler Sonntagsblatt*, approvingly described the "new cemetery of honour" in Kassel, redesigned by the municipal gardeners on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the bombing in 1953,

"The confusion of the different crosses made from wood and stone has been replaced by a beautiful and solemn arrangement [of two hundred identical gravestones, each bearing fifteen to twenty names]. In future, the graves will be tended collectively in order to stress the communal aspect that unites all the people who have found their last place of rest here."²⁴

Citing considerations of "propriety" and concerns over a "dignified appearance", the municipal authorities in Kassel reaffirmed the collective identity of a disparate group of people who, in truth, had often shared nothing more in common than to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Not unlike the fallen soldiers of the *Wehrmacht*, who lay buried in military formation in 'fields of honour', the (civilian) casualties of aerial warfare were thus pressed into an imaginary community even in death.²⁵

²¹ See StAK Fotoarchiv. *Gedenkstätten auf Trümmern*.

²² Ibid. The image has been reproduced in Frank-Roland Klaube, *Kassel lebt*, p. 82.

²³ Meinholt Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler*, vol. 6: Bundesrepublik (Heidelberg: Esprint, 1987), p. 109 uses the phrase, "totales Gefallenengedächtnis".

²⁴ "Zum 22. Oktober 1953: Der neue Ehrenfriedhof", *Kasseler Sonntagsblatt*, 25-10-53.

²⁵ Compare Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler* vol. 6, pp. 132-34.



FIGURE 5. Private sites of mourning in Kassel, after 22nd October 1943
(photos: StAK Fotoarchiv. *Gedenkstätten auf Trümmern*).



Memorials

One way to explore continuity and change in the collective identity of the dead is to look at war memorials. As Reinhart Koselleck has argued in a now classic essay on memory and identity, war memorials embody a "double process of identification": they identify the dead as the bearer of certain standards and ideals and in turn oblige the living either to fulfil their legacy or to heed their warning. This section argues that in Kassel as well as Magdeburg, there emerged a broad and unquestioned consensus that the casualties of air warfare formed part of a community of victims. If there was broad agreement on this point across party-political as well as ideological lines, the nature of their victimhood was less clear and at times heavily contested. Whereas the democratic Left in Kassel tended to subsume the casualties of aerial warfare under the rubric of 'victims of Nazism', Conservatives preferred to speak of 'victims of war'. The Church went furthest in stressing a causal relationship between the deeds of the Germans in World War II and the casualties of aerial warfare, with some representatives suggesting that, in truth, the dead of the air war had fallen victim to the Germans themselves. In Magdeburg, by comparison, the dominant view, as popularised by the *SED* and her subsidiaries, held that the dead of the air war were victims of a crime. Reviving a Nazi-propaganda trope, they spoke of deliberate "murder" at the hands of the allied bombs.

Kassel

On 5th November 1948, the *SPD* introduced a motion in the city parliament of Kassel that called for the erection of a "dignified site of memory for the victims of fascism".²⁶ In his defence of the motion, city councillor Goethe emphasised that the monument was not intended to deepen divisions among the citizenry. On the contrary, the monument should serve as a general warning "to never again rule by the use of violence". In order to underline its conciliatory and integrationist function, Goethe employed the broadest definition of 'victim of fascism' conceivable. Encompassing the dead and the living, the group ranged from the victims of Nazi political, racial and religious persecution to the fallen soldiers of "all countries", the expellees [*Flüchtlinge*], the "bombed out" [*Ausgebombte*] and the victims of war [*Kriegsbeschädigte*]; from the resistance of 20th July 1944 to the German anti-fascists and the anti-fascist fighters in Republican Spain.

²⁶ StAK A.0. *Stadtverordnetenversammlung*. "14. Sitzung am 5. November 1948, Punkt 6", pp. 26-33. On the official opening of the memorial see StAK A.1.10. No. 186.

The definition was sharply criticised by councillor Reinbach of the *KPD*, who insisted that only those "who had actively fought against Fascism" deserved to be called 'victims of fascism', while those who "had become victims by accident" did not qualify. This, however, was a minority view, and the motion was unanimously referred to the building commission [*Baukommission*] for further elaboration. The stipulations of the resulting competition, passed by the City Council in January 1951, adopted the councillor's inclusive definition.²⁷ The document defined "victims of fascism" as "Kassel citizens" who had been persecuted for political, racial or religious reasons. In addition, the category included those "who had to pay with their lives for their allegiance to democratic freedom and love of peace and for their resistance against dictatorship and rule of violence". The latter group was specified further to include the "inmates of the concentration camps", the "victims of bombing" and "soldiers who had been forced to serve under the flag and had died or been maimed as a consequence".²⁸

If, according to the Council, the dead and survivors of the air raids were thus to be identified as 'victims of fascism' alongside with all other victims of war, then this point was lost on the parliamentary representative of the local League of Air Raid Victims, Konrad Fülling (*BHE/PWG*).²⁹ In a debate on the restoration and extension of the city's central World War I 'warrior monument', Fülling remarked that the memorial to the victims of fascism had excluded "the victims of the two world wars, and in particular the many victims of the bombing war".³⁰ In an earlier council debate on the same topic, Fülling had supported a *FDP* motion for restoration but added that he wished to see the "victims of the city of Kassel", and in particular the "victims of the bombing" included.³¹ He was supported in this by the Social Democrats, who argued that the monument be renamed "Memorial site for the victims of both world wars". Both parliamentary parties thus identified the dead of the air raid as 'victims of war', albeit for different reasons. While the *BHE* tried to secure public recognition for the casualties of aerial warfare, the *SPD* sought to redefine the meaning of the 'warrior monument' altogether, turning it into a site of mourning and admonition. To *FDP* councillor Kaltwasser, meanwhile, the monument was

²⁷ StAK A. 4. 41 No. 54. *Wettbewerb zur Erlangung von Entwürfen für den Bau eines Denk- und Mahnmals (Opfer des Faschismus)*. Competition stipulations, dated 3 Jan. 1951.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ The activities of merchant Konrad Fülling (1904-1964), head of the local League of Air Raid Victims and city council member for the *Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechten* and the *Partei Freie Wählergemeinschaft* from 1952 to 1956, were crucial in establishing the memory place of 22nd October 1943 as a day of annual commemoration.

³⁰ StAK A.0. *Stadtverordnetenversammlung*. "9. Sitzung, 15.12.1952, Punkt 5", pp. 5-12, here: p. 8. On the history of the Kassel *Kriegerehrenmal* see Peter Adamski ed., "Glücklich die Stadt, die keine Helden hat". *Über Denkmäler in Kassel. Bd. 1: Das Ehrenmal in der Karlsaue*. Geschichtswerkstatt am Friedrichsgymnasium (Kassel, 1993); StAK A.1.10. No. 416. *Ehrenmal in der Karlsaue 1957-1970*; Meinhold Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland, Bd. 6: Bundesrepublik*, pp. 77f, as well as *passim* for the context.

³¹ StAK. *Stadtverordnetenversammlung*. "5. Sitzung, 30-6-52", pp. 20-27, here: p. 25.

not about victimhood at all but about the "honour" of the German soldier in World War II, which he tried to separate from the "guilt" of the commander-in-chief.³²

Although both the "memorial to the victims of fascism" [*Mahnmal*] and the re-opened "soldiers' monument" [*Ehrenmal*] included the civilian casualties of aerial warfare among the commemorated groups, the second half of the 1950s witnessed the erection of half a dozen memorials that were exclusively dedicated to the dead of the air war. While the sheer number of dedications was indicative of the important place of this group of casualties in the memory culture at large, the memorials—through their iconography and inscriptions—also revealed the attributes which the founders ascribed to the dead, and by implication, to themselves. In contrast to the memorial to the victims of fascism, which had been erected by the secular authorities, the memorials in memory of the air war were created on the initiative of the (Protestant) Church, which, while conceptualizing the air raid as an 'affliction', sought to offer consolation and transcendental hope to the bereaved.

With one exception, the memorials were erected on the sites of mass burial in the various cemeteries, displaying Christian iconography and inscriptions drawn from the Bible. At the cemeteries of the city districts of *Bettenhausen*, *Wahlershausen* and *Harleshausen*, the memorials took the shape of a large cross adorned with a Bible verse, while at *Wehleiden* and at the *Brüderkirche*, the memorials depicted an angel. Significantly, three memorials showed survivors rather than casualties, invariably represented as female or as children: while at *Rothenditmold*, a pietà-style sculpture was depicted in "silent prayer" for her deceased loved-ones, the central monument at the main cemetery, dedicated on Memorial Sunday 1956, showed a relief of "five women and three children trying to take shelter from the inexorable war", as the Christian weekly, *Kasseler Sonntagsblatt*, put it.³³

The iconography and inscriptions of the Church-sponsored memorials identified the casualties of aerial warfare—the deceased as well as the survivors—as helpless victims of a Divine judgement, offering consolation in the transcendental promises of the Christian faith: "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep the in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared" (Exodus 23, 20), read the inscription on the memorial on the *Brüderkirche* in the old town, designed by the sculptor Kurt Lehmann and dedicated on Memorial Sunday, 1958 (fig. 6). While the central message of the Church was one of hope and consolation in the face of catastrophic loss and bereavement, the notion of affliction also established a connection between victimhood and agency. "The dead have a right to be

³² Ibid., p. 22f. On the myth of a 'clean' *Wehrmacht* in the 1950s see Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, pp. 133-308; Brochhagen, *Nach Nürnberg*, pp. 21-130; Rolf-Dieter Müller & Hans-Erich Volkmann eds., *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999).

³³ "Weihe des Ehrenmals für die Bombenopfer", *Kasseler Sonntagsblatt* 78/49 (2-12-56), p. 16.

remembered by us because none of us can wash his hands of [their death]", pastor Schwab declared at the official opening of the memorial on the main cemetery in 1956.³⁴ On this interpretation, the casualties of allied bombing, rather than having fallen victim to Nazism or the war, were victims of the *Kasseler* themselves, who had brought Divine affliction onto the city by their wrongdoings. At the consecration of the new cemetery in 1953, the Catholic pastor, Ludwig Wiegand, asked the mourning congregation, "Were we not part of this wretched crowd that once answered with 'yes' to the question, 'Do you want total war?'"³⁵

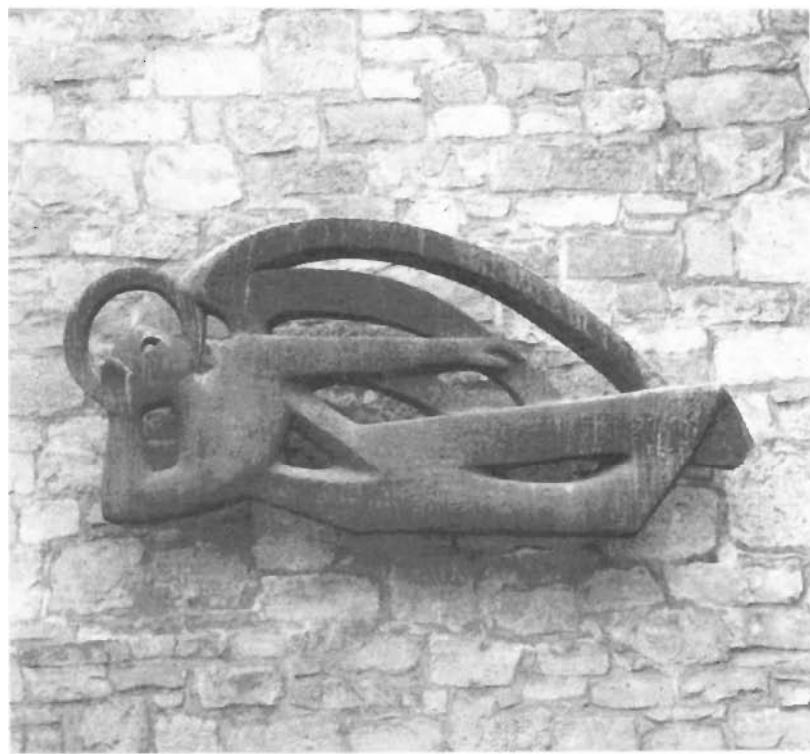


FIGURE 6. Memorial to the casualties of the air war, *Brüderkirche Kassel* (photo: StAK Fotoarchiv).

Within this context, several clerics also raised the issue of a possible connection between death in the air war on the one hand and the persecution and extermination of the Jews on the other. In his address at the commemorative service of 1949, pastor Wiegand told his audience of a Jewish mother who had begged him to look after her daughters when she received her deportation order for 23rd October 1943. The family was killed in the air raid, which, according to the pastor, had saved them from an even worse form of dying in the Nazi extermination camps.³⁶ Whatever the factual basis of the anecdote—and there are reasons to doubt its accuracy—, the address contained an unusually critical potential,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ "An den Gräbern der Bombenopfer", HN 26-10-53.

³⁶ "Kassel trauerte am Grabe der Opfer des 22. Oktober 1943", HN 24-10-49, p. 5.

serving as a reminder that the casualties of aerial warfare were not the only victims of World War II, that indeed, there had been different and arguably worse forms of victimhood than being killed in an air raid.

Although implicit only in Wiegand's address, the notion of retribution featured prominently in the memoirs of several clerics in the 1950s. Pastor Preger of the *Lutherkirche* in Kassel, for example, likened the flight of the bomb-stricken population from the devastated city to the "exodus of the children of Israel" in the deportations. His Magdeburg colleague, cathedral preacher Ernst Martin, compared the image of burning churches in the air war to the image of burning synagogues in the November pogrom of 1938.³⁷ Although the Church invariably conceived of retribution as an act of God rather than of mankind, the conceptualisation easily combined remnants of anti-Semitic stereotypes about the power of 'International Jewry' with philo-Semitic notions about the singularity of Jewish suffering.³⁸

While the identification of the dead of the air raid as 'victims of fascism', 'victims of war' or 'victims of Divine judgment' remained controversial, the consensus formula that served to cover up the dissension was the identification of the dead as "our fellow citizens", as the mayor, Willi Seidel (SPD), wrote in a public appeal on the occasion of the 10th anniversary in 1953.³⁹ Striking a similar chord, the Protestant bishop, Adolf Wüstemann, declared in a commemorative address in October 1951, "We commemorate the dead as those who have shared their lives with us in this city."⁴⁰ The dead were defined in relational and spatial terms, not in the categories of agency and responsibility. Whoever was to blame for their death and however much they themselves might have had a hand in their own undoing, they were "our dead" (Seidel), an imagined community that included soldiers as well as women and children, the rich and the poor, avid supporters of the Nazi-regime as well as its opponents. Even some 90 foreigners and forced labourers from 9 nations who had died in the air raid and been buried in the mass grave on the main cemetery were tacitly subsumed under the category of 'our dead'.⁴¹

³⁷ For Kassel: Franz Christoph Preger, "Aus meiner Kasseler Amtszeit 1908-1945", in: Stolze, *Lutherkirche in der Ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Zwei Pfarrer berichten* (Kassel: Ms, 2005), pp. 4-37, here: p. 30; For Magdeburg: Ernst Martin, "Memento", in Herbert Martin, *Ernst Martin: Aus seinem Leben* (Bad Harzburg: Ms., 1979), pp. 57-61, here: p. 60.

³⁸ Compare Frank Stern, *Im Anfang war Auschwitz. Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus im deutschen Nachkrieg* (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1991), pp. 25-39; 267-98.

³⁹ *Kasseler Post* of 15-10-1953; *Hessische Nachrichten* of 18-10-1953.

⁴⁰ LKA Kassel SB Wüstemann. *Ansprache am 22. Oktober 1951*, p. 3.

⁴¹ Among the 2946 casualties of 22nd October 1943 buried on section 30 of the main cemetery, the so-called 'field of bomb victims', 30 were identified as French (6 of whom were transferred to France in November 1949), 29 as Dutch, 12 as Italian, and 11 as Belgian. There also lay buried two Poles, two Bulgarians, two Danes, one Russian, and one Swiss. In addition, 35 casualties remained unidentified. Graves number 2947 to 3634 contained the bodies of the casualties of later air raids, who were generally transferred to the 'field of bomb victims' after the war, mostly in the spring of 1965. The foreign victims of post-1943 air raids were transferred to section 20 of the cemetery, where the foreign victims of Nazi forced labour policy lay buried.

Magdeburg

Among the political elites of Magdeburg, too, the identity of all the dead of the air raid as 'victims' was not in doubt. Although *KPD* functionaries initially drew a sharp distinction between the minority of the "antifascist freedom heroes" on the one hand and the majority of the German population "who had cheered the false messiah" on the other,⁴² the Magdeburg mayor Rudolf Eberhard, a one-time Social Democrat, pursued an inclusive policy in his politics of memory. In this, he differed little from his *SPD*-colleagues west of the border. At the formal opening of the "grove of honour" [*Ehrenhain*] for the "victims of fascism" on the main cemetery in June 1947—a site ostensibly dedicated to the (Socialist) resistance fighters to Nazism—, Eberhard took great pains to include the civilian casualties of aerial warfare as well as the *Wehrmacht* soldiers in his commemorative address, both of which he subsumed under the category of "victims of Hitler's war". With regard to the dead of the air war, he turned explicitly against the Nazi propaganda notion of sacrifice, maintaining instead that they had died as innocent victims.⁴³

By the 1950s, the dead of 16th January 1945 were no longer victims of a past war, but of a present war. With the civil administration having undergone a process of Stalinisation, the dead were re-appropriated for the global confrontation between the forces of the "world peace camp" [*Weltfriedenslager*] and "Anglo-American Imperialism".⁴⁴ Nor were they victims of war in the usual sense; rather they were victims of crime, of "bestial" mass murder, as the lead article in the *SED*-daily, *Volksstimme*, of 4th May 1950 put it.

The present-centred nature of the official conception of victimhood was well reflected in the stipulations for a competition that the city administration organised in 1959 in order to obtain designs for a "memorial to the victims of 16th January 1945".⁴⁵ Although to be

Compare Friedhofsamt Kassel, *Kriegsgräberlisten und Gräberlisten Hauptfriedhof*; Hans Günter Pasche / Joachim Diefenbach / Karl Hermann Wegner, *Todtenhof und Nordstadtpark. 150 Jahre Kasseler Hauptfriedhof* (Kassel: Verlag Evangelischer Medienverband, 1993), pp. 21-23.

⁴² Walter Kassner, "Unsterbliche Opfer", *Freiheit* 21-6-47; "Den Opfern des Faschismus", *Amtl. Mitteilungsblatt* 2-10-45.

⁴³ "Ehrenhain für die Opfer des Faschismus. Die Einweihung am 22.. Juni 1947 auf dem Westfriedhof", *Amtliches Mitteilungsblatt* 27-6-47. Compare also StAM Rep. 41/610. *Die Einrichtung für die OdF auf dem Westfriedhof, 1946-1950*.

⁴⁴ La Magd. - LHA -, Rep. P 16 *SED-Stadtleitung Magdeburg. Sekretariat Nr. IV/5/1/45 A*, "Arbeitsrichtlinien der Kreisleitung der SED Magdeburg für die Monate Januar und Februar 1951". In June 1950, Eberhard was deposed, put on trial for 'professional misconduct on matters of the economy' and sentenced to five years of imprisonment in 1952. On 5 September 1950, the Communist, Philipp Daub, was installed as the new mayor. See Ingrun Drechsler, art., "Eberhard, Rudolf", in: *Magdeburger Biographisches Lexikon*, p. 152. On the context: Thomas Großbölting, "Das Bürgertum auf dem Rückzug", in: *Magdeburg. Die Geschichte der Stadt*, pp. 867-887; Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann, "Magdeburg als Stadt des Schwermaschinenbaus 1945-1990: Politische Geschichte und Gesellschaft unter der SED-Diktatur", in *ibid.*, pp. 811-852, here: pp. 819-822.

⁴⁵ StAM Rep. 41/2466, fol. 137-186. "Künstlerischer Ideenwettbewerb "Mahnmal der Opfer des 16. Januar 1945" vom 25.4.1959".

erected on the site of mass burial at the main cemetery, the memorial was not primarily intended as a site of memory but as a site of "indictment" and "appellation", as city councillor Meyer reminded the jury before they entered into deliberations on the different proposals.⁴⁶ During the selection procedures, Meyer again pointed out that the design should convey the message that "human beings have been senselessly murdered regardless of their persuasion".⁴⁷ Accordingly, designs that were likely to invite contemplative reflection or individual mourning on the part of the visitor carried little favour with the jury. For example, sculptor Eberhard Rossdeutscher's suggestion that a cemetery called for a *Gedenkmal* or 'site of memory' rather than a *Mahnmal* or 'memorial' was rejected, just as his idea of a pictorial representation of the mythical bird of the *phoenix* was criticised as an "idealised depiction of an eternal cycle of war and peace".⁴⁸ By contrast, the jury commended a proposal that showed a six-meter high neo-realist bronze sculpture of a "falling person" who was seen raising the left arm in defiance. "The gesture of resistance and indictment is commendable, and expresses well the central idea of the monument", the jury commented, adding, "[The sculpture] shows at once helpless annihilation and a strong will to live" (fig. 7).⁴⁹

Although neither this design nor any other was ever realised due to financial difficulties and shortages in the supply of material, the jury decisions reflected the official identification of the dead in the Magdeburg of the late 1950s. The casualties of allied bombing were victims of a crime but they were cast less as helpless victims than as defiant accusers who, in some respects, resembled the official 'victims of fascism', the (Socialist) resistance fighters.

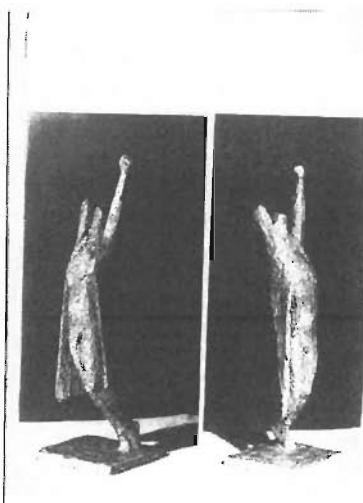


FIGURE 7. Unrealised design for the memorial on the main cemetery, Magdeburg (photo: StAK Rep 41/2466).

⁴⁶ Ibid., fol. 158. "Protokoll des Preisgerichts".

⁴⁷ Ibid., fol. 162.

⁴⁸ Ibid., fol. 160.

⁴⁹ Ibid., fol. 158.

Commemorating the Dead

Differences in identification found expression in the commemorations, which (re-)emerged in both cities in the 1950s. Celebrated on or around the anniversary of the date of allied bombing, these ceremonies in many ways formed the backbone of public memory. Not only did they provide a public forum for opinion makers to expound the meaning of violent death in the air war, they also elicited extensive coverage in the local media, both on the rituals and the commemorated events. Either directly or indirectly, commemorations confronted large segments of the local population with the subject, triggering personal memory traces and stabilizing the status of the iconic dates as collective *lieux de mémoire*. In marking the day of the heaviest raid by way of public ceremonies, the local post-war elites, however, did not establish a new cultural practice but took up a tradition that was permeated with the topographical, semiotic and semantic choices of Nazism. As this section will show, the post-war agents of public memory rarely addressed the problematic history of this practice but pursued a policy of silent denazification and partial adaptation.

In Kassel, the main organisations and institutions behind the organisation of public ceremonies—the League of Air Raid Victims, the civil administration and the Churches—responded by re-Christianizing the format of the celebrations. There was a convergence of secular and spiritual narratives, in which a prominent status was accorded to the pastor and the rites of the Christian funeral service. In Magdeburg, by contrast, a strict separation between state and Church persisted. While the *SED* and her affiliated organisations mainly drew on the indigenous tradition of the Socialist protest rally, they also incorporated central tropes of Nazism into the secular ceremonies. Confined to the spiritual space of the church building, the Churches, meanwhile, employed the format of the "memorial hour" or *Gedenkstunde*.

Different adaptations had repercussions on the topography of memory. In post-war Kassel, the cemetery replaced the public square as the most important site of commemoration, indicating a semantic shift from the *imitatio heroica* of the Nazi cult of death to issues of grief and mourning.⁵⁰ From here the rites of commemoration re-entered the urban space, foremost the churches and later also the public squares. The practice of holding secular ceremonies on large city squares, although important in the early 1950s, proved short-lived, however. With the erection of a memorial on the main cemetery in 1956, secular commemorations returned to the resting place of the dead, where they were performed annually until the end of the 1960s. In Magdeburg, by contrast, the trajectory of

⁵⁰ Compare Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler*, p. 266

commemoration took the opposite direction. Prioritizing appellation over issues of mourning, the secular elites initially focused on the public squares but moved certain rituals to the cemetery when encountering challenges to their politics of memory. In comparison, the activity of the Church remained confined to the spiritual sphere of the church building.

Kassel

In Kassel, the inception of an institutionalised culture of memory did not originate from above but derived from below, from the activities of the local branch of the League of Air Raid Victims. The League was an organisation of the living, not the dead, whose goal was to gain compensation for material losses incurred in the air war by means of federal law [*Lastenausgleich*].⁵¹ However, the League also pressed for public remembrance of the dead, both as a means to further the claims of the living, and, it seems, in order to answer an emotional need of their members. Turning to the subject of aerial bombing as a weapon in domestic politics, the interest group organised a two-day meeting of the city's evacuees in the summer of 1949 in order to make their collective grievances heard in the run-up to the first federal parliamentary election.⁵² Some 2,000 evacuees attended the central event on Sunday morning, which was billed as a "memorial service" [*Totengedenkfeier*] but sported the motto, "Forgotten victims of bombing demand their rights!".

The keynote speech was delivered by the president of the Central League, Dr. Mattes, who used the occasion to throw invective at all established political parties. He threatened to found a special-interest party if the demands for speedy repatriation and liberal compensation went unheeded. In order to underline his argument, Mattes invoked the dead as the guardians of the interests of the war damaged, "The admonition of the dead of World War II to remember the dispossessed has already been forgotten. This is why today the war damaged are forced to voice their demands and to proclaim their loss of faith in justice."⁵³

⁵¹ Compare "Gerechtigkeit: Gerechte Lastenverteilung! Von Adolf Bauser", in: *Selbsthilfe. Unabhängige Zeitschrift für Politik, Kultur und Wirtschaft*. No. 1 of 1st April 1946, p. 1; "Hilfe für die Fliegergeschädigten", *ibid.*, No. 2 of 15th April 1946, p. 1.; "Was wir wollen. Ziele und Aufgaben des Bundes der Sparer und Fliegergeschädigten", *ibid.*, No. 7 of 1st July 1946, p. 1.; "Fliegergeschädigte gründen Zentralverband. Heidelberger Tagung der Fliegergeschädigten Verbände", *ibid.*, No. 15 of 15th September 1947, p. 1.

⁵² "Partei der Kriegsgeschädigten auf dem Treffen der Ausgebombten Nordhessens angekündigt", *HN* 5/139 (13-6-49), p. 1; "Evakuierte bleiben Kasselner", *ibid.*, p. 5; "Für die Opfer des 22. Oktober", *ibid.*; StAK A.1.00, vol. 13: "19.5.49. Treffen der Ausgebombten und Evakuierten aus Nordhessen"; *ibid.*, "2.6.49, Ankündigungen 1b"; StAK NL Seidel, entry of 11/12-6-49, p. 206. On the context see Michael Krause, *Flucht vor dem Bombenkrieg. „Umquartierungen“ im Zweiten Weltkrieg und die Wiedereingliederung der Evakuierten in Deutschland 1943-1963* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag 1997); Katja Klee, *Im „Luftschutzkeller des Reiches“. Evakuierte in Bayern 1939-1953: Politik, soziale Lage, Erfahrungen* (München: Oldenbourg, 1999).

⁵³ "Geschädigte demonstrieren für ihr Recht", *Selbsthilfe* 13 (1-7-49), p. 2.

While the event was hailed as an "impressive mass rally" by the League's weekly journal, *Selbsthilfe*, the mixture of special-interest politics and funeral ceremony drew sharp public criticism. In a letter to both Kassel newspapers, Karl Häring, regional SPD functionary, spoke of an abuse of memory, accusing the League of having "take[n] advantage of the good will of their fellow citizens" for self-interested political gain.⁵⁴

Unimpressed by the criticism, the League of Air Raid Victims continued to invoke the legacy of the dead in order to legitimise the demands of the living. In the autumn, the local group revived, in modified form, a practice that had been initiated by the *NSDAP* but abandoned with the defeat of Nazi Germany, the public commemoration of the casualties of aerial warfare. On 22nd October 1949, some one thousand local citizens gathered for a "funeral service with religious participation" at the main burial site on the main cemetery, as the press announcement put it.⁵⁵ The format revolved around the commemorative addresses by two clergymen, to be followed by wreath laying and prayer.⁵⁶ As rites of demarcation, a brass ensemble performed hymns that were taken up by the congregation. Issues of loss, mourning and consolation stood at the centre of a ceremony that provided an institutional frame to a well-established informal practice, the visiting of the gravesites of loved ones on their day of death.⁵⁷ The groups, institutions and organisations assembled on that day made up the decisive agents of memory in Kassel throughout the 1950s and beyond: the League of Air Raid Victims, the Churches, the Council, the bereaved and the evacuees.

In the institutionalisation of commemoration as an annual event, the League of Air Raid Victims played a crucial role. Proceeding with a mixture of obstinacy and street pressure, the association not only organised ceremonies on their own initiative but also lobbied the Council and the Church for greater involvement. Although reluctant to comply,⁵⁸ the Council preferred to take control of developments that it could not prevent. When the League managed to enlist the support of a broad coalition of private citizens and local organisations for the celebration of a "memorial service" in the centre of town in 1951, the Council granted institutional support but decided to take over the organisation

⁵⁴ "Eine missbrauchte Totenehrung", *HN* 5/140 (14-6-49), p. 3.; "Dem Eigennutz ist jedes Mittel recht. Böse Entgleisung auf dem Kasseler Evakuierertreffen", *Hessischer Sonntag. SPD Informationen* 1/49 (19-6-49), p. 3.

⁵⁵ "22. Oktober †", *HN* 21-10-49.

⁵⁶ "Kassel trauerte am Grabe der Opfer des 22. Oktober 1943", *HN* 24-10-49, p. 5; "Kränze als Zeichen der Verbundenheit", *KZ* 24-10-49; "Den Toten des 22. Oktober 1943 zum Gedächtnis", *Der evangelische Sonntagsbote*, 6-11-49, p. 405.

⁵⁷ When the *KZ* remarked in its report on the commemoration that hundreds of mourners had gathered at the graves "as [they do] every year", it probably referred to this informal practice. Compare "Kränze als Zeichen der Verbundenheit", *KZ* 24-10-49.

⁵⁸ Compare StAK A.1.10., *Magistratsprotokolle* 27.3.1950-22.3.1951, "Sitzung am 16-10-50".

and implementation of the event in the future.⁵⁹ Just as the political elites, the Protestant church, too, was of the opinion that public rituals had best be presided over by the established institutions of Church and City. When approached by the committee in the autumn of 1951, the bishop of *Kurhesse-Waldeck*, Adolf Wüstemann, agreed to deliver the commemorative address but proposed that in future the commemorations be held in one of the church ruins in such a way as to forestall "any appeal to nationalist feelings of hatred", as he remarked in a note for the files.⁶⁰

The remark may be a reflection of the bishop's concern over the strong presence of groups with grievances against the post-war settlement in the "citizen's committee" that stood behind the organisation of the commemorative event. Next to such established institutions as the German Red Cross or the Society of Housewives, there functioned as cosignatories also the Interest Group of the Victims of Occupation [*Interessengemeinschaft der Besatzungsgeschädigten*], the League of the Expellees, and the League of Ex-*Wehrmacht* Soldiers [*Bund ehemaliger Wehrmachtsangehöriger*]. Just as remarkable as the list of participants was the list of absences. Organisations of the political Left, such as the trade unions, were missing, so was the local group of the Victims of Nazism (VVN) and the Jewish community.

While the League of Air Raid Victims was successful in putting the date of 22nd October on the official calendar, in practice the Air Raid Victims were progressively marginalised. When the Church offered, in 1952, to hold special anniversary services in all Protestant churches, the parliamentary representation of the Air Raid Victims, the League of the Expellees and Disenfranchised (BHE), withdrew a council motion that had been designed to declare the day of 22nd October an official "day of remembrance".⁶¹ On the occasion of the 10th anniversary in 1953, the city took over the organisation of the secular commemoration but proved reluctant to repeat the effort in subsequent years. Among the Council, reservations persisted both about the day of remembrance in general and the role that the Air Raid Victims played in the implementation of the event in particular. In a Council meeting of October 1954, deputy mayor Grenzebach (FDP) argued that memories of the bombing had better not be actualised year after year by way of public ceremonies. Instead, he suggested that the casualties of aerial warfare be commemorated together with all the other victims of war on the National Day of Mourning or on Memorial Sunday.

⁵⁹ StAK A.1.10. No. 398. *Trauerfeier am 22.10. (1951-68)*, "Sitzung des Magistrats der Stadt Kassel am 18.10.1951. Beschluss".

⁶⁰ LKA Kassel, SB Wüstemann No. 22. "Vermerk 27.9.51: Stellungnahme des Bischofs zur Gedenkfeier für die Kasseler Bombenopfer am 22. Oktober 1951"; see also ibid., Fülling to Wüstemann, 12-10-51. "Betr.: Gedenkfeier am 22. Oktober ds. Js. für die Bombenopfer".

⁶¹ StAK A.1.10. No. 398. *Trauerfeier am 22.10. (1951-68)*, "Antrag auf Einrichtung des 22. Oktober als ständigen Gedenktag der Kasseler Bombenopfer". For the debate in the *Stadtverordnetenversammlung* see StAK A. 0. *Sitzung* of 30 June 1952, pp. 34-39.

Councillor Goethe (SPD), meanwhile, took exception to the special-interest politics that the speakers of the Air Raid Victims pursued during their funeral ceremonies.⁶²

Constant re-negotiations between the Air Raid Victims on the one hand and Council and Church on the other had considerable impact on the actual implementation of the ceremonies, forestalling the emergence of a central site of commemoration in the city. At the same time, the protracted process put limits to the extent to which Nazi-era liturgical elements were restored in post-war Kassel. In 1952, the Air Raid Victims held the secular commemoration in the same place where the Nazis had conducted their largest funeral ceremony of the entire war, the 'square of honour' in front of the town hall. The following year, however, the city assumed responsibility and shifted commemorative activity to the square in front of the ruins of the *Martinskirche*, popular symbol of Kassel and also target of *Bomber Command* on 22nd October 1943. In 1954 and 1955, the Air Raid Victims organised ceremonies on the *Friedrichsplatz*, the city's traditional parade-ground. In 1956, the secular ceremony was moved from the centre of town to the "cemetery of honour" on the main cemetery, where the bulk of the casualties lay buried.⁶³ The Church, meanwhile, held annual memorial services in most parish churches until the 15th anniversary of the air raid in 1958. After that, commemorative activity was centralised in the *Martinskirche* as the city's largest church.⁶⁴

In comparison to their wartime predecessors, the secular commemorations of the 1950s were distinguished by the reintroduction of formal elements from the Christian liturgy. This was most strongly reflected by the prominence that was given to the church bell as the most important acoustic marker. In the "memorial hour" of 22nd October 1953, for example, the church bells were sounded both as an opening rite and as a closing rite, taking up no less than twenty-five minutes of the sixty-minute commemoration.⁶⁵ Likewise, church hymns and spiritual music by Baroque composers such as Johann Sebastian Bach, Friedrich Händel and Friedemann Bach—often performed by a church brass ensemble—replaced the predilection for the 'heroic' music of Beethoven and Wagner that had been characteristic of the Nazi-era funeral services. Finally, there was the central role assigned to representatives of the Church. Even at the secular ceremonies, a clergyman—rather than a functionary or politician—tended to hold the central commemorative address. The re-Christianising of the commemorative culture found its institutional expression in the agreement between Church and Council, of 1958, to hold an ecumenical church service

⁶² StAK A.1.10. No. 398, "Mitteilungen: Gedenkfeier für die Opfer des 22. Oktober 1943".

⁶³ "Bombenopfer sind unvergessen. Gedenkfeier auf dem Ehrenfriedhof", KZ 22-10-56.

⁶⁴ LKA Kassel, Dekanat Kassel-Mitte No. 17. *Gedenkgottesdienste in der Martinskirche. Jahrestag der Zerstörung Kassels 1952-1983*, Letter of dean Schwab to editors of *HA* and *KP*, 20-10-59.

⁶⁵ LKA Kassel. Dekanat Kassel-Mitte No. 17. *Gedenkgottesdienste in der Martinskirche. Jahrestag der Zerstörung Kassels 1952-1983*. "Schwab an Pfarrer des Kirchenkreises", 19-10-53.

rather than organise two separate events on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the bombing.⁶⁶

Next to religious elements, the ceremonies also showed remnants of the commemorative culture of Nazism, especially so, but not exclusively, in the formal repertoire of the League of Air Raid Victims. In October 1952, for example, the Air Raid Victims not only chose the same public square for their commemoration as the *NSDAP* had done in 1943, they also erected a "grove of honour" and made use of pylons in order to symbolise the alleged sacrifice of the casualties by means of flames. In so doing, they translated a symbolic mode of representation that had been very popular with the Nazis into the post-war world. Three years later, the Air Raid Victims used Wagner's "Twilight of the Gods" and Beethoven's "Egmont" as demarcation rites, thus unwittingly, perhaps, ascribing a heroic quality to the dead of the air war.⁶⁷ By contrast, the City Council was much more cautious about the use of music and symbols that bore an association with any military tradition, past or present. Although, in 1953, formations of the Federal Border Guard as well as the police and the fire brigade gave the ceremony a stately air, in 1957, the Council emphasised that in order "to avoid any military appearance", the official wreath would be carried by civil servants rather than police officers.⁶⁸ This caution notwithstanding, the city also approved of one central element of continuity between the ceremonies of the war years and the 1950s, "The Song of the Good Comrade". Reintroduced in 1950, the song was performed as background music to the ceremonial honouring of the dead at every ceremony throughout the 1950s. On a symbolic level, an important element of the Nazi cult of death had thus been preserved, the identification of the casualties of aerial warfare as soldiers.⁶⁹

While the organisation and implementation of the ceremonies lay in the hands of the local elites and the special interest group of the Air Raid Victims, there is much evidence to suggest that the public commemorations enjoyed broad popular support in post-war Kassel. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary in 1953, for example, commemorative services were held in no less than twenty-six Protestant parish churches, while the press reported an attendance of 10,000 people for the secular commemoration that followed. Although the year of the tenth anniversary no doubt represented a special case, participation was considerable in other years as well: some 5,000 Kasseler attended the commemoration on the main cemetery in 1950, while the following year, some 1,200

⁶⁶ See StAK A.1.10. No. 398. *Trauerfeier am 22.10. (1951-1968)*. "Vermerk", 13-10-58; "Magistrats Mitteilungen 21-10-58".

⁶⁷ *HN; KP; KZ 1955*

⁶⁸ StAK A.1.10. Nr. 398. *Vermerk* 23-10-57.

⁶⁹ On the history of *Das Lied vom Guten Kameraden* see the comments by Dietmar Klenke in Hans Maier / Michael Schäffer eds., 'Totalitarismus' und 'Politische Religionen'. Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs, vol. II (Paderborn / Munich / Vienna / Zurich: Schöningh, 1997), p. 66.

gathered in the assembly hall of the *Friedenshof* in order to listen to the commemorative address by bishop Wüstemann.⁷⁰ With the passing of time, attendance waned, levelling off in the range of several hundred, but on special occasions, such as the consecration of two new church bells in 1962, the commemorative service was still able to attract more people than the largest city church, the *Martinskirche*, could hold.⁷¹

In the 1950s, the *lieu de mémoire* of 22nd October mattered, equalling in importance the National Day of Mourning celebrated in November and surpassing by far the commemorative events organised in memory of the victims of Nazism. It appears that participation was particularly high among two groups for whom the war did not easily pass into history, the bereaved and the evacuees. In view of a death toll of 9,202 non-combatants, the first group must have comprised tens of thousands of people, while there were, by 1950, still more than 70,000 *Kasseler* who had not yet returned to their hometown.⁷² The relatives of the casualties adorned the graves of their loved ones with fresh flowers on the anniversary of their day of death and attended the ceremonies with a high emotional involvement, not infrequently shedding tears in public.⁷³ The evacuees, for their part, took the official commemorations as an occasion to revisit the city of their birth and their longings, welcoming the opportunity of city-sponsored travel when some of them still lived in desperate financial circumstances some fifteen years after the end of the war.⁷⁴

Magdeburg

Whereas in Kassel, the format of the commemorations showed a tendency towards re-Christianisation, in Magdeburg, public memory remained a strictly secular affair, drawing on the tradition of the socialist mass rally while integrating elements of the Nazi cult of death. Whereas in Kassel, questions of mourning and consolation stood at the centre of the commemorative activity, in Magdeburg, the secular events revolved around the themes of protest and indictment. Here, secular commemorative rituals did not emerge as the result of pressure from below but were implemented from above by the local *SED* and the associated organisations, in particular the so-called *Friedensrat* or Peace Council. Influenced by the trajectory of the Cold War and the priorities of a highly centralised state bureaucracy, the commitment of the *SED* to the local memory place of 16th January

⁷⁰ *Kasseler Sonntagsblatt*, 29-10-50; 28-10-51, p. 12.

⁷¹ "Die Osanna-Glocke rief zum Gedenken", *Hessische Allgemeine*, 23-10-61.

⁷² "Die zahlenmäßigen Veränderungen unter den Kasseler Bürgern, die während der Kriegszeit evakuiert wurden, nach Ergebnissen der Volkszählungen", in: *Statistischer Bericht der Stadt Kassel* (1/1952), pp. 29-35, here p. 30.

⁷³ "Kassel trauerte am Grabe der Opfer des 22. Oktober 1943", *HN* 21-10-49.

⁷⁴ StAK A.1.10. *Trauerfeier am 22.10.* (1951-1968), correspondence between the evacuee Konrad K. and mayor, 17-10-63; 18-10-63; 24-10-63.

remained, however, half-hearted at best. This resulted not only in inconsistencies of annual implementation but also in room for manoeuvre for other agents of memory such as the Churches and the bereaved.

During the phase of the "antifascist-democratic upheaval" of 1945 to 1949, the date of 16th January 1945 had emerged as a *lieu de mémoire* of local significance, promoted by the City Council as a historic parallel to the iconic destruction of Magdeburg in the Thirty Years War. With the erosion of local self-government from 1948 this began to change.⁷⁵ When the Berlin SED leadership, in 1950, discovered the potential value of strategic bombing in the propaganda struggles of the Cold War, Magdeburg and the raid of 16th January 1945 were subordinated to Dresden and the raids of 13/14th February 1945, which were installed as a national day of commemoration.⁷⁶ This official prioritising not only led to a rewriting of indigenous experiences in the light of the model of Dresden—an 'import of memory', so to speak—but also delayed the emergence of annual rituals.

The new politics of memory divested Allied bombing of its original context of World War II and re-contextualised the campaign as the first act of Imperialist aggression in the Cold War. According to this re-interpretation, strategic bombing had made no contribution to the destruction of German fascism. Without any military objective, the allied air war had aimed deliberately to destroy the territory of the future GDR. A leader's comment in the regional SED-paper, *Volksstimme*, summed up the main themes of the new narrative in May 1950 thus,

"The German people will celebrate this day [the German surrender on 8th May 1945, JA] with heartfelt gratitude to the victorious Soviets [...] to whom alone we owe the liberation from fascist slavery and tyranny. But what did the Anglo-American imperialists do? As the Red Army rushed from victory to victory all the way from Stalingrad to the river Oder, the Anglo-American Imperialist bombers [...] unleashed an insane orgy of destruction. [...] The devastation served only one purpose: to leave a scene of devastation, a dead zone, to the inexorably advancing Red Army."⁷⁷

Drawing on central tropes of the Nazi wartime narrative, the air war was conceptualised as a senseless atrocity, as "murder, despicable treacherous murder", as a leader in the bloc-CDU party paper, *Der Neue Weg*, put it.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ On this see aspect of the Stalinisation see Thomas Großbölting, *SED-Diktatur und Gesellschaft. Bürgertum, Bürgerlichkeit und Entbürgerlichung in Magdeburg und Halle* (Halle: mdv, 2001).

⁷⁶ See Groehler, "Dresden", in: *Blätter*, pp. 137-41; Gilad Margalit, "Der Luftangriff auf Dresden. Seine Bedeutung für die Erinnerungspolitik der DDR und für die Herauskristallisierung einer historischen Kriegserinnerung im Westen", in: Susanne Düwell / Matthias Schmidt eds., *Narrative der Shoah. Repräsentationen der Vergangenheit in Historiographie, Kunst und Politik* (Paderborn / München / Wien / Zürich: Schöningh, 2002), pp. 189-207; Matthias Neutzner, "Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern: Die Erzählung vom 13. Februar, in: Oliver Reinhard / Matthias Neutzner / Wolfgang Hesse, *Das rote Leuchten. Dresden und der Bombenkrieg* (Dresden: Druckhaus Dresden, 2005), pp. 128-163.

⁷⁷ "Der Befreiungstag ein Tag des Gedenkens", *Volksstimme* 103 (4-5-50), p. 1.
⁷⁸ *Der Neue Weg* (16-1-50).

Although the Magdeburg *SED* recognised the potential inherent in the symbolic date of 16th January for the propagandistic mobilisation of the local population, the day at first occupied only a subordinate place in the annual festive calendar. On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the attack in 1950, a public meeting was held that did not explicitly deal with the air war but with the transformation of the 'People's Congress Movement' into the 'National Front'.⁷⁹ In the following year, propagandistic treatment remained largely confined to the press.⁸⁰ In an *SED* executive meeting of 22nd January 1951, a party functionary commented on the disappointing results, "We did not make enough use of 16th January. On this day especially we could have mobilised the masses. The fight to preserve peace is our central task."⁸¹

The following year, the local political elites decided to put the *lieu de mémoire* to better use, proposing to commemorate the day as a "memorial day in the memory of the victims of the terror raid".⁸² Although agreed upon by all political parties,⁸³ the decision did not initially meet with the approval of the local Peace Council, which argued that priority should be given to the national over the local, to Dresden over Magdeburg, "Our objections that 13th February 1952—the day of the destruction of Dresden—has been selected by the German Peace Council in Berlin as the national commemoration day went unheeded", an internal report pointed out.⁸⁴ Celebrated as a decentralised string of commemorations rather than as a single mass event, the celebration of 1952 inaugurated a tradition of secular remembrance that has continued to the present day. Some years earlier, in 1948, the Protestant Church had started to mark the return of the day by means of an annual "hour of commemoration" in the Cathedral refectory.⁸⁵ The extent to which Church and state pursued a separate politics of memory in the 1950s was illustrated by the refusal of the Church to comply with the official request to ring the church bells during the ceremonial minute of silence on 16th January 1952.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ "Die Nationale Front handelt. 3000 Magdeburger auf der Großkundgebung der Nationalen Front", *Volksstimme* 14 (17-1-50), p. 1; "In der Nationalen Front dem Frieden dienen. Großkundgebung am 5. Jahrestag der Zerstörung Magdeburgs", *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁰ StAM, Rep 41, Nr. 917. *Chronik der Stadt Magdeburg*, entry of 16-1-51.

⁸¹ LA Magd. – LHA -, Rep. P 16. *SED-Stadtleitung Magdeburg*. No. IV/5/1/45, fol. 7-21, here: 19. *Niederschrift Sekretariatsitzung 22.1.51, top. 5.*

⁸² LA Magd. – LHA -, Rep. P 1 *Landesfriedenskomitee Sachsen-Anhalt*, No. 33, fol. 117. *Monthly Report for January 1952.*

⁸³ The report mentions the "*Democratic bloc*" rather than the *SED* as the initiator. See *ibid.*

⁸⁴ LA Magd. - LHA -, Rep. P 1. *Landesfriedenskomitee Sachsen-Anhalt*, no. 33, fol. 117.

⁸⁵ AKPS Rep. J1. Ev. Domgemeinde, nos. 3290-1, *Kanzelabkündigungen 1936-54.*

⁸⁶ *Berichte der Magdeburger Kirchenleitung zu den Tagungen der Provinzialsynode 1946-1989*, ed. Harald Schulze (Göttingen: V & R, 2005), p. 97 (report by bishop D. Ludolf Müller, 11-2-52); LA Magd. - LHA -, Rep. P 1. *Landesfriedenskomitee Sachsen-Anhalt*. No. 33, fol. 117.

In the files of the Peace Council, a detailed report has been preserved that provides insight into the meticulous planning of the ceremonies at the height of the Cold War.⁸⁷ The "Plan on the Organisation of 16th January 1953" aimed at the comprehensive and yet closely supervised mobilisation of the citizens of Magdeburg for the political goals of the *SED* regime. The plan distinguished between two phases, a preparatory phase and the organisation of the event proper. In a first step, the National Front was expected to make frequent references to the upcoming anniversary, while the Peace Committee would publish a proclamation that was complemented by a daily string of articles and eyewitness accounts in the press. In addition, there were plans to put up slogans in public places and window displays, while the political parties and affiliated organisations agreed to commit themselves to a "campaign of education" about the meaning of 16th January 1945. On the day itself, short commemorations were to be held in all schools, work places and administrations, while the central rally was scheduled for the public square of *Alter Markt* for four o'clock. Afterwards, delegations would proceed to a makeshift monument erected on the ruins of the *Kammerlichtspiele* theatre on *Breiter Weg*, where they would lay wreaths. Until the fall of night, "young pioneers" and members of the "Free German youth" would stand guard at the monument. In addition, it was planned to sound air raid sirens at midday, during which traffic was expected to come to a standstill. The population and the administration would also be asked to drape the windows with flags.

In the summary report of 22nd January, the Peace Committee gave an equivocal assessment. While most measures had been implemented as planned, the putting-up of public slogans and the decoration of shop windows had left much to be desired. On the central rally, the report noted that attendance had reached a figure of 3,500 to 3,800 people. The report was critical of the speech by City Councillor Bösche, which was censored both for its excessive length and its failure to address the "world struggle for peace" in any detail. As a consequence, the "protest resolution" against a trial for espionage in the United States had received insufficient attention, the report noted critically. In conclusion, the Peace Council suggested that, in future, the "instruction" and "inspection" be intensified.⁸⁸

Although certain rituals and symbols—such as the wreath-laying as a symbolic offering of the living to the dead—were drawn from the same repertoire as in Kassel, there were important differences between the two cities. This was no accident but reflected the strong emphasis that the bearers of the ritualised action in Magdeburg placed on protest and indictment rather than on mourning and consolation. In the secular commemorations

⁸⁷ LA Magd. -LHA- Rep. P 2 Bezirksfriedensrat Magdeburg Nr. 54. *Berichte, Statistiken, Arbeitspläne und Presseartikel des Kreisfriedensrates Magdeburg*, fol. 336-9: "Bericht über die durchgeführte Gedenkkundgebung am 16. Januar 1953".

⁸⁸ All quotes *ibid.*

of the 1950s, the Christian element—so prominent west of the border—was absent. Not only was the commemorative address held by a political functionary rather than a cleric. Hymns, prayer and the symbol of the cross were missing as well. Instead, the commemorations of the early 1950s bore the imprint of the Socialist mass rally, featuring flags, banners, uniformed youth, and workers' delegations. The recitation of poems by working class poets, the reading of protest resolutions and the observance of a ceremonial minute of silence also stemmed from the same tradition. At the same time, the ceremonies adopted formal elements from the Nazi funeral ceremonies, showing a tendency to invest the ritual action with an aural atmosphere and tending to heroize the casualties of aerial warfare. In 1953, for example, the makeshift memorial was framed by "guards of honour" who stood by as the official delegations laid their wreaths to the tune of Beethoven's funeral march from symphony no. 3, "eroica".⁸⁹ Another example was the prominent role of the national anthem, which, as in the Third Reich, invested local events with a national significance.

While the secular commemorations emphasised determination and protest, expressions of grief were tightly circumscribed. This marginalisation of mourning did, however, not go unchallenged. On the semi-public level, ordinary citizens made the makeshift memorial into a personal site of memory by placing wreaths dedicated to their relatives.⁹⁰ On the institutional level, the Protestant Church likewise called for a renegotiation of the meaning of 16th January. In November 1953, a regional synod passed a motion that called on the City Council to declare the day a specially protected "day of remembrance" on which all festivities would be forbidden.⁹¹ The appeal was taken up by the *bloc CDU* and popularised in the *CDU* party paper, *Der Neue Weg*.⁹² At stake was nothing less than a re-orientation of the official memorial culture, from an emphasis on protest to an emphasis on mourning, as was clearly recognised by the *SED*-controlled City Council. In the meeting of 13th January 1954, the Council rejected the motion, arguing that the institutionalisation of

⁸⁹ "Unser Gelöbnis: Nie wieder ein 16. Januar 1945!", *Der Neue Weg* 20-1-53, p. 3.

⁹⁰ LA Magd. -LHA- Rep. P 2 Bezirksfriedensrat Magdeburg Nr. 54. *Berichte, Statistiken, Arbeitspläne und Presseartikel des Kreisfriedensrates Magdeburg*, fol. 336f. "It was planned that only the political parties and the mass organisations would lay wreaths at the memorial. There were, however, not twelve wreaths but 113." See also Alf Lüdtke, "Histories of Mourning: Flowers and Stones for the War Dead, Confusion for the Living – Vignettes from East and West Germany", in: Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith eds., *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations* (Toronto / Buffalo / London: UTP, 1997), pp. 149-179.

⁹¹ EKPS Rep. A Spec. K 2351, *Verhandlungsniederschrift* 12./13.4.53: "d) Antrag Dr. Blieffert – betr. 16. Jan."

⁹² "Was ist nun eigentlich mit dem 16. Januar? Wir warten immer noch auf eine Verordnung des Rates der Stadt", *Der Neue Weg* (12-1-1954), p. 3.; "CDU beantragt den Schutz des 16. Januar. Verbot aller Lustbarkeiten an dem Schreckenstag Magdeburgs gefordert", *ibid.* (13-1-1954), p. 3. On the role of the East-German *CDU* in the formative period of the GDR see Michael Richter, *Die Ost-CDU 1948-1952. Zwischen Widerstand und Gleichschaltung* (Dusseldorf: Droste, 1990); Michael Richter / Martin Rißmann eds., *Die Ost-CDU. Beiträge zu ihrer Entstehung und Entwicklung* (Weimar / Cologne / Vienna: Böhlau, 1995).

the day of 16th January as a "special day of repentance" was wrong.⁹³ Remarkably, the Council responded by radically curtailing commemorative activity altogether. In future, the commemoration of the dead would be moved from the place of death, the centre of the city, to the place of burial, the *Westfriedhof*, where the Council would confine the ritualised action to simple wreath laying.⁹⁴ The city space itself, by contrast, would be reserved to the celebration of the reconstruction effort, as was made clear by the decision of 1955 to hold a special "voluntary work action" on the day of 16th January.⁹⁵

Serving the dead: *Mortui viventes obligant*

"The meaning of this death cannot be understood and cannot be explained rationally", declared Kassel deputy mayor Wilhelm Grenzebach (*FDP*) as he laid a wreath in memory of the casualties of allied bombing on 22nd October 1953. Deploring the "destruction" of millions of "defenceless human beings [...] in our time", he concluded on a note of deep anthropological pessimism, "The graves [...] raise the issue of justice. The answer is: Mankind is evil from the beginning".⁹⁶

In his radical refusal to make sense of violent death in war, Grenzebach's speech was unusual. While the post-war protagonists of public memory no longer demanded an *imitatio heroica* as their Nazi predecessors had done during the war, they rarely abandoned the underlying premise of a reciprocal relationship between the dead and the living. In the 1950s, the 19th century notion of *mortui viventes obligant*—of an obligation of the living towards the dead—still formed the conceptual basis for most attempts at bestowing meaning on violent death.⁹⁷ The conceptual frame endured not least due to its ability to posit a connection between the bereaved and the deceased across the rupture of death. *Mahnung* and *Verpflichtung* remained crucial terms in local discourses on violent death despite the fact that the precise nature of this 'admonition' and the purpose of the

⁹³ StAM Rep. 18/4; Ra. 30: *Ratssitzungen* (Dec. – Jan. 1954). No. 2 Wednesday, 13th Jan. 1954, fol. 4f.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Compare StAM Rep 18/4; Ra. 41: "Ratssitzungen Januar 1955. Niederschrift über die 1. Sitzung am Mittwoch, 5.1.55"; LA Magd. –LHA- Rep. P 13 SED-Bezirksleitung Nr. IV/2/3/40. "Bürositzungen. Sitzungen am 6.1.1955, p. 004: Vorschläge für den 16. Januar."

⁹⁶ "Kranzniederlegung für die Toten des 22. Oktober", *Kasseler Zeitung* 24-10-53. Compare also "Kassel wird sie nicht vergessen", *Kasseler Post* 24/25-10-53; "Kranzniederlegung für die Bombenopfer", *Hessische Nachrichten* 24-10-53.

⁹⁷ Reinhart Koselleck, "Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden", in: Odo Marquard und Karlheinz Stierle eds., *Identität* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1979), pp. 255-276, here: p. 255. On the cultural context see: Jakob Baumgartner, "Christliches Brauchtum im Umkreis von Sterben und Tod", in: *Im Angesicht des Todes: ein interdisziplinäres Kompendium*. Hansjakob Becker *et.al.* eds. (Sankt Ottilien: EOS-Verl., 1987), pp. 91-133.

'obligation' had become tenuous. What, then, was the obligation that the living owed to the dead in a world in which the idea of heroic succession had become discredited?

Kassel

In Kassel, the local elites tried to answer this question by providing a number of consensus formulae which were all premised on the identification of the dead as "our dead". The first obligation revolved around the act of remembrance itself: to stop forgetting. "Our dead admonish us never to forget them", Catholic pastor Wiegand declared in typical fashion in 1949.⁹⁸ Two years later, in 1951, the same idea was expressed through the words of a popular 19th century poem, "Soul, do not forget them / soul, do not forget the dead!", an actor from the state theatre recited from "Requiem" by Friedrich Hebbel.⁹⁹ While the act of remembrance was considered as the fulfilment of an obligation in itself, the carriers of the mnemonic discourse insisted that the dead also held a more specific lesson for the living: the admonition of "never again". No longer demanding from the living to carry on the fight on their behalf, the dead, on the contrary, called on the survivors to prevent another war from ever happening again. Formulated by clerics and secular authorities alike, the injunction of "never again" was the most popular attempt at deriving some kind of lesson from violent mass death in the 1950s.

While the tropes of 'stop forgetting' and 'never again' were equally popular among the secular and religious authorities, clerics were eager to stress the close connection between God's judgement on the one hand and the obligation of a Christian renovation on the other. "Make sure that the rubble of your cities will be turned into steps that lead to God", as Lutheran pastor Velbinger declared at a memorial service in 1950.¹⁰⁰ The secular representatives of the city administration, meanwhile, combined the general injunction of 'never again' with the attempt to harness the memory of the dead to the immediate task at hand, the reconstruction. The extent to which public statements on death oscillated between tradition and innovation, between *apologia* and critical engagement is well illustrated by the commemorative speech that the Social Democratic mayor, Willi Seidel, held at the 10th anniversary of the air raid in 1953.

Before an audience of 10,000 residents, Seidel universalised the legacy of 'our dead' by drawing a pacifist conclusion from the catastrophe of 22nd October 1943. Echoing the Weimar-era peace movement, the mayor invoked the slogan, "Never again another war!",

⁹⁸ "Kränze als Zeichen der Verbundenheit", *KZ* 24-10-49.

⁹⁹ Friedrich Hebbel, "Requiem", in: *Deutsche Gedichte. Eine Anthologie*. Ed. by Dietrich Bode (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1988), p. 214f.

¹⁰⁰ "Gedächtnisgottesdienst zur Erinnerung an den Bombenangriff auf die Stadt Kassel, 22-10-50", in: Velbinger, *Predigten*, pp. 202-6, here: p. 206.

as a lesson that the carnage of World War II held for the present.¹⁰¹ Although Seidel spoke in oblique terms of the "megalomania and craving for power of a few irresponsible men" that were responsible for the present situation, he refused to explore the nexus between aggressive war and domestic destruction in any detail. "Let us not search hatefully for the culprits in the past", he told his audience, proposing instead to lay the past to rest for the sake of reconciliation in the present. He declared:

"We must and want to draw a line below the past. Let the spirit of peace and reconciliation enter between us".¹⁰²

In line with this injunction, Seidel, in an earlier passage, de-contextualised the air raid in terms of a "natural disaster" that had struck "our poor city" out of nowhere.¹⁰³

At the same time, the mayor, in his speech, exploited the semantic ambiguity of the German term *Opfer* in order to turn the dead into guardians of the reconstruction. Next to an emphasis on innocent victimhood, there ran a second strand of meaning that invested the term with connotations of sacrifice. On this reading, the dead obliged the living to join hands in the "reconstruction of our beloved city of our fathers", as the mayor expressed it. In his concluding paragraph, Seidel even spoke of the dead as "having given their blood for us so that we can live". In so doing, he echoed the official conceptualisation of violent death during the Nazi years, which had typically been expressed through the phrase, "Germany must live even if we have to die".¹⁰⁴

In many respects, Seidel's public statement can be considered typical of a dominant strand of West-German public memory in the 1950s.¹⁰⁵ Seidel's speech was an indictment of the cruelty of war in general, shirking for the sake of internal and external reconciliation any confrontation with either the specific nature of the German war of 1939-1945 or the strategic air war of the Western allies of 1942/3-1945. At the same time, it demonstrated not only the present-centred uses of memory but also the longevity of interpretive frames that were derived from the pre-1945 world, be this the invocation of Weimar-era pacifism or of a notion of sacrifice that—although of long standing—had been used to excess during the years of the Third Reich.

¹⁰¹ StAK NL Seidel, Ansprachen 3 [No. 48-93], here: No. 84, 22.10.1953. "Trauerfeier vor der Martinskirche aus Anlass des 10. Jahrestages der Zerstörung Kassels", pp. 1201-1205, for the quotation: p. 1204. On the history of the slogan "Nie wieder Krieg", see Reinhold Lütgemeier-Davin, "Basismobilisierung gegen den Krieg: Die Nie-wieder-Krieg-Bewegung in der Weimarer Republik", in: Karl Holl / Wolfram Wette eds., *Pazifismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1981), pp. 47-76.

¹⁰² Seidel, "Trauerfeier", p. 1204.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 1201.

¹⁰⁴ The phrase derived from a poem by Heinrich Lersch, "Soldaten-Abschied" (1914).

¹⁰⁵ Compare the observations of Hannah Arendt, "Besuch in Deutschland 1950: Die Nachwirkungen des Naziregimes", in: idem, *Zur Zeit: politische Essays*. Marie Luise Knott ed. (Hamburg: Rotbuch, 1986), pp. 43-69, here: p. 45.

Five years later, in 1958, Seidel's successor, Lauritz Lauritzen (SPD), placed greater emphasis on the historical context, speaking of mass death as a "hard indictment of all those who were in positions of political responsibility back then". According to Lauritzen, the "most disastrous of all wars" was the end point of a German special path that he traced from the failed Hitler putsch of 1923, through the accession of power of the "Hitler-tyranny" in 1933 to the destruction in World War II. While the mayor's address reflected wider shifts in emphasis in the public discourse on Nazism that characterised the late 1950s, he still drew a strict distinction between 'them'—the Nazi-rulers—and 'us', the victims. "In a megalomaniac military adventure they wanted to conquer the world. With their catastrophic downfall they brought boundless misery over all of us", he declared in the *Martinskirche* on 22nd October 1958.¹⁰⁶

While the universalising and self-victimising tendencies of the post-war memory culture have been well documented in recent research,¹⁰⁷ less attention has been paid to the deep divisions which lay just below the surface of an integrationist slogan such as 'Never again'. In Kassel, these divisions were exposed in the local debate on the rearmament of West Germany, which was an integral part of Adenauer's policy of Western integration.¹⁰⁸ Locally, the various stages of the drive for the establishment of a new West German army were bitterly contested by the radical Left, and at the grass roots at least, also by the moderate Left and non-affiliated sections of the population.¹⁰⁹ Publicly, the opposition found expression in mass rallies, petitions for a referendum and forms of direct action.¹¹⁰ In Kassel, the issue proved deeply divisive for several reasons. In the eyes of many critics, the establishment of a Western German army served to deepen the partition of Germany while breathing new life into the discredited tradition of Kassel as a garrison town and 'Capital of the Reich Warrior Days'. Most of all, however, they feared that the reestablishment of an army would inevitably lead to another war, and thus to a repeat of the night of 22nd October 1943.

In this context, the radical Left tried to divest the slogan of 'Never again' from its depoliticised commemorative context and to reclaim the formulation as a rallying cry for

¹⁰⁶ StAK A.1.10 Nr. 607. *Reden OB Lauritzen*. No. 53 (22-10-58), no pagination.

¹⁰⁷ Gottfried Niedhart, "So viel Anfang war nie' oder: 'Das Leben und nichts anderes' – deutsche Nachkriegszeiten im Vergleich", in: *Lernen aus den Krieg?*, pp. 11-38, here: p. 16f.; Helmut Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte. Die nationalsozialistische Herrschaft in den Debatten des Deutschen Bundestages* (Munich / Vienna: Hanser, 1999), pp. 37-77; Moeller, *War Stories*, pp. 21-50.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen II* (Munich: bpb, 2000), pp. 142-152; Edgar Wolfrum, *Die geglückte Demokratie* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006), pp. 96-143.

¹⁰⁹ On the context see, Michael Geyer, "Der Kalte Krieg, die Deutschen und die Angst. Die westdeutsche Opposition gegen Wiederbewaffnung und Kernwaffen", in: Klaus Naumann ed., *Nachkrieg in Deutschland* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001), pp. 267-318.

¹¹⁰ Compare Bruno Osuch, *Die Bewegung gegen die Remilitarisierung in Kassel (1949-1956)* (Kassel: Ms., 1977).

organised street protest against the re-armament of the Federal Republic.¹¹¹ "No more tiger tank city, never again another 22nd October 1943", a banner read on a protest march of the Left in Kassel, which drew on the *lieu de mémoire* of allied bombing in order to posit a connection between armament and destruction—past and present.¹¹² According to this reading, the destruction of World War II was a direct consequence of Kassel's importance as an armaments centre during the Third Reich, which had earned the city the nickname of "tiger tank city". Just as the "re-militarisation" of the Adenauer government re-enacted the re-armament of the Third Reich, so would the city again meet the fate of World War II in a future war, the argument went.¹¹³ From this angle, the Communist Left attacked the integrationist politics of memory of the local elites. According to the *Sozialistische Volkszeitung*, the "true culprits [...] of the past and instigators of a new misfortune [in the present]" went unmentioned at the commemorative speeches. The dead obligated the living to get involved in radical political action with the goal of "putting a stop to the activities of the culprits [...] forever", which the newspaper identified as a coalition of American capitalists and German militarists.¹¹⁴ The following year, the *Sozialistische Volkszeitung* went one step further, presenting the Communist Party (KPD) as the "most determined fighter against an even worse 22nd October".¹¹⁵

The local debate revolved around the consequences of the reestablishment of an army for life in the city. The question was one of whether Kassel should again house military personnel or whether the bitter experience of the (air) war precluded such a possibility. When the local *Hessische Nachrichten*, in 1956, asked its readers to voice their views in a readers' poll, the response was overwhelming. Within the course of little over a week, 1,501 letters reached the editors.¹¹⁶ Of those, 1386 readers opposed the stationing of troops while only 112 welcomed it. Just as remarkable as the result was the pre-eminent role that memories of the bombing played in the readers' responses: "This magical date [of 22nd October] surfaces again and again as the symbol of a painful experience", the editors wrote in the introduction. While the proponents of a West-German army pointed towards the financial benefits of a garrison, the opponents invoked the memory of 22nd October and claimed that the stationing of troops put the city at additional risk in a future war: "Kassel

¹¹¹ On the genesis of the rallying cry, "Nie wieder Krieg", in the early Weimar Republic see Karl Holl, *Pazifismus in Deutschland* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 144.

¹¹² See the photograph in Bruno Osuch, "Neubeginn im Rüstungszentrum Kassel", in: Ulrich Schneider *et al.* ed., *Als der Krieg zu Ende war. Hessen 1945: Berichte und Bilder vom demokratischen Neubeginn* (Frankfurt a.M.: Röderberg, 1980), pp. 56-65, here: p. 63.

¹¹³ Compare Anonymous [Willi Belz], "22. Oktober 1943 – Ewige Mahnung zum Frieden. Kassel gedenkt der Opfer der Bombenangriffe. Niemals darf sich das Grauenvolle wiederholen!", *Sozialistische Volkszeitung* (SVZ) 22-10-51, p. 4.

¹¹⁴ [Willi Belz], "Der 22. Oktober mahnt Kassel", SVZ (22-10-53), p. 4.

¹¹⁵ "Kassels Zerstörung am 22. Oktober 1943", SVZ (23-10-54), p. 6.

¹¹⁶ *Hessische Nachrichten* no. 42 of 18th February 1956. All the published reactions are reprinted in Osuch, *Remilitarisation*, documentary appendix.

has suffered enough", was the rationale that informed this argument.¹¹⁷ Or, as another contribution put it,

"Tens of thousands of *Kasselner* had to witness how thousands of their relatives were roasted to death in the flames, painfully perished in smashed ruins and suffocated in blocked air raid shelters ... Those were the advantages of a 'garrison city'! That was the end of the 'tank city of Kassel'. That was the 'wiping out' of the 'tiger [tank, JA] city'! We've had enough for ever...".

Magdeburg

In Magdeburg, 'remembrance', 'peace' and 'rebuilding' were central terms in the secular discourse as well but were invested with connotations quite different from their usage in Kassel: "Peace" was the "fight for peace", be this, as in 1954, for the success of the Berlin Four Power Conference or, as in the following year, against the ratification of the Parisian treaties.¹¹⁸ The term, 'rebuilding', meanwhile, conveyed more than the physical reconstruction of the city but encompassed the creation of a new society, i.e., the GDR. In the secular memory culture of Magdeburg, the admonition of 'never again' was premised on the identification of the dead as 'victims of crime' and accompanied by specific interpretive guidelines. 'Never again' equalled the active 'struggle for peace', which in turn was synonymous with the identification with and active support of the socialist 'world peace camp'. This interpretation was popularised through all the channels available to the SED, its affiliated organisations, and the "agents of transmission" (Hermann Weber), the 'National Front' and the 'Regional Peace Committee'.

On 1st September 1949, the daily *Volksstimme* published a small article entitled, "The last letter", which formed part of the special coverage on the fourth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II.¹¹⁹ The article reported on a letter of farewell which an old carpenter had scribbled on a piece of wood shortly before his death in a makeshift air raid shelter on 16th January 1945. While the letter was a document of despair in the face of imminent death, the newspaper professed to know what the old men would have written if he had had enough time. It claimed that "he surely would have added: 'Fight for a better world of peace' ". In a similar vein, the article "Mass death in the Beer Cellar" on the same page concluded with the admonition to "always remember and to join the peace front! Citizens of Magdeburg, you owe this to yourselves, your children and to the 16,000 dead

¹¹⁷ Quote from a letter by Willy Orth, in: *ibid.* "Wo werden die Streitkräfte stationiert?"

¹¹⁸ "Ich habe den 16. Januar nicht vergessen!", *Volksstimme* 8/13 (16-1-54), p. 1; Werner Guse, "Auferstanden aus Ruinen", *Volksstimme* (15-1-55), p. 4.

¹¹⁹ "41 Millionen Tote mahnen", *Volksstimme* 3/204 (1-9-49), supplement.

of this dreadful winter night."¹²⁰ The same message was conveyed by the make-shift monument erected on the ruins of a theatre in January 1953, which carried the inscription, "Never again another 16th January. That is why you must fight for peace!"¹²¹

The legacy of the dead was thus an uncompromising one. Gestures of conciliation were eschewed in favour of a rekindling of hatred towards the old and new enemy. The living were enjoined to stand up against "Anglo-American imperialism", the "deadly enemy of the German people", as one headline from January 1950 put it.¹²² As in other fields of mass mobilisation and propaganda, the *SED* and its subsidiaries were remarkably unconcerned about employing and thus perpetuating Nazi propaganda techniques and tropes.¹²³ In 1952, for example, the *Volksstimme* ran a picture-series of postcard images from pre-war Magdeburg that carried the title, "Do you still remember? Before Ami-gangsters destroyed our city".¹²⁴ During the war, the Nazi press had run a similar series, which was called, "From the criminal records of the gangsters of the air."¹²⁵

There were, however, some indications that among the affiliated bourgeois parties, and in particular the *CDU*, reservations persisted well into the early 1950s about a politics of memory that revolved around the institutionalisation of hatred. In an article that appeared on the seventh anniversary of the air raid in the *CDU* party paper, *Der Neue Weg*, the author expressed his hope that the church bells would admonish the readers "to remember this day in a new spirit, without opening-up old wounds and inciting new hatred; without sowing new strife but [...] to work for true peace." Yet, at the same time, the paper, if anything, even surpassed the *SED* in its denunciation of 16th January 1945 as a 'crime', insisting in a lead article of 1951 that "what happened on this day [i.e., 16th January 1945] in Magdeburg was murder, common treacherous murder [*gemeiner Meuchelmord*]."¹²⁶

Conclusion

An exploration of the ways in which the dead were remembered highlights the differences in the commemorative cultures of Kassel and Magdeburg. The identification, in Kassel, of

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ "Unser Gelöbnis: Nie wieder ein 16. Januar 1945!", *Der Neue Weg* no. 16 (20-1-1953), p. 3.

¹²² "Der schwarze Tag von Magdeburg: Heute sehen viele klarer als 1945 / Der anglo-amerikanische Imperialismus – der Todfeind des deutschen Volkes", *Volksstimme* 16-1-1950, p. 4.

¹²³ Compare Winfried Ranke, "Linke Unschuld? – Unbefangener oder unbedachter Umgang mit fragwürdig gewordener Vergangenheit", in: Dieter Vorsteher (Hrsg.), *Parteiauftrag: Ein Neues Deutschland. Bilder, Rituale und Symbole der frühen DDR* (Munich / Berlin: Koehler und Amelang, 1997), pp. 94-112.

¹²⁴ Compare *Volksstimme* of 1952.

¹²⁵ See, for example, *Völkischer Beobachter* 153/56 (2-6-1943), p. 3.

¹²⁶ "Wenn heute alle Glocken läuten...", *Der Neue Weg* 7/13 (16-1-1952), p. 3.; "Ein düsterer Schatten: Magdeburg – 16. Januar 1945", ibid. 6/13 (16-1-1951), p. 3.

the dead as 'our dead' goes some way in explaining the emergence of a memory culture that centred on rites of mourning which de-politicised, de-contextualised and re-Christianised its subject matter. The public conversation was characterised by a set of formulae that were designed to restore 'dignity' to the victims of the air raid and derive some kind of meaning from their premature death. The consensus, however, remained fragile, as the controversy over rearmament showed. Moreover, de-politicisation avoided rather than engaged with the rhetoric of National Socialist propaganda, thus ensuring that many tropes continued to linger just below the surface.

By contrast, the official identification of the dead in Magdeburg as 'victims of crime' stood at the centre of a memory culture that re-contextualised and re-politicised the air war. Public commemorations revolved around protest while representations of death were used as 'evidence' of crime and 'indictment' of the criminal alike. In Magdeburg, Nazi tropes did not just linger on semi-publicly but were openly embraced by the dominant agent of memory in the city, the Socialist Unity Party. The 1950s memorial culture not only shared with Nazi propaganda the indictment, it also marginalised issues of private grief and mourning. To this, local citizens responded by looking for semi-public outlets, such as the laying of unauthorised wreaths.

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that some historiographical positions on the cultural impact of the air war need to be reconsidered. The memory of the air war was not the exclusive prerogative of the East German state but was just as intensely remembered in a West German city as in its East German counterpart, if not more so. Likewise, the preoccupation in memory research with the 'myth of victimhood' has tended to obfuscate the very real differences in the commemorative practices of East and West German urban societies.¹²⁷ Nor does the evidence bear out the view that post-war (West) German memory prioritised the material and cultural losses of the air war over its human costs, as Elisabeth Heinemann has claimed.¹²⁸ Despite their absence in visual representations, the dead were central to the 1950s memorial culture of Kassel. Indeed, the intense concern with questions of piety, 'dignity' and bereavement suggests that the famous dictum of the German 'inability to mourn' needs to be critically revisited.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Groehler, "Dresden", in: *Blätter*, pp. 137-41.

¹²⁸ Elizabeth Heinemann, "The hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's Crisis Years and West German National Identity" in: *AHR* 101/2 (1996) 354-395, here: pp. 368-70.

¹²⁹ Alexander & Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (München: R. Piper & Co., 1967), here: pp. 36-42. Adopting a psychoanalytical approach, the Mitscherlichs argued that the collective 'inability to mourn' resulted from a frustrated love of the *Führer*, Adolf Hitler, who used to embody the collective 'ego-ideal' [Ich-Ideal] of the nation. One consequence was a coldness that extended not just to the victims of the Germans but also to the German victims, who were invoked as a screen memory only.

The sites, rituals and narratives established by the end of the 1950s determined the trajectory of public memory in the decade that followed. Throughout the 1960s, the syntax of memory changed but little. In the city of Kassel, the *lieu de mémoire* was typically commemorated in the following manner. In the morning, representatives of the city laid wreaths "in quiet remembrance" at the memorial on the main cemetery. This was followed, in the afternoon, by an "hour of commemoration" on the cemetery, which was organised by the League of Air Raid Victims with the participation of the Church. At night, there was an ecumenical church service in the *Martinskirche*, which climaxed in the ceremonial ringing of the big church bell on the hour that the air raid had commenced in 1943. On the full anniversaries of 1963 and 1968, the mayor gave the central commemorative address, while on ordinary anniversaries, this task was performed by a Protestant or Catholic pastor from Kassel.

In Magdeburg, the *SED* and affiliated organisations focused their commemorative activity on the cemetery, where they held a ceremony in which wreaths were laid and the mayor, or one of his deputies, held a speech. On full anniversaries, the *SED* also organised additional events in the city itself. In 1965, the city council was convened for a special session, in which guests from other war-torn cities took part as well as—and this was a novel development—representatives from the Church. Five years later, the *SED* held a so-called "peace rally" on *Karl-Marx-Street* in the centre of town. The Church, meanwhile, commemorated the *lieu de mémoire* by holding memorial services in the Cathedral, although this practice was no longer observed on an annual basis by the mid-1960s.

Throughout the 1960s, commemorations mattered, attracting between several hundred and several thousand people while eliciting regular, and at times extensive, coverage in the local media. Yet, there were unmistakable signs that the observance of the annual day of remembrance was taking on a routine, almost perfunctory character. The bombing, it seemed, no longer exercised the minds and hearts of those involved in commemorative activity to quite the same extent as had been the case in the previous decade of the 1950s. Despite the regular invocation of the "unforgotten bombing victims", Lethe, the river of forgetfulness of Greek mythology, appeared slowly to swallow up the dead. As the *Hessische Allgemeine* remarked in 1966 with reference to the memorial service on the main cemetery in Kassel, "The circle of those taking part in the commemorations gets smaller year after year".¹³⁰ There were both socio-cultural and socio-demographic reasons for this development.

Unlike other aspects of Germany's catastrophic past, the air war did not stand at the centre of the political and mnemonic controversies that transformed (West) German

¹³⁰ "Bombenopfer sind unvergessen", *HA* (24-10-1966).

society in the 1960s.¹³¹ In some respects, the subject had been pacified too successfully by the local elites. True, there were attempts, on the part of the Kassel branch of the War Resisters International,¹³² to divest the memory place of the grip of elite politics and turn it into a pacifist symbol. In 1963, for example, the war resisters organised a ceremony that was dedicated to the "victims of the inferno of 22nd October 1943". Sporting the motto, "Never again bombs on Kassel", the event was followed by a torchlight procession of some 100 activists through the streets of Kassel.¹³³ In Magdeburg, meanwhile, the *SED* on occasion used the *lieu de mémoire* in order to denounce the American war in Vietnam. At the 'peace rally' on 16th January 1970, for example, a regional *SED* functionary declared, "When we commemorate this night [of the bombing], parallels come to mind with the criminal conduct of the American war in Vietnam."¹³⁴

On the whole, however, these attempts at putting the memory of World War II bombing in the service of a pacifist politics or a state-sponsored protest against American foreign policy were pursued only half-heartedly. In Kassel, the war resisters failed in establishing an annual commemorative tradition, while the Magdeburg *SED* generally used other channels than the memory place of 16th January to revile the American engagement in Vietnam. As Mary Nolan has argued, the (West) German student movement did not compare the carpet bombing of the American Air Force in Vietnam to indiscriminate area bombing in World War II.¹³⁵

By and large, the same held true of the other defining issue of the 1960s, the "return" of the Nazi past.¹³⁶ Although an opinion survey found in 1968 that one third of the (West) German population thought that the conduct of the allied air war to some extent 'atoned' for genocidal war and Judaeocide,¹³⁷ relativising rhetoric found no enunciation in the public memory culture of Kassel. Here, the political elites repeatedly referred to the *lieu de mémoire* of 22nd October in order to gain popular acceptance for alternative memory places that addressed Nazi crimes. When, for example, the opening of an exhibition on Jewish children's drawings from *Theresienstadt* concentration camp fell on 22nd October 1961, mayor Lauritz Lauritzen (SPD) seized the opportunity in order to legitimize the

¹³¹ Axel Schildt / Detlef Siegfried / Karl Christian Lammers eds., *Dynamische Zeiten. Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften* (Hamburg: Christians, 2000); Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich: Beck, 2001), pp. 138-181; Konrad H. Jarausch, "Der nationale Tabubruch. Wissenschaft, Öffentlichkeit und Politik in der Fischerkontroverse", in: Sabrow / Jessen / Große Kracht eds., *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte*, pp. 20-40; Wolfrum, *Geglückte Demokratie*, pp. 187-326; Winkler, *Weg nach Westen*, pp. 206-314; Jarausch, *Umkehr*, pp. 133-242.

¹³² On organised pacifism in post-war Germany see Holl, *Pazifismus in Deutschland*, pp. 220-237.

¹³³ "Feierstunde und Schweigemarsch der Kasseler Kriegsdienstgegner", HA 23-10-63.

¹³⁴ "Friedenskundgebung", *Der Neue Weg* (17/18-1-70), p. 1.

¹³⁵ Nolan, "Air Wars, Memory Wars", p. 19, footnote 47.

¹³⁶ Detlef Siegfried, "Zwischen Aufarbeitung und Schlussstrich. Der Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten 1958 bis 1968", in: Schildt et. al., *Dynamische Zeiten*, pp. 78-113.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 102.

engagement with the Nazi past through the invocation of the well-established day of remembrance. In his opening address, he emphasised that this coincidence was of more than just symbolic significance, for it underlined the "misery that a wrongheaded political system [...] has brought upon the world".¹³⁸ Although Lauritzen, in problematic fashion, equated the German victims of war with the (German-) Jewish victims of German genocide, he did so in order to raise awareness for other, worse forms of suffering (and dying) than those encountered by the we-group in the air war.

Whereas in Kassel, the hierarchy of victimhood was starting to change by the 1960s, slowly displacing 'our dead' from the pre-eminent position that they had enjoyed in the previous decade, in Magdeburg, the status of the air raid casualties changed but little throughout the period. While they continued to be depicted as victims of a crime, there was, however, a reorientation in the labelling of the criminal. With the inception of a propaganda campaign that aimed at exposing the continuities between the Third Reich and the Federal Republic,¹³⁹ a greater share of the blame in the destruction of Magdeburg was assigned to the "swastika-rats" of Nazism.¹⁴⁰ As mayor Sonnemann (SED) declared at the ceremony on the twentieth anniversary in 1965,

"Despite our achievements, we are worried about developments in Western Germany, where the same people occupy influential positions again who also bear a great share of the responsibility for the destruction of Magdeburg."¹⁴¹

The second reason for the progressive ossification of public memory in the 1960s and 1970s lay in the gradual erosion of the *milieu de mémoire* that had sustained commemorative activity in the 1950s. "It is our fate to become ever lonelier in our pain", Kassel mayor Karl Branner (1910-1997) declared on the 30th anniversary of the air raid in 1973.¹⁴² He thus gave expression to a sentiment that was frequently voiced in Kassel and Magdeburg throughout the period: the belief that the memory group comprised of the eyewitnesses of the cataclysmic events, with the bereaved and evacuees at its core, but did not extend to the post-war generation. Such a view appeared to be borne out by the development of the League of Air Raid Victims. Despite their claim to have been the "first expellees" of the war, the Air Raid Victims, in contrast to the expellee organisations, never managed to foster a group identity that would make them attractive to the descendants of the experience-generation. Although the Kassel group still boasted some 1,000 members in

¹³⁸ StAK A.1.10. No. 607: *Reden [OB Lauritzen]*. "Ansprache anlässlich der Eröffnung der Ausstellung 'Hier fliegen keine Schmetterlinge'", p. 1.

¹³⁹ Michael Lemke, "Instrumentalisierter Antifaschismus und SED-Kampagnenpolitik im deutschen Sonderkonflikt 1960-1968", in: Danyel ed., *Die geteilte Vergangenheit*, pp. 61-86.

¹⁴⁰ "Hakenkreuzratten", in: "Nie mehr diese Verbrechen zulassen! Magdeburger Bürger gedachten der zahllosen Opfer des Bombenangriffs vor 15 Jahren", *Der Neue Weg* (19-1-60), p. 6.

¹⁴¹ "Unsere Stadt soll blühen", *Volksstimme* 18-1-65.

¹⁴² StAK A.1.10. *Reden. [OB Branner]* Nr. 669. IV. 75-101 (1973), no. 100: "Ansprache Gedenkgottesdienst zur 30. Wiederkehr des 22. Oktober 1943", 22-10-1973.

1963, ten years later, there were only 150 left. By the time of the 30th anniversary in 1973, they no longer possessed the influence to pressurize the city into organising a commemorative event that would have had a "certain propagandistic effect", as an internal letter put it.¹⁴³ By the mid 1970s, the League was in inexorable decline, and so was public memory of the air war, or so it seemed.

¹⁴³ Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart Q 3/43. *Bund der Fliegergeschädigten hessen*. Kreisgruppe Kassel to Zentralverband, letter of 15th August 1973; postcard of 16th October 1973.

The Return of the Dead

The Renaissance of Commemoration in the 1980s and 1990s

Introduction: Shifting Contexts

In September 1987, the alternative Kassel city magazine, *Stattzeitung*, carried a cover that showed a grisly image of mass death (fig. 8).¹ Dozens of scattered corpses and body parts formed a bizarre landscape of death that extended beyond the pictorial frame on the left and right margins. In the foreground, a single body was stretched out in the position of an inverted crucifix while, in the background, rescue workers were visible together with a burnt-out lorry. The cover reproduced a photograph that had been taken in the immediate aftermath of the area raid of 22nd October 1943, showing the retrieval of dead bodies from a notorious public shelter turned mass grave.² Contrary to what one might expect, however, the photo reporter of the *Stattzeitung* had not taken the motif from an archive but had found it in his immediate environment—in the form of a giant poster covering the entrance of a brick bunker in 1980s Kassel.³

The real-life photomontage was the work of a group of local activists, the "Tenacious Doves", who reintroduced apocalyptic visualisations of mass death into contemporary urban space in order to shock the population into recognising the dangers of the 1980s arms-race.⁴ By way of textual commentaries, they established several referential frames to their montage. On one level, they situated the photograph within the context of World War II. A small caption located the image in time and space, referring to the air raid of 22nd October 1943 and indicating where the corpses had been recovered. On another level, a large headline established a connection between the past and the present, linking the World War II image to its immediate environment. The pun, "Dead certainly DEAD CERTAIN" made a point about the futility of civil defence measures in the face of Atomic annihilation. Finally, a banner drew a parallel between threats to the locality and World politics, urging

¹ *Stattzeitung* (September 1987), title page.

² See Werner Dettmar, *Die Zerstörung Kassels im Oktober 1943. Eine Dokumentation* (Fuldabrück: Hesse, 1983), p. 167.

³ *Stattzeitung* (October 1987), p. 6.

⁴ See the reporting on the action in the daily press, *HNA* 128 (4-6-87), Stadt; 129 (5-6-87), Stadt; 194 (22-8-87), Stadt.

the viewer towards a certain kind of political action, "Stop the Stationing of US Atomic missiles", the Tenacious Doves demanded. According to a report by the *Stattzeitung*, the police arrived to take the names of the activists but left again when they were told that the activists had the word of the Social Democratic mayor, Hans Eichel, not to interfere with their action.⁵



FIGURE 8. Image of World War II mass death on the cover of *stattzeitung*, Sept. 1987.

The example illustrates a characteristic trend in the urban memorial cultures of the 1980s and 1990s: the return of the dead. The casualties of World War II bombing re-entered the urban space by means of visual representations and exhibitions, through personal 'eyewitness accounts' and public commemorations. The dead stood at the centre of a revival of interest in the experience of indiscriminate bombing in both Kassel and Magdeburg. They re-emerged in an environment in which short-term political

⁵ *Stattzeitung* (October 1987), p. 6.

developments intersected with longer-term cultural and generational trends to produce a peculiar dynamic to the "process of double identification" (Reinhart Koselleck) that characterises the remembrance of violent death in war.⁶ The renaissance of commemoration in the 1980s and 1990s revolved around two related but distinct issues, security and identity, or more precisely, the questions of 'peace' and of 'guilt'. The dead of World War II bombing were invoked as historic prelude to an "Atomic Holocaust" (Petra Kelly) just as their collective identity as 'innocent victims' was called into question by the growing acceptance of the historical Holocaust as the central "civilisation rupture" (Dan Diner) of the twentieth century.⁷

On both counts, the year of 1979 may be considered a turning point: as the year of the NATO-twin track decision, 1979 made the preservation of peace the defining political issue of the 1980s; as the year of the first screening of the TV series 'Holocaust' and the 40th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, 1979 forced a critical reappraisal of the historic identity of local communities. The debate over these issues was underpinned by generational changes that altered the connection between primary experience and discursive power, with important repercussions for local discourses on the Nazi past. By the early 1980s, the generation from which the functional elites of the Third Reich had been recruited—the age cohorts born around 1905—reached the end of their biological lives while the 'sceptical generation' of those born around 1925 neared retirement age. At the same time, the first post-war generation of those born around 1945—the generation of '68'—moved into positions of influence, gradually gaining prominence in the public enunciation of the past.⁸

As the introductory example indicates, politics played an important role in the return of the dead in the 1980s. With their dramatic gesture, the Tenacious Doves protested against the consequences of the NATO twin-track decision of 12th December 1979, which had agreed on the stationing of a new generation of mid-range ballistic missiles should disarmament talks with the Soviet Union fail.⁹ The Tenacious Doves formed part of a broad but heterogeneous social movement commonly referred to as the Peace Movement,

⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, "Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden", in: Odo Marquard and Karlheinz Stierle eds., *Identität* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1979), pp. 255-276, here: p. 255.

⁷ Petra Kelly, "In der Tradition der Gewaltfreiheit", in: Eberhard Rathgeb, *Deutschland kontrovers. Debatten 1945 bis 2005* (Munich / Vienna: Carl Hanser, 2005), pp. 311-14, here: p. 313; Dan Diner ed., *Zivilisationsbruch. Denken nach Auschwitz* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1988).

⁸ Norbert Frei, *1945 und wir. Das Dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen* (Munich: Beck, 2005), p. 27. On the heuristic value and limits of the concept of 'generation' see Ulrike Jureit / Michael Wildt eds., *Generationen. Zur Relevanz eines wissenschaftlichen Grundbegriffs* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005); Jürgen Reulecke ed., *Generationalität und Lebensgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003). See also the founding text by the sociologist Karl Mannheim, "Das Problem der Generation", in: idem, *Wissenschaftssoziologie. Auswahl aus dem Werk*. Ed. with an introduction by Kurt H. Wolff (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1964), pp. 509-565.

⁹ For the context see Andreas Rödder, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1969-1990* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), pp. 59-74.

which combined utopian visions of communitarian living with apocalyptic fears about the future of mankind in an age of environmental pollution and nuclear deterrence.¹⁰ As the slogan, "Stop the Stationing of US Atomic Missiles", illustrates, the politics of many activists was as one-sided as their modes of expression were unorthodox, aiming to shock the public through the confrontation with mass death.¹¹ The fight against the twin-track decision may be considered the political catalyst for the renaissance of interest in World War II aerial bombing.¹² In acting as a pressure group that put the subject back onto the public agenda, the local peace movement fulfilled a function that the League of Air Raid Victims had assumed in the 1950s and 1960s.

With the ascendancy of the peace movement came the rise to dominance of a narrative that had been confined to the radical Left in the 1950s, the conceptualisation of the air raid as a prelude to total annihilation. In Kassel, this development was furthered by the broad support of the local political elites, especially the Social Democrats, who infused the established commemorative consensus formula of 'Never again' with a political edge. In different yet parallel ways, the NATO twin-track decision also marked a turning point for the memory culture in Magdeburg. In their executive meeting of 13th December 1979, the Magdeburg SED decided to harness the political agitation against NATO to local memories of mass death, reviving the *lieu de mémoire* of 16th January as a "fighting day [Kampftag] against the NATO missile decision".¹³

The renaissance of interest in World War II occurred within the context of a commemorative turn in the political culture in general.¹⁴ Between 1983 and 1995, German society relived the twelve years of the Third Reich as a sequence of 50th anniversary events.¹⁵ In Kassel, this was accompanied by an empirical turn towards the history of the everyday under Nazism, as is illustrated by the town council resolution of May 1979 to commission a scholarly history of Kassel during National Socialism.¹⁶ Influenced by the great 'embarrassment' [Betroffenheit] that the TV series, "Holocaust", had created, the research design specified that the fate of Kassel Jewry should stand at the centre of

¹⁰ Rödder, *Bundesrepublik*, pp. 213f.; Steve Breyman, *Why Movements Matter. The West German Peace Movement and U.S. Arms Control Policy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 36.

¹¹ On the Anti-American undercurrent of the peace movement see Dan Diner, *Verkehrte Welten. Antiamerikanismus in Deutschland. Ein historischer Essay* (Frankfurt a.M.: Eichborn, 1993), pp. 151-167; on the East German attempts at exploiting the potential of mass protest in the FRG Hubertus Knabe, *Die unterwanderte Republik. Stasi im Westen* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2000), pp. 234-260.

¹² A similar point is made by Elisabeth Domansky, "A Lost War: World War II in Postwar German Memory", in Alvin Rosenfeld (ed.), *Thinking about the Holocaust* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 233-272. But see for an alternative view Mary Nolan, "Air Wars, Memory Wars", in: *CEH* 38/1 (2005), pp. 7-40, here: p. 24, footnote 63; Andreas Huyssen, "Air War Legacies: From Dresden to Baghdad", *New German Critique* 90 (Fall 2003), pp. 163-176, here: p. 164f.

¹³ LA Magd. -LHA-, Rep. 16. SED-Stadtleitung Magdeburg. Sekretariat. No. IV/D-5/1/068, fol. 2f.

¹⁴ Frei, 1945 und wir, p. 9.

¹⁵ Klaus Naumann, *Der Krieg als Text. Das Jahr 1945 im kulturellen Gedächtnis der Presse* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998).

¹⁶ StAK A.0. Stadtverordnetenversammlung, vol. 140. IX. LP, session 26 of 7-5-1979, pp. 32-41.

attention.¹⁷ The renaissance of the local *lieu de mémoire* of aerial warfare occurred against the backdrop of a broader paradigm shift in which the attempt of revisionist historians and the centre-right federal government to 'normalise' German history backfired and led to the prioritisation of the Holocaust as the pivotal "civilisation rupture" of the twentieth century.¹⁸ In Magdeburg, the impact of this shift remained confined to the commemorative practice of the Protestant church until 1989/90 but became central to the secular sphere after unification as well.

Finally, political and cultural shifts intersected with generational change. By the 1980s, the common experiential basis between the protagonists of public memory and their audiences—a characteristic feature of the memory culture of the 1950s and 1960s—had become tenuous. The hegemonic narratives of the local elites were increasingly enunciated by members of age cohorts who had been socialised in the post-war world. When the Kassel mayor, Hans Eichel, born in 1943, addressed the citizenry on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the air raid in October 1983, he had no personal experiences of aerial warfare on which to draw. But among his audience in the tightly packed *Martinskirche*, there were still many contemporaries of the iconic event, in particular members of the Hitler youth generation and the sceptical generation born between 1920 and 1935. While the 'official' enunciation of the meaning of mass death in World War thus passed into the hands of a generation socialised in the two post-war Germanys, contemporaries turned to the historiographical recreation of the air war in order to preserve 'their' memories.¹⁹ In no small measure, this transition from "communicative" to "cultural" memory accounted for the peculiar dynamic of the urban memory culture in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁰

This chapter unravels the impact of political, cultural and generational shifts on the form and content of the commemorative practices in Kassel and Magdeburg in the 1980s and 1990s. The period not only witnessed the revival of interest in the experience of area bombing but also ushered in a critical re-appraisal of the role of local communities in World War II. While a core set of rituals remained stable throughout the period, the

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 33. Compare Norbert Frei, "Auschwitz und Holocaust. Begriff und Historiographie", in: Hanno Loewy ed., *Holocaust: Die Grenzen des Verstehens. Eine Debatte über die Besetzung der Geschichte* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992), pp. 101-109; Peter Märtesheimer and Ivo Frenzel eds., *Im Kreuzfeuer: Der Fernsehfilm 'Holocaust': Eine Nation ist betroffen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1979).

¹⁸ The literature on the politics of memory of the Kohl government and the famous *Historikerstreit* is vast. For a dispassionate evaluation twenty years after, see Ulrich Herbert, "Der Historikerstreit. Politische, wissenschaftliche, biographische Aspekte", in: Sabrow / Jessen / Große Kracht eds., *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte*, pp. 94-113. On the politics of memory of the Kohl government see also Sabine Moller, *Die Entkonkretisierung der NS-Herrschaft in der Ära Kohl* (Hannover: Offizin, 1998).

¹⁹ See chapter eight below.

²⁰ Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Beck, 4th ed., 2002), p.48-66; Lutz Niethammer, "Diesseits des 'Floating Gap'. Das kollektive Gedächtnis und die Konstruktion von Identität im wissenschaftlichen Diskurs", in: Kristin Platt & Mihran Dabag, *Generation und Gedächtnis. Erinnerungen und kollektive Identitäten* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1995), pp. 25-50.

semantics of commemoration underwent a shift in emphasis as the Cold War gave way to a new world order in the late 1980s. In the early 1980s, the protagonists of public culture drew on the memory place in order to illustrate the dangers of an atomic war. In this perspective, the historic experience of bombing featured as a prelude to nuclear annihilation in the present. Such an interpretation, while eroding some of the received narrative props of the 1950s, ultimately re-affirmed a narrative that conceived of the local community as a victim of forces beyond its control. The emergence of local Holocaust memory and the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, however, forced a critical re-evaluation of the *lieu de mémoire* in both cities. In the minds of clerics, politicians, and journalists, the memory of mass death in World War II bombing no longer allowed for the construction of a collective identity of martyrdom but called for an exploration of the nexus between local disaster and the larger historical context.

Between 'Fighting Day' and 'Prayer for Peace': Commemoration in the 1980s

One day after the NATO twin-track decision of 12th December 1979, the Magdeburg *SED* discussed the political consequences in their regular executive meeting [*Sekretariatsitzung*]. "Through extensive political mass agitation amongst all workers and the population at large", the minutes recorded, "the NATO decision must be used as an opportunity to expose the whole brutality of Imperialism, in particular the Imperialism of the USA and FRG."²¹ The board agreed to represent this shift in world-political affairs as a "decisive climax" in the "preparation [of Western Imperialism] for war". To this end, the *SED* decided to revive the memory place of 16th January as a "fighting day [*Kampftag*] against the NATO missile decision" that would demonstrate the "will for peace of the population of Magdeburg".²² The organisation of the 35th anniversary of the air raid in January 1980 was put in the hands of the "Section Agitation / Propaganda" of the *SED* and the City Council, which produced a detailed plan on the semiotics of commemoration.²³ The conception [*Ablaufkonzeption*] drew in part on established rites of remembrance as practised since the 1950s but also showed elements of contemporary mass mobilisation.²⁴

²¹ LA Magd. –LHA-, Rep. 16. *SED-Stadtleitung Magdeburg. Sekretariat*. No. IV/D-5/1/068, fol. 2f.

²² Ibid., fol. 3.

²³ Ibid., fol. 82; 87; 170-172.

²⁴ LA Magd. –LHA-, Rep. P 13, Nr. IV/E-2/3/120, fol. 64f. "Konzeption für die Großkundgebung am 9. September 1984 in Magdeburg"; StAM Rep. 18/4. Ra 634. 4. Ratssitzung 17-1-85. "Jahreskulturplan 1985 der Stadt Magdeburg". For the context: Jürgen Danyel, "Politische Rituale als Sowjetimporte", in: Konrad Jarausch / Hannes Siegrist eds., *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945-1970* (Frankfurt / New York: Campus, 1997), pp. 67-86; Ralf Rytlewski / Detlev Kraa, "Politische Rituale in der Sowjetunion und der DDR", in: *APuZ* B3 (1987), pp. 33-48; Martin Sabrow, "Kollektive Erinnerung und kollektiviertes Gedächtnis. Die Liebknecht-Luxemburg-Demonstration in der Gedenkkultur der DDR", in: Alexandre

In 1980, the commemoration of the dead returned to its place of origin. While representatives of the *SED*, the associated parties and others laid wreaths at the West cemetery in the morning, the central event was held at Old Market Square in the centre of town, the same space where the Nazi party had staged the first public commemorations in 1944. In comparison to the ceremonies of the 1940s and 1950s, the 35th anniversary celebration was far larger in scale. Whereas in the 1950s several thousand Magdeburgers had assembled at an improvised memorial, the local press, in 1980, reported an attendance figure of 70,000 people, one in four of the entire city population.²⁵ The "mass rally" reflected the hierarchical structure of GDR society. While regional functionaries from party and state were seated on a VIP rostrum, ordinary Magdeburgers were left standing throughout the event.²⁶ As an "organised mass", they witnessed the formal opening by a trade union functionary as a demarcation rite, were treated to a speech by the Magdeburg mayor, a "workers' declaration", and as a closing rite, communal singing of the hymn of the International Workers' Movement, "Brothers, to Sun, to Freedom". At the same time, the inclusion of representatives from the Red Army as guests of honour—an element of protocol insisted on by the regional *SED* leadership—made clear that this was not a pacifist rally but was aimed solely against the West.²⁷

The *SED* organised a similar "mass rally" on the full anniversary of 1985, whereas on ordinary remembrance days activities were restricted to the traditional wreath laying at the *West* cemetery and a remembrance concert of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.²⁸ January 1984 formed an exception when a "peace meeting" was held on the cemetery with 15,000 attendants, in all likelihood as a response to the deployment of the first Euro missiles in the Federal Republic. In 1985, the rally was even bigger in size than in 1980, with the local press reporting attendance figures of 80,000 people.²⁹ More significant was the attempt to broaden the public appeal by recruiting speakers from different generations and walks of life. At the rally, "For Peace and Détente—Against NATO Arms Build-Up", the keynote speech was delivered by the First Secretary of the *SED* city leadership, Heinz Hanke, but *Superintendent* Dietrich Schierbaum from the Protestant church was also invited to speak.³⁰

Escudier ed., *Gedenken im Zwiespalt. Konfliktlinien europäischen Erinnerns* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2001), pp. 117-138.

²⁵ *Volksstimme* 34/14 (17-1-80), p. 1; 7.

²⁶ LA Magd. -LHA-, Rep. 16. *SED*-Stadtleitung. Sekretariat. No. IV/D-5/1/068, fol. 172. On the importance of the rostrum see M. Gibas and R. Gries, "Vorschlag für den ersten Mai: die Führung zieht am Volk vorbei!" Überlegungen zur Geschichte der Tribüne in der DDR", in: *Deutschlandarchiv* 1995 (5), pp. 481-494.

²⁷ LA Magd.-LHA-, Rep. 13. *SED*-Bezirksleitung Magdeburg. No. NID-2/3/119, fol. 2.

²⁸ See *Volksstimme* 35/14 (17-1-81), p. 8; 40/14 (17-1-86), p. 6; 41/14 (17-1-87), p. 8; 43/14 (17-1-89), p. 1.

²⁹ *Volksstimme* 38/14 (17-1-84), p. 1; 3.

³⁰ LA Magd., -LHA-, Rep. P13. *SED*-Bezirksleitung. No. IV/E-2/3/129, fol. 119f.

The end of détente not only led to renewed investment in the *lieu de mémoire* on the part of the political elites but also to a revival of commemoration by the Protestant Church. Encouraged by an Episcopal appeal to conduct a rogation service for peace, the Magdeburg Church resurrected a tradition that had been discontinued since 1965.³¹ On 16th January 1980, a "prayer for peace" was held in the *Wallonerkirche*, from where the practice moved permanently to the Cathedral the following year.³² With the exception of the full anniversary of 1985, the "prayer for peace" did not contain all the liturgical elements of a Sunday church service but was conducted in the form of a short half-hour "commemorative worship" [*Gedenkandacht*] held in front of an anti-war memorial by Ernst Barlach. Typically, the liturgy consisted of a short address by the pastor, a meditative section that sometimes involved the memorial, communal singing of church hymns and prayer. After the blessing a period of ceremonial silence followed, to be succeeded by the pealing of the Cathedral bells on the hour that the bombs had started to fall in 1945.³³ Attendance figures are only recorded for 1985 when the congregation numbered about 600 worshippers.³⁴ While this was less than one per cent of the number of people who had attended the *SED*-organised commemoration on Old Market Square the same day, the "prayer for peace" offered an alternative interpretation whose popular resonance increased in the same measure as the *SED* co-opted the Protestant church in the official "struggle for peace".

Just as in Magdeburg, the NATO twin-track decision of December 1979 provided the catalyst for a revival of interest in the local day of remembrance in Kassel as well. Here, local peace activists recognised the opportunity to broaden the mass appeal of the movement by reaching out to the memories of the war generation. In a programmatic article in the alternative *Stattzeitung*, activist Christian Wollenteit argued that the Left had hitherto shied away from tapping collective memories of World War II for fear of stoking "revanchism". This policy—he maintained—had played into the hands of the "rulers", who had had it "too easy". He went on to call on the movement to recognise "the sleeping potential that those people carry who have experienced Stalingrad and the expulsion from the East" and suggested harnessing "their fears" to the cause of peace.³⁵ To this end, the Kassel "Workshop Peace Week" seized the opportunity when, in October 1983, the 40th

³¹ On the appeal by bishop Krusche see Erhard Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949-1989* (Bonn: bpb, 2000), p. 382f.

³² See Archiv der Ev. Domgemeinde Magdeburg, *Monatliche Mitteilungen der Domgemeinde 1964-72*, entry of Jan. 1965; *Mitteilungsblatt 1975-1995*, entry of 16th Jan. 1980.

³³ Archiv der Ev. Domgemeinde Magdeburg, *Domprediger Quast. Sammlung Friedensgebete*. "Mahnung zum Frieden – Gebet um Frieden" [1983]; "Gedenkandacht vor dem Barlachmal am 16.1.1989"; "Gebet am Barlachehrenmal 16.1.1990"; "Gedenken der Zerstörung Magdeburgs 16.1.1991"; "Friedensgebet 16.1.1992"; "Gebet um Frieden und Versöhnung 16.1.1993"; "Friedensgebet 50. Jahrestag Magdeburg 16.1.1995". I would like to thank pastor Giselher Quast for making these texts available to me.

³⁴ *Die Kirche* (10-2-85).

³⁵ Christian Wollenteit, "Wider den falschen Konsens. Anmerkungen zur Friedensbewegung", in: *Stattzeitung* 10/81, pp. 20f.

anniversary of the bombing happened to coincide with the pinnacle of nation-wide movement activity against the Euro missiles. "Kassel 1943 admonishes. Never again bombs on our city. Say, 'No'. No new atomic missiles in our country", was the slogan of the local groups, which was underlined visually by a photomontage that depicted an historic image of war-torn Kassel together with a mushroom cloud.³⁶

Drawing on the action repertoire of earlier protest movements, the Struggle Against Atomic Death of the 1950s and the Vietnam protest movement of the 1960s,³⁷ the Kassel activists sought to take the commemoration of mass death out of the confines of church and cemetery into the public square.³⁸ As an opening event to the "action [and] resistance week" of 15th to 23rd October 1983, a "die-in" was staged on the large *Friedrichplatz*, followed by a "stand-up for peace".³⁹ In another square, a one-week vigil "in memory of the dead of the Kassel bombing night" was conducted as a warning against the dangers of Atomic war. This message was underlined symbolically by setting up crosses and images of war-torn Kassel. On the day of remembrance itself, peace activists lit 10,000 candles in the vicinity of the *Lutherkirche*, each light to symbolize a casualty of strategic bombing. Meanwhile, inside the church, all-night fasting and prayer was accompanied by communal singing of the civil rights hymn, "We shall overcome".⁴⁰ Five years later, in 1988, some 300 activists carrying torches formed a human peace sign on *Königsplatz*. The square had been selected on purpose because of its association with mass death in October 1943, when it had functioned as a collecting place for retrieved corpses.⁴¹

In order to make their cause heard, peace activists also interfered with the established rituals of wreath-laying and ecumenical church service. On the 40th anniversary, a heckler challenged the bishop, Hans-Gernot Jung, to speak out on the issue of nuclear disarmament during his sermon in the *Martinskirche*, while the following day, peace activists sported a banner reading, "Kassel 1943 admonishes", during the official ceremony at the cemetery.⁴² In memory of the casualties of allied bombing, activists placed 1,000 red roses on the graves. While the impact of peace movement activity was considerable on the full anniversaries of 1983 and 1988, their long-term influence on the semiotics of commemoration should not be exaggerated. By and large, official commemoration remained in the hands of the political and spiritual elites. The Church, in particular, proved

³⁶ For a reproduction see *GhK publik* (9-11-83).

³⁷ Breyman, *Why Movements Matter*, p. 154; 162.

³⁸ For the context see *ibid.*, pp. 177-209.

³⁹ See the leaflet, "Kassel 1943 mahnt: Nie wieder Bomben auf unsere Stadt. NEIN. Keine neuen Atomraketen in unser Land", in: StAK, not catalogued; *Stattzeitung* 10/83, p. 23.

⁴⁰ Leaflet, "22. Oktober 1943 / 22. Oktober 1983", in: StAK S5 C126. Friedensbewegung.

⁴¹ "Zeitzeugen erinnern und mahnen zum Frieden", *HA* (24-10-88).

⁴² Hans-Gernot Jung, *Rechenschaft der Hoffnung. Gesammelte Beiträge zur öffentlichen Verantwortung der Kirche* (Marburg: Elwert, 1993), p. 161; *HA* (24-10-83).

unwilling to adapt traditional liturgy to the demands of lay activists.⁴³ Core elements of the annual remembrance service included a meditative overture played on the organ as an introductory rite; psalm reading and bible lesson; the singing of hymns and chorals by the choir and the congregation; a sermon by the pastor, to which, on full anniversaries, was added an address by the mayor; and finally, prayer and blessing. The service concluded with the pealing of a single church bell, the *Osanna*, as a closing rite.⁴⁴

Between Prelude and Retribution: Making Sense of Urban Destruction

This section explores shifts and continuities in both synchronic and diachronic perspective by way of a close reading of central anniversary celebrations in Kassel and Magdeburg. Throughout the 1980s, commemoration revolved around three interrelated issues: security, group identity and personal identity.⁴⁵ When the concern over peace stood at the centre of memory, the historic experience of indiscriminate bombing was easily harnessed to the construction of a group identity of victimhood. Special legitimacy was derived from the past to speak out on issues of war and peace in the present. In characteristic fashion, the Magdeburg mayor, Herzig (SED), justified his participation in an international conference of "martyr cities" with Magdeburg's destruction in World War II.⁴⁶ To the extent, however, that fears over an 'Atomic Holocaust' gave way to an intensified confrontation with the historical Holocaust in the late 1980s, 'peace' was displaced by 'guilt' as the central issue, calling into question the notion of collective victimhood. At the same time, and in some respect independent of these shifts, public commemorations were a space in which the protagonists of memory addressed the long-term impact of aerial warfare on personal identities as well, calling attention to the mental and physical scars that the exposure to extreme violence had left on individual biographies.

Meaning depends on context. To speak of 'guilt' and 'atonement' in the sacral setting of the church is different from using the same vocabulary in the secular space of the market square. In the light of this reflection, a fundamental difference in the memory cultures of

⁴³ See Dekanat Kassel-Mitte, *Akte Martinskirche*, correspondence between deacon, Hans Feller, and Dieter Wollenteit, "speaker of the peace workshop at the congregation of Kirchditmold", 7-9-88; 26-9-88.

⁴⁴ Hans Feller, "Gedenket aber der früheren Tage...". *Stadtgeschichte und Gedenken am Beispiel der Martinskirche zu Kassel*, in: Hans Werner Dannowski ed., *Erinnern und Gedenken* (Hamburg: Steinmann, 1991), pp. 45-61, here: p. 52.

⁴⁵ On the distinction between collective identity and personal identity see Jürgen Straub, "Personale und kollektive Identität. Zur Analyse eines theoretischen Begriffs", in: Assmann / Friese eds., *Identitäten*, pp. 73-104; Rüdiger Thomas / Werner Weidenfeld, Art. "Identität", in: Werner Weidenfeld / Karl-Rudolf Korte ed., *Handbuch zur deutschen Einheit 1949—1989—1999* (Bonn: bpb, 1999), pp. 430-441, here: p. 430; Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, pp. 130-33.

⁴⁶ StAM Rep. 41/701. "Rede des Oberbürgermeisters auf der Konferenz der Märtyrerstädte vom 27.4. bis 29.4.1987 in Madrid".

Kassel and Magdeburg becomes apparent. In Kassel, the central space of commemoration was the church. Even when politicians were invited to give the keynote speech, their words were embedded in the liturgy of an ecumenical church service. In Magdeburg, the situation was different. Although the church constituted an important space as well, the sacral remained the preserve of religious ministers and the Christian congregation. Here, the most important commemorative space was the secular framework of the public square. This held true even when representatives of the Church agreed to make a contribution, as was the case in 1985.

"Great Carthage Waged Three Wars": Mass Death as Prelude to Atomic Annihilation

The 40th anniversary commemoration in Kassel was celebrated at the height of the controversy over the NATO arms build-up on 22nd October 1983.⁴⁷ Attracting some 1,800 worshippers, the "Worship for Peace" was held in the town's biggest sacral space, the *Martinskirche*.⁴⁸ The Protestant bishop of Kurhesse-Waldeck, Hans-Gernot Jung, conducted the liturgy, while the commemorative address was held by Hans Eichel, the Social Democratic mayor. The question of 'peace' was central to both of them, but the sacral narrative of the bishop invested the term with different meanings from the secular narrative of the politician: For the church man, the term had an eschatological dimension; for the politician, peace was a political issue.⁴⁹

The bishop expounded a sacral narrative that drew on religious texts in order to prescribe a cycle of despair and lamentation, recognition and salvation.⁵⁰ To this end, the opening rite of an organ meditation was followed by an Old Testament reading from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, 1:1-11. "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people!"⁵¹ In recalling Kassel's destruction in World War II through the words of Jeremiah, Jung provided a language of mourning to the congregation in the church. At the same time, he offered an explanation for catastrophic rupture that found the root cause for urban destruction in the misdeeds of the 'we-group'. Jerusalem was destroyed by her enemies in 587 A.D. because of her sins against God (1:8), and so was Kassel in October 1943, the bible reading appeared to suggest. Rejecting any interpretation that explained the events with reference to fate, the narrative posited divine judgement as an explanation for urban

⁴⁷ On 22nd October 1983, altogether some one million West-Germans protested against the Euro missiles in several regional gatherings and at a central rally in Bonn. See Brymann, *Why Movements Matter*, p. 193.

⁴⁸ "Zehntausend Lichter zum Gedächtnis der Toten", *blick in die kirche* 11/1983, p. 17.

⁴⁹ See Art. "Frieden", in *Theologische Real-Enzyklopädie* 11, pp. 599-643, here: 636.

⁵⁰ "Samstag, 22. Okt. 1983, 20 Uhr, Martinskirche Kassel. Gottesdienst für den Frieden am 40. Jahrestag der Zerstörung Kassels", in: Dekanat Kassel-Mitte, *Akte Martinskirche*.

⁵¹ I have used the following edition, *The Old Testament. The Authorized or King James Version of 1611*. With an introduction by George Steiner. Everyman's Library 175 (London: CUP, 1996).

catastrophe, and offered repentance as a way towards redemption.⁵² In so doing, the bishop took up an interpretation of the catastrophic events that had been expounded by individual pastors since the 1940s.⁵³

The two hymns that followed took up the motif of lamentation but turned it from the specific to the general, from the mourning over a historical event to a universal condition of human existence. Sung by a choir, the first song was a modern variation of the 17th century hymn, "Alas, how transitory, alas how vain is the life of man".⁵⁴ Everything is vain, material possessions no less than life. Hope rests with God alone, the lyrics suggested. The second hymn, the 16th century "When we are in deepest pain", developed further the motif of divine consolation.⁵⁵ The lyrics explicated the belief that there was double consolation in God—both as a confidant of sorrow and as the locus of forgiveness, "This is why we come to you, oh Lord, and lament all our pain because we are forlorn in our sorrow and affliction". Within the overall structure of the service, the hymns functioned as prelude to the core of the sacral narrative, the sermon.

Hans-Gernot Jung based his address on Paul's epistle to the Romans 5:1, which explicated the Pauline (and Protestant) gospel of 'salvation through grace' and 'justification through faith', "We who have become justified through faith / have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ".⁵⁶ Here, 'guilt' and 'peace' were invested with transcendental meaning. Just as all mankind stood in need of Divine grace, 'peace' described the relationship between God and justified believers. Turning against a worldly reading of this passage, Jung insisted that "peace with God" was not a slogan to be used in the political debates of the day but a reminder of Christ's sacrifice for the sake of man. Accordingly, the bishop refused to comment on the NATO twin-track decision when challenged to do so by a heckler. He emphasised that his task was not to "advocate a single opinion that could be considered binding upon the conscience" but to stand up for mutual respect.⁵⁷ In so doing, Jung implicitly criticised a grass roots movement among the clergy of his own State Church, who had drawn on the same passage in order to justify their uncompromising opposition to the Euro missiles.⁵⁸ With his rejection of the argument of a

⁵² Gunther Wanke, Art. "Klagelieder", in: *TRE* 19, pp. 227-230.

⁵³ See chapter two above.

⁵⁴ *Evangelisches Kirchengesangbuch der Evangelischen Kirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck (EKG)* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1976), no. 327: 1; 8. The variation was written by Wolfgang Fortner (born 1907).

⁵⁵ EKG 282: 1-5.

⁵⁶ Compare Horst Balz, Art. "Römerbrief", *TRE* 29, pp. 291-308.

⁵⁷ "Zehntausend Lichter zum Gedächtnis der Toten", *blick in die kirche* 11 (1983), p. 17. Unfortunately, the text of the sermon has not been preserved. But see Hans-Gernot Jung, "Unter dem Evangelium", in: Hans-Gernot Jung, *Rechenschaft der Hoffnung. Gesammelte Beiträge zur öffentlichen Verantwortung der Kirche*. In Verbindung mit Frithard Scholz und Gerhard Zinn herausgegeben von Martin Hein (Marburg: Elwert, 1993), pp. 158-174.

⁵⁸ "Frieden und Gerechtigkeit. Eine Erklärung von Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrern der Evangelischen Kirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck", in: *blick in die kirche* 10/83, p. 17.

"no [to the Euro missiles] without any yes" in favour of a "no with a conditional 'still'", the bishop supported the mainstream position of the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany as laid down in several declarations in the early 1980s.⁵⁹

In contrast to the bishop, the Social Democratic mayor, Hans Eichel, engaged more directly with both the political issues of the day and the legacy of the bombing war. In his commemorative address, he invoked the memory of Kassel's destruction in World War II in order to make a passionate plea for unilateral disarmament.⁶⁰ He positioned himself on the Left of the *SPD*, associating himself with a view of equal distance from both superpowers whose most prominent spokesman was the mayor of Saarbrücken, Oskar Lafontaine.⁶¹ Drawing on the late Bertolt Brecht, Eichel argued for pacifism as the historic lesson from the carnage of World War II. "For mankind is threatened by wars against which the wars of the past are no more than pitiful attempts; and they will come if we do not smash the hands of those who prepare them openly", he quoted from Brecht's address to the "People's Congress for Peace", which had first appeared in the *SED*-daily, *Neues Deutschland*, in November 1952.⁶² Within the mayor's argument, the air raid of 22nd October featured above all as a historic warning, as a prelude to total annihilation facing the city in a future Atomic war,

"[Speculations on a winnable Atomic war] have forced us to look back. To look back at the unbelievable misery of the women, children and old men back then in October 1943 [...]. But all of this was little compared to the terror that would face us today."⁶³

In comparison, Eichel briefly referred to the place of the air raid within the larger historical context but did not dwell upon it. In his address, he made clear that the city's destruction belonged in the context of the history of National Socialism but made no attempt to explicate the precise relationship between the two. Instead, he posited that both subjects had been shrouded in taboo until very recently because of "the misery, our guilt, complicity through inaction".⁶⁴ Clearly, for the highest political representative of the city in 1983, the question of peace took precedence over the issue of guilt.

⁵⁹ For the quotations: Hans-Gernot Jung, "Unser Friedensauftrag ist Predigt, Seelsorge und Unterricht", *blick in die kirche* 10 (1983), p. 13f. See also, "Konflikt um die 'Nachrüstung' – Was soll die christliche Gemeinde tun?", *ibid*. The declarations of the *EKD* are collected in Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, *Die Denkschriften der EKD*. Vol 1/3: *Frieden / Menschenrechte / Weltverantwortung* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1993). For the context see, Anke Silomon, "Verantwortung für den Frieden", in: Claudia Lepp / Kurt Nowak eds., *Evangelische Kirche im geteilten Deutschland (1945-1989/90)* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), pp. 135-160.

⁶⁰ For the text of the speech see StAK A.1.10. No. 715. "Ansprache Martinskirche 22.10.1983".

⁶¹ Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen II. Deutsche Geschichte 1933-1990* (Munich: Beck, 1999), p. 417.

⁶² Bertolt Brecht, *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe* 23 (Berlin / Weimar / Frankfurt a.M.: Aufbau / Suhrkamp, 1993), pp. 215f.: "Zum Kongress der Völker für den Frieden".

⁶³ StAK A.1.10. No. 715, "Ansprache Martinskirche".

⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

The speech was followed by two hymns, which returned to the sacral narrative, calling on God for "His peace". In particular the second song, "Give us peace gracefully", a Reformation hymn traditionally sung at the closing of the church service, could also be understood as an implicit comment on the mayor's speech and as a subtle criticism of his politics.⁶⁵ Eichel had concluded on a plea for action "for each one of us" and stressed that "our efforts are needed". By contrast, the lyrics put faith in God alone, "for there is no one else who could fight for us". Whereas the mayor called for direct action, the hymn made a plea for acquiescence. This difference was even more pronounced in the second stanza, which was not sung on this occasion but was probably familiar to regular churchgoers. Stanza two explicated the traditional Lutheran doctrine of 'Two Kingdoms', calling on God to give "peace and good government" to "all authority so we may lead a still and quiet life"—a far cry from the Brechtian injunction "to smash the hands of those who prepare for war".

Whereas in Kassel, commemorative activities on the 40th anniversary revolved around the issue of 'peace', in Magdeburg, 'peace' and 'guilt' entered into a much closer relationship. For the political elites of the *SED*, the renaissance of the memory place went with a revival of the political rhetoric of the 1950s. The theorem of "Imperialism" allowed for a narrative that equated the German war of aggression with the (Western) allied efforts to end this war. "German monopolists" had been responsible for World War II just as Anglo-American "Imperialists" had been responsible for the destruction of Magdeburg, as the journalist, Günter Honig, wrote in his leaders comment in the *Volksstimme* of 16th January 1980.⁶⁶ The construct also provided for a trans-historical dimension, linking the past to the present, "Then and now, imperialist policy always stays the same", the author declared. In his commemorative address of the same day, Magdeburg's mayor, Werner Herzig (*SED*), took this line of interpretation even further, extending the responsibility of Imperialism to the city's first destruction in the Thirty Years War. Magdeburg, he maintained, had twice been victimised by "the ruthless rulers of the oppressor societies", in 1945 no less than in 1631.⁶⁷ Within this crude materialist frame, Herzig interpreted the air raid of 16th January 1945 as the final attempt on the part of Imperialism to stop the coming of "a new historic age" of peace and socialism. Although this plan had been thwarted by the "glorious [...] war of liberation" of the Red Army, "Imperialist armament and expansion plans" were again threatening peace and mankind—an "unholy alliance" of "USA, FRG, and NATO", "today as always", as the mayor stressed ominously.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ EKG 139.

⁶⁶ Günter Honig, "Gedanken zu diesem Tage", *Volksstimme* 34/13 (16-1-80), p. 1.

⁶⁷ StAM Rep. 41/531, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 5f.; 7.

Interestingly, Herzig invoked Bertolt Brecht as well, citing from his Open Letter of September 1951 the passage about "Great Carthage" that had waged three wars and become uninhabitable after the third—a problematic analogy that not only drew an implicit parallel between the German conduct in World War II and the military feats of Hannibal in the Second Punic War but also cast Germany in the role of victim by (Roman) Imperialist aggression.⁶⁹

Five years later little, if anything, had changed in the political narrative of the *SED*, as the main commemorative address at the mass rally "For Peace and Détente—Against NATO arms build-up" illustrates. Before an audience of 80,000 people, the First Secretary of the Magdeburg *SED*, Heinz Hanke, declared, "Never will we forget who was responsible for this cruel deed of destruction and barbarism: It was Imperialism, the bane of humanity".⁷⁰ The evocation of the past served to cultivate a politics of hatred in the present. While Hanke spoke of "anger" when recalling the 50 million casualties of World War II, another speaker, a 21-year-old chemist, provided a present-centred channel for these emotions, "I hate those Imperialist forces in the world, those reactionary circles in the USA and in the NATO states who are again preparing the destruction of entire cities and countries, indeed of our planet."⁷¹ Whereas the speakers evoked feelings of hatred towards the trans-historical villain of 'reactionary Imperialism', they drew on the dead in order to oblige the living to strengthen state Socialism in order to secure peace. "The stronger Socialism, the more secure is peace", was the formula that connected past and present, the dead of World War II with self-obligations "to attain high production figures".⁷²

Yet, embedded in this secular narrative of Imperialist atrocity and Socialist fight for peace was the speech of a representative from the Protestant church who approached the issues from a very different angle. On some level, the very presence of superintendent Dietrich Schierbaum at the official commemoration of the 40th anniversary was indicative of shifts in state-church relations in the 1980s, reflecting a mutual will for (temporary) coexistence.⁷³ Politically, the willingness of the Church to cooperate no doubt played into the hands of the *SED*, who sought to broaden the appeal of the official peace movement. Successful cooptation, however, came at the price of allowing an alternative interpretation of the events of 16th January 1945 to be voiced outside the confines of the church.

⁶⁹ "Offener Brief an die deutschen Künstler und Schriftsteller", Brecht, *Werke* 23, p. 155f.

⁷⁰ *Volksstimme* 39/14 (17-1-85), p. 1; *Neues Deutschland* (17-1-85), p. 1f.

⁷¹ Ibid. On the politics of hatred in the GDR see Richard Bessel, "Hatred after War. Emotion and the Postwar History of East Germany", *History and Memory* 17/1-2 (2005), pp. 195-216.

⁷² *Volksstimme* 39/14 (17-1-85), p. 2.

⁷³ On state-church relations in the late GDR see Gerhard Besier, *Der SED-Staat und die Kirche 1969-1990* (Frankfurt a.M.: Propyläen, 1995).

In his speech, Schierbaum did not speak of atrocity but put the term "affliction" at the centre of his reflections on the meaning of mass death in aerial warfare.⁷⁴ 'Affliction', Schierbaum explained, was a Biblical term that reminded Christians of their guilt. Remarkably, the superintendent did not refer to the Christian understanding of guilt in its trans-historical and transcendental meaning but spoke of the historic guilt of "Germans" who had destroyed many cities in the "Soviet Union and in England [...] long before a single bomb fell on Magdeburg".⁷⁵ Responsibility for World War II rested with "Germans" not with abstract concepts, making the destruction of Magdeburg the logical consequence of aggression, for "people reap what they sow", as Schierbaum maintained with reference to the Old Testament metaphor of Hosea, 8:7. Echoing a central passage from the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt of 19th October 1945, he located the historic cause for the city's destruction in 1933, and more specifically, in the failure "not to have confessed more courageously, prayed more faithfully [...] and believed more strongly".⁷⁶

Schierbaum not only differed from his fellow speakers by situating the air war in the context of the Third Reich, he also refrained from blaming 'Imperialism' for the dangers facing the world in the 1980s. Instead, he spoke of "mutual respect" and counselled that "on the issue of peace, everybody needs to start sweeping at his own door".⁷⁷ With his emphasis on German guilt rather than Imperialist atrocity and his plea for mutual respect instead of hatred, the superintendent expressed a solitary opinion within the framework of the secular commemoration. The self-critical potential of the address was safely contained by three speakers who all toed the party line. Nonetheless, his contribution was significant in illustrating the gradual erosion of the discursive power of the *SED* in the 1980s.⁷⁸ It pointed to the Church as the most important locus of an alternative interpretation of the meaning of urban destruction, as an analysis of the church-based commemoration will illustrate.

"Judgements That We Bring Onto Ourselves": Mass Death as Retribution

⁷⁴ StAM Rep. 41/481. *Veranstaltungen und Aktivitäten anlässlich des 40. Jahrestages der Zerstörung Magdeburgs. "Rede des Superintendenten".*

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ The text is reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung. Deutsche Geschichte 1945-1955* (Bonn: bpb, 5th ed., 1991), p. 378. For the context see Clemens Vollnhals, *Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung 1945-1949: Die Last der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1989).

⁷⁷ StAM Rep. 41/481. *Veranstaltungen und Aktivitäten anlässlich des 40. Jahrestages der Zerstörung Magdeburgs. "Rede des Superintendenten".*

⁷⁸ Martin Sabrow, "Einleitung: Geschichtsdiskurs und Doktringesellschaft", in: Martin Sabrow ed., *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs. Der Umgang mit der Vergangenheit in der DDR* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2000), pp. 9-35.

In the evening of 16th January 1985, the Protestant church celebrated its traditional Prayer for Peace in the form of an ecumenical church service in the Magdeburg cathedral. The service was grounded in a confession of historic guilt from which a special responsibility was derived to stand up for peace in the present. At the centre of the narrative stood the idea of reconciliation, which was expounded verbally as well as enacted symbolically.⁷⁹ The central symbol of the commemorative service was a "peace candle" bearing the Latin inscription: "Dona nobis Pacem" [Give Us Peace]. Lit ceremoniously during the service, the candle was sent on a "pilgrimage of commemoration, reconciliation, and prayer for peace" through those cities in the GDR that had suffered similar experiences in aerial warfare to Magdeburg. While the candle established a national context for the remembrance of World War II bombing, the liturgy consciously provided for an international dimension. Through the active participation of representatives from Rotterdam, Moscow, Poland, and Frankfurt, local destruction was put in the context of wider historic developments and lamentation tampered by the exploration of guilt.

As in Kassel in 1983, the service started with a demarcation rite that drew on the Lamentation of Jeremiah. In Magdeburg, however, the nexus of loss and guilt was not universalised but applied to the historical context of January 1945. In her introduction, Cathedral preacher Waltraud Zachhuber described the "suffering [and] misery" of Magdeburg as the end point of a "long history of failure, forgetfulness, and guilt", which she specified in three respects.⁸⁰ Firstly, she singled out the Jews of Magdeburg who had experienced "expulsion, flight, and destruction" long before the town had been destroyed in 1945. Second, she reminded the congregation of the "German armies" and "soldiers from Magdeburg" who had spread "suffering, pain, and death" throughout Europe. Finally, the preacher pointed to the destruction of Germany's cityscapes and the division of the nation. Speaking for the congregation at large, Zachhuber acknowledged "our complicity" in the crimes against Jewry and other nations and ascribed a redemptive power to the act of remembrance.⁸¹

The introduction was followed by a prayer that developed further the theme of redemption through memory, imploring God "to let us learn from your judgments that we bring onto ourselves". The prayer also introduced the second theme of the sacral narrative, 'peace'—defined not as the fulfilment of one's duties towards the Socialist state but as the

⁷⁹ In emphasising the connection between guilt, responsibility and peace, the Church in Magdeburg drew on the "Word on Peace" which the Protestant Churches of the GDR and the Federal Republic had published jointly on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II in 1979. See "Wort zum Frieden", in: *Kirche als Lerngemeinschaft. Dokumente aus der Arbeit des Bundes der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR* (Berlin: Ev. Verlagsgemeinschaft, 1981), pp. 260-2.

⁸⁰ For the text see the memory book, *Eine Kerze unterwegs im Zeichen von Frieden und Versöhnung*, in: *Archiv der Evangelischen Domgemeinde Magdeburg*.

⁸¹ Ibid.

liberation of the individual from fear, mistrust, and deceitfulness through the grace of God. The transcendental dimension in this understanding of 'peace' was underlined by the hymn, "Thou Art the Duke of Peace", which was sung by the whole congregation after the prayer. The lyrics celebrated Jesus Christ both as the source of consolation and of intercession with God, suggesting that despite "all our sins and guilt", there was hope for redemption.⁸² On the level of liturgy, the promise of forgiveness was reinforced by the presence of representatives from nations victimised by Germany, who indicated their willingness to meet the admission of guilt in a spirit of conciliation through their active participation in the church service.

The greetings [*Grußworte*] were followed by the core of the sacral narrative, the sermon, in which superintendent Schierbaum spoke on Ephesians 2:14. The opening passage, "[Christ] is our peace", had become something of a catchword in the Church interventions in the political debate on rearmament in the 1980s, featuring as early as in the Word on Peace of September 1979, which had been issued jointly by the Protestant Churches of the GDR and the Federal Republic.⁸³ Within the context of secular society in the GDR, the Christological dictum rejected the simple equation of peace and socialism, emphasising the distinctive contribution of the Christian faith to the problem of peace instead.⁸⁴ At the same time, the epistle addressed the relationship between guilt and redemption, professing confidence in the Divine promise of salvation through faith alone.⁸⁵ "There is no guilt too great that cannot be forgiven by Him on the Cross", as Schierbaum reassured his congregation in the sermon.⁸⁶

In his address, the superintendent acknowledged the Holocaust as the pivotal crime of World War II, and constructed a hierarchy of suffering in which the air raid on Magdeburg occupied a subordinate place. The "inferno" of Magdeburg's destruction had been without precedent in local history, but it was an "affliction" that had been brought upon the city by her residents. Repeating a core passage from his earlier address at the secular ceremony, Schierbaum found the historic cause for the night of 16th January 1945 in January 1933, and more generally, in a turn-away from Jesus Christ. The fate of Magdeburg in World War II called for "compassion", but even more for "shame" since the "madness of mutual annihilation had originated from us". For Schierbaum, Auschwitz eclipsed Magdeburg, "guilt" outweighed "lamentation", as he made clear by putting the memory place of 16th January in relation to the *lieu de mémoire* of 9th November. Yet—he maintained—even the

⁸² EKG 391.

⁸³ "Wort zum Frieden", reprinted in: *Kirche als Lerngemeinschaft*, pp. 260f., here: p. 261.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Compare Franz Mußner, Art., "Epheserbrief", in: *TRE*, pp. 743-752.

⁸⁶ "Ansprache im Gedenkgottesdienst in Magdeburg"; in: *Eine Kerze unterwegs im Zeichen von Frieden und Versöhnung, Archiv der Domgemeinde Magdeburg*.

guilt of genocide could be forgiven, as he saw illustrated in the gesture of conciliation that the Jewish rabbi, Abraham Glanz, had shown towards the superintendent on 9th November 1978, when both prayed together at the Jewish cemetery. "Such can be wrought by the peace of God that is above all reason", Schierbaum concluded.⁸⁷

Although the reflections on the place of the Holocaust were embedded in a problematic narrative of lamentation, recognition and forgiveness, the Protestant Church in Magdeburg preceded the Church in Kassel by several years in making the genocide of European Jewry the pivotal event of the commemoration of aerial warfare. While Schierbaum, in 1985, constructed a hierarchy of suffering, his counterpart in Kassel, the dean Hans Feller, equated mass death in the extermination camps with mass death under the bombs. In an address on 23rd October 1983, he employed a paratactic construction to speak of the "innocent suffering of Kassel and Auschwitz".⁸⁸ Within the context of the annual remembrance service in Kassel, the nexus between extermination and destruction was not explored in any detail until the fiftieth anniversary of the anti-Semitic pogrom, in 1988, had put the persecution of German Jewry at the centre of the local memorial culture,⁸⁹ and equally important, until the collapse of Communism had laid to rest fears over a nuclear war.⁹⁰ The first time that the memorial service was used to address the fate of Kassel Jewry was in October 1991, in a sermon by pastor Udo Luest.

"Why memory?", was the opening question of an address that took Matthew 5:9 as a starting point for a reflection on the meaning of 22nd October 1943, its connection with 9th November 1938, and the lessons for the present. In his sermon, Luest employed the visual as a memory trigger, showing slides of pre-war Kassel in order to take the congregation (and himself) back to the days of their youth,

"Some of us will recognise [the historic Old Town]. Memories of youth and adolescence come awake—dreams of quiet peacefulness".⁹¹

Yet, the visual revelling in the beauty of Old Kassel was brought to an abrupt end when the pastor proceeded to show images of the burning city and the landscape of ruins—images "that we have elided from our memory", as he insisted. He went on to describe the

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ The text of the sermon is reprinted in, "Hans Feller, "Gedenket aber der früheren Tage..." Stadtgeschichte und Gedenken am Beispiel der Martinskirche zu Kassel", in: Hans Werner Dannowski ed., *Erinnern und Gedenken* (Hamburg: Steinmann und Steinmann, 1991), pp. 45-61, here: p. 56. The sermon was held on Sunday, 23rd October 1983, not, as erroneously stated in the text, on the night of 22nd October 1983 itself. See letter of Hans Feller to author, Feb. 2006.

⁸⁹ See the press clippings in StAK S5 R5. *Judenpogrom "Kristallnacht" 7.-9. Nov. 1938*. For a critical analysis of the blind spots of 'Kristallnacht'-memory in the 1980s see Elizabeth Domansky, " 'Kristallnacht', the Holocaust and German Unity. The Meaning of November 9 as an Anniversary in Germany", *History & Memory* 4/1 (1992), pp. 60-94.

⁹⁰ See the special issue, "Christen und Juden", *blick in die kirche* 11/88; *kassel kulturell* No. 8 (11/88); StAK Best. A.1.10. [OB Eichel]. No. 964. II. 1988. 87; 89; 90.

⁹¹ Udo Luest, "Gottesdienst 22.10.1991". I would like to thank the pastor in retirement for making available a copy of the sermon to me.

bombing night as a somatic experience that had the power to bring back memories of sounds, smells, fears and hopes almost fifty years after the event. "Who [amongst us] does not have the images in front of his eyes, the smell of smoke in his nose, of the swath of fire and the firestorm."⁹²

Born in 1928, Luest spoke as much in his capacity as an eyewitness as in his pastoral role, engaging in an intra-generational dialogue with his audience, many of whom will have held personal memories of the war like himself. It was also this personal approach in which he chose to establish a connection between the symbolic dates of 22nd October 1943 and of 7th November 1938, the day of the pogrom in Kassel.⁹³ "Does both belong together—the *Martinskirche* and the synagogue—does this commemoration belong in this evening hour?", he asked. As the rhetorical question made clear, to speak of the fate of the Kassel Jewry when speaking of the air raid of 22nd October 1943 was still far from self-evident in the early 1990s. Whatever his audience might have thought, the pastor clearly believed that both dates did belong together. Recalling personal memories of the sudden disappearance of his Jewish classmate in the autumn of 1941, he stated reproachfully, "nobody explained it to us", intimating that his generation had been made complicit in a crime for which they were too young to bear personal responsibility but which was to haunt them for the rest of their lives, "Perhaps we still ask tonight, where were we in November 1941 when the largest group of Jews was deported?"

To Luest, confronting the past was not only necessary as a moral obligation towards the victims but also, and perhaps more so, as a deterrence to the present. Echoing a dictum by Alexander Mitscherlich, he maintained that "whoever represses his past is compelled to repeat it".⁹⁴ On this interpretation, violent assaults on asylum seekers in recently reunified Germany were a direct consequence of the 'unmastered past' of the Third Reich,

"Aren't there reasons enough to look back? Day after day we experience how minorities are marginalised in the recently enlarged Germany, with brutal violence according to the motto, one human life, one foreigner does not count for much".

Consequently, the pastor wished the Bible verse of Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the Peacemakers", to be understood as an injunction on the individual to stand up for a civil society, "to speak out for peace, to raise our voice for the persecuted and the threatened, as well as for the foreigners. We must be watchful and be on our guard against hatred [...]."⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ On the anti-Semitic looting and burning of November 1938 in Kassel see Wolf-Arno Kropat, "Reichskristallnacht". *Der Judenpogrom vom 7. bis 10. November 1938 – Urheber, Täter, Hintergründe* (Wiesbaden: Kommission für die Geschichte der Juden in Hessen, 1997), pp. 56-78.

⁹⁴ The idea of the compulsion to act out the repressed goes back to Sigmund Freud, "Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten", in: *Studienausgabe. Ergänzungsband*, pp. 206-215, here: p. 210.

⁹⁵ Lüst, "Gottesdienst 22.10.1991".

By the time of the fiftieth anniversary in 1993, the understanding that the destruction of Kassel was not a single event but a gradual process that had started with the persecution of the Jews in 1933—still controversial in 1991—had become a standard element of the public memory culture. In his commemorative address of 22nd October 1993, for example, the new mayor, Georg Lewandowski (CDU), referred matter-of-factly to 1933 as the year in which the destruction of the urban community had set in.⁹⁶

"Mine Eyes Do Fail With Tears": Dealing with Pain

As important as questions of collective identity—the we-group as a victim of war vs. the we-group as an integral part of a perpetrator society—were for the memory culture in the 1980s and 1990s, this was not the whole story. Anniversary commemorations also provided a space in which protagonists of public memory reflected on the long-term impact of the experience of extreme violence on individual biographies, not least of all their own. Likewise, commemorative ceremonies were not just a locus for rational deliberation on the causes, consequences and lessons of mass death in aerial warfare. They were also a space for public mourning, in which contemporaries and their descendants came face to face with grief and loss. Throughout the period, the Church saw itself as much as consoler as an educator, in particular vis-à-vis those members of the congregation who held primary memory traces of the traumatic events, a group that probably formed the majority of attendants at the annual remembrance services up until the mid-1990s. By drawing on the Bible, hymns, and selected secular literature, the Church provided a language of public mourning to the congregation. Kassel pastor Klaus Röhrling, for example, made an excerpt from the Lamentations of Jeremiah 2.11 into a *leitmotif* of his remembrance service of 1990, "Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled".⁹⁷ Dean Hans Feller, in 1983, recalled the lyrics of the hymn no. 349, "The radiant morning of eternity", which one of his predecessors had intoned on the morning of 23rd October 1943.⁹⁸

For the negotiation of loss in the 1980s and 1990s, the central issue was the rupture between past and present, as the following example from Kassel illustrates. In his Sunday service of 23rd October 1983, dean Hans Feller remarked,

⁹⁶ "Versöhnter Umgang schenkt Zukunft", *Bonifatiusbote* 44 (31-10-93), p. 17. See also Esther Hass, "Die Zerstörung begann 1933", *HNA* 247 (22-10-93).

⁹⁷ "Gottesdienst zum Gedächtnis der Zerstörung Kassels am 22. Oktober 1943". I would like to thank *Oberlandeskirchenrat* i.R. Klaus Röhrling for making a copy available to me.

⁹⁸ The text is reproduced in Hans Feller, "'Gedenket aber der früheren Tage... ' Stadtgeschichte und Gedenken am Beispiel der Martinskirche zu Kassel", in: Dannowski, *Erinnern und Gedenken*, pp. 45-61, here: pp. 54-58. I would like to thank *Dekan* i.R. Hans Feller for drawing this text to my attention.

"Whoever looks at the old photographs [...] will observe [...] [that the] paper fades but the faces don't grow older. When I see the faces of my killed brothers-in-law, of the perished friends and class mates, a feeling of alienation comes over me.—Their sons have grown older than the fathers ever were!"

Feller's feeling of "alienation" had its natural basis in the growing temporal distance between the iconic event and the present but was reinforced by the modernising reconstruction and the social and mental shifts or "*Wandlungsprozesse*" of German society since the end of the war. "Alien the faces, alien the style of the letters and thoughts—as if from a different world which is so far away!", the dean exclaimed.⁹⁹

Yet, as Feller knew, traumatic experiences of the kind encountered in aerial bombing tended to return as *mémoires involontaire*, as unwanted memories that "broke forth" unexpectedly, as one crossed a street, heard a sound, or smelled a scent. Feller described this phenomenon, which is well known from clinical psychiatry, in the following terms,

"All of a sudden, an image, a memory, a smell: and the pain is back, the memory and the thoughts! You walk across the new Kurt-Schumacher-Avenue and suddenly you remember: The cars pass over the collapsed cellars of the Old Town. How many corpses might still be laying there? Suffocated, buried, forgotten?"

The answer that the Church gave to this problem in the 1980s and 1990s was "to risk looking back", to consciously confront one's personal memories. As the dean readily conceded, this was a painful process that opened up old wounds and involved "pain and doubt [*Anfechtung*]". Facing the past, however, was necessary to avoid the danger of emotional and mental "sclerosis", both on an individual and on a social level.¹⁰⁰ The underlying premise was the notion that returning to the past would help mastering the present—a central assumption of psychoanalysis of course, which was typically—and, within the context of post-fascist German society, problematically—expressed through the cabalist dictum, "The secret of salvation is memory".¹⁰¹

"Or Does The Memory [...] Remain Unaffected by the Changes of Our Day?"¹⁰²

Commemoration in the 1990s

⁹⁹ Ulrich Herbert ed., *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland. Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung 1945-1980* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003).

¹⁰⁰ Feller, "'Gedenket aber der früheren Tage...' Stadtgeschichte und Gedenken am Beispiel der Martinskirche zu Kassel", in: Dannowski, *Erinnern und Gedenken*, pp. 45-61, here: pp. 55; 56; 57.

¹⁰¹ On the problematic and reductionist usage of the dictum in 1980s West-German Holocaust memory see Micha Brumlik, "Gedenken in Deutschland", Platt and Dabag eds., *Generation und Gedächtnis*, pp. 115-130.

¹⁰² "Friedensgebet 16.1.1992 Barlachhrenmal", in: Archiv der Ev. Domgemeinde Magdeburg.

What happens to local memory cultures when the political and social environment changes as dramatically as was the case in Magdeburg, and to a lesser extent, Kassel, between 1989 and 1995? Did the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the *SED* dictatorship and the accession of the former GDR to the Federal Republic lead to radical rupture in the commemoration of the air war as well? Or did, on the contrary, supra-local change leave local commemorative traditions unaffected, be this because of a conscious effort to retain markers of continuity amidst sweeping change or because longer-term generational and cultural factors proved more important than short-term socio-political rifts? This section explores these issues with a special emphasis on Magdeburg, approaching the subject by looking at elements of change and continuity in the topography of memory between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. It argues that the trajectory of commemoration in the post-GDR environment may be described as a process of selective appropriation of pre-1989 traditions. Politicians, clerics and artists drew on some elements while discarding others, seizing on the memory place in order to reformulate a civic identity amidst the turmoil of the "unification crisis".¹⁰³

On the most general level, continuity prevailed in Kassel as well as Magdeburg. In both localities, the subject of allied bombing retained a prominent place in the memory culture, forming an important element in the commemorative cycle of 1983 to 1995. The 50th anniversaries in 1993 and 1995 were commemorated with an extraordinary investment of time and effort, spawning special "committees" that coordinated the activities of the administration, the Church, artists, and ordinary citizens.¹⁰⁴ Given the prominent role that the *SED* had played in the shaping of the *lieu de mémoire* since the 1950s, this finding might be surprising with regard to Magdeburg. Yet, unlike most other dates, 16th January did not disappear from the commemorative calendar with the demise of Socialism.¹⁰⁵ Quite the opposite was the case: against the backdrop of dramatic socio-political change, the memory place steadily gained in importance in the early 1990s—a process that climaxed in the three-day commemorative marathon of January 1995 that surpassed even the state-sponsored mass rallies of the 1980s.¹⁰⁶ In a temporal perspective, two phases may be distinguished: firstly, the unification years of 1989 to 1990, in which the air war was rediscovered as a common experience of Germans on both sides of the crumbling Wall;

¹⁰³ Jürgen Kocka, *Vereinigungskrise. Zur Geschichte der Gegenwart* (Göttingen: V & R, 1995).

¹⁰⁴ For Kassel see: StAK A.4.415 No. 357/1: 50. Jahrestage; for Magdeburg: StAM Rep 18/4 StR 56. Entry of 6-9-94.

¹⁰⁵ The protest marches in memory of Rosa Luxemburg & Karl Liebknecht have a similar post-1989 history. See Martin Sabrow, "Kollektive Erinnerung und kollektiviertes Gedächtnis. Die Liebknecht-Luxemburg-Demonstration in der Gedenkkultur der DDR", in: Alexandre Escudier ed., *Gedenken im Zwiespalt. Konfliktlinien europäischen Erinnerns* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2001), pp. 117-138.

¹⁰⁶ "Dreitägiges Gedenken zur Mahnung an die Bombennacht", *Volksstimme* (5-1-95), p. 11.

Landeshauptstadt Magdeburg ed., *Magdeburg 16. Jan. 1945 – 16. Jan. 1995. Programm* (Magdeburg, 1995).

secondly, the years of 1991 to 1995, in which the 'woman of the rubble' was drawn upon as an historic example to a crisis-ridden present.

"Two Cities—One Fate": The Air War As National Founding Myth¹⁰⁷

"For the first time, the remembrance of the victims of 16th January 1945 has united *Magdeburgers* and citizens from the twin city of Braunschweig", wrote the *Volksstimme* on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the bombing in 1990.¹⁰⁸ The previous day, an official delegation from Braunschweig had participated in the commemoration on Old Market Square, where the deputy mayor of the West-German twin-city, Brigitte baroness Große, addressed the small crowd of several hundred *Magdeburgers*. She reminded her audience that "once before, [...] on 16th January 1945, citizens from Braunschweig came to the rescue of the burning Magdeburg". Speaking of the air war as a "common fate", the baroness employed the first person plural in order to invoke a national identity grounded in a past of shared catastrophe.¹⁰⁹ In 1945, *Braunschweigers* had helped *Magdeburgers* in coping with urban destruction just as Western Germans were coming to the rescue of their impoverished Eastern relatives today, her analogy suggested. In contrast to the optimism of the Braunschweig mayor, the local superintendent, Almuth Noetzel, struck a cautionary tone. Exhibiting an acute awareness of the patronising undercurrent in the Western politician's speech, she warned in her address with a view to the future just as much as to the past,

"Let us listen carefully to the words of those who now intend to assume responsibility for our country. Let us not be awed by well-sounding phrases".¹¹⁰

Contrary to appearances, however, the joint ceremony was not a direct result of the revolutionary upheaval of the autumn of 1989 but reached back to the politics of memory of the SED. Since the 1950s, the political elites in Eastern Germany had tried to use the common experience of the air war as a lever to engage West German cities in political agitation about the westernising course of the Federal Republic—an endeavour that finally came to fruition under the different political conditions of the late 1980s. On 1st September 1988, the 49th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, the Magdeburg mayor welcomed an official delegation from Braunschweig at a so-called "peace forum". Four and a half months later, the political representatives from the two cities met again to

¹⁰⁷ A. Heidelmayer, "Zwei Städte – ein Schicksal", *Volksstimme* 44/13 (16-1-90), p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ "Gemeinsames Gedenken in Magdeburg", *Volksstimme* 44/14 (17-1-90), p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. See also *Der Neue Weg* (16-1-1990), p. 6.

¹¹⁰ Almuth Noetzel, "Nie wieder soll der Himmel über Magdeburg brennen!" Ansprache auf dem Alten Markt am 16.1.1990". I would like to thank pastor Almuth Noetzel for making available a copy of this speech to me.

commemorate death in war on the occasion of the 44th anniversary of the big Magdeburg raid.¹¹¹ The re-discovery of the air war as an experience that was not unique to the cities of the GDR but provided a common backdrop to German city dwellers east and west of the border was thus a phenomenon that preceded unification by several years. The selective continuation of the practice in post-dictatorial Magdeburg and its usage for post-unification nation building may be considered characteristic of the memory culture of the air war as a whole.¹¹²

"The Same Confidence and Commitment": The Woman of the Rubble as Example

This process of appropriation and redefinition is best described with reference to the fate of the Socialist-era monuments in post-unification Magdeburg. Within the topography of memory in Socialist Magdeburg, two monuments were dedicated specifically to the air war.¹¹³ Erected in 1968 and 1983, they functioned as visual signifiers of central narrative strands in the cityscape. The first was a memorial that marked the central gravesite on the West cemetery where some 2,400 casualties of the air war lay buried.¹¹⁴ Bearing little resemblance to the projected idea of 1959, the design took the shape of a simple memorial slab that obliged the living to 'remember' 16th January and to "fight for peace", as the inscription put it.¹¹⁵

The second monument was designed by Heinrich Apel and consisted of two sculptures and a bronze door with a relief (fig. 9). The ensemble was erected at the entrance to the ruin of the *Johanniskirche* in the historic town centre, where a permanent exhibition on Magdeburg's destruction was housed since 1979.¹¹⁶ The monument was dedicated on 9th May 1983 in order to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the start of the reconstruction in the old town, emphasising the theme of triumph over criminal adversity. While one sculpture showed a mother sheltering her child from the falling bombs, the other depicted a rubble woman clearing debris. In order to provide the historical context, the relief depicted apocalyptic scenes from the firestorm. Furthermore, the bronze door established a link to

¹¹¹ StAM Rep. 41/703, vol. 1: "Rede des OB anlässlich der Gedenkveranstaltung zum 44. Jahrestag der Zerstörung Magdeburgs im 2. Weltkrieg am 16.1.89".

¹¹² Compare Klaus Naumann, "Leerstelle Luftkrieg. Einwurf zu einer verqueren Debatte", in: *Mittelweg* 36 2/98, pp. 12-15, here: p. 12.

¹¹³ For a survey of the topography of memory see Heinz Gerling, *Denkmale der Stadt Magdeburg* (Magdeburg: Helmuth Block, 1991); Ingelore Buchholz / Maren Ballerstedt, *Man setzte ihnen ein Denkmal* (Magdeburg, 1997).

¹¹⁴ Grünflächenamt ed., *100 Jahre Westfriedhof Magdeburg* (Magdeburg, no year).

¹¹⁵ On the projected design see Rep. 41/2466. "Mahnmal der Opfer des 16. Januar 1945 in Magdeburg". For the memorial as realised in 1968: "Zum mahnenden Gedenken", *Volksstimme* (16-1-68), p. 8; Gerling, *Denkmale*, p. 17.

¹¹⁶ KHM Ordner Johanniskirche, "Konzeption zur Neugestaltung der 'Mahn- und Erinnerungsstätte für die Zerstörung Magdeburgs' in der ehemaligen Johanniskirche", p. 2. I would like to thank Ms. Karin Grünwald for making this material available to me.

the present by pointing an accusatory finger at those "who have not learned from history".¹¹⁷ In his unveiling speech, mayor Herzig (SED) praised the work for striking a balance between accusation and optimism, between the atrocity of the "Anglo-American terror bombers" and the achievements of the "activists of the first hour".¹¹⁸

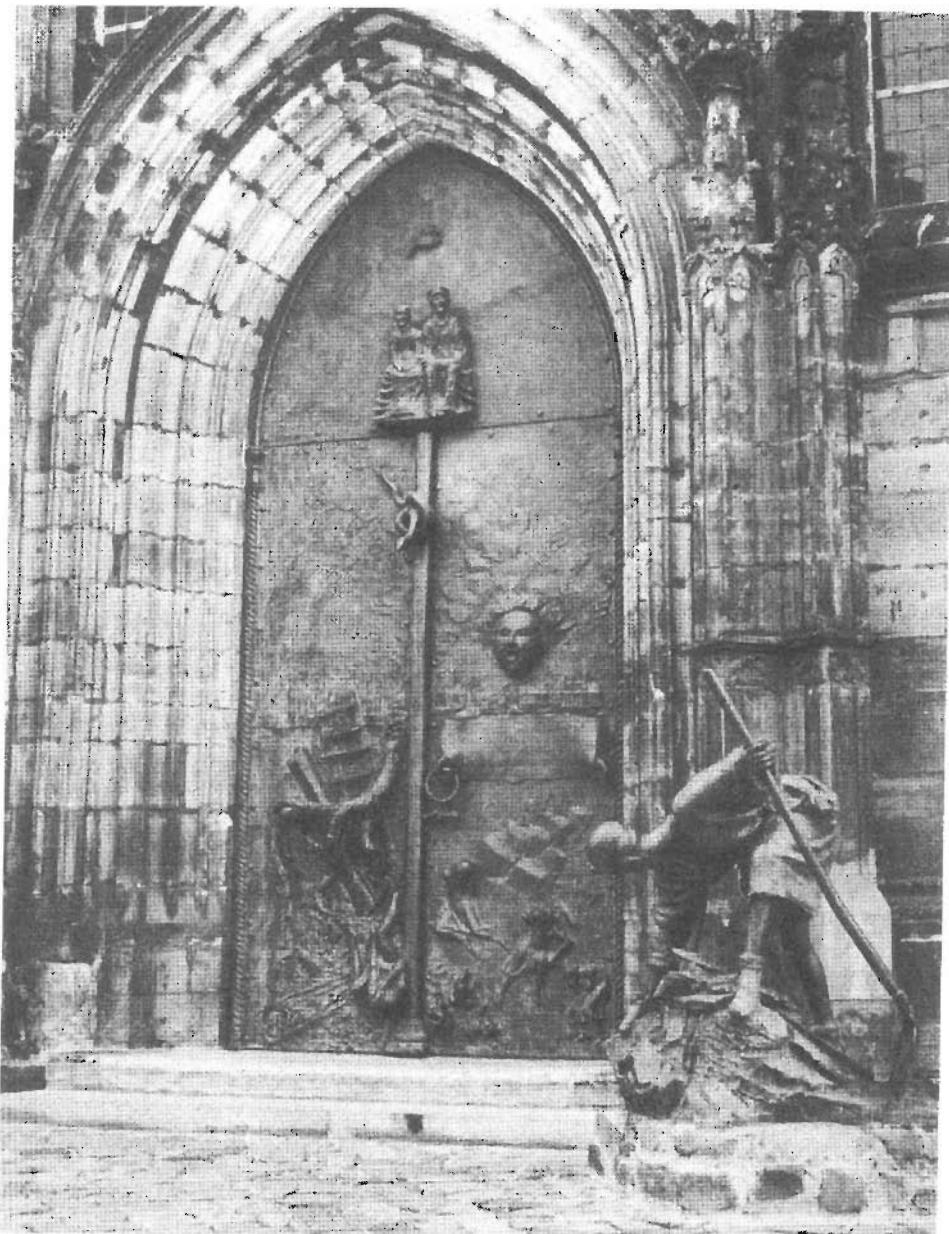


FIGURE 9. Sculptural ensemble by Heinrich Apel, *Johanniskirche* Magdeburg (photo: H. Gerling, *Denkmale der Stadt Magdeburg*, p. 7).

In post-dictatorial Magdeburg, the memorial on the West cemetery was replaced while the ensemble in front of the *Johanniskirche* remained. Whereas the formulaic admonition to 'fight for peace' was discarded due to its close association with the propagandistic

¹¹⁷ Gerling, *Denkmale*, p. 7 shows the relief and the rubble woman but leaves out the mother sheltering her child.

¹¹⁸ StAM Rep 41/534, p. 6f.

vocabulary of the *SED*, the semantic potential of the sculptures proved flexible enough to be adapted to the conditions of the post-1989 world.

In the run-up to the 50th anniversary commemorations, the town council initiated a competition for a re-planning of the gravesite on the West cemetery, from which a design by sculptor Wieland Schmiedel emerged victorious. In contrast to the straightforward inscription on the old memorial, the new design refrained from codifying a central message, inviting "meditation" instead of "admonition", as a press report put it (fig. 10).¹¹⁹



FIGURE 10. Part of the new memorial on the *Westfriedhof* Magdeburg, unveiled on 16-1-1995 (photo: author, 2004).

Using stone and steel, geometrical forms and open space, the arrangement was based on the ground plan of a cathedral. The prospective visitor entered through the nave and proceeded to the apse, where the site of mass burial was located. On the way, he or she came across a marble plate that bore the inscription, "16th January 1945". Reaching the aisle, the visitor encountered an open space in which a dislocated cube was framed by steel girders that afforded no protection against the sky. Finally, in place of the altar, a marble stele stood next to a steel girder from which a rusted steel ball was hanging, evoking

¹¹⁹ Renate Wähnelt, "Mahnmal aus Marmor und Metall erinnert an die Toten", *Volksstimme* 11-1-95, p. 14.

associations of both church bell and wrecking ball.¹²⁰ In a press conference, Schmiedel stressed that he had attempted to create a memorial that left room for individual thoughts and feelings, conveying not just pessimism but also a promise of hope. "One can rebuild, one can hear the bell; the space can be closed, and the cube be put right", he explained.¹²¹

While the political injunction "to fight for peace" had thus disappeared from the memory landscape of Magdeburg, the accusatory tone and the celebration of perseverance remained. Shorn of their Socialist connotations, both narrative strands played an integral part in the memorial culture of post-dictatorial Magdeburg. Not only was there continuity on the level of narrative, the protagonists of post-1989 public memory also drew on the same symbolic repertoire as their predecessors, as the following examples will illustrate.

In January 1991, the Magdeburg city council made a symbolic effort to prevent the outbreak of hostilities in the looming Gulf War by sending off last-minute telegrams to the heads of state of Germany, Iraq, and the United States. This helpless gesture of impotence, although indicative of strong currents of anti-war sentiment in Germany, was neither particularly original nor, of course, of any consequence to the course of events in the Persian Gulf. What was remarkable, however, was the circumstance that the council legitimised its intervention in current international affairs by invoking the memory of urban destruction in World War II. "On 16th January 1945, the last war brought great suffering and death over our city", the telegram read.

In two additional dispatches the following day, the signatories expressed their "sadness" [*Betroffenheit*] and "angst" at the outbreak of hostilities through the words of the church inscription by Heinrich Apel,

"We appeal to political reason worldwide. 'We accuse all those who still have not learned from history, and who continue to sow hatred and dissension'—is written on the door of the *Johanniskirche*."¹²²

Here, the protest against the Gulf War was couched in a phrase that had been coined at the height of the second Cold War in the 1980s. In this tradition, the accusatory finger of the "we" was directed against "those" who had not "learned" their lesson from history, in 1945 no less than in 1983 or in 1991, the reference suggested. Implicitly, a community of "pain" and "suffering" was juxtaposed to "hating" and "quarrelsome" forces of aggression, which were identified as "Anglo-American" then and now.

While the use of the inscription points towards strands of continuity in the secular memory culture of Magdeburg across the caesura of 1989/90, another usage illustrates the

¹²⁰ See "Faltblatt zur künstlerischen Neugestaltung der Gedenkstätte für die Opfer des Luftangriffs vom 16. Januar 1945". Text: Norbert Eisold (Magdeburg, 1995).

¹²¹ Renate Wähnelt, "Mahnmal aus Marmor und Metall erinnert an die Toten", *Volksstimme* 11-1-95, p. 14

¹²² StAM Rep. 18/4. StVV 6. Sitzung of 17-1-91.

extent to which public symbols could be re-loaded with different meanings in different contexts. Against the backdrop of an upsurge in xenophobic violence in the early 1990s, a committee of liberally minded politicians, clerics, journalists and citizens chose the memory place in order to launch an appeal for a "chain of light against war, violence, and xenophobia". The initiative brought together a crowd of approximately 50,000 *Magdeburgers* on 16th January 1993.¹²³ As a commentary on the events, the *Volksstimme* again quoted from the inscription, presenting Apel's memento against the trans-historical misdeeds of "Imperialism" as an admonition for the creation of a civil society.¹²⁴

Of equal, if not greater, importance to the post-1989 memory culture was another element from the ensemble in front of the *Johanniskirche*, the sculpture of the "rubble woman", which, during the unveiling ceremony of 1983, had been praised as a monument to perseverance in the face of criminal adversity. It was the potential for positive identification that made the figure attractive to the first post-unification administration under the Social Democratic mayor, Willi Polte, which had to cope with an imploding industrial base and the moving away of some 30,000 residents in the 5 years between 1989 and 1995.¹²⁵

As early as 1991, Polte declared that he "wished [...] for all Magdeburger today [to have] the same confidence and commitment that many citizens showed in the face of death and rubble back then."¹²⁶ In addition to furnishing a historic precedent, the idolisation of the 'rubble woman' also served another purpose: it provided a way for salvaging the lives' work of the 'reconstruction generation' from the discrediting of the political system in which they had spent most of their lives. "What you, dear Magdeburger, have achieved for our city, for your home town, is not forgotten", Polte declared in the town hall during a special "honouring of rubble women" that opened the string of commemorative activities in January 1995.¹²⁷ Quoting from an eyewitness account, he continued, "Only those who have seen what Magdeburg looked like after the night of 16th January 1945 can judge how much reconstruction effort is visible in the face of the city today".¹²⁸ With a view to critics who tried to turn the memory place into a discursive space for reflecting on the cultural and

¹²³ "Heute Lichterkette: Machen Sie mit", *Volksstimme* (16-1-93), p. 1. See also ibid., p. 3; 17-1-93, pp. 1 & 3.

¹²⁴ *Volksstimme* (16-1-93).

¹²⁵ Compare Winfried Bettecken, " 'Dann jagen uns die Bürger gleich wieder aus dem Rathaus' ", in: *Magdeburg. Geschichte der Stadt*, pp. 933-950.

¹²⁶ ##.

¹²⁷ Büro des Oberbürgermeisters, Magdeburg, Willi Polte, "GW zur Ehrung von Trümmerfrauen (16. Januar 1995, 9.30 Uhr, Rathaussaal)". See also Alfred Heidelmayer, "Der große Irrtum einer amerikanischen Zeitung", *Volksstimme* (16-1-92), p. 14, "The woman of the rubble, the workers in the factories, the people at the drawing board, they all have done great things. This should not be forgotten and flogged to death (*zerredet werden*)."

¹²⁸ Büro des Oberbürgermeisters, Magdeburg, Willi Polte, "GW zur Ehrung von Trümmerfrauen (16. Januar 1995, 9.30 Uhr, Rathaussaal)."

human costs of 40 years of *SED* rule, Polte added, "Some seem to have forgotten already".¹²⁹

In important respects, the political elites of the early 1990s pursued a symbolic politics that resembled the course of the late 1940s. Just as the civil administration under Rudolf Eberhard (*SED*) had constructed a *lieu de mémoire* of aerial bombing in order to infuse the citizenry with a sense of confidence in the reconstruction effort, the administration under Willi Polte (*SPD*) drew on the memory place in order to present the "will to survive" of the post-war years as a historic example to the present. Underlying both approaches were notions of victimhood and perseverance that tended to marginalise questions about complicity and agency. On the iconographical level, the historic parallel was symbolised by the re-emergence of the sculpture of "Magdeburg in Mourning", which was returned to the ruins of the *Johanniskirche* in 1989 and quickly became the defining image in the visual narrative of the 1990s.¹³⁰ By inviting feelings of grief and mourning, the sculpture conveyed emotions that had been missing from the official memorial culture of the GDR. At the same time, the sculpture called for empathy with the city as a "victim" of forces beyond its control.

Whereas local journalists and the civil administration selectively appropriated elements of the pre-1989 discourse to the post-dictatorial environment, the Protestant Church drew on the tradition of the annual Prayer for Peace, which continued throughout the early 1990s. On a formal level, the only change was the addition to the liturgy, in 1990, of hymn no. 390, "Wake Up, Wake Up, Thou German Land". This was a 16th century song that urged a national *renovatio* out of the spirit of Protestantism.¹³¹ Thematically, the Church kept its distance from the political elites, commenting critically on the social and cultural changes in the wake of unification, as an example from 1992 illustrates.

"Has [unification] also changed the memory of the casualties of war; the recognition that we as Germans were guilty and that this guilt was paid back through the bombing terror of the Americans and British?", asked Cathedral preacher Giselher Quast in his address of 16th January 1992.¹³² Drawing attention to the introduction of the "National Day of Mourning" in Magdeburg, Quast took exception to the military ceremonial that accompanied the new ritual, in particular the language of honour that was employed by the

¹²⁹ See Peter Dömeland, "Es begann mit der Sprengung der Türme von St. Ulrich", *Volksstimme* 13-1-93, p. 9; "Zum 16. Januar: Bilder einer doppelten Zerstörung in unserer Stadt", *ibid.*, 17-1-93, p. 10.

¹³⁰ Starting in the 1980s, the discussion on the return of the sculpture preceded the collapse of the *SED* dictatorship. See StAM Rep. 41/604. *Kirchenfragen Sicherung der Ruine Johanniskirche und Auswahl eines Standortes für die Plastik "Trauernde Magdeburg"*; Rep. 12U 44. *Nachlass Gerling. Plastik "Trauernde Magdeburg"*. The motif appeared in: Manfred Wille, *Der Himmel brennt über Magdeburg* (Magdeburg: Volksstimme Druckerei, 1990), cover; *Volksstimme* (13-1-93), p. 9; "Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot" (Magdeburg: Calbe, 1995), p. 7; Manfred Rolle, "Stadt in Flammen" *Bild* (Jan. 1995),

¹³¹ EKG 390, "Wach auf, wach auf, du deutsches Land".

¹³² Archiv der Evangelischen Domgemeinde Magdeburg, "Friedensgebet 16.1.1992: Barlachehrenmal".

political elites. "On 16th January we do not honour the dead in Magdeburg because their death was not honourable but painful", he stressed, adding with reference of the dead soldiers of World War II,

"We do not honour them because they did not die on the field of honour but on the field of German guilt—we pity them as agents of an unlawful system against which they could not or would not stand up, and who were torn from their families and our people."

According to Quast, the only Christian way was one of "emphatic pacifism", which was not commensurable with any politics. "[Pacifism] will always be a provocation"—in the GDR no less than in unified Germany, he concluded.

Conclusion

Recent literature on "air wars, memory wars" has suggested that there is something distinctly novel about "the invocation of bombings past to critique bombings present" in early 21st century Germany.¹³³ Andreas Huyssen, for example, has argued that, in its opposition to the Iraq War of 2003, the German peace movement "for the first time [...] bolstered its position by referring directly to the experience of strategic bombings of German cities in World War II".¹³⁴ As this chapter has shown, such a thesis is untenable. On the level of local culture, the renaissance of interest in World War II bombing preceded the contemporary "turn of the tide" in the German memory culture by at least two decades.¹³⁵ In Kassel no less than in Magdeburg, the NATO-twin track decision of December 1979 provided the political catalyst for new investment in a memory place that had been institutionalised in local culture since the early 1950s.¹³⁶ A set of meanings and rituals was still in place when local politicians, clerics, and peace activists infused the *lieu de mémoire* with new political relevance in the 1980s. In Magdeburg, 80,000 residents attended a state-sponsored mass rally on 16th January 1985, which turned the 40th anniversary of the bombing into a "fighting day" against the twin-track decision. Meanwhile, in Kassel, on 22nd October 1983, over 1,800 residents crammed into the city's central church in order to celebrate a commemorative service on the 40th return of a

¹³³ Mary Nolan, "Air Wars, Memory Wars", in: *CEH* 38/1 (2005), pp. 7-40, here: p. 25.

¹³⁴ Andreas Huyssen, "Air War Legacies: From Dresden to Baghdad", *New German Critique* 90 (Fall 2003), pp. 163-176, here: p.164f. See also Nolan, "Air Wars, Memory Wars", p. 24, footnote 63.

¹³⁵ Norbert Frei, "1945 und wir. Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit", in idem, *1945 und wir. Das Dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen* (Munich: Beck, 2005), pp. 7-22, here: p. 21.

¹³⁶ Compare also Malte Thießen's findings for Hamburg: Malte Thießen, "Gedenken an 'Operation Gomorrha'", in: *ZfG* 1/05, pp. 46-61, here: p. 56.

cataclysmic air raid, while in a nearby-church, peace activists staged an all-night prayer and fasting.

While there was remarkable continuity throughout the 1980s and 1990s in the basic format of commemoration despite the ebb and flow of peace movement activity and, in Magdeburg, regime change, there were important shifts in content. The period witnessed the gradual erosion of the hegemonic status of an interpretation of events that had, first and foremost, stressed the victimhood of the local community in World War II aerial bombing. By the mid-1980s, the public enunciation of the meaning of the memory place passed into the hands of a generation that, unburdened by personal responsibility for the catastrophic past, showed a greater sensitivity for the historical context and a greater receptivity to the memory of the Holocaust. For members of the generation of '68', but also of the older 'sceptical generation', mass death in World War II bombing no longer attested solely to the victimhood or martyrdom of the memory group but also to their complicity in the crimes of Nazism.

DESTRUCTION

"What We Have Lost"¹

Framing Urban Destruction, 1940-1960

Introduction

"The sun starts her daily round
She rises in eternal beauty.
But quickly she covers her face
She looks for a town but cannot find her."²

Thus concludes the anonymous poem, "Thus died my home town", which circulated in the streets of Kassel in the aftermath of the heavy bombing raid of 22nd October 1943. The lines are based on an observation that was frequently made in the aftermath of heavy fire bombings. The thick concentration of smoke particles in the air blotted out the sun, casting the devastated cityscape in an eerie twilight.³ In giving a description of a physical phenomenon, the text, on a symbolic level, also posits an end. In the poem, the term 'death' is used both descriptively and metaphorically, referring to the destruction of human life, material objects and social relations in equal measure. Bombing did not just terminate the lives of thousands of residents, but transformed the urban environment beyond recognition. A certain prevalence of material destruction in post-war representations of the air war has often been noted, and sometimes been taken as evidence of a prioritisation of the cultural over the human losses in German post-war society.⁴ Less often has the notion of destruction itself been analysed. What did Germans think that they had lost in the air war? How did they conceptualise the impact of aerial warfare on their material and social environment? What kind of language did they use to talk about it, and to what purpose?

¹ "Was wir verloren haben ... ", in: *Kasseler Zeitung* 7/272 (22-10-53), p. 1.

² *So starb meine Heimatstadt*. See appendix 1 and introduction.

³ Compare the caption of a British reconnaissance photograph taken of the city of Kassel on 30th October 1943, "7 days after the attack fires were still burning in Kassel and a smoke haze lay over the smouldering ruins of the town." Quoted according to Werner Dettmar, *Die Zerstörung Kassels im Oktober 1943. Eine Dokumentation* (Fuldabrück: Hesse GmbH, 1983), p. 153.

⁴ See Elizabeth Heinemann, "The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's "Crisis Years" and West German National Identity", in: *AHR* 101 (1996), pp. 354-95.

This chapter argues that German city dwellers of the mid-twentieth century responded to the devastation by turning to two traditional concepts that were readily available to them, *Heimat* and *Kultur*. As "historical ideas", both terms had been in use since the early nineteenth century to define ways of belonging and distinction, to lay claim to the unique and the universal, and to construct images of the self and the other.⁵ Although Germans tried to make sense of what had happened to the locality by framing their perceptions in traditional ways, this was a dynamic process. While experience was interpreted in terms of received ideas, the enunciation of those ideas changed with time.⁶ An analysis of the evolution of those two ideas in the period of 1940 to 1960 can help to illuminate ruptures and continuities in time as well as identify parallels and differences in space between the memory cultures of Kassel and Magdeburg.

The connection between the notions of *Kultur* and *Heimat* on the one hand and strategic bombing on the other was established during the war. From early on, Nazi propaganda denounced allied bombing as a wilful assault on German *Kultur*, insinuating that the destruction of cultural monuments was a means to the end of annihilating the racial identity of the German *Volk*.⁷ By comparison, the idea of *Heimat* was less often invoked in the official propaganda but featured prominently in a semi-public undercurrent of popular opinion that drew on primary experiences. Stripped of their overtly *völkisch* connotations, both ideas retained an important place in local discourse beyond the political watershed of 1945. Indeed, the flexibility and positive connotation of both concepts made them attractive to influential agents of memory in both Kassel and Magdeburg. Due to its inclusive nature, *Heimat* became a crucial category for the post-war world: the term was drawn upon to articulate feelings of longing and belonging, to invoke ideals of common endeavour and social harmony, and to reflect on rupture and continuity. While rooted in the locality, the notion could also be constructed as an "interchangeable representation" of

⁵ On the "idea of *Heimat*" see Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials. The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / Oxford: UCP, 1990); Alon Confino, "The Nation as Local Metaphor: *Heimat*, National Memory and the German Empire, 1871-1918", in: *History and Memory* 5/1 (1993), pp. 42-88; idem, *The Nation as Local Metaphor. Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and national memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); idem, "This lovely country you will never forget". *Kriegserinnerungen und Heimatkonzepte in der westdeutschen Nachkriegszeit*", in: Habbo Knoch ed., *Das Erbe der Provinz. Heimatkultur und Geschichtspolitik nach 1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004), pp. 235-251. On the notion of "Kultur" as used in Germany since the late 18th century Jörg Fisch, Art. "Zivilisation, Kultur", in: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 7 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992), pp. 679-774, here: pp. 704ff.

⁶ See Alon Confino, "Telling about Germany: Narratives of Memory and Culture", in: *The Journal of Modern History* 76 (June 2004), pp. 389-416, here: p. 412. For the relationship between continuity and change in German memory since 1870 see Rudy Koschar, *From Monuments to Traces. Artifacts of German Memory 1870-2000* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: UCP, 2000). pp. 1-14.

⁷ Echoes of this narrative have recently been re-popularised by Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg* (Munich: Propyläen, 2002), p. 524, "Potsdam was destroyed in order to annul Prussian militarism historically."

the region and the nation.⁸ Most important of all, perhaps, *Heimat* was by definition at the receiving end of organised violence: *Heimat* could be defended in war, it could endure and suffer, but it could not go to war itself.⁹ The same was true of *Kultur*, which remained important as an indicator of loss, a marker of civic identity, and a bridge between the locality and the wider world. Both concepts thus provided a way for urban societies to talk about the allied air war without talking about local investment in the German war of conquest, extermination, and genocide.

In Kassel as well as Magdeburg, the impact of aerial warfare on *Kultur* and *Heimat* was explored by way of three narrative codes or languages. The carriers of public memory quantified loss by producing figures, referred to 'their' town in anthropomorphic metaphors, and visualised urban destruction through photographs and drawings. While this holds true for Magdeburg as well as Kassel, significant differences emerged in the uses and emphases with the escalation of the Cold War in 1948/49, as this chapter will demonstrate. Whereas in Kassel loss tended to be discussed in affective and aesthetic categories—condensed in the nostalgic image of the 'beautiful town'—in Magdeburg political usages dominated a public discourse that revolved around the twin-themes of 'criminal' destruction and 'heroic' rebuilding.

Establishing the Parameters, 1940-45

"Bombs on A Thousand Years"—Urban Destruction as a 'Crime against *Kultur*'¹⁰

In response to allied air raids, Nazi propaganda habitually pointed to the great damage that the attacks had caused to cultural monuments such as historic buildings and churches. This was a stock propaganda response, which allowed the Nazi media to talk about strategic bombing without saying much. The emphasis on *Kultur* served to conceal the real extent of the destruction—including war industries—while providing a lever with which to indict the allied conduct of the air war as a crime.¹¹ *Kultur* was an important term in the *Lingua Tertii Imperii* for several reasons. The politicization and nationalisation of the concept in the wake of World War I allowed Nazism to pose as defender of the material and spiritual

⁸ Confino, "Nation as Local Metaphor", p. 50.

⁹ Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁰ German M. Vonau, "Bomben auf 1000 Jahre", *KLZ* 14/266 (12-11-43), p. 1.

¹¹ Compare the instructions to the Nazi press in the wake of the raid on Lübeck of 30th March 1942 by Min.Dirig. Fritzsche, "This was a deliberate attack on places of cultural interest that had nothing to do with any military exigency. It can neither be justified from a military point of view nor from an industrial point of view. Its only objective was to destroy what is irreplaceable." In: B.Arch R55 / 20898, fol. 43f. Compare also B.Arch. NS 18/1058, fol. 110, *Propagandistische Auswertung des Angriffs auf Köln*.

values of the nation against the threat of a materialist *Unkultur*.¹² Moreover, the term was easily infused with ideas of racial supremacy, as *Trübner's German Dictionary* in its 1943 edition illustrates. Here, the term was defined in the words of Joseph Goebbels as the "highest expression of the creative forces of a people". Quoting from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, the article emphasised that 'Aryan' culture was under continuous threat, legitimising aggressive war as a "world mission [...] to take over the protection of European *Kultur* against the threat of annihilation from the East."¹³

In Kassel, the propaganda theme of strategic bombing as a deliberate attack on Germany's cultural heritage was adapted to local circumstances in the aftermath of the air raid of 22nd October 1943. This was above all the work of two local propagandists, Hans Schlitzberger (1902-1978) and German M. Vonau (1900-1956), who published a string of articles on the subject in the official Nazi newspaper, the *Kurhessische Landeszeitung*, in the autumn of 1943. Schlitzberger, a rabid anti-Semite, was the paper's editor and second in command of the regional propaganda office;¹⁴ Vonau was a conservative fellow traveller of Nazism who rose in importance in regional propaganda as the war progressed, featuring as editor in chief of the *Kurhessische Landeszeitung* in the autumn of 1943.¹⁵

In a leader of 6th November 1943, "The New Beginning", Schlitzberger developed a narrative that revolved around a number of sharp opposites: matter versus spirit; creativity versus nihilism; good versus evil.¹⁶ "The criminal destruction by nihilist forces" had destroyed material goods, but the "eternal German spirit of research" [*der ewige deutsche Forschergeist*] had survived. Clearly, the article was designed to boost the morale of the local population, to stress survival over death and the 'new beginning' over catastrophic rupture. In so doing, the author revealed something of the ambivalence with which Nazism viewed the air war. According to Schlitzberger, the "catastrophe" was not to be regretted. For "together with all the good and great things that have been destroyed, much that was superfluous and a hindrance has been weeded out as well." Foremost among the latter was the "spirit of the metropolis [*Geist der Großstadt*]" that had "caused so much damage to our racial [*völkisch*] soul".¹⁷ In its stead, the "spirit of the front" had entered the devastated

¹² Fisch, Art. 'Kultur', in: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, here: pp. 759-66.

¹³ Trübner's Deutsches Wörterbuch, vol. 4: I-N, ed. by Alfred Götze (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1943), pp. 298ff.

¹⁴ See B.Arch R55 / 645, fol. 14. Letter of Hans Schlitzberger to *Ministerialdirektor* Berndt, propaganda ministry, 7th July 1943; Schlitzberger was *Gauverlagsleiter* of the *Gauverlag Kurhessen GmbH*.

¹⁵ Vonau is also listed as editor in chief of the "Der Propagandist: Mitteilungsblatt der Gaupropagandaleitung" after its re-launch in June 1944. See B.Arch R55 / 610, fol. 85; on his life and career see also StAK S1 No. 2379. *German M. Vonau*.

¹⁶ Hans Schlitzberger, "Der neue Anfang", *KLZ* 14/261 (6-11-43), p. 1. See also "Zerstörerkraft gegen Schöpfergeist", *KLZ* 14/267 (13/14-11-43), p. 1; "Warum? Juda und die modernen Vernichtungskriege", *KLZ* (19-11-44), p. 1.

¹⁷ Compare also Schlitzberger's comments in "Zerstörerkraft gegen Schöpfergeist" where he writes of the pre-1933 old town, "In certain districts of the old town, the people were huddled together in near life-

city. In Schlitzberger's interpretation, then, fire bombings functioned as a cathartic force that destroyed matter but purified the racial spirit. On balance, gain outweighed loss.

In contrast to Schlitzberger, Vonau put a different emphasis on urban destruction. To be sure, he was no less vitriolic in his condemnation of the allied conduct of the air war. But in his leader of 12th November 1943, "Bombs on a Thousand Years—Terror has destroyed the historic face of Kassel", there was none of Schlitzberger's indifference to the fate of cultural monuments.¹⁸ On the contrary: the destruction of *Kultur* was the lynchpin around which Vonau's narrative revolved. Drawing on the popular distinction between Western civilisation as the gratification of material needs and European *Kultur* as the material expression of spiritual values, Vonau accused the Western allies of ignorance and hypocrisy. He, too, worked with a number of stark opposites: the air war was a war of "merciless terror" and "fanatical hatred" against "awe-inspiring", "noble" and "holy" cultural monuments. Their destruction amounted to a desecration, a disenchantment of the world. It was an "irreplaceable loss to all of cultured mankind [*Kulturmenschheit*]" before which "the human being conscious of history and culture is left speechless".¹⁹ Giving a detailed description of the destroyed architectural monuments in Kassel, Vonau depicted the city as a living organism whose "historic face" had been disfigured and whose "body" had been trampled on by an "enemy on a rampage of blood and destruction".²⁰

Without doubt, Vonau's emphasis on the extent of the cultural loss served to accentuate the greatness of the alleged crime, and thus to indict the Western allies in moral terms. Within the overall argument, the fate of the locality did not so much matter for its own sake but as an exemplum for the war as a whole. This frame, however, also allowed the author to express a sense of shock: the air raid of 22nd October amounted to an irredeemable loss of the city's architectural history, and by implication, of local identity, "[The enemy] burnt down and blew up the indefinable magic of the thousand-year old town, which we try to capture in the words of culture, tradition, art, and history."²¹ In

threatening conditions in cave-like holes. These were the natural breeding grounds of Bolshevism and other crimes." On the hostility of Nazism towards the urban environment see: Bernard Marchand, "Nationalsozialismus und Großstadtfeindschaft", in: *Die alte Stadt* 1/99, pp. 39-50.

¹⁸ German M. Vonau, "Bomben auf 1000 Jahre", *KLZ* 14/266 (12-11-43), p. 1. See also "Das Haus an der Wildemannsgasse. Vor den Trümmern des Grimm-Hauses / Unzerstörbar bleibt der Geist", *KLZ* 14/262 (8-11-43), p. 3; as well as the series "Stätten im Herzen der Kasseler. Aus der Geschichte der Kulturdenkmäler der Gauhauptstadt", *KLZ* 14/249 (23/24-10-43), p. 3; 250 (25-10-43), p. 4; 252 (27-10-43), p. 3; 253 (28-10-43), p. 3; 261 (6-11-43), p. 5 (no author given).

¹⁹ Vonau, "Bomben auf 1000 Jahre".

²⁰ Ibid. For a detailed description of war losses and post-war reconstruction and neglect of architectural monuments in Kassel see Hartwig Beseler and Niels Gutschow, *Kriegsschicksale Deutscher Architektur. Verluste – Schäden – Wiederaufbau. Eine Dokumentation für das Gebiet der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Vol. II: Süd (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz, 1988), pp. 856-886. For Magdeburg see Götz Eckardt ed., *Schicksale deutscher Baudenkmale im zweiten Weltkrieg. Eine Dokumentation der Schäden und Totalverluste auf dem Gebiet der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*. Vol. I (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1978), pp. 247-270.

²¹ Vonau, "Bomben auf 1000 Jahre". On the importance of the notion of the 'beautiful old town' for regional identities in Germany see Jürgen Paul, "Der Wiederaufbau der historischen Städte in Deutschland nach dem

lamenting the loss of the "indefinable magic" of Kassel, Vonau articulated a sense of belonging. The "thousand-year old town" was a metaphor for the nation; it was also *Heimat*.

"Heimat remains!"?²²

Grimm's German Dictionary of 1877 defined *Heimat* in relation to place, either real or imagined. *Heimat* was the "the land or region where one was born or where one lived permanently", the "place of birth or permanent residence", the "parental home or estate", and finally, in a transcendental perspective, "heaven".²³ If *Heimat* resided in a place, then what happened to the idea when the place itself was transformed beyond recognition? The answer that local propagandists gave to this question was unequivocal: "*Heimat* remains!" was the characteristic title of a poem by the local poet, Willi Lindner, which appeared in the *Kurhessische Landeszeitung* two weeks after 22nd October 1943. On the whole, however, Nazi propaganda preferred not to dwell too much on the impact of allied bombing on *Heimat*. This was for several reasons.

The Nazi regime had led the nation into an aggressive war on the implicit understanding that the *Heimat* would remain safe. The confident boast ascribed to Herman Göring from the summer of 1939 that no enemy plane would penetrate the borders of the *Reich* illustrated this understanding. On a more general level, Nazism was deeply suspicious of any idea of *Heimat* that did not encompass the militaristic neologism of '*Heimat* front'.²⁴ While drawing on its patriotic fervour and communitarian idealism, Nazi propagandists despised the love of provincialism and the tolerance of diversity that stood at the core of the historic enunciation of the idea.²⁵ *Trübner's German Dictionary* of 1939 remarked critically that the term, while carrying connotations of the Latin *patria*, lacked the "political significance" of the younger term, *Fatherland*.²⁶

zweiten Weltkrieg", in: Cord Meckseper and Harald Siebenmorgen eds., *Die alte Stadt: Denkmal oder Lebensraum?: Die Sicht der mittelalterlichen Stadtarchitektur im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1985), pp. 114-156, here: pp. 119f.; Klaus von Beyme, *Der Wiederaufbau. Architektur und Städtebaupolitik in beiden deutschen Staaten* (Munich / Zurich: Piper, 1987), pp. 13-22.

²² Willi Lindner, "Die Heimat bleibt bestehen!", *KLZ* 14/258 (3-11-43), p. 3.

²³ *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 10, 864f.

²⁴ See, for example, "Propaganda der Tat. Schnapschüsse vom Frontabschnitt 'Heimat'", *Der Propagandist. Mitteilungen der Gaupropagandaleitung Kurhessen* 1/1944, pp. 18-21. For the historical roots of this suspicion see Timothy W. Mason, "Die Erbschaft der Novemberrevolution für den Nationalsozialismus", in: idem, *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft. Dokumente und Materialien zur deutschen Arbeiterpolitik 1936-1939* (Opladen: Westdt. Verl, 1975), pp. 1-17.

²⁵ Compare Applegate, *Nation of Provincials*, p. 212.

²⁶ *Trübner's Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol 3: g – h (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1939), p. 387f. (entry 'Heimat').

It was therefore no coincidence that public reflections on the impact of allied bombing on *Heimat* as a place of belonging played only a marginal role in Nazi propaganda, and were typically left to the medium of lyrical poetry. Willi Lindner in "Heimat remains!" insisted that *Heimat* rested in nature and was indestructible as long as there were affective bonds between the people and their locality.²⁷ A week later, the writer Fritz Stück unwittingly demonstrated the helplessness of the official narrative in the face of unprecedented devastation.²⁸ His poem, emphatically called "My Kassel" (*Mein Kassel*), was constructed as an oath that the lyrical I addressed to the anthropomorphic city. Drawing on the stock repertoire of 'heroic' Nazi phraseology, the lyrical I thanks the dead and invokes the archetypal "Hessian loyalty", which "stands guard" in the rubble. Any reflection on the extent of the destruction is immediately countered by optimistic professions of faith in victory and the city's phoenix-like rise from the rubble in an indefinite future. Finally, in the poem, a "proud ring of forests" does what the Nazi regime was unable to do: "to guard the soil of the *Heimat*".²⁹

While National Socialist propaganda thus privileged notions of cultural loss over those associated with *Heimat*, there were private voices that told a very different story. Far from subscribing to the optimistic rhetoric of the official narrative, these voices contemplated the possibility that the bombs might not only have destroyed material goods and killed an unprecedented number of family, friends and acquaintances but the very notion of *Heimat* itself.³⁰ It is indicative of the force of these stories that they found collective expression in the cultural artefacts of anonymous lyrical poetry.³¹ One, "Thus died my home town", established a link between death and *Heimat* in its very title, while another couched popular concern in the form of a lyrical song.³² The "Kasseler Heimat Song" or *Kasseler Heimatlied* has come down in two variants, alternatively called "The Song of the Sorrowful Kassel" or *Das Lied vom leidgeprüften Kassel*. While "Thus died my home town" adopted an elegiac tone, the "Song" was bitter and sarcastic, as the first stanza illustrates,

"Where the roofs lie scattered in the streets
[...] Where bombers circle in the skies at night
Where entire city districts burn from time to time
There is my home, Kassel on the river Fulda".

²⁷ Willi Lindner, "Die Heimat bleibt bestehen!", *KLZ* 14/258 (3-11-43), p. 3.

²⁸ For the full text plus translation see appendix 3.

²⁹ Fritz Stück, "Mein Kassel", *KLZ* 14/265 (11-11-43), p. 3.

³⁰ See chapter one.

³¹ See introduction.

³² For the text plus translation see appendix 2.

Interestingly, the two versions differed in a crucial verse that described the consequences of aerial warfare on the affective ties to the locality. While the "Heimat Song" emphatically expressed feelings of love towards the *Heimat*, "The Song of the Sorrowful Kassel" replaced affection with disbelief: "Kassel, my home, I don't recognise you anymore."³³ Likewise, the first variant concluded with the line, "Kassel, my home; I love like my blood", whereas the second version put, "Kassel, my home, say, 'It is enough!'".

In Magdeburg, the local Nazi media likewise habitually denounced strategic bombing in terms of a desecration of *Kultur*. On occasion, propagandists also used the concept to legitimise the German war of conquest as a defensive campaign on the behalf of Occidental culture, which united the peoples of Continental Europe against the combined threat of 'Bolshevist' and Anglo-American *Unkultur*.³⁴ In comparison to Kassel, however, the theme was not adapted to local circumstances with quite the same urgency. This was no surprise, given that Magdeburg was not subjected to indiscriminate area bombing until January 1945. By that time, the official media no longer provided an outlet for purely local developments. Similarly, the notion of the air war as the destruction of *Heimat* played an important role in private correspondence but by early 1945 no longer found expression through cultural artefacts as it had done in Kassel 15 months previously.

Articulating Loss, 1945-1960

Kultur and *Heimat* remained crucial concepts for framing urban destruction across the political watershed of May 1945. In important ways, both concepts provided a bridge for elements of the wartime narrative into the post-war world. Shorn of their overtly racial connotations, they furnished important narrative frames for articulating feelings of loss, bereavement, and resentment. Next to continuity, however, there was also change. With the collapse of the nation state, *Heimat* displaced *Kultur* from its dominant position. This shift reflected the extent to which the counter narrative of the war years filled the vacuum that was left by the discontinuation of Nazi propaganda in the spring of 1945. Equally important, local societies developed new languages in which to discuss the material impact of aerial warfare: these were the languages of figures and images. While both reached back into the war years, their public enunciation only reached prominence under the altered conditions of the post-war world.

³³ StAK S8 C53.

³⁴ "Um die Kultur des Abendlandes", *Magdeburgische Zeitung* (8/9-4-44), p. 1. See also, "Der Bombenkrieg. Von Gauleiter Rudolf Jordan", in: *Der Mitteldeutsche* (23-1-44), p. 1; *Magdeburgische Zeitung* (24-1-44), p. 1.

The Language of Figures

"The only institution that has so far been able to create order out of rubble [...] is the statistician", wrote Carl Otto Hamann in the regional daily, *Hessische Nachrichten*, in the autumn of 1945. "The bare figures draw a portrait of the destroyed city, recording for the present and the future the horrifying picture of a tormented community that has been sacrificed to the madness of an idea", the journalist opined.³⁵ The excerpt attests to the importance that statistical data gained in the post-war discourse on urban destruction.

Creating a semblance of order out of chaos, they promised to provide objective criteria for measuring the material impact of aerial warfare. The language of figures was the language of the political and planning elites. Ascertained and promulgated by the civic administration, statistical data demonstrated the expertise of the new local government and the 'sacrifice' of the local community alike, providing the basis for petitions to the occupying powers and claims on supra-local bodies for the allocation of state funds.³⁶ At the same time, they immunised post-war city planning against criticism from the population.

On a more general level, the language of figures shaped ways of perception. In both Kassel and Magdeburg, the impact of allied bombing was measured by three criteria which focused exclusively on civilian loss and hardship: firstly, the post-war population as compared to the 1939/43 population figure; second, the number of civilian dwellings damaged or destroyed; and finally, the amount of rubble in cubic meters or cubic meters per capita.³⁷ This is not to deny that there were perfectly legitimate reasons for the city administration to do so. After all, rubble clearance was a necessary prerequisite for any rebuilding work while the shortage of housing constituted the most pressing social problem of the post-war years. It is, however, to argue that all three criteria lent weight to an interpretation of the allied air offensive that reduced strategic bombing to indiscriminate area bombing, and area bombing in turn to a deliberate attack on civilian infrastructure.

³⁵ "Zahlen zwischen Trümmern", *HN* (14-11-45), p. 3.

³⁶ Compare *Verwaltungsbericht der Stadt Kassel 1945-1949*. Ed. Statistisches Amt & Wahlamt der Stadt Kassel, pp. 153-156; StAK NL Seidel, *Reden*, vol. I, no. 4, pp. 659-667: "5.5.46. Kassel baut auf", StAK A.1.10. No. 53. *Berichte an den Regierungspräsidenten, Staatsministerien, Minister & Militärregierung*, passim; StAK A.O. *Stadtverordnetenversammlung*, vol. 5, minutes of 28th July 1947, pp. 20f.

³⁷ For the extraordinary problems connected with any attempt at establishing 'objective' figures of loss see the discussion in Uta Hohn, *Die Zerstörung deutscher Städte im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Regionale Unterschiede in der Bilanz der Wohnungstotalschäden und Folgen des Luftkrieges unter bevölkerungsgeographischem Aspekt* (Dortmund: Dortmunder Vertrieb für Bau- und Planungsliteratur, 1991), pp. 34-50; Friedrich Kästner, "Kriegsschäden", in: *Statistisches Jahrbuch Deutscher Gemeinden* 37 (1949), pp. 361-391; W. Göpner, "Die zerstörte Stadt im Kartenbild. Darstellungsformen in Schadensplänen", in: *Berichte zur deutschen Landeskunde* 6 (1949), pp. 95-117.

In the immediate post-war period of 1945 to 1948, there were only marginal differences in the ways that the local political elites in Kassel and Magdeburg presented and utilised their figures of loss. In Kassel, the official tally of destruction was popularised by the mayor, Willi Seidel (SPD), the head of the planning department, Erich Heinicke (SPD), and the director of the reconstruction bureau, Ludwig Kessler. The mayor set the tone in a public speech that he gave in May 1946 on the opening of the exhibition, "Kassel is rebuilding!". Before an audience of planning experts, representatives from the municipal, regional and state level as well as the military government, Seidel emphasised the extent of the destruction in Kassel, positioning the city among "those [...] that have been most severely destroyed in our German fatherland". "All in all, all that has remained of Kassel except for the unique landscape and thousand years of history is a heap of rubble", he added. In order to illustrate the extent of loss, Seidel emphasised that only 16,000 dwelling units had survived the war out of a pre-war figure of 65,000.³⁸

The mayor left the details to the municipal architect [*Baurat*], Erich Heinicke, who likewise stressed the exceptional nature of the local situation:

"From the study of the figures anybody will realise that our city has suffered exceptional destruction under the impact of total war in comparison to other German cities."

This claim was illustrated by the criterion of rubble per capita. Heinicke produced figures that put Kassel well ahead of all other cities, with 27 cubic meters per person as compared to 20 for Cologne, 18 for Frankfurt and 9 for Hamburg. He went on to stress that the figures were deceptive because they took the pre-war population as a basis. If, however, one were to take the present city population, Kassel would have to bear an even higher rate of rubble as compared to other cities. This was no mere game of numbers but served the explicit purpose, as Heinicke himself emphasised, to underline "the real situation in our city" before an audience of influential decision makers.³⁹ One year later, the city received official confirmation of its exceptional status within the state of *Hesse*. The State Ministry of Reconstruction authorised figures that put the level of destruction in Kassel at 77.6%, placing the city well ahead of Darmstadt with 46.7% and Frankfurt with 32.7%.⁴⁰

If the language of figures was used to draw attention to the plight of the town, it also served to legitimise post-war urban planning and to silence its critics. Reconstruction

³⁸ StAK NL Seidel, *Reden I*, no 4 (5-5-46): "Kassel baut auf".

³⁹ The speech is reprinted in Werner Durth & Niels Gutschow, *Träume in Trümmern. Planungen zum Wiederaufbau zerstörter Städte im Westen Deutschlands 1940 bis 1950*. Vol 2: Städte (Braunschweig / Wiesbaden: Vieweg, 1988), pp. 807-810.

⁴⁰ StAK A.0. Stadtverordnetenversammlung, vol. 5, minutes of 28-7-47, p. 20; "Das Wohnungsproblem in Zahlen", *HN* 3/101 (2-8-47); *Verwaltungsbericht*, p. 153. Interestingly, the statistical handbook of Hesse gives a different figure, placing the war damage to dwelling units for Kassel at 63.8%. See *Statistisches Jahrbuch für Hessen*, ed. by Hess. Statistisches Landesamt (Offenbach, 1948), p. 193. Hohn, *Zerstörung*, puts the figure for Kassel at 60%. See *ibid.*, p. 271 (table 42).

planning in Kassel derived from the war-time plans of architects working for the Speer bureau of reconstruction. Premised on the assumption of near-total destruction, the blueprints combined elements of the *Gau* capital planning phase with the modernist ideal of a structured and relieved city.⁴¹ Both shared in common a high degree of disregard for the historic urban space.⁴² Post-war continuity of these ideas was personified by Heinicke himself, who had headed the planning department since 1941 and was kept in office against the demands of the American occupation officer after he had switched parties from the *NSDAP* to the *SPD*.⁴³ In his 1946 exhibition speech, Heinicke argued that the destruction was so vast as to necessitate, and indeed, to provide a "unique opportunity to create a new healthy organism and a very far reaching new ordering".⁴⁴

A city-sponsored damage chart from July 1945 supported Heinicke's claim about the near-total disappearance of the pre-war city in the air war. The chart placed many buildings in the category of total destruction (70-100%) which an earlier assessment had categorised as near total (70-80%), thereby superseding objections that the regional preservationist, Friedrich Bleibaum, had raised.⁴⁵ When the reconstruction exhibition of 1946 attracted heavy public criticism for showing slightly revised blueprints from the Nazi phase of urban planning, the mayor justified the exhibits by pointing to the level of destruction. On the occasion of a meeting of the Hessian Council for Reconstruction, he emphasised,

"I believe that the critics [...] overlook the fact that urban planning needs to make a difference between moderately damaged cities on the one hand and cities that have suffered near-total destruction on the other. Kassel, unfortunately, belongs in the second category."⁴⁶

In Magdeburg, statistical data likewise were used to document the extent of material destruction. As in Kassel, the second civil administration of 1946-1950 under mayor Rudolf Eberhard (*SED*) emphasised that the city had suffered exceptionally during the

⁴¹ On the post-war reconstruction of Kassel see Folckert Lüken-Isberner, "Kassel: Neue Stadt auf altem Grund", in: Klaus von Beyme et.al. eds., *Neue Städte aus Ruinen. Deutscher Städtebau der Nachkriegszeit* (Munich: Prestel, 1992), pp. 251-298; Thomas König, "Der Konflikt um die Erhaltung historischer Bausubstanz", in: *Leben in Ruinen*, pp. 97-102; Durth / Gutschow, *Träume in Trümmern*, vol. II: *Städte*, pp. 791-809. For the context: Durth / Gutschow, *Träume*, vol I: *Konzepte*, pp. 161-220; Beyme et.al. eds., *Neue Städte*, pp. 9-31; Paul, "Wiederaufbau", in: Meckseper and Siebenmorgen eds., *Die alte Stadt*, pp. 115-156; Jeffry M. Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War: The Reconstruction of German Cities after World War II* (New York & Oxford: OUP, 1993). Compare also, for a conservative reconstruction, the study on Munich by Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory. Architecture, Monuments, and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (Berkely / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 2000).

⁴² For the general context see Durth / Gutschow, *Träume*, vol. I, pp. 237-80.

⁴³ See StAK NL Seidel. *Tagebuch*, pp. 63f. (entry of 25-4-46); 65 (entry of 6-5-46).

⁴⁴ Ansprache, in: Durth / Gutschow, *Träume*, vol. II, pp. 807-810, here: p. 809.

⁴⁵ König, "Konflikt", p. 101. A copy of the damage chart of July 1945 can be found in StAK NL Kaltwasser, *Mappe 42*.

⁴⁶ "Großhessischer Aufbaurat in Kassel", *HN* No. 54 (4-6-46), p. 4. For an assessment of the public criticism see J. Wolff, "Kassel baut auf! Eine städtebauliche Betrachtung", in: *Baumeister* 2/3 (1947), pp. 80ff.

war.⁴⁷ "Among Germany's big cities, there are only a few that showed an image of destruction as desolate as in Magdeburg by the end of Hitler's war", wrote the mayor in the 1946 publication, "One Year of Reconstruction in Magdeburg".⁴⁸ One year later, at a public rally, Eberhard put the tally of destruction for the most severely affected city districts at 77.3%, whereas the damage for the city as a whole was given as 60%.⁴⁹ Yet, it was not percentage points as in Kassel but the absolute number of destroyed dwelling units that became the most popular indicator for the degree of destruction in Magdeburg.

"Through Hitler's war, 40,677 dwelling units have been totally destroyed, 5,499 lightly damaged and 1,295 severely damaged", as the municipal architect, Erich Koß (1899-1982), informed his audience at a public rally in the summer of 1947.⁵⁰

In contrast to Kassel, in Magdeburg the tally of destruction was usually presented as the effect of a historic cause. Where the Kassel mayor, Seidel, in the speech quoted above, obliquely referred to a "foolish system" that had caused "wounds" and "guilt", the Magdeburg political elites habitually cited the name of Hitler in connection with the balance-sheet of loss. For example, mayor Eberhard headed the section on urban destruction in his 1947 progress report with, "What Hitler cost us", while the chapter on loss in the 1946 publication, "Magdeburg is alive", carried the title, "The demolished city—legacy of a criminal leadership".⁵¹ The language of figures thus served an educational purpose, demonstrating the consequences of Nazi rule and thereby legitimising the 'new beginning' under the *SED*-led civil administration.

With the escalation of the Cold War in 1948/49, the ultimate cause of urban destruction was replaced by the immediate cause: 'Hitler' was replaced by the Western allies. In this new context, statistical data became stock figures in the propagandistic repertoire against the West. "40,677 totally destroyed dwelling units" was the heading of an article published in the *SED*-daily, *Volksstimme*, on 16th January 1951, which drew a direct link between the "Anglo-American bombing terror" of World War II and contemporary policies of the "American war mongers", quoting a US senator with a line reminiscent of Hitler's infamous remark about the 'eradication' of British cities.⁵² In line with the socialist cult of numbers, figures formed an integral part of most official statements on the air war throughout the 1950s.⁵³ In 1952, for example, the commemorative article in the *SED*-daily,

⁴⁷ On the career and fate of Rudolf Eberhard see *Magdeburger Biographisches Lexikon* (Magdeburg: Scriptum, 2002), p. 152.

⁴⁸ Magistrat der Stadt Magdeburg ed., *Ein Jahr Aufbauarbeit in Magdeburg* (Magdeburg, 1946), p. 7.

⁴⁹ "Die neue Stadt – das gemeinsame Werk", in: *Freiheit*, Magdeburger Beilage, no. 130, p. 5 (7-6-47).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "Verehrung dem Alten – Mut zum Neuen", *Freiheit* 130 (7-6-47), p. 5.

⁵² *Volksstimme* (16-1-51), p. 4.

⁵³ Compare Jürgen Danyel, "Politische Rituale als Sowjetimporte", in: Konrad Jarausch / Hannes Siegrist eds., *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945-1970* (Frankfurt / New York: Campus, 1997), pp. 67-86, here: p. 74.

Volksstimme, contained a special section, entitled "The result of 40 minutes of war", in which detailed figures were given of the numbers and types of bombs used, people killed, housing, public buildings, schools, meeting halls, churches, cinemas, theatres, museums, and hospitals destroyed.⁵⁴ The list had been compiled from the official report of the Nazi chief of police of March 1945, without, however, including the army installations and war industries that were listed in the original document.⁵⁵

The language of figures formed an important element of urban memory cultures. As the language of the political elites, it established order out of chaos, provided 'scientific' evidence for claims of negative distinction and positive achievement, legitimised the modernising objectives of reconstruction, and served as ammunition in the propaganda battles of the Cold War. For the memory culture as a whole, however, the visual played an even greater role. Images were the most important medium through which urban societies engaged with urban destruction.⁵⁶ In both Kassel and Magdeburg, visual representations were crucial for the way in which institutions, organised groups and individuals remembered aerial warfare.

The Language of Images

"Within a few hours, [...] the *Gau* capital of *Kurhessen* [was turned] into a field of rubble whose ruins accusingly rise up against the sky, bearing witness to the senseless destruction at the hands of the Anglo-American conduct of the air war."⁵⁷

Taken from the summary report by the chief of police in Kassel of December 1943, the quotation is illuminating in several respects. Not only does the excerpt anticipate a central medium of urban memory cultures, the visual, it also draws attention to two important functions of (photographic) visualisations: they are (re-)produced both for their documentary and their symbolic value. Photography is a polysemous medium, speaking to the mind and the emotions in equal measure: it is both document and relic.⁵⁸ In the example, the author attempts to capture the impact of allied bombing by evoking an image

⁵⁴ *Volksstimme* (16-1-52), p. 4.

⁵⁵ See NA RG 243 E-6, file no. 39 9 (box 383). "Erfahrungsbericht über den schweren Terrorangriff auf den LS-Ort Magdeburg am 16.1.1945".

⁵⁶ Compare Jörn Glasenapp, "Nach dem Brand. Überlegungen zur deutschen Trümmerfotografie", in: *Fotogeschichte* 91 (2004), pp. 47-64. On the importance of the visual for memory see Burke, "History as Social Memory", p. 101.

⁵⁷ "Erfahrungsbericht", in: StAK S8 C40, p. 13.

⁵⁸ Susan Sontag, *Über Fotografie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 15. Aufl., 2003), pp. 146-172; Roland Barthes, *Die helle Kammer. Bemerkungen zur Photographie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1980).

that revolves around the notion of the ruin. As a piece of evidence, the ruin bears witness; as a symbol, it stands in for urban destruction as a whole and accuses the Western allies.⁵⁹

As Allan Sekula has argued, photographic communication may be understood as an "incomplete utterance" whose readability depends "on some external matrix of conditions and presuppositions".⁶⁰ Yet, as Susan Sontag has pointed out, the meaning of any visual message remains fragile: even the most straightforward caption provides only one among many possible ways of reading an image.⁶¹ Recognising the polysemous potential of the medium, Nazi propagandists attempted to restrict the semantic potential of visual utterances by straightforward textual frames. "Images accuse!", was the headline of a typical article in the *Kasseler Post* of 12th September 1940, depicting three close-up images of bomb damage to civilian dwellings.⁶² This and similar attempts at channelling reader responses notwithstanding, there was no way of knowing if the photographs did not also communicate another message in addition to the 'criminality' of the allied air war: the destructiveness of allied bombing and the inability of the regime to prevent it. Joseph Goebbels himself acknowledged this conundrum when in the autumn of 1944 he cancelled a propaganda project of special commemorative stamps that were to carry famous cultural landmarks. "Those images [...] back then [in 1943] were capable of eliciting feelings of anger and revenge, [but] today [they] will only cause resignation", as his decision was paraphrased in the official document closing the file.⁶³ In a similar manner, visual representations of bomb damage disappeared from the local press as actual damage escalated.⁶⁴

This section argues that it was precisely the polysemous nature of visual narratives that accounts for the popularity of photography in post-war memory cultures of allied bombing. Photos could be invested with multi-layered meanings, document and symbolise very different things. For the same reason, the visual remained a difficult medium, presenting the local political and journalistic elites with problems not unlike those facing their Nazi predecessors. This was particularly the case with rubble photography. After all, post-war visualisations of urban destruction stood in the tradition of the well-established usages of Nazi propaganda. Equally important, there was a critical potential in rubble photography

⁵⁹ Compare Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning", in: Victor Burgin ed., *Thinking Photography* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 84-109, who speaks of the photograph as both document and fetish; see also Sontag, *Über Fotografie*, pp. 9-30; 146-172; Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung. Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern nach 1945* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), pp. 9-19; Jens Jäger, *Bilder der Neuzeit. Einführung in die Historische Bildforschung* (Tübingen: edition diskord, 2000).

⁶⁰ Sekula, "Invention", p. 85.

⁶¹ Sontag, *Fotografie*, p. 106f.

⁶² "Bilder klagen an!", *KP* 53/252 (12-9-40).

⁶³ B.Arch R55 / 611. *Propaganda gegen feindlichen Luftterror durch Sonderbriefmarken*, fol. 161.

⁶⁴ Compare B.Arch NS 18 / 1333, fol. 61. *Wiedergabe der Aufnahmen von Großschadensstellen in der Presse*; ibid., fol. 73. *Propagandamaßnahmen im Zusammenhang mit dem Luftkrieg*.

that was difficult to control. In Kassel, the civil administration threatened to sue a publisher of a photographic picture book that had depicted the city in its devastated state for fear of the negative impact on tourism of these images.⁶⁵ In Magdeburg, panoramic views of the devastated cityscape drew attention to the spires of church ruins that the *SED* had earmarked for demolition against the opposition of the Protestant clergy.⁶⁶ One consequence was that in neither town images of urban destruction were as dominant in public discourse as might be expected; another that rubble photography was rarely left to 'speak for itself' but integrated into wider narrative frames. This holds true for both the guided media of Magdeburg as well as for the more pluralistic media of Kassel. Only in private photograph albums do we find visual representations of destruction whose commentary is descriptive rather than normative.⁶⁷

The visual narratives in both Kassel and Magdeburg shared important features in common. At least three constituent parts made up visual discourse, of which rubble photography formed but one element. Next to panoramic views of the devastated cityscape and close-ups of individual motifs, representations of the bygone and the re-created played equally important roles. Indeed, more often than not, rubble motifs were integrated into broader visual (or textual) narratives of loss and (re-)gain. In both cities, the vision tended to be selective, subsuming self-inflicted damage in the broad picture of indiscriminate bombing, eliding all visual references to the role and destructive power of Nazism, and prioritising the cultural over the industrial dimension of loss. Finally, visual narratives in both cities showed an intense interest in motifs depicting local landmarks, suggesting that at the centre of local discourses stood the preservation and reformulation of local identities.

Throughout the period of 1945 to 1960, the visual narratives followed a trajectory that was decisively influenced by the progress of the reconstruction. Initial juxtapositions of 'before the destruction—after the destruction' gave way to the triad of 'before—after—now', or were replaced by the juxtaposition of the damaged motif with its reconstructed counterpart. While this broader shift occurred in both Kassel and Magdeburg, differences in emphasis developed as a result of the integration of the two cities into the antagonistic socio-political systems of the Federal Republic and the GDR.

In Kassel, several visual narratives complemented one another. The city administration promulgated a present-centred narrative that professed confidence in the task of the reconstruction, whereas local journalists and art critics met a public demand for nostalgic images of a sanitised past. By contrast, the ruling elites in Magdeburg depicted the

⁶⁵ StAK A.1.00. *Magistratsprotokolle*, vol. 13: session of 22nd Sept. 1949, "9. Bilderkatalog 'Germany'."

⁶⁶ AKPS Rep A Spec G. A795. *St Ulrich*; StAM Rep 41.416. *Heiliggeistkirche*; Rep 41.918.

Katharinenkirche. For the context see Friedrich Jakobs, "Wie Phönix aus der Asche", in: "Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot", pp. 165-177, here: 176.

⁶⁷ See, for example, StAK, Fotoarchiv. *Fotoalbum. Frau Johann Schlieper zum 17.11.49. Wolf Bür.*

reconstruction as a quasi-sacral undertaking while they linked limited appeals to nostalgic sentiment closely to political objectives.

"Like a fellow human being that has left us"⁶⁸ – Nostalgia

On New Years' Eve, 1946, a remarkable article appeared in the second licensed Kassel daily, the *Kasseler Zeitung*. It carried the title, "In memoriam anno...". The piece was a dream narrative in which an I-narrator relived the happy days of an end-of-year pub crawl through the narrow alleys of the medieval old town of Kassel. As the narrator recalls, his memory became blurred after the fourteenth pub but eyewitnesses assured him that the merry party went on to visit the public houses on the *Altmarkt* and *Renthof*. After this, even the eyewitnesses lost count but according to rumour some had made it to *Graben*, where they had been seen eating herring salad with bread buns. "Fire crackers exploded, serpents swirled through the air, with paper streamers adding to the merry confusion. Confetti rained down, and the church bells chimed from the nearby *Martinskirche*. Happy New Year!", the narrator enthusiastically remembered. Then, suddenly, reality intrudes in the form of "twelve heavy strokes" protruding from somewhere onto the narrator's ear. He awakes, alone, shivering with cold. Through the half-barricaded window, a field of ruins stares him in the face.⁶⁹

In the Kassel of the late 1940s and early 1950s, one of the most influential responses to the surrounding devastation was to close one's eyes and pretend it had never happened. This is not to suggest, of course, that the residents of post-war Kassel permanently lived in a dream world. After all, even the above article did not conclude on a picture of despair but with a note of hope, a vision of a rebuilt city. Rather, it is to argue for the considerable popularity of a narrative that dealt in nostalgia, in images of an unscathed city. At the centre of this narrative stood the idea of *Heimat*, captured in the myth of *Alt-Kassel* or "Old Kassel". Popularised through a range of diverse media—historical exhibitions, postcard series, calendars, commemorative articles—nostalgia even spawned its own literary genre, the memory book.⁷⁰ Carrying titles like "Kassel—Buildings of an Old Town", or "Kassel before the Firestorm", these publications were not interested in delineating the causes and

⁶⁸ German M. Vonau, *Kassel. Bauwerke einer alten Stadt* (Kassel: Friedrich Lometsch, 1950), p. 5.

⁶⁹ "In memoriam anno...", *Kasseler Zeitung* 1/14 (30-12-46).

⁷⁰ Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Kassel, *Alt-Kassel. Aus Kunst und Geschichte einer schönen Stadt. Ausstellung im Hessischen Landesmuseum April bis Juni 1947* (Kassel: Karl Winter, 1947); *Alt Kassel. Kalender auf das Jahr 1949* (Kassel: Karl Winter, 1948); the postcard series "Kassel – die tausendjährige Stadt" & "Alt-Kassel, die Heimstatt althessischer Bau- und Handwerkskunst"; Karl Kaltwasser, "Vergangenes Kassel", *Hessische Nachrichten* (20-10-45).

consequences of the disaster that had struck the city.⁷¹ Nor were they interested in the reality of life in pre-war or post-war urban society. They traded in an imagined past of beauty, social harmony and innocence. Nostalgia, the "painful longing for home", has received little attention as an influential cultural force in studies of the early Federal Republic. The dominant view is summed up by Paul Betts, who argues for the "relative absence of [...] nostalgia after 1945."⁷²

The evidence from Kassel suggests otherwise. Not only did romanticised images of *Alt-Kassel* outnumber rubble photography in public discourse, nostalgia also provided a bridge for elements of the wartime propaganda narrative into the post-war world. The continuity across the hiatus of 1945/49 was not just one of narrative but also of narrator. For Kassel, this was personified by the propagandist, journalist and art critic, German M. Vonau. During the war, Vonau, together with Hans Schlitzberger, had set the local parameters for the ways in which the air war was conceptualised as a criminal assault upon German *Kultur*. After 1945, accusation turned into lamentation, thereby divesting the theme of its overtly anti-Western tone and adapting it to the new political environment. This was in no small measure due to the influence of Vonau himself. Whereas Schlitzberger disappeared from public view in 1945, Vonau joined the conservative daily, *Kasseler Post*, in 1949 and soon re-established himself as an important voice in local journalism. Through his journalistic work as well as a string of popular books, he fashioned himself as one of the most influential guardians of Kassel's cultural heritage.⁷³

"How many years lie between us and the Kassel of old", Vonau intoned in the preface to his "Kassel—Buildings of an Old Town", published in 1950. "And yet the city lives in our memory", he continued, "like a place that we visited years ago and have not yet seen again ... like a fellow human being who has left us and of whom pictures and letters still lie on our desk."⁷⁴ In the book, the author arranged his material as a series of vignettes: drawings of historic buildings were accompanied by short sketches about their architectural history. "We become witness again to the building's hour of birth [...] It is

⁷¹ Rudolf Helm ed., *Kassel vor dem Feuersturm* (Kassel: Schneider & Weber, 1950; ²1953; ³1960); German M. Vonau, *Kassel. Bauwerke einer Alten Stadt* (Kassel: Friedrich Lometsch, 1950); *Cassel und Wilhelmshöhe in alten Stichen und Lithographien* (Kassel: Friedrich Lometsch, 1955); Walter Kramm, *Kassel. Wilhelmshöhe Wilhelmstal* (München, Berlin: 1951); Merian 4/10, "Kassel" (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1952).

⁷² Paul Betts, "Remembrance of Things Past: Nostalgia in West and East Germany, 1980-2000", in: Paul Betts and Greg Eghigian eds., *Pain and Prosperity. Reconsidering Twentieth-Century German History* (Stanford; California: Stanford UP, 2003), pp. 178-207, here: p. 180.

⁷³ Compare *Kassel. Bauwerke einer alten Stadt; Cassel und Wilhelmshöhe in alten Stichen und Lithographien*. Text von G.M. Vonau – Typographie Fritz Lometsch (Kassel: Friedrich Lometsch, 1955); *Kassel vor dem Feuersturm*. Hrsg. von Dr. Rudolf Helm. Mit einem Nachwort von G.M. Vonau (Kassel: Schneider & Weber ²1953); *Hessisches Land*. Mit einem Vorwort von G.M. Vonau (Kassel: Karl Winter, 1948); G.M. Vonau ed., *Führer durch Kassel und Wilhelmshöhe. Ein Wegweiser für Einheimische und Fremde* (Kassel: Karl Basch, 1st-4th ed., 1953-56). For Vonau's reputation by the time of his death in 1956 see the obituaries collected in StAK S1 Nr. 2379.

⁷⁴ Vonau, *Kassel. Bauwerke einer alten Stadt*, p. 5.

like a discovery, a first rendezvous, even if we will never again see the building in the reality of the cityscape, which has been transformed by a dreadful event [*ungeheuerliches Geschehen*]", as the onetime Nazi propagandist obliquely referred to the air war in 1950.⁷⁵

Central elements of this nostalgic narrative were prefigured in an article that Vonau had written in early November 1943 for the Nazi daily, *Kurhessische Landeszeitung*.⁷⁶ The article dealt with the destruction in the recent air raid of the so-called "*Grimm* house", a half timbered Renaissance building in which the two Romantic philologists Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm had lived from 1805 to 1814. "Buildings have a face like humans", Vonau wrote, anthropomorphising his subject matter. "In front of the rubble of the *Grimm* house, we stand in front of a beloved being; a beloved being that died, was murdered." The destruction of the *Grimm* house, then, called for mourning, "mourning that all people conscious of *Kultur* ought to share". In the injunction to mourn was embedded an accusation, for the air war was "annihilation, destruction, murder [...] extermination at all cost", as Vonau declared. The author thus skilfully blended the local with the national, sentimental art journalism with hate propaganda. For his entry on the *Grimm* house in the memory book of 1950, Vonau copied verbatim those passages from his article that dealt with the significance of Grimm's collection of fairy tales "as the greatest cultural present" [*Kulturgeschenk*] for the "German people" and "all of humanity". By contrast, his ramblings on the criminality of the allied air war had disappeared.

"Old-Kassel" was not an invention of the post-war world but derived from the turn-of the century preservationist movement, which had discovered the picturesque qualities of Germany's historic cityscapes—the "beautiful old town[s]"—as a source of local and national pride and identity.⁷⁷ The most influential of the memory books of the 1950s, *Kassel before the Firestorm*, borrowed its photographic imagery from the preservationist manifesto of 1913, *Alt Cassel*, by Alois Holtmeyer.⁷⁸ Nor was the attempt to define the city in terms of art and culture a novel phenomenon. Rather, it was a selective appropriation of

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

⁷⁶ "Das Haus an der Wildemannsgasse. Vor den Trümmern des Grimm-Hauses. Unzerstörbar bleibt der Geist", *KLZ* 14/262 (8-11-43), p. 3.

⁷⁷ Jürgen Paul, "Der Wiederaufbau der historischen Städte in Deutschland nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg", in: Meckseper and Siebenmorgen eds., *Die alte Stadt*, pp. 114-156, here: pp. 119f.; Klaus von Beyme, *Der Wiederaufbau*, pp. 13-24. On Kassel see Alois Holtmeyer, *Alt Cassel* (Marburg: Elwert, 1913), pp. 5f., and passim; A. Holtmeyer, *Die Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler im Regierungsbezirk Kassel*, vol. IV: Kreis Cassel-Stadt (Marburg: Elwert, 1923); *Alt-Cassel. Federzeichnungen von Ernst Metz* (Melsungen: Heimatschollen Verlag, [1922]). See also the periodicals by the local *Heimat* movement: *Hessenland. Zeitschrift für die Kulturpflege des Bezirksverbandes Hessen* (1890ff.); *Heimat-Schollen. Blätter zur Pflege hessischer Art, Geschichte und Heimatkunst* (1921ff.); *Hessische Heimat. Veröffentlichungen des Landesvereins für Heimatschutz für Kurhessen und Waldeck in Verbindung mit dem Museumsverein der Stadt Kassel und dem Verein für Naturkunde in Kassel* (1937ff.). On the history of preservationism in Hesse see H. Feldtkeller, "Aus der Geschichte der Denkmalpflege in Hessen", in: *Hessische Heimat* NF 25 (1975), pp. 18-23. On preservationism and memory in general Rudy Koschar, *Germany's Transient Pasts. Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (USA: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁷⁸ Compare Helm, *Kassel vor dem Feuersturm* (1950), pp. 17ff. to A. Holtmeyer, *Alt Cassel* (1913), pp. 1-96.

a tradition that throughout the Third Reich had run parallel to the militaristic image of Kassel as the City of the *Reich* Warrior Days.⁷⁹ In post-war Kassel, the nostalgic narrative was carried by a group of (self-appointed) custodians of the city's cultural heritage who tended to be middle class in their social disposition and conservative in their political outlook, often supporting the *FDP*.⁸⁰ They depicted "Old Kassel" as a "gem of medieval architecture" rather than an unsanitary, overcrowded district with a distinct proletarian milieu and radical politics. In short, 1950s nostalgia sanitised and depoliticised *Alt-Kassel*.⁸¹

Despite their idealisation of the 'beauty' of *Alt-Kassel*, the middle class guardians of the architectural heritage made only half-hearted attempts at exploiting the critical potential inherent in this notion in order to criticize the brutal modernisation that the *SPD*-led civil authorities, drawing on the ideas and personnel of Nazi-era city planning, had initiated.⁸² To employ Svetlana Boym's distinction, post-war nostalgia was 'reflective' rather than 'restorative'.⁸³ The myth of Old-Kassel was premised on the assumption of irredeemable loss. Although individuals such as the curator of the State Art Collection, Rudolf Helm, and the journalist, German M. Vonau, spoke out in public against the removal of the vestiges of the historic city, on the whole, the planning elites faced little popular opposition in their pursuit of constructing a "new city on historic ground".⁸⁴ *Kasseler* attended in great numbers the exhibition, "Alt-Kassel—The art and history of a beautiful town", which was staged by the State Art Collection in order to "honour the city's past" in the summer of 1947.⁸⁵ This nostalgic sentiment did not, however, translate into political pressure from

⁷⁹ See, for example, *Kassel-Wilhelmshöhe, die schöne deutsche Kunst und Parkstadt* (Deutschland-Bildheft No. 232) (Berlin: Universum, [1935]); Walter Kramm, *Kassel, Wilhelmshöhe, Wilhelmstal* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1933).

⁸⁰ See the contributions of German M. Vonau, Hans Vogel, head of the state art collection [*Direktor der Staatlichen Kunstsammlung*], and Dr. Bleibaum, regional preservationist, to *FDP-Kreisvorstand Kassel* ed., *Freie Demokratische Partei. Landesparteitag Hessen. Kassel 10.-12. März 1950* (Kassel, 1950). The art critic Karl Kaltwasser was town councillor for the FDP from 1952 to 1968. See StAK S1 No. 1527. *Karl Kaltwasser*.

⁸¹ In the 1930s, there lived 460 people to the hectare of the Old Town and the Upper New Town. Compare Wolfgang Kemp & Floris Neusüß eds., *Kassel 1850 bis heute. Fotografie in Kassel – Kassel in Fotografien* (Munich: Schirmer-Mosel, 1981), pp. 16-24. Compare the memoirs of the Communist activist, Willi Belz, *Die Standhaften. Über den Widerstand in Kassel 1933-45* (Ludwigsburg: K. J. Schromm, 1960). See also the helpful MA dissertation by Holger Marsen, Ulrike Kulbarsch, Peter Soltau, *Stadtteilgeschichte als Stadtgeschichte. Kassel* (Kassel: Kulbarsch, 1978), pp. 152-209.

⁸² On the rebuilding of Kassel as a "new city on historic ground" see Folckert Lüken-Isberner, "Kassel: Neue Stadt auf altem Grund", in: Beyme et.al. eds., *Neue Städte aus Ruinen*, pp. 251-266.

⁸³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xviii.

⁸⁴ Rudolf Helm, "Kassel baut auf", *Hessische Nachrichten*. 1/50 (25-5-1946), p. 4; German M. Vonau, "Die Rettung unserer Städte", *Kasseler Post* (8-8-51).

⁸⁵ Staatliche Kunstsammlung in Kassel, *ALT-KASSEL. Aus Kunst und Geschichte einer schönen Stadt*. Ausstellung im Hessischen Landesmuseum, April bis Juni 1947 (Kassel: Karl Winter, 1947), p. 3. On attendance see "Alt-Kassel", *KZ* (30-5-47), p. 2.

'below' for the preservation of what had been left of the historic cityscape in the contemporary environment.⁸⁶

With the passing of time, representations of "Old Kassel" in public discourse were gradually replaced by images of the contemporary city, a process that was closely related to the conceptualisation of the city's reconstruction in the 1950s as a "rebirth". This can be illustrated best with subsequent editions of what was perhaps the most successful of the memory books of the 1950s, *Kassel before the Firestorm*. The first edition of 1950 depicted the cultural monuments of Kassel with special emphasis on the middle age and Renaissance periods, all of which had more or less been "wiped out" by the "dreadful destruction that Kassel suffered in the last war", as the editor, Rudolf Helm, put it in his introductory essay.⁸⁷ By contrast, the destruction itself was absent, as was the rubble.

Three years later, a new edition appeared on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the air raid. An advertisement in the conservative *Kasseler Post* praised *Kassel before the Firestorm* as a "book in memory of the immemorial cityscape", as a must-have for "every *Kasselner*, whether living in Kassel or abroad". The advertisement stressed the advantages of the second, improved edition where the concept of "Old Kassel" had been extended to include the city districts of Wilhelmian origin in order to keep alive "memories of places of happy lives". Moreover, the second edition had also become "a book for the future", documenting the population's "will to live", as the advertisement pointed out.⁸⁸ In a new epilogue, German M. Vonau emphasised the importance of the book, which did not just preserve "delightful memories of what has been lost" but, in the revised, second edition, also celebrated "the changed image of a city reborn". In this context, images of the destruction became presentable within a pictorial sequence of 'before—after—now'. According to Vonau, they were to be read both as a "memento" to the "hardest fateful hours of our city" and as a sign of confidence in the "indestructible [...] human will to live".⁸⁹

Picturesque representations of Old-Kassel tended to depict motifs from the medieval old town, with the Church of St. Martin or *Martinskirche* as the defining landmark at its centre. Through certain photographic techniques such as frame, detail, photographic angle and position, they evoked what Vonau had called the "indefinable magic" of old Kassel, a

⁸⁶ Compare Thomas König, "Der Konflikt um die Erhaltung historischer Bausubstanz", in: *Leben in Ruinen*, pp. 97-115, here: p. 102. Ironically, the one notable exception revolved around the preservation of a building that, in a narrow sense, did not form part of *Alt-Kassel* at all, the late Wilhelmian state theatre on the *Friedrichsplatz*. Compare the press clipping collection in StAK S5 N43. *Staatstheater*.

⁸⁷ Rudolf Helm, *Kassel vor dem Feuersturm* (Kassel: Schneider und Weber, 1950), p. 15.

⁸⁸ "Der Wiederaufbau Kassels in Wort und Bild. 20 seitige Sonderbeilage", *Kasseler Post* 71/248 (24/25-10-53), no pagination.

⁸⁹ Rudolf Helm ed., *Kassel vor dem Feuersturm. Mit einem Nachwort "Zehn Jahre danach" von German M. Vonau* (Kassel: Schneider & Weber, 1953), no pagination.

sentiment of cosy homeliness. Typically reprinted to illustrate commemorative articles on the air war in the local press, these images lost in influence after the fifteenth anniversary of the air raid in 1958. In 1960, the third edition of *Kassel before the Firestorm* appeared in radically altered form under the new title of *Kassel then and now*.⁹⁰ It kept only about one third of the images from the previous editions while two thirds showed contemporary motifs. On the dust jacket, the editors explained their decision with the passage of time and the "many new sense impressions" that the contemporary city afforded to the observer.

"In its present form, the book only records of the old Kassel what seems worthy to pass on to a younger generation that never knew the Kassel of old. After that, we want to focus on the new Kassel."⁹¹

In Magdeburg, nostalgia did not play the same role as in Kassel. Although the first post-war administration, in January 1946, commissioned the building department [*Bauverwaltung*] to produce visual material from "old" Magdeburg as well as from the contemporary city, visual representations of the bygone generally remained of subsidiary importance in the public narrative on urban destruction.⁹² There appear to have been two reasons for this. Firstly, as a city whose medieval and Renaissance architecture had been destroyed in the Thirty Years War, Magdeburg had never commanded the same attention from turn-of-the-century preservationists as Kassel had done. "Although Magdeburg is one of Germany's oldest towns, it has the outward appearance of a modern German city", an English-language city guide commented in 1939.⁹³ In the 1920s, the Social Democratic city administration self-consciously promoted Magdeburg as a "youthful" city that had embraced architectural modernism, coining the slogan, "city of the new building spirit".⁹⁴ By comparison, the phrase 'old Magdeburg' referred to the city as it had existed before the destruction of 1631 rather than to a 'beautiful town' worthy of admiration and preservation in the present. In short, there was no tradition on which the cultural enunciation of post-war nostalgia could have drawn.

⁹⁰ Wilhelm Batz & Kurt Mitte eds., *Kassel einst und jetzt*. Ein Bildbuch mit Beiträgen von Rudolf Helm, Karl Kaltwasser, Kurt Mitte. Zeichnungen von Christian Beyer (Kassel: Schneider & Weber, 1960).

⁹¹ Ibid., dust jacket.

⁹² StAM Rep. 18/4, Ra. 4. *Ratssitzungen*. "Dezernentenbesprechung vom 2.1.1946, 1. a: Schaffung von Bildmaterial".

⁹³ *Magdeburg. The City in the Heart of Germany*. Ed. Magdeburger Verkehrsverein und Verkehrsamt (Magdeburg, [1939]).

⁹⁴ Hermann Beims, "Vorwort", in: *Magdeburg*. Ed. Magistrat der Stadt Magdeburg (Berlin-Halensee: Dari, 1927), pp. 5f., here: p. 6; Johannes Göderitz, "Magdeburg, die Stadt des Neuen Bauwillens", in: ibid., pp. 26-31. See also Mathias Tullner, "Modernisierung und mitteldeutsche Hauptstadtpolitik – Das 'neue Magdeburg' 1918-1933", in: *Magdeburg. Geschichte der Stadt*, pp. 729-764, here: pp. 742-748.

Second, public discourse in the city was dominated by the official narrative of the political elites.⁹⁵ Although in the immediate post-war period, local artists and photographers were still able to publish visual representations of the pre-war cityscape, such production soon ceased.⁹⁶ It appears, therefore, that some kind of public demand for romanticised images of the pre-war city did exist in war-torn Magdeburg as well. Yet, there was little room for the public enunciation of such sentiments due to the restrictions placed upon public memory by the political representatives of the emerging Socialist dictatorship.⁹⁷ After all, the catchword and self-professed goal of the local *SED* elites and their associated 'bourgeois' political parties was "to build a new, more beautiful Magdeburg in a new Germany".⁹⁸

There were, however, two instances in the late 1940s and early 1950s in which visual representations of "old Magdeburg" gained a limited currency in the public treatment of urban destruction. During the immediate post-war period of 1946/47, the *SED*-led civil administration regularly invoked the idea of *Heimat* by way of visual representations of the undamaged cityscape. In the reconstruction exhibition of 1947, "Magdeburg is alive!", for example, an entire exhibition room was devoted to the theme of "dear old *Heimat*". While the cabinets displayed photographs of a selection of locally renowned *Magdeburger*, including poets, socialists, reformers and eccentrics, the walls were decorated with images of Baroque buildings, churches and streets. Marks of ownership [*Hauszeichen*] retrieved from the rubble were placed on pedestals. The room was dominated by a panoramic aerial view of the city measuring 3m × 2.5 m. – "All together, a piece of the cosy and yet

⁹⁵ For the general context see Martin Sabrow ed., *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs. Der Umgang mit der Vergangenheit in der DDR* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2000); idem, "Kollektive Erinnerung und kollektiviertes Gedächtnis. Die Liebknecht-Luxemburg-Demonstration in der Gedenkkultur der DDR", in: Alexandre Escudier, *Gedenken im Zwiespalt. Konfliktlinien europäischen Erinnerns* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2001), pp. 117-138.

⁹⁶ H. Friedrich, *Magdeburg. Bildmappe 1* (Magdeburg: Otto Lindner, 1946), idem, *Magdeburg. Bildmappe 2* (Magdeburg: Otto Lindner, 1946). See also Lu Seegers, "Kulturelles Leben in Magdeburg nach 1945", in: *Magdeburg. Portrait einer Stadt*, pp. 879-906, here: p. 891.

⁹⁷ Compare the contrasting example of Dresden: Matthias Meinhardt, "Der Mythos vom "Alten Dresden" als Bauplan. Entwicklung, Ursachen und Folgen einer retrospektiv-eklektizistischen Stadtvorstellung", in: Andreas Ranft und Stephan Selzer, *Städte aus Trümmern. Katastrophenbewältigung zwischen Antike und Moderne* (Göttingen: V & R, 2004), pp. 172-200.

⁹⁸ Compare the comments by Alfred Weber in *Freiheit* (12-5-46). "Long before the last war there was talk about the redevelopment of the old town. The narrow, dark streets and alleys were the centres of physical and mental disease. Here, rickets and tuberculoses were at home; this was the breeding ground for crime and moral degradation." On the reconstruction of Magdeburg see Hans Berger, "Magdeburg: Klassenkampf der Dominanten", in: Beyme et.al. eds., *Neue Städte*, pp. 299-312; Hermann Manz, *Der Wiederaufbau der Zentren der beiden Städte Magdeburg und Hannover nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Cologne: Geograph. Inst., 1995); Iris Reuther / Monika Schulte, "Städtebau 1945-1990", in: *Magdeburg. Geschichte der Stadt*, pp. 915-932; Landeshauptstadt Magdeburg / Stadtplanungsamt Magdeburg, *Städtebau in Magdeburg 1945-1990. 2 vols.* (Magdeburg: Landeshauptstadt Magdeburg, 1998).

industrial Magdeburg", as the Communist daily, *Freiheit*, commented in its report on the exhibition.⁹⁹

With the focus on panoramic views of the pre-war cityscape, architectural landmarks and rubble clearance, the visual narrative as produced by the Magdeburg civil administration during the immediate post-war period differed little from similar narratives as they were published by the civil administration in Kassel.¹⁰⁰ Within this frame, cultural landmarks represented *Heimat* rather than *Kultur*, positioning the present *SED* administration in a long tradition of local self-government. While acknowledging the achievements of the 'bourgeois' past, the Magdeburg mayor, Rudolf Eberhard, turned sharply against romanticising tendencies. As he stressed in his opening address of the 1947 exhibition,

"We think in admiration of old Magdeburg, the city of our fathers. [...] But we refrain from any romantic rapture that only recognises the good in the old and depicts the past as a realm of quiet cosiness."¹⁰¹

On the whole, the loss of the Magdeburg of old was not to be regretted. "We have lost a city and gained the freedom to rebuild her according to our will and our plans", the mayor declared.¹⁰²

As Magdeburg went through a process of Stalinisation in 1949/50, images of old Magdeburg as visual markers of "dear old *Heimat*" disappeared from public discourse. Instead, they were occasionally used in order to illustrate the propaganda campaign against the Western powers, and in particular, the United States. In the spring and summer of 1952, the *SED* daily, *Volksstimme*, ran a picture series with photographs of well-known landmarks from the time before the war. The series was called, "Do you remember – Before Ami-barbarians destroyed our city", and denounced allied bombing as a crime against *Kultur*. On 22nd January 1952, for example, a pre-war image of the *Johanniskirche* was published with the caption,

"Who from Magdeburg does not remember the hill of St. John with its honourable church? [...] Never will they forget who reduced their hometown to debris and rubble with phosphorous and fire bombs. Imperialist barbarians must never again

⁹⁹ "Lieber trocken Brot als Bombenhagel. Wiederaufbaukundgebung und Eröffnung der Ausstellung 'Magdeburg lebt!'. *Freiheit* (9-6-47), p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Erich Heinicke, "Kassel – einst – jetzt – später", in: *Baurundschau* 37/17-18 (1947); Ludwig Kessler, "Kassel baut auf...!" (Berlin: Verlag für Technik und Kultur, [1946]), pp. 3-10.

¹⁰¹ StAM Rep. 41/92. *Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Ausstellung "Magdeburg lebt"* 1947, fol. 13f.: "Die neue Stadt – das gemeinsame Werk", here: fol. 13.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, fol. 14.

destroy the cultural possessions of our nation; therefore all peace-loving Germans opt for all-German elections".¹⁰³

In tone and theme, the series drew directly on a nationwide Nazi propaganda campaign from the summer of 1943, which had depicted cultural monuments in their undamaged state under the heading of "From the debt register of the air gangsters".¹⁰⁴ Whereas in Kassel the cultural enunciation of nostalgia allowed one-time Nazi propagandists to re-establish themselves as honourable art critics mourning the loss of architectural treasures, in Magdeburg the narrators changed but the narrative remained the same. Here, post-card images from old Magdeburg served as evidence for an alleged crime against German Kultur.

Visualising the 'Disfigured Face'—Rubble Photography

The German visual inventory of urban destruction derived from two sources and two time periods: professional and private photographs taken during and after the war. In the years of 1940 to 1945, photo reporters and professional photographers took pictures on the orders of local state and party officials, while amateurs shot private photographs in circumvention of official regulations.¹⁰⁵ After the war, the new civil administrations as well as institutions such as the church commissioned professionals to document the destruction. At the same time, photo reporters and photo amateurs photographed their transformed environment, sometimes for commercial purposes.¹⁰⁶ In the post-war memory

¹⁰³ "Kennst Du es noch? Bevor Ami-Gangster unsere Stadt zerstörten", in: *Volksstimme*. 6/18 (22-1-52), p. 4. See also *Volksstimme* 6/19 (23-1-52); 6/21 (25-1-52); 6/23; 6/24; 6/27; 6/28-30; 6/33-35; 6/37; 6/40-47; 6/49; etc.

¹⁰⁴ "Aus dem Schuldbuch der Luftgangster", *Völkischer Beobachter* 56/153 (2-6-43), p. 3; 56/155 (4-6-43), p. 3; 56/159 (8-6-43), p. 3; 56/206 (28-7-43), p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ For the context see: Thomas Deres und Martin Rüther eds., *Fotografieren verboten! Heimliche Aufnahmen von der Zerstörung Kölns* (Köln: Emons, 1995); Rolf Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen. Fotografie im NS-Staat* (Bielsko-Biała: Philo Fine Arts, 2003); Ludger Derenthal, *Bilder der Trümmer- und Aufbaujahre. Fotografie im sich teilenden Deutschland* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 1999), pp. 44-86; Jörn Glasenapp, "Nach dem Brand. Überlegungen zur deutschen Trümmerfotografie", in: *Fotogeschichte* 91 (2004), pp. 47-64; Jens Jäger, "Fotografie – Erinnerung – Identität. Die Trümmeraufnahmen aus deutschen Städten 1945", in: *Kriegsende 1945 in Deutschland*. Ed. Jörg Hillmann und John Zimmermann (München: Oldenbourg, 2002), pp. 287-300; *Deutsche Fotografie. Macht eines Mediums 1870-1970*. Ed. Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Köln: Du Mont, 1997).

¹⁰⁶ In Kassel, the civil administration commissioned Georg Heinrich Worch to photograph the bomb damage of 11th September 1941. It is not clear who documented the much larger damage of 22nd October 1943, perhaps also Worch or Karl Haase-Halver (1905-1970). See StAK A.1.10, No. 1,083. *Secretary Minna Bähr to Gustaf Lahmeyer, lord mayor 1933-1945*, letter of 13th Sept. 1941; "Untergang des alten Kassels", HN 248 (24-10-58). Private photographs were taken during the war by, among others, the professional photographer, Kurt W. L. Mueller (1901-1977), the art historian Karl Paetow, Carl-Werner Schmidt-Luchs, the Marburg fire fighter Friedrich Unkel, and the *Luftwaffe* pilot Anton Riediger. The most important post-war photographer was Walter Thieme, who documented the destruction for the Protestant church and traded rubble photography commercially, earning him the nickname, "rubble photographer". See *Leben in Ruinen*, p. 103ff. The "film-amateurs Kassel", in 1950, called on their members to "collect memories and photograph and film everything" that was dear to them. See "Kamera-Ausflug in die Vergangenheit", *KP* (14/15-10-50).

culture, selected war-time images merged with rubble photography of the immediate post-war period, subsuming bomb damage from a two-score number of air raids, demolitions by the retreating *Wehrmacht*, and rubble clearance under the heading of a single symbolic *lieu de mémoire*.

Kassel

In Kassel, visualisations of urban destruction served both as documentary evidence and as symbolic representation of death and survival. The visual narrative was distinguished by three features: the recurrence of certain motifs, contextualisation, and, finally, romanticization.

The multitude of images tended to revolve around a set of recurring motifs, of which the most prominent were the cross and the ruins of a local landmark, the *Martinskirche*.¹⁰⁷ Both featured together as early as 1947 when the *Hessische Nachrichten* devoted an illustrated article to the memory of the air raid of 22nd October 1943. The picture on the title page was called, "Old-Kassel today". It was composed around a diagonal line, which stretched from the bottom left corner to the top right corner, dividing the foreground from the background (fig. 11). In the foreground, the observer looked upon a heap of rubble, overgrown with weeds. The heap was crowned by a gravestone in the shape of a cross whose upper half contrasted sharply against the sky. The focus, however, rested on the burnt-out towers of the Church of St. Martin in the background. The church structured the landscape of rubble, rendering the transformed urban environment recognisable to the local observer. The motif allowed for the moonscape of rubble to be identified as the hometown while visualising its 'disfigured face'. As such, the photograph was open to contrasting readings. As the traditional Christian symbol of mourning, the cross testified to the 'death' of 'Old Kassel', which four years after the raid still presented a picture of utter desolation. In this perspective, the photograph might be interpreted as a veiled criticism of the civil administration, which had made little progress in reviving the city two years after the end of hostilities.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, the cross could also be understood as a symbol of resilience and hope, pointing to the existence of a mourning congregation and thus to the continuation of life among the rubble.

In Magdeburg, Paul Gehlert appears to have worked for the city as the official photographer both before and after 1945. See StAM. *Fotoalbum P. Gehlert*.

¹⁰⁷ Compare the similar observation by Klaus Naumann, *Der Krieg als Text. Das Jahr 1945 im kulturellen Gedächtnis der Presse* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998), p. 35.

¹⁰⁸ The relationship between the daily press and the civil administration was strained throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s. See Interior Ministry to Regional Councillor [Regierungspräsident], 29th August 1947: "Verhältnis des Magistrats der Stadt Kassel zur Presse". In: StAK A.1.10 No. 53.



FIGURE 11. "Old-Kassel today" reads the caption of the commemorative photograph, *HN* 22-10-47.

Second, visual representations of the destruction rarely appeared in isolation but were usually put in context. Verbal or visual contextualisation may be understood as an attempt on the part of the local protagonists of public discourse to structure ways of seeing, to influence responses to the visual. Throughout the period, the depiction of the "disfigured face" was usually linked to a positive message. Often, this was done visually through the juxtaposition of rubble photography with visual representations of the 'new Kassel', as in the *Kasseler Post* of 22nd October 1952, which contrasted "images of cruelty" with "images of hope".¹⁰⁹ The same effect could also be reached textually, as in the following example. On the fifth anniversary of the air raid in 1948, the *Kasseler Zeitung* marked the day by publishing a photograph and a poem. Both were set off from the surrounding text by a double frame, thus stressing their commemorative character (fig. 12).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ "Mahnstätte der Grausamkeit – Lichter der Hoffnung. Heute vor neun Jahren raste der Feuersturm über Kassel", *KP* (22-10-52).

¹¹⁰ Fünf Jahre danach – Gedanken zum 22. Oktober, *KZ* (22-10-48). For the text plus translation see appendix 4.



FIGURE 12. "Five Years After—Thoughts on 22nd October", KZ 22-10-48.

The image took in a panoramic view of the devastated old town, looking down from the tower of the Lutheran Church in south-eastern direction upon a scene of near total urban destruction. This impression was underscored further by a number of compositional elements. The frame cut off the landscape of ruins at the bottom, left and right margins, while the camera focused on a triangle of ruins in the centre, two of which were important landmarks, the Church of St. Martin to the left and the *Druselturm* to the right. Moreover, the slanting angle made the landscape of ruins appear to extend all the way to the horizon. There was hardly any life visible in the streets, reinforcing the impression of irredeemable desolation, of a violent break with everything that went before it, a zero hour. Taken by the professional photographer, Walter Thieme, in 1946 or 1947, the image provided visual confirmation of the notion of 'total' destruction, and soon attained iconic status in the local memory culture.¹¹¹ By the time of its first publication in the local media in 1948, it may already have circulated as a postcard.

¹¹¹ The image was reproduced in the early 1950s in *Kasseler Post* of 1-1-50, "Schicksal unserer Stadt"; *Kasseler Post* of 22-10-52, "Mahnstätte der Grausamkeit – Lichter der Hoffnung"; *Die neue Zeitung* No. 307 of 31-12-51, "Kassel. Von Wolfgang Drews"; *Kasseler Post*, supplement Oct. 1953. "Kassel – Zehn Jahre danach. Zerstörung und Wiederaufbau einer Stadt". It has remained one of the defining images of the

The accompanying poem was called, "Five years after—Thoughts on the 22nd October". The sixteen verses were constructed around a tension between blissful memories of an idealised past and descriptions of a desolate present. The lyrical I introduced the subject matter in the stock phrases of conventional *Heimat* poetry, "In dear old Kassel, on the beautiful banks of the river Fulda", the first verse ran. Here, *Heimat* was present as an absence, defined through loss: "Proud buildings and beautiful squares" had found an "early grave"; "rubble, debris and pain" had replaced "wealth [and] prosperity" while "grief" had taken the place of "merriment" and "excitement". The bulk of the poem thus read like a textual commentary on the Thieme photograph. Characteristically, however, the poem did not end on despair but on a note of optimism, "Despite everything we are not going to despair, strong in our faith everywhere!", the lyrical I intoned in verse thirteen, and continued,

"Our hope will not disappear
Wounds heal with time
[...]
Our Diligence will create something new again
And the time of want will be pushed aside."

The poem provides a good example of the dominant narrative frame of the 1950s. Typically, images of urban destruction were embedded in a tale of hope and confidence—a public narrative that preceded actual progress in the reconstruction by several years.

Next to recurring motifs and contextualisation, another influential mode of representing the 'disfigured face' was to soften the visual impact of urban devastation. This was done by drawing on the conventions of idyllic genre painting, presenting 'nature' as a benign force that covered the devastated cityscape with flowers or snow. An early example was published on Whitsun 1946 in the *Hessische Nachrichten* where a photograph showed horses grazing peacefully against a backdrop of bizarre ruinous shapes. Another image focused on wild flowers in full bloom, reaching up to the façade of the severely damaged Wilhelmian government building.¹¹² While here, 'nature' was invoked in order to aestheticize the landscape of rubble, the civil administration preferred painting to photography as a medium through which to render devastation presentable. For a city-sponsored publication, *Kassel is alive—despite everything*, of 1948, the city council commissioned a local artist, Christian Beyer, to supply water colour drawings of famous architectural landmarks in their post-war state.¹¹³

destruction' to the present day. See StAK S5 P97. See also Stadtmuseum Kassel, [Ausstellungen]. *Interviewpartner / Innen*. "Interview mit Herrn Walter Thieme vom 16.6.1993".

¹¹² "Kasseler Pfingsten", HN 2/56-7 (8-6-46), p. 4. Compare also Hans Vogel, *Die Ruine in der Darstellung der abendländischen Kunst* (Kassel: Winter, 1948).

¹¹³ *Kassel lebt trotz alledem!* (Kassel: Kasseler Druck- und Verlagshaus, 1948).

Both approaches did not remain confined to the sphere of representations but by the mid-1950s were applied to the cityscape as well. For the Federal Flower Exhibition (*Bundesgartenschau*) of 1955, the rubble that had been deposited on the banks of the *Karlsaue*—a park stretching on the left of the river Fulda—was planted with roses and thus transformed into a tourist attraction, while the severely damaged neo-classical building of the *Fridericianum* was used to house an international exhibition on modern art.¹¹⁴

Magdeburg

In contrast to Kassel, there was no space in the official Magdeburg media for romantic rubble photography. Here, visual representations of urban destruction were integrated into two narrative contexts. The first was one of cause and effect, the second of a heroic overcoming of a zero hour.

In the official discourse, wartime and post-war images of the devastated cityscape testified above all to the effects of a criminal deed. By the early 1950s, the *SED*-controlled media returned to the Nazi propaganda narrative that had used selected images of damaged churches and civilian dwellings to denounce the allied air war as a crime. In so doing, the local media abandoned an earlier interpretation that had named Hitler as the prime culprit for the destruction of the city. Against the background of the Cold War, Anglo-American 'imperialism' took the place of Hitler and 'his' war. In January 1952, for example, an image depicting a street of rubble with the damaged *Johanniskirche* in the background was supplied with the caption,

"The Anglo-American air gangsters stopped neither in front of churches nor living quarters. Their catchword was to destroy and to murder".¹¹⁵

Rubble photography constituted one element within a broader narrative that sought to draw on personal memories of strategic bombing in order to legitimise the policies of the Communist elites. "The rubble in our city admonishes: what do you do for peace?", was the caption of a drawing depicting the Magdeburg cathedral.¹¹⁶

Images of urban destruction were not just employed as an accusation but also as backdrop to demonstrate the success of the reconstruction effort: they visualised the 'zero hour' against which the 'new Magdeburg' contrasted sharply. A visual sequence of three images from January 1953 may provide a typical example. Picture one showed a scene of utter desolation. The facade of a burnt-out building in the foreground drew attention to a

¹¹⁴ Compare Lucius Burckhardt, "Blütenzauber auf Trümmern. Die Bundesgartenschau von 1955", in: *Kassel 1955. Die Stadt im Jahr der ersten documenta* Exhibition catalogue (Marburg: Jonas, 1992), pp. 77-83; Harald Kimpel, *documenta. Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Köln: Du Mont, 1997), pp. 73-146.

¹¹⁵ "Auferstanden aus Ruinen", *Volksstimme* (16-1-52), p. 4.

¹¹⁶ *Volksstimme* (16-1-51), p. 4.

street covered in debris, which directed the eye to the damaged towers of the *Johanniskirche* in the centre-background. While no sign of life was visible in this desolate cityscape, picture two showed workers lifting an iron girder from the rubble, symbolically leading upwards. The positive message was underlined by the caption, which read, "We tackled the problems". The final picture focused on new residential blocks on Karl Marx Street, demonstrating the success of the communal effort.¹¹⁷

These examples notwithstanding, rubble photography played a rather limited role in the local master narrative of criminal destruction and heroic reconstruction. This was no coincidence but the consequence of a political directive from above. In January 1953, the local *SED*-leadership decided that the press in future was to put greater emphasis on the "perspective of reconstruction" in its coverage of the memory place of 16th January.¹¹⁸

"The new City, more beautiful than ever"—*Heimat* Reborn?

In both cities, the annual return of the *lieu de mémoire* provided an occasion to review the progress of the rebuilding effort. In Kassel as well as Magdeburg, a narrative developed which conceptualised the 1950s reconstruction as a 'rebirth' of *Heimat* following upon its 'death' in the air war. In Magdeburg, the notion of 'rebirth' was invested with quasi-sacral connotations and soon took on a triumphal tone. The city had risen from the rubble and *Heimat* been reborn "more beautiful" than ever, as local functionaries and the media would stress over and over again.¹¹⁹ In Kassel, the rhetoric of overcoming the rubble was prominent as well but the tone was celebratory rather than triumphal. Kassel was being rebuilt but if *Heimat* would return was another question. Moreover, the idea itself came under scrutiny: Was there, after all, a link between the *Heimat* of old and the catastrophe?

¹¹⁷ *Volksstimme* No. 13 (16-1-53), p. 5.

¹¹⁸ LA Magd. –LHA-, Rep. 16 *SED-Stadtleitung Magdeburg. Sekretariat*. No. IV/5/1/50, fol. 16: Minutes of 2nd January 1953.

¹¹⁹ "Aus den Trümmern wuchs ein schöneres Magdeburg", *Volksstimme* 12 (15-1-56), p. 5. See also *Volksstimme* of 16-1-50, p. 3; 16-1-52, p. 4; 16-1-53, p. 5; 16-1-54, p. 7.

Magdeburg

On the decennial of the air raid in 1955, the *SED*-daily, *Volksstimme*, carried a commemorative page that was carefully arranged and richly illustrated (fig. 13). The page was framed by the first lines of the East German national anthem, "Risen from the Ruins / And Facing the Future". The quotation did not just make for a nice visual effect but also set the theme for the textual and visual narratives, linking the local to the national. The "new Magdeburg" was rising from the "rubble and the graves", in which the combined destructive force of "Anglo-American air gangsters", "American monopoly capitalists", "Fascism" and "German militarism" had thrown the city, as the first secretary of the local *SED*, Werner Guse, stressed in his programmatic article.¹²⁰ The "new Magdeburg" was not just a city rebuilt but a society transformed. The 'hometown' was an interchangeable representation of the new social order, "where the factories and the residential buildings as well as the new social and cultural facilities are owned by the people": *Heimat* stood for Magdeburg just as much as for the German Democratic Republic and the idea of a "united, democratic and peace-loving Germany".¹²¹ The "new Magdeburg", however, remained under threat. "The same American monopoly capitalists who ordered the destruction of our city and bear the responsibility for the unspeakable atrocities that have brought so much suffering on the population are again preparing another war", Guse wrote ominously. The injunction of "never again" thus linked the past with the present, allied bombing in World War II with the Parisian treaty of the 1950s.¹²²

Public memory invested the reconstruction with sacral shades of meaning, as is best illustrated by the visual sequence that occupied the centre of the page. Three images and a poem were arranged as a triptych, in which the construction workers on the wings took on the role of disciples worshipping an apotheosised city that was framed by an archway resembling a halo. The reconstruction was a sacral undertaking, for which the two workers were prepared to devote several hundred 'voluntary' reconstruction hours over the next twelve months. It was, however, not enough to give one's labour, the city population also needed to identify with the 'fight for peace' in the "peace state" of the GDR, as the poem at the centre bottom of the photomontage stressed, "Your hands carry / the fate of village and town / Preserve like your life / the blossoming seeds of peace", the poet, Georg Järschke, urged his readers in sentimental language. In extension of this argument, the

¹²⁰ *Volksstimme* (15-1-55), p. 4. "Auferstanden aus Ruinen / Und der Zukunft zugewandt". Compare also LA Magd. –LHA- Rep. P16. *SED-Stadtleitung Magdeburg* No. IV/5/1/58, fol. 5.

¹²¹ "Auferstanden aus Ruinen / Und der Zukunft zugewandt", *Volksstimme* (15-1-55), p. 4.

¹²² Ibid.

commemorative article of the following year carried a picture of a paramilitary unit marching through the streets of the "more beautiful Magdeburg". It carried the inscription, "We will never allow to be taken away from us what we have built in eleven years of hard labour, our beautiful residential dwellings, hospitals, child care units [...]. None of this must again be destroyed by an imperialist aggressive war that would only serve the interests of profit-hungry money magnates."¹²³

The rhetoric of 'rebirth' thus served as evidence of both the superiority of the new social order and as a means to foster a climate of fear.

Kassel

In Kassel no less than in Magdeburg, the *lieu de mémoire* of 22nd October 1943 became an occasion that called for celebration. On the 10th anniversary of the air raid in 1953, the local media did not just cover the official commemoration in great detail but also brought out special supplements that reviewed the achievements of the reconstruction. This was done mainly in the medium of photography: "1943 – Kassel on 22nd October – 1953. Picture reports from back then and from today", was the title of a special page by the *Hessische Nachrichten*, which juxtaposed rubble photography with pictures taken in 1953.¹²⁴ By way of visual representations, the air raid of 22nd October 1943 was cast as a zero hour whose causes remained unexplored but whose legacy the "tenacious rebuilding effort" of the city population was about to master.

The conservative *Kasseler Post* published a twenty page supplement, "Kassel ten years after: destruction and reconstruction of a city", in which the editorial took the progress in the rebuilding effort as evidence of the "will to live of the Kassel citizenry [*Bürgertum*]".¹²⁵ This was underlined visually by juxtaposing a contemporary aerial view to Walter Thieme's panoramic image of desolation from 1946/7. In contrast to the left-leaning *Hessische Nachrichten*, the *Kasseler Post* did not exclude images of "Old Kassel" altogether from its pictorial narrative but in no way linked the picturesque views of "medieval artistry" to World War II. The air war was depicted as a "sudden catastrophe engulfing the *Heimat*"; the city as a martyr who "had been forced to drink from the cup of suffering to the full".¹²⁶ On the tenth anniversary of the air raid, it was not so much the actual progress in the physical reconstruction that appeared noteworthy to the editors but the "rebirth of the will to live." "A city has found itself again, which had lost with one

¹²³ "Aus den Trümmern wuchs ein schöneres Magdeburg", *Volksstimme* No. 12 (14-1-56), p. 5.

¹²⁴ "Bildberichte von damals und heute", *Hessische Nachrichten* 9/246 (22-10-53).

¹²⁵ "Zehn Jahre danach. Der Lebenswill des Kasseler Bürgertums", *Kasseler Post*, supplement Oct. 1953.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

stroke not just its corporeal substance but its sense of constituting a polity, a century-old tradition", they maintained.¹²⁷

In contrast to the other two papers, the liberal *Kasseler Zeitung* struck a less optimistic tone, using the decennial to reflect on the meaning of material destruction. "What we have lost...", was the title of an editorial on the front page that stressed the irreversible nature of loss, intimating that even a city rebuilt might not equal the hometown reborn, "No reconstruction plan will ever bring back to life the distinctive atmosphere in the alleys of the old town that once delighted the traveller through Old-Kassel."¹²⁸ In a similar vein, the same journalist noted ominously in his special report, "The *Heimat* ten years after the Firestorm—Kassel's Rebirth",

"On 22nd October 1943 a city was destroyed. A polity that had grown organically through a thousand years lost its face. People come and go; a city dies only once".¹²⁹

In subsequent years, the conservative and liberal press repeatedly voiced concern that the reconstruction took too little cognizance of tradition. "The new city" was the title of an article published in the *Kasseler Post* on the 12th anniversary of the air raid, in which the journalist told an anecdote of an old lady who had lived in the city for 60 years but could not find her way in the rebuilt town. "Kassel lost its historic face 12 years ago. For the older generation, the city never recovered it", the piece concluded.¹³⁰ If there was some concern that the 'new city' for all its progressive features might never become *Heimat*, local publicists also asked more probing questions about the character of the "1000-year-old Kassel" that had 'died' on 22nd October 1943.

These questions were rarely raised in connection with Nazism and the war. While the Kassel adult education centre, in the autumn of 1957, ran a lecture series on the Third Reich under the title of "un-mastered past", the connection between Nazism and the locality was hardly drawn: Kassel as the hometown remained victim, while responsibility rested with supra-local government and institutions, or at most, with certain local individuals.¹³¹ The extent of this consensus is best assessed from its margins. In his memoirs, first published in 1960, the Communist activist, Willi Belz, firmly anchored the destruction of the home town in the Old Testament parable of 'sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind'.¹³² Deplored the disinterestedness of the general public in reflecting on the causes for the disaster, he pointed to the aggressive politics of Nazism in

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ "Was wir verloren haben...", *Kasseler Zeitung* 7/272 (22-10-53), p. 1.

¹²⁹ "Die Heimat zehn Jahre nach dem Feuersturm. Kassels Wiederaufstieg", *Kasseler Zeitung* 7/274 (24-10-53).

¹³⁰ "Die neue Stadt", *KP* (24-11-55).

¹³¹ StAK S4 L15. VHS Kassel, *Arbeitsplan Herbst 1957*, p.4f., "Unbewältigte Vergangenheit".

¹³² AT Hosea 8,7, "For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind".

general and the importance of Kassel as an armaments centre, military garrison, and traffic junction in particular. Even Belz, however, drew a categorical distinction between the locality and the nation: the war had been started "from German soil", the "Nazi state" had turned Kassel into an armaments centre—and the "hometown" had suffered.¹³³

More influential than Belz's Marxist deliberation on guilt and responsibility was another narrative that probed the meaning of catastrophic rupture for the city's past and future. It was most influentially advanced by Karl Kaltwasser, middle class scholar and liberal politician, who jotted down some thoughts as early as November 1943 and developed them into a commemorative article, "Bygone Kassel", published in the *Hessische Nachrichten* on 22nd October 1945.¹³⁴ Twelve years later, the critic returned to the subject in an influential epilogue that he wrote for a new edition of Paul Heidelbach's classic treatment, *Kassel, A Millennium of Hessian City Culture*.¹³⁵

On Kaltwasser's view, the (air) war had done more than destroy the "image" of Kassel; it had "mortally wounded" the city. Here, Kaltwasser saw a crucial difference between Kassel and other German towns, "Whereas elsewhere, in Frankfurt or Hamburg, life had been buried beneath the rubble, in Kassel life itself was buried."¹³⁶ This was less because of a difference in the severity of the air raids than because of the nature of the Kassel of old. Throughout its history, Kassel had been a residential town and a 'city of subjects' [*Untertanenstadt*], which had been defined by and through the state, he argued. In other words, for all its beauty, Old Kassel had lacked in a tradition of civil liberties. As a consequence, "false government" and "erroneous obedience" had had more disastrous effects on the city than on other German towns.¹³⁷ In arguing thus, Kaltwasser, shifted the focus from the air war to the wider historical context. Rather than the bombing, the lack of a confident middle class culture was to blame for Kassel's 'death' in October 1943.

By the end of the 1950s, the *Heimat* of old was taking on a different connotation. To the same extent that nostalgia receded, influential protagonists of the public discourse came to point to the beneficial effects of the city's 'death and rebirth' in the (air) war, as the next chapter will show.

¹³³ Willi Belz, *Die Standhaften. Über den Widerstand in Kassel 1933-1945* (Kassel: Selbstverlag, 21978 [first edition: Ludwigsburg: K. J. Schromm, 1960]), pp. 161-166, here: p. 161.

¹³⁴ Karl Kaltwasser, "Vergangenes Kassel", in: *Hessische Nachrichten* (22-10-45), p. 5. Manuscript in StAK NL Kaltwasser, Mappe 35. *Kassel. Vergang und Dauer I*, 17th October 1945. See also the notes dated 27-11-43, in: *ibid.*, Mappe 32.

¹³⁵ Paul Heidelbach, *Kassel. Ein Jahrtausend Hessischer Stadtkultur*. Ed. Karl Kaltwasser (Kassel und Basel: Bärenreiter, 1957), pp. 297-319. For the local reception of the new edition see StAK NL Kaltwasser, Mappe 36.

¹³⁶ *Kassel. Ein Jahrtausend Hessischer Stadtkultur*, p. 315.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, urban communities framed unprecedented destruction with the traditional concepts of *Kultur* and *Heimat*. Both parameters were established during the years 1940 to 1945 but after the end of the war were expressed in the novel narrative codes of the figure and the image. While this holds true for both Kassel and Magdeburg, the escalation of the Cold War in 1948/9 reinforced differences in emphasis. While in Kassel, the material impact of aerial warfare tended to be discussed in affective and aesthetic categories, allowing one-time Nazi propagandists to reinvent themselves as guardians of *Kultur*, the protagonists of public discourse in Magdeburg focused on political usages that drew heavily on the themes of Nazi wartime propaganda.

From Celebration to Lamentation: Dealing with the Legacy of the Air War, 1960-1995

Introduction

"A Look at the Time of Hopelessness" was the title of a commemorative article that the journalist Wolfgang Hermsdorff wrote for the *Hessische Allgemeine* on the occasion of the 22nd anniversary of the October raid in 1965 (fig. 14).¹ The article was accompanied by an image that transported the reader back in time, visualising memories of war-time desolation: a street lined by collapsed buildings and burnt-out facades; overhead cables hanging down; rubble clearance detachments at work. "A desolate picture", as Hermsdorff summed up the scene in order to continue, "All the greater are the reconstruction achievements that Kassel and her citizens were capable of in the past two decades." The return of the day of remembrance elicited mournful reflection but also pride in a collective achievement. Functioning as foil to a brighter present, memories of urban destruction were integrated into a wider narrative of successful overcoming.²

The text may be considered a typical example of the way in which local publicists conceptualised the material legacy of aerial bombing in the "dynamic" 1960s, at a time when a "new society" turned to enjoying the fruits of steady economic growth amidst a climate of broad optimism for the future.³ West German chancellor Ludwig Erhard's declaration of the end of the "post-war period" in 1963 found a local parallel in the staging of an architectural exhibition that proudly proclaimed, "A City has been Rebuilt".⁴ "The wounds have been healed; the ruins have disappeared", as municipal press officer Hans Pippert wrote in a special edition of *Hessen heute*, fusing the technical idiom of city

¹ Wolfgang Hermsdorff, "Blick in die Zeit der Trostlosigkeit", *HA* 22-10-65.

² Ibid.

³ Axel Schildt, "Materieller Wohlstand – pragmatische Politik – kulturelle Umbrüche. Die 60er Jahre in der Bundesrepublik", in: Axel Schildt / Detlef Siegfried / Karl Christian Lammers eds., *Dynamische Zeiten. Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften* (Hamburg: Christians, 2000), pp. 21-53.

⁴ StAK S5 O190.

planning with organic metaphors.⁵ The "new face" of the "city of tomorrow" had finally put the ghosts of the air war to rest.⁶ Or so it seemed.



FIGURE 14. Commemorative article on the 22nd anniversary of the air raid, *HA* 22-10-1965.

Yet, a mere decade later, dissonant voices radically called into question the narrative of the rebuilt city as success story. As the optimistic belief in progress was eroded by a broad sense of crisis in society at large,⁷ New Left critics started to articulate their *Betroffenheit* or "dismay" over the urban environment.⁸ Subverting the idiom of the 1960s, these voices lamented the "open [and] bleeding wounds" of the "heap of rubble" that had yet to become

⁵ "Eine Stadt ist wieder aufgebaut", *Hessen heute* (special edition *Hessentag* 1964), p. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ See Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory. Architecture, Monuments, and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 229-31; Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen II* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2000), pp. 330f.

⁸ Rolf Hanusch, "Ach Kassel", *stattzeitung* 54 (6/80), p. 3. For the context: Klaus von Beyme *et.al.*, "Leitbilder des Wiederaufbaus in Deutschland", in: Beyme *et. al.* eds., *Neue Städte*, pp. 9-31, here: pp. 26-30. See also the important contemporary texts: Alexander Mitscherlich, *Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1965); Wolf Jobst Siedler / Elisabeth Niggemeyer / Gina Angress, *Die gemordete Stadt. Abgesang auf Putte und Straße, Platz und Baum* (Berlin: Herbig, 1964).

a city again.⁹ Contemporary Kassel was in truth still *kaput*: a city that stood as testament to the "consequences of totalitarian rule".¹⁰ Lacking in "urbanity", the city invited no sense of identification, exuding neither "warmth" nor "intimacy".¹¹ According to the critics, post-war city planning had not mastered the air war, but had, on the contrary, cynically exploited the devastation to engineer a "second destruction"—an "unprecedented annihilation of history", as Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm wrote in a report that was provocatively called *Die verpasste Stadt* or "The Failed City".¹²

Having originated among the New Left, the narrative of reconstruction as second destruction fused with traditionalist nostalgic sentiment, ushering in a renaissance of the idea of *Alt-Kassel* as a 'beautiful town' of social harmony and innocence.¹³ By the late 1980s, the force of this critique was such that a prominent leftwing critic could demand the demolition of the post-war city altogether and its rebuilding "according to the plans prior to 1943".¹⁴ While this "radical solution to the dreadful state of Kassel's inner city" was, of course, never implemented, the early 1990s did witness the self-conscious attempt to regain the "lost city" by way of re-founding the historic city district of the Lower New Town.¹⁵

In Magdeburg, this shift from 'modernist' celebration to 'post-modern' mourning is discernible as well, albeit with some differences in emphasis and timing.¹⁶ Although, as a rule, realities on the ground lagged behind the grandiose schemes of Socialist city planning, a self-celebratory tone of spectacular success formed an integral part of the

⁹ "Blutende, offene Wunden": Rolf Hanusch, "Ach Kassel", *stattzeitung* 54 (6/80), p. 36; "Steinehaufen": Rolf Schwendter, "Aus dem Steinehaufen Kassel eine Stadt machen", *stattzeitung* 5 (10/76), pp. 6f.

¹⁰ "Zeugnis der Folgen totalitärer Herrschaft": Joachim Vieregge, "Zwei Jahre in Kassel: etwas von außen gesehen", *stattzeitung* 3 (8/76).

¹¹ "Kulturlose Stadt"; "kein Hauch von Urbanität": Rolf Hanusch, "Ach Kassel", *stattzeitung* 54 (6/80), pp. 3 & 36; "Wärme"; "Intimität": Joachim Vieregge, "Zwei Jahre in Kassel: etwas von außen gesehen", *stattzeitung* 3 (8/76).

¹² Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, *Die verpasste Stadt. Innenstadt Kassel, Zustandsanalyse und Methodik der Wiedergewinnung* (Kassel: Gesamthochschule, 1989), p. 6.

¹³ On the embrace, and transformation, of the idea of *Heimat* by the New Left see Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces. Artifacts of German Memory, 1870-1990* (Berkely – Los Angeles – London: UCaP, 2000), pp. 228-237.

¹⁴ Rolf Schwendter, "Thesen zur radikalen Lösung der Innenstadtmissere", in: Fördergemeinschaft Kassel ed., *kasseler Jahrbuch zur Stadtentwicklung 1987* (Kassel, 1987), pp. 51-60, here: p. 51. On the importance of Schwendter, professor of Deviance Studies at the *Gesamthochschule Universität Kassel*, for the local Left see: *Die innere Heimat. Portraits von Kasseler Leuten* (Habichtswald-Ehlen: George, 1994), pp. 67-77; Christine E. Winter-Heider, *Festschrift für Rolf Schwendter. Fragmente einer Begegnung – Elemente einer Entgegnung* (Kassel: Kassel UP, 2005).

¹⁵ Stadt Kassel, *Wie baut man eine Stadt: Wege zur Unterneustadt* (Kassel, 1994); Magistrat der Stadt Kassel ed., *So baut man eine Stadt. Wege zur Unterneustadt. Rahmenplan* (Kassel, 1996). For the quotation: Peter Wisotzki / Karl-Hermann Wegner, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Stadt. Chancen für die Stadtarchäologie in Kassel* (Baunatal: Ahrend, 1991). Compare also the discussion on the Upper New Town: Christian Kopetzki, "Ein Spaziergang durch die Oberneustadt im Frühling 1995", *kassel kulturell* 4/89, pp. 19-21; Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, "Ja, nur her mit dieser Oberneustadt"; Dieter Windel, "Behutsame Mischbebauung", *kassel kulturell* 5/89, pp. 20f.; M. Wilkens, "Wie die Oberneustadt wieder ein einprägsames Gesicht bekommen könnte", *kassel kulturell* 6/89, pp. 34-36.

¹⁶ For the terms 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' as tags for the respective periods of 1958 to 1975 and 1975 to 2000 see Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory*, p. 8.

official narrative until 1989.¹⁷ As in Kassel, the achievements of post-war reconstruction, real and imagined, were described in the idiom of medical surgery.¹⁸ In contrast to Kassel, aesthetic rather than functional categories prevailed: the "new face" of the city was said to be "beautiful"—indeed, "more beautiful" than the pre-war city had ever been, as political functionaries and the guided media never grew tired of emphasising.¹⁹ By the 1980s, however, the emergence of the notion of *Alt-Magdeburg* provided a visual alternative to the contemporary cityscape: via the medium of photography, cultural memories of the pre-war city called into question the official success story of the 'Socialist metropolis'. To some extent, therefore, the narrative of successful overcoming had already been subverted by the time that SED-rule collapsed in 1989/90. The subsequent re-evaluation of the results of Socialist city planning as a "second destruction" in part drew on the idea of *Alt-Magdeburg* as popularised in the 1980s.²⁰

As this chapter will demonstrate, local debates over the merits and shortcomings of post-war reconstruction were informed by memories of the air war. Despite the differences in political culture, the protagonists of public discourse in both cities drew on similar vocabularies and concepts in order to talk about the material legacy of aerial warfare. They employed organic metaphors to prescribe life cycles of 'death' and 'rebirth', of 'faces' wiped out and restored, of 'wounds' bleeding, closed up and scarred. From the 1960s to the mid-1990s, the *lieu de mémoire* of aerial bombing served as an important point of reference for both the defenders of the post-war rebuilding and its critics: as 'zero hour' of the unprecedented success story of a 'modern' or 'beautiful' city; as 'pretext' to engineer cynically a premeditated assault on the "visual identity" of the *Heimatstadt*;²¹ as symbolic date to initiate belated 'healing' through the restoration of iconic ruins or the re-founding of historic city districts. Underlying these debates were broader questions about ways of belonging and identification, about the relationship of the resident to the urban environment. How much tradition was necessary in order to feel 'at home'? Or, put differently, how much *Heimat* resided in the "new" city? The answers that institutions,

¹⁷ The difference between scheme and achievement is emphasised by Hermann Heinrich Manz, *Der Wiederaufbau der Zentren der beiden Städte Magdeburg und Hannover nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Ein Vergleich der politischen Hintergründe, der Aufbauziele, der Planungen und deren Realisation* (Köln: Selbstverlag des Geographisches Institut der Universität zu Köln, 1995). On planning inconsistencies see also Hans Berger, "Magdeburg: Klassenkampf der Dominanten", in: Beyme et.al. eds., *Neue Städte*, pp. 299-312; Friedrich Jakobs, "Wie Phoenix aus der Asche", in: Puhle ed., "Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot", pp. 165-177; Landeshauptstadt Magdeburg / Stadtplanungsamt ed., *Magdeburg. Architektur und Städtebau* (Halle: Janos Stekovics, 2001), pp. 29-31.

¹⁸ "Spaziergang ins Vergangene", *MZ am Wochenende* 3/2 (15-1-65), p. 2.

¹⁹ The phrase, *schöner denn je*, derived from a speech by Wilhelm Pieck, which he held in Magdeburg in 1952. See StAM Rep. 41/703, fol. 7.

²⁰ See, for example, "Zum 16. Januar: Bilder einer doppelten Zerstörung in unserer Stadt", *Volksstimme* (15-1-93), p. 10.

²¹ Klaus von Beyme, *Der Wiederaufbau. Architektur und Städtebaupolitik in beiden deutschen Staaten* (Munich / Zurich: Piper, 1987), pp. 13-24, here: p. 13.

social groups and individuals gave to these questions between the 1960s and the mid-1990s form the subject matter of this chapter.

The "Closed Wound"—Celebrating the City Rebuilt, 1960-1975

With the completion of the first phase of the reconstruction in the 1960s, the material legacy of the war gradually began to disappear from the urban landscape. Although in Kassel, and even more so, Magdeburg, war ruins and vacant lots remained integral parts of the urban topography well into the 1990s, they lost their commanding hold on the imagination of the contemporaries.²² Influential protagonists of public discourse celebrated the achievements of the reconstruction, employing various forms and media—exhibitions, books, photographs and music pieces—to declare an end to the rubble years. In both cities, successful overcoming was invested with meaning that extended beyond the practical side of providing housing and social facilities to the resident, and evacuee, population.

Stressing renewal over restoration, the political elites of both cities argued that the "new face" of the cityscape symbolised comprehensive shifts in the political and cultural outlook of the citizenry as well. Through biologist imagery, a connection was posited between the 'modern face' of the city and reconfigurations of civic identity. In this rhetoric, the locality, as an "interchangeable representation" (Alon Confino), also stood in for the nation at large.

In Kassel, the early 1960s marked the turning point when the post-war rhetoric of 'rebirth' gave way to an emphasis on closure. This shift was well reflected in the official city guide, *Führer durch Kassel und Wilhelmshöhe*. In several editions of the second half of the 1950s, mayor Lauritz Lauritzen (SPD) had used the formulation of the "changing face" in order to refer to the reconstruction as an event in progress.²³ The metaphor was dropped in the eighth edition of 1960 in favour of a sentence that indicated that a provisional end-point had been reached. "After a time of fruitful reconstruction, the new image of our town is nearing completion", Lauritzen wrote in the preface, which was reprinted verbatim in the following editions of 1961 and 1962.²⁴ Two years later, the city administration officially declared the reconstruction period to be over. On the occasion of

²² For Magdeburg, see the photographs in: Hans-Joachim Krenzke / Jürgen Goldammer, *Magdeburg. Bewegte Zeiten – Die 50er und 60er Jahre* (Gudensberg-Gleichen: Wartberg, 1997), especially pp. 62f. In Kassel, the municipal planning office established, in 1976, that there were still 26 vacant lots in the inner city. See StAK A.0. Stadtverordnetenversammlung, vol. 134. "17. Sitzung am 10.Juli 1978", p. 40.

²³ "Unsere Stadt wandelt ihr Gesicht" was the wording of the fourth edition of 1956 to the 7th edition of 1959. See *Führer durch Kassel und Wilhelmshöhe. Ein Wegweiser für Einheimische und Fremde* (Kassel: Basch, 4th ed., 1956; 5th ed., 1957; 6th ed., 1958; 7th ed., 1959). Compare also the transcendental wording of the third edition of 1955, "die aus Trümmern wiedererstandene Stadt".

²⁴ *Führer durch Kassel und Wilhelmshöhe. Ein Wegweiser für Fremde und Einheimische* (Kassel: Basch, 8th ed., 1960; 9th ed., 1961; 10th ed., 1962), p. 3.

the 1964 *Hessentag*—a cultural festival organised annually in order to promote a sense of common identity among the different regions making up the post-1945 state of *Hesse*—closure on the post-war years was celebrated through a special exhibition that carried the title, "A City has Been Rebuilt". In his opening address, Lauritzen's successor as mayor, Karl Branner (SPD), declared that the "epoch of construction" had come to an end, to be followed by a phase of continuous "extension".²⁵

In Magdeburg, the self-proclaimed goal of turning the city into a "Socialist metropolis" precluded an overt emphasis on closure in the present. The projected *longue durée* conveniently helped to gloss over planning inconsistencies as well as bottlenecks in the supply of labour and materials that seriously impeded the pace of the reconstruction.²⁶ Thus, mayor Philipp Daub (SED) could write in the first post-war city guide, published in 1961, that the booklet did not yet depict a "completed" city because "stormy Socialist construction" produced permanent change in all spheres of society as well as in the cityscape.²⁷ Casting the promising achievements of the present as a prelude to an even brighter future, the mayor emphasised that the "new construction according to Socialist principles" had made the "face of the city [...] beautiful and attractive already" but would produce greater achievements still in the future.²⁸ This emphasis on the ongoing process notwithstanding, the Magdeburg city council also set a symbolic mark of closure in 1961. On the 16th anniversary of the air raid, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was performed in order to illustrate the progress *per aspera ad astra* or "through darkness to light" that the city had made since the end of the war.²⁹ Quickly, the remembrance concert became an integral part of the commemorative activities surrounding the memory place, and even survived the regime change of 1989/90.³⁰

Together with the "new Socialist city" a "new Socialist human being" had emerged from the rubble and debris of the war, as Friedrich Sonnemann (SED), Philipp Daub's successor as mayor, declared on the occasion of the 17th anniversary of the air raid in

²⁵ StAK S5 O190. *OB Branner eröffnete "Eine Stadt ist wieder aufgebaut"* (Hessentag 1964 / Pressenotiz 33).

²⁶ An early example was the controversy, in 1952, between central government and local authorities on the reduction of labour and materiel engaged in rubble clearance for the sake of rebuilding Berlin. StAM, Rep. 41/762, fol. 6-8. See also the literature in footnote 17.

²⁷ *Führer durch Magdeburg. Die Stadt des Schwermaschinenbaus*. Ed. Rat der Stadt Magdeburg, Abt. Kultur (Magdeburg, [1961]), p. 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ "Glockengeläut zum Gedenken", *Der Neue Weg* (19/20-1-63), p. 7; "Durch Nacht zum Licht", *Der Neue Weg* (18-1-62), p. 5; *Volksstimme* No. 7 (7-1-61); No. 18 (20-1-61); *Mitteldeutsche Neueste Nachrichten* No. 16 (19-1-61). See also Magdeburgische Philharmonie ed., *100 Jahre städtisches Orchester Magdeburg* (Magdeburg, no date), p. 39.

³⁰ When, in 1998, music director Matthias Husman refused to conduct the 9th symphony on 16th January, he was dismissed from his post without notice by the director general. See the coverage of the affair in the local press: *Volksstimme* no. 308 of 22-12-1997, p. 11; no. 10 of 14-1-98.

1962.³¹ Three years later, Sonnemann drew a parallel between the "new" Magdeburg and a "more beautiful", i.e., Socialist, Germany.³² Echoing this rhetoric, Hessian minister president Georg-August Zinn (SPD) emphasised in a public address of 1964 that the "renewal" of Kassel encompassed spiritual and cultural aspects just as much as the material reconstruction.³³ Five years earlier, the City Council had already issued a publication that underlined this very link between material and spiritual regeneration. The booklet, *Kassel – City of the Documenta*, recast the erstwhile City of Reich Warrior Days as a community that had wholeheartedly embraced modernity, playing an avant-garde role in the democratic culture of West Germany as host of the progressive art exhibition of the *documenta*.³⁴

Conspicuous in this self-congratulatory rhetoric was the frequent use of vocabulary that implied strong emotional gratification. In 1963, for example, Kassel mayor Branner (SPD) wrote in response to television coverage of the bombing war, "We are rightly proud of our new ascendancy that finds a clear expression in the new rise of our cities."³⁵ Here, Branner used the adjective *stolz* or "proud" to refer to a collective state of consciousness—a term that, according to Grimm's German dictionary, denotes qualities of virility, strength and heroism.³⁶ Sonnemann, in 1962, spoke of *Genugtuung* or "satisfaction", thus using a word that implied emotional compensation for previous injuries.³⁷ The significance of this kind of language becomes apparent when situating the "end of the post-war period" (Ludwig Erhard) within the context of the "return" of the 'unmastered past' of Nazi barbarism.³⁸ At a time when German and Israeli courts confronted the German public with state crimes that triggered a domestic discourse of guilt and shame, the achievements of the reconstruction were couched in the language of pride and honour, offering a symbol of positive identification for the 'war generation' turned 'reconstruction generation'. To an extent, the 'heroic' language of the discourse of closure can thus be understood as fulfilling a compensatory function for feelings of humiliation induced by the public discussion about the crimes of Nazism.

³¹ *Der Neue Weg* (17-1-62), p. 4.

³² "Aber das Herz schlug weiter. Magdeburg – zwanzig Jahre nach der Zerstörung", *Der Neue Weg* (16-1-65), p. 8.

³³ "Einleitende Worte des Hessischen Ministerpräsidenten Zinn (2-7-64)", in: StAK A.4.41. No. 457. *Hessentag in Kassel*.

³⁴ *Kassel – die Stadt der documenta*. Ed. Magistrat der Stadt Kassel, Kultur- und Presseamt (Kassel [1960]). On the history of the exhibition see Harald Kimpel, *documenta. Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Cologne: Du Mont, 1997).

³⁵ StAK A.1.10. Nr. 621. *Reden [OB Branner] II 1963/41. "Fernseh-Sendung 22. Oktober 1963"*, p. 2.

³⁶ *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1957), entry 'stolz (adj.)', column 231-266, here: column 233.

³⁷ Compare *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 5 (1897), entry 'Genugthuung', column 3517.

³⁸ Detlef Siegfried, "Zwischen Aufarbeitung und Schlussstrich. Der Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten 1958 bis 1968", in: Schildt / Siegfried / Lammers eds., *Dynamische Zeiten*, pp. 77-113, here: p. 78.

Given this connection, it is no surprise that, amid the turmoil of '1968', members of the political establishment would point towards the post-war achievements of the war generation in order to counter charges about their activities during the war.³⁹ In the autumn of 1968, Kassel mayor Branner (1910-1997) did just that at an opening address to the exhibition, "From Ruins to the New City", which was staged to mark the 25th anniversary of the iconic air raid.⁴⁰ According to the mayor, the exhibition was not a self-congratulatory celebration of the post-war rise of Kassel but served the pedagogical purpose of an inter-generational admonition. Here, the sons rather than the fathers stood accused. Branner placed upon the youth of 1968 the obligation to familiarise themselves with the "incomprehensible destruction" of Kassel's "zero hour" in order to understand the consequences that resulted from disregarding the lessons of the past. Reversing the customary roles in the inter-generational conflict, he re-cast the war generation as staunch defenders of democracy against an irrational onslaught of youthful exuberance and ignorance: "They must learn why the older generation will not tolerate any deliberate or accidental endangering of our democracy and the fruits of many hard years of reconstruction." Speaking for his generation at large, he postulated a "right to be proud", while placing on the younger generation the "duty to acknowledge the achievements [of the reconstruction]".⁴¹

Allied Bombing as 'Zero Hour'

Within the larger discursive context of 'reconstruction' and 'renewal', allied bombing as *lieu de mémoire* retained a pivotal place throughout the 1960s. It legitimised the radical break with the pre-war urban environment, and more generally, functioned as dark foil to the present. In the 1960s, allied bombing took on the meaning of a negative founding myth—the archetypal 'zero hour'—in Kassel as well as Magdeburg. As the following discussion will show, there was both apologetic and critical potential in such an interpretation. Just as the notion of radical rupture could be used to telescope the years of the Third Reich into a single event, thus obfuscating both local support of Nazism as well as personal and structural—not least of all: city planning—continuities across the watershed of 1945, the notion could also be used as a vantage point for exploring the uncanny aspects of the pre-war *Heimat*.

³⁹ Compare Bernd-A. Rusinek, "Von der Entdeckung der NS-Vergangenheit zum generellen Faschismusverdacht – akademische Diskurse in der Bundesrepublik der 60er Jahre", in: Schildt et.al., *Dynamische Zeiten*, pp. 114-147.

⁴⁰ StAK A.1.10. No. 638/78. *Reden OB Branner 1968*, "Eröffnung der Ausstellung 'Von Ruinen zur neuen Stadt'".

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 3f.

In Kassel, the connotation of the memory place began to change with the completion of the first phase of the reconstruction. Gradually, the notion of the aerial bombardment as the 'dying day' of *Alt-Kassel* was displaced by the notion of 22nd October 1943 as the 'birthday' of the new city—a cathartic catastrophe that had severed the links with a discredited past in order to make way for a brighter future. By the 1960s, a narrative strand thus gained dominance that had first been articulated by committed Nazis in 1943/44, and had subsequently been embraced by city planners and the civil administration: the end point was a new beginning; urban destruction a unique opportunity for a thorough new ordering of the city-space.⁴² At the same time, the counter-trend of the nostalgic yearning for the city of old—to which the *lieu de mémoire* indicated nothing but catastrophe—, as influentially promoted during the war by conservative fellow travellers of Nazism and popularised by conservative traditionalists in the 1950s, lost in influence.⁴³

To be sure, *Alt-Kassel* did not disappear from public discourse in the 1960s. With the increase of purchasing power in the wake of steady economic growth, more *Kasseler* than ever before could afford to spend money on luxury items such as picture books—and the continuous trickle of new publications on the pre-war city suggests that a certain demand existed throughout the period.⁴⁴ Yet, as an imagined place of architectural beauty and social harmony, the notion of *Alt-Kassel* reached a low point in the 1960s. "Whoever has known Old Kassel cannot help but be touched by certain feelings of nostalgia when looking at those photographs", the editor to a special edition of Friedrich Herboldt's 1950s newspaper series wrote in 1968, but characteristically added, "But he will also acknowledge that the city has become so much healthier and more spacious [since] 1945".⁴⁵ This impressionistic evidence is corroborated by the findings of contemporary public opinion research. According to a poll conducted by the Bad Godesberg Institute of Social Research in 1964, 90% of the population agreed that the civil administration had done a commendable job in rebuilding Kassel after 1945. Only 7% of the sample interviewees were of the opinion that grave mistakes had been made. The social researchers also found that nine out of ten residents felt happy in their "new *Heimat*", the

⁴² Compare the programmatic leader by Hans Schlitzberger, "Der neue Anfang", *KLZ* 14/261 (6-11-43), p. 1.

⁴³ Compare the founding text of nostalgic sentiment by German M. Vonau, "Bomben auf 1000 Jahre", *KLZ* 14/266 (12-11-43), p. 1.

⁴⁴ Ernst Metz, *Hochfürstlich Hessische Residenzstadt Cassel*. Einführung von Leopold Biermer (Kassel: Lometsch, 1961; 2nd 1961); Wolfgang Hermsdorff / Carl Eberth, *Es geschah in Kassel von 1900 bis heute* (Kassel: Verlag Schneider und Weber, 1964); *Kassel einst und jetzt. Ein Bildbuch mit Beiträgen von Rudolf Helm, Karl Kaltwasser, Kurt Milte. Zeichnungen von Christian Beyer*. Ed. by Wilhelm Batz and Kurt Milte (Kassel: Schneider & Weber, 4th ed. 1966); Fritz Lometsch, *Cassel in alten Bildern* (Kassel: Lometsch, 1966); Friedrich Herboldt, *Bilder aus dem alten Kassel* (Kassel: Druck und Verlag GmbH Kassel, 1968); Paul Heidelbach, *Casseler Spaziergänge* (Kassel: Schneider & Weber, 1969).

⁴⁵ Hessische Brandversicherungsanstalt, Direktor, "Zum Geleit", in: Herboldt, *Bilder aus dem alten Kassel*.

majority of whom had no personal memories of *Alt-Kassel* because they had been born after the war or moved to the city after 1945.⁴⁶

In the light of these figures, a private letter addressed to the mayor in 1964 may claim to carry more than just anecdotal significance.⁴⁷ Written by a 70-year-old woman on the 21st anniversary of the bombing night, the letter started off by recounting harrowing scenes from the air raid, and went on to recall feelings of despair and hopelessness, "Never will Kassel be a city again, I thought to myself. [...] The destruction is just too great." Past dejection was contrasted to present elation when the woman continued by praising the rebuilt city, "Kassel has risen again [...] more beautiful than ever. A miracle has happened". Remarkably, the writer not only expressed her happiness and gratitude at the fact of the reconstruction itself, she also explicitly commended the modern way in which the city had been rebuilt. Although she admitted to being moved by visual representations of the "romantic alleys" of *Alt-Kassel*, she was unequivocal in her praise of the new living quarters that allowed for "sun, wind, and air":

"A good thing it is that the dark and gloomy alleys are gone, with the pale women and the pale little children [...] It is a good thing that the heart of Kassel has been created in a such a friendly and homely way that everybody loves the new city, visitor and local alike".⁴⁸

Although preservationists pointed out that some eminent historical monuments of *Alt-Kassel* could have been restored if the political will to do so had existed—that indeed, buildings like the *Nahlsche Haus* or the *Lutherische Pfarrhaus* had fallen victim to post-war city planning rather than the bombing war—their cautious critique of the principles underlying the reconstruction was shared by a minority only.⁴⁹ The marginal role of traditionalist sentiment in the period is well illustrated by the fact that chief city architect Wolfgang Bangert, in 1961, could use the official organ of the *Heimat* League as a platform to celebrate "Kassel—the new city on old ground".⁵⁰ Here, Bangert not only reiterated the standard argument of modernist city planning that the "near total destruction" of the bombing war had "cleared the way" for 'healing' the long-ailing organism of the city. He also challenged the preservationist readership of the magazine to leave behind their nostalgia and embrace the new Kassel.⁵¹ "Among the *Heimat* enthusiasts one can often hear the regretful complaint that all the old beauty has vanished and that our new cities

⁴⁶ "So sehen die Bürger ihre Stadt", in: *Unsere Stadt Kassel* (1968), p. 20; Institut für angewandte Sozialwissenschaften (ifas), *ifas report Sonderheft Kassel* (Bad Godesberg, 1964).

⁴⁷ StAK A.1.10 Nr. 398. *Trauerfeier am 22.10.* (1951-1968), Elisabeth R. to mayor Lauritzen, 22/23-10-64.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Gottfried Ganßauge, "Was blieb vom alten Kassel erhalten?", *Hessische Heimat* NF 11/2-3 (1961), pp. 28-32.

⁵⁰ Wolfgang Bangert, "Kassel – eine neue Stadt auf altem Grund", *Hessische Heimat* NF 11/2-3 (1961), pp. 2-8.

⁵¹ For the quotations: *ibid.*, pp. 2 & 4.

[...] all look the same", Bangert wrote. Intimating that the recognition by traditionalists was a central measuring rod for the success of his work, he continued, "And [...] those who have tirelessly worked for the reshaping of the city, will feel amply compensated for their efforts when the citizens of Kassel, and in particular the friends of the *Heimat*, will feel—above and beyond the pain for what has been irrevocably lost—affection and love for the newly risen [...] city."

Whereas in Kassel, the notion of the *lieu de mémoire* as 'zero hour' finally displaced the notion of 22nd October 1943 as 'dying day', in Magdeburg there was a shift of emphasis rather than a paradigm change. Here, official interpretations remained within the established framework of the dialectic of death and rebirth, which had been a constituent element of the guided discourse ever since the emergence of the air raid as a memory place in 1946.⁵² However, in 1960s Magdeburg too, political functionaries tended to stress the 'new beginning' rather than the death of the old order. "We are looking to the future", as Karl Broßmann, head of the Magdeburg bloc *CDU*, wrote in a programmatic article on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the air raid. "We remember in order to become aware of how much we have achieved in Magdeburg since 1945", he continued.⁵³ In a similar way, mayor Friedrich Sonnemann (*SED*), in a written statement on the 20th anniversary of the air raid, celebrated the "construction achievements" of the present.⁵⁴ While acknowledging that "not all the wounds of the Imperialist war had yet been healed", he intoned,

"Today, twenty years after the day of destruction, the eyes and hearts of our citizens are no longer filled with tears. No, blissfully they look upon what they have achieved and their hearts belong to Socialism."⁵⁵

The pathos of the political elites notwithstanding, there is evidence to suggest that the 'beauty' of the 'new' Magdeburg was not appreciated by all sections of the population. This appears to have owed less to the discrepancy between the self-congratulatory rhetoric and the slow progress of actual reconstruction than to the official goal of the rebuilding effort, the 'Socialist metropolis'. Within the political context of a party dictatorship, conflicting positions on the feasibility of the restoration of historic buildings quickly took on the character of a power struggle, in particular between the state and the Church. Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, a bitter controversy raged over the question as to whether the numerous church ruins of the historic Old Town should be integrated into the new cityscape or whether they should be torn down. Generally, the state sought to reduce the presence of ecclesiastical buildings whereas the Church strove to preserve as many of them

⁵² See chapter one.

⁵³ Karl Broßmann, "Wir blicken in die Zukunft. Gedanken zum 16. Januar", *Der Neue Weg* 16-1-1960, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Friedrich Sonnemann, "Aber das Herz schlug weiter", *Der Neue Weg* (16-1-65), p. 8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

as possible, opposing all projected demolitions tenaciously if unsuccessfully. The issue was particularly contentious where political rather than functional criteria appeared to motivate the demolition plans, as was the case with the 17th century *Heiliggeistkapelle* and the 14th century *Katharinenkirche*. After a projected struggle, the partially-restored *Heiliggeistkapelle* was torn down in 1959 in order to make way for a mass rally ground.⁵⁶ Five years later, the shell of the *Katharinenkirche* was demolished as an "inappropriate" reminder of the war on the 'modern' boulevard of *Karl-Marx-Street* in contravention of an earlier church-state agreement.⁵⁷

A petition sent to the City Building Office may help to elucidate some of the ways in which traditionalists drew on the experience of aerial warfare in order to make a case for preservation. The letter was not written by a local resident but by a West German citizen who had heard of the projected demolition of the *Heiliggeistkirche*. Legitimising his intervention with a common responsibility of Germans east and west of the border for the cultural heritage of the nation, he drew on the shared experience of aerial warfare in order to argue that historic buildings must be treated as material expressions of a single *Kulturnation* or "cultural nation". Here, the rupture of allied bombing did not provide a unique opportunity for creating something new but conferred a special obligation on the post-war generation to preserve carefully what was left.⁵⁸

Within Magdeburg, the bitter conflict over the demolition of the church ruins appears to have functioned as an important catalyst for segments of the old middle classes to turn to cultural memories of the pre-war city. In a dialectic twist, the ruthless policy of creating a "Socialist metropolis" helped to invest material relics of the past with an emotional significance that they had not hitherto possessed, spawning a notion that had until then existed in rudimentary form only: the idea of *Alt-Magdeburg* as a beautiful city. When the 42-year-old civil engineer, Heinz Gerling, co-founded the Interest Group for the Preservation of Historical Monuments in 1964, he was motivated in part by the experience of the demolitions, as his biographer maintains.⁵⁹ In the same year, 68-year-old Werner Priegnitz, pensioned artisan and associate of the municipal museum, suggested at a museum board meeting the idea of a photograph exhibition on Old Magdeburg.⁶⁰ His

⁵⁶ Compare StAM Rep. 41/416. *Heiliggeistkirche*; AKPS Rep. A Spec. G. A 774. *Abriss der Heiliggeist-Kirche*.

⁵⁷ Stadtbaudirektor Ungewitter, "Begründung über den Abbruch der Katharinenkirche im Nordabschnitt der Karl-Marx-Straße", in: StAM Rep. 41/918, fol. 1-3. See also AKPS Rep. A Spec. G. A 22522. *St. Catharinen Bauten (1952 bis 1967)*.

⁵⁸ StAM Rep. 41 / 416. *Heiliggeistkirche*, Letter of W.P. to *Rat der Stadt-Bauamt*, 15-11-56.

⁵⁹ Heike Kriewald, art. "Gerling, Heinz", in: *Magdeburger Biographisches Lexikon*, pp. 208f. In 1997, Gerling was made an honorary citizen for his services to the architectural heritage of Magdeburg.

⁶⁰ Rep. 41 / 792. *Rat der Stadt MD, KHM. Protokolle von Dienstbesprechungen des Museums (1962-70)*, fol. 52. See the biographical sketch by Maren Ballerstedt, art. "Priegnitz, Wilhelm Franz Werner", *Magdeburger Biographisches Lexikon*, pp. 557f.

recommendation went unheeded but in an article for the party paper of the bloc Liberal Democrats, the *Liberal-Demokratische Zeitung*, Priegnitz described the iconic event of 16th January 1945 as the "day of fate" and "day of destruction" for Old Magdeburg while paying no more than lip service to the notion of rebirth.⁶¹ By this time, the *Heimat* researcher had for some years used the occasion of the day of remembrance in order to give public lectures on "Magdeburg in the past, present, and future". Using slides to invite his audience on "a stroll through the old Elbe city", he emphasised the "immeasurable loss" of the bombing war, as the bloc-CDU party paper, *Der Neue Weg*, put it in a report on his lecture of 16th January 1958.⁶² Was this activity, perhaps, also a veiled comment on the demolition policy of the City Council?

Born "at the Moment Death [Came] over the City": Celebrating the New Beginning

Whatever the reservations of traditionalists, their voices played a marginal role only throughout the 1960s. Dominating public discourse was the celebration of the city rebuilt, as a modern "consumer paradise" and "city of fine art" in Kassel;⁶³ as a vibrant "city of heavy industry" and beautiful "city of Socialist education and culture" in Magdeburg.⁶⁴ The medium of choice for demonstrating the achievements of the reconstruction was the visual. In newspapers, exhibitions, and special publications, photographs of the contemporary city were contrasted with rubble photography, providing both 'objective' evidence of post-war progress and serving as potent symbol of the mastering of the past. Here, the 1960s witnessed the culmination of a trend that had been in evidence since the mid 1950s: rubble photography as dark foil for a hopeful present.⁶⁵ Through the visual, the notion of the air war as the "real zero hour" of the local community was confirmed over and over again.⁶⁶

Next to the visual, there emerged another way of representation that captured both defining notions of the 1960s: the air war as a new beginning and the present as a thriving

⁶¹ W. Priegnitz, "16. Januar 1945 – Tag der Vernichtung", *LDZ* (16-1-65), p. 3.

⁶² "Gedenken an den 16. Januar 1945", *Der Neue Weg* (20-1-58), p. 2.

⁶³ "Kassel – Stadt der Kunst", in: *Hessen heute*. Special edition 1964: *Hessentag. Kassel 3.7. bis 5.7.1964*, p. 16

⁶⁴ *Führer durch Magdeburg. Die Stadt des Schwermaschinenbaus*. Hrsg. Rat der Stadt Magdeburg, Abt. Kultur (Magdeburg: [1961]), p. 1.

⁶⁵ For Magdeburg, see, for example Rudi Hartwig, "Als die Nacht vorüber war...", *Volksstimme* No. 14 (16-1-60), p. 3; "Magdeburg 16. Januar 1965: Schön ist unsere neue Stadt / Magdeburg 16. Januar 1945: Lasst das nicht wieder zu!", *Volksstimme* 19/14 (16-1-65), p. 1; "Nach zwanzig Jahren", *MZ am Wochenende* 3/2 (15-1-65), pp. 1ff.; "Wie haben wir dich verändert...", *Volksstimme* (16-1-69), p. 12; for Kassel: "Kassel 1943-1968. Eine Dokumentation", ed. by Magistrat der Stadt Kassel – Pressestelle. Redaktion und Gestaltung: Hans Pippert, Reinhard Matthäus, in: *Unsere Stadt* (Oct. 1968).

⁶⁶ "We know that Kassel's real zero hour was 22nd October 1943 [...]." Karl Branner, "Eröffnung der Ausstellung 'Von Ruinen zur neuen Stadt', 27.9.68", in: StAK A.1.10. Nr. 638. Reden [OB Branner] II 1968/78.

time of youth. Drawing an analogy between the hometown and the life of the individual, the local media became fond of marking the day of remembrance by portraying the lives of young adults who were born on the day that the old city was destroyed. As an illustration of a dialectic relationship between death and life, this mode of representation was particularly popular in Magdeburg. Symbolically designating the *lieu de mémoire* as a day that called for celebration, not mourning, mayor Sonnemann (SED) even received two residents in order to present them with gifts in advance of their twentieth birthday on 16th January 1965.⁶⁷

The first such example appeared in print on the occasion of the 13th anniversary of the air raid in 1958. In a *Volksstimme* article, journalist Hans-Georg Noack told a parable that dramatised the victory of life over death through the virtues of courage and perseverance. At the centre of the narrative stands machine fitter Franz W., to whom a son is born "at the moment that death had come over the city".⁶⁸ While the screams of the newborn inspire hope among the little crowd huddled in the air raid shelter, the confident mood gives way to desperation when the building collapses. Whereas the people around him despair, Franz W. remains steadfast, and taking up all his strength, manages to dig a hole through the rubble with his bare hands, rescuing himself and the baby (while apparently leaving behind his wife, who goes unmentioned). "After countless hours, Franz W. squeezed himself out into the open of a dusky dark day. The bundle with his son he kept tightly pressed to his chest as he stepped over the rubble that used to be his home in a dark, sunless alley of the Old Town. [...] [T]hrough the sheets and the coat, he felt the beating of a little heart", the first part of the narrative concluded, dramatically illustrating the notion of the collapse of the old city—and by extension: the old order—as the birthday of the new. This was followed by another part, which was set in the present: father and son survey the open plain "that used to be the darkest part of the Old Town". While the father recalls the misery of life in the back alleys and the "death of the old Magdeburg in the hour of birth of the boy", the son confidently replies, "We will rebuild, only more beautiful than before!", adding with conviction, "But we will not allow the new streets to be destroyed by the bombs again". Presenting coincidence as a parable, the guided media took up the subject several times in the 1960s.⁶⁹

In Kassel, the *Hessische Allgemeine*, in 1968, also researched the names of young adults who were born on the night "that *Alt-Kassel* disappeared forever" but did not invest

⁶⁷ "Geburtstagskinder beim OB", *Volksstimme* (18-1-65), p. 8.

⁶⁸ Hans-Georg Noack, "Der 16. Januar mahnt", *Volksstimme* No. 13 (16-1-58), p. 3.

⁶⁹ See Rudi Hartwig, "Als die Nacht vorüber war ...", *Volksstimme* (16-1-60); Elisabeth Bauermeister, "Als ich geboren wurde ...", *Volksstimme* (16-1-65), p. 6; "Tod und Leben nebeneinander: Geboren am 16. Januar 1945", *Mitteldeutsche Neueste Nachrichten* (16/17-1-65), p. 11; "Der Luftdruck warf ihr Körbchen herum. Am 16. Januar 1945 erblickte Elisabeth Bauermeister das Licht der Welt", *LDZ* (16-1-65).

the subject with quite the same tone of high pathos.⁷⁰ Whereas in Magdeburg, birthday girl Elisabeth Bauermeister praised the industry of the reconstruction generation, her counterpart in Kassel, Ingrid Esbach, confessed to amnesia when asked about her memories of the rubble years, "Kassel before the reconstruction? To be honest, I don't know much about it", she replied according to the newspaper. Likewise, when asked about the lessons from the air raid, 25-year-old *Kasseler* Jochen Gärtner merely reiterated the general consensus of 'Never again'. By contrast, Elisabeth Bauermeister pointed fingers at the alleged threat originating from Western Germany, stressing her determination to fight against "people in Western Germany [...] who are planning even worse deeds". In Magdeburg, the example suggests, an overt emphasis on closure was precluded by the politicisation of the air raid, whereas in Kassel, wartime destruction appeared ever more as a distant memory.

Revisiting *Alt-Kassel*

There was both apologetic and critical potential in the re-appropriation of the *lieu de mémoire* as a founding myth for the new city. On the one hand, the emphasis on the notion of a new beginning corroborated a tendency that had been in evidence ever since the formation of a collective memory place in the 1940s: the telescoping of World War II, and more generally, the Third Reich, into a single event whose inherent characteristic was victimhood rather than agency. On the other hand, the notion of the 'zero hour' helped to stabilize the political cultures of the present—of a liberal democracy in Kassel and a Socialist dictatorship in Magdeburg. In Kassel, a self-confident sense of collective achievement opened up possibilities for a critical reengagement with the past. From the vantage point of present closure, influential voices started to revisit *Alt-Kassel*, and what they found bore little resemblance to the nostalgic image of beauty, innocence and harmony that had been attached to the idea in the 1950s. In Magdeburg, continuity prevailed: here, the guided media tended to look on the pre-war urban environment with ambivalence, just as they had done in the 1950s. Pre-war Magdeburg may have been picturesque in places, but emphasis was placed on the unsanitary living conditions that were taken as emblematic of a corrupt social order.⁷¹

⁷⁰ "Am 22. Oktober 1943: Acht Namen im Geburtsregister", *Hessische Allgemeine* (22-10-68).

⁷¹ Compare the typical comments in: "Spaziergang ins Vergangene", *MZ am Wochenende* 3/2 (15-1-65), p. 2: "In our memory the familiar often equates the beautiful because we are fond of remembering the old Magdeburg. But once, this part of the city ranked amongst the most densely populated in all of Germany. [...]. Yes, that's what it was like. The people had to live in dark alleys and narrow backyards that resembled shafts without sun."

In Kassel, the notion of the 'zero hour' led to a curious discrepancy in different sectors of the memory culture. At a time when commemorations started to draw causal connections between the "night of horror" of 1943 and the "domestic policy disaster" of 1933,⁷² the official city guide, in a historical sketch of a thousand years of municipal history, telescoped the years of Nazism into the date of 22nd October 1943.⁷³ The same strategy was adopted by the municipal press office on the 25th anniversary when, in a twelve-page documentary, the iconic event was singled out as a vantage point for a summary sketch of Kassel's "path from decline to rise" between 1943 and 1968.⁷⁴ In comparison, the *Führer durch Magdeburg* of 1961 provided a more detailed—if by no means less problematic—picture of the recent past, listing the "organised resistance of the workers under the leadership of the *KPD*" and "Anglo-American terror raids" as the defining features of local history in the years of 1933 to 1945.⁷⁵

While the notion of 'zero hour' thus provided ample room for evading uncomfortable questions about agency, complicity and continuity, the notion could also furnish an opportunity to explore—from the perspective of a prosperous present—the uncanny side of *Alt-Kassel*. This exploration could take the form of a personal confession, as was the case with novelist Christine Brückner (1921-1997), who contributed an essay to the above mentioned special documentary "Kassel 1943-1968". It could also take the form of essayistic reflection, as in "Kassel—Portrait of a City" by poet Manfred Hausmann (1898-1986).

In the piece, "The New Kassel is Incomparable", Brückner contrasted adolescent memories of wartime Kassel with her feelings upon moving back to the city in 1960.⁷⁶ In her reflections, the air raid occupied a central place, functioning as violent rupture that separated the past from the present, adolescence from adulthood: "On that night, all my possessives [*Possessiva*] burnt to ashes", she wrote. Brückner vehemently opposed any notion of 'return'. In 1960, she moved to Kassel, but did not return to the *Vaterstadt* she had left in 1943:

⁷² "Schreckensnacht"; "die innenpolitische Katastrophe in Deutschland vor 30 Jahren", Karl Branner, "Deutschlands Städte starben nicht?—Das alte Kassel ist gestorben", in: StAK A.1.10 Nr. 621. *Reden /OB Dr. Branner/* II 41/63.

⁷³ "Tausendjähriges Kassel", in: *Führer durch Kassel und Wilhelmshöhe. Ein Wegweiser für Fremde und Einheimische*. Textgestaltung August Straub (Kassel: Basch, 9th ed., 1961), pp. 6-10, here: p. 10.

⁷⁴ Magistrat der Stadt Kassel, Pressestelle (ed.), Sonderbeilage "Unsere Stadt 1943 bis 1968", *Unsere Stadt Kassel* [1968].

⁷⁵ *Führer durch Magdeburg. Die Stadt des Schwermaschinenbaus*. Hrsg. Rat der Stadt Magdeburg, Abtl. Kultur (Magdeburg [1961]), p. 6.

⁷⁶ Christine Brückner, "Das neue Kassel ist unvergleichlich", Sonderbeilage "Unsere Stadt 1943 bis 1968". The text is reprinted in: Christine Brückner, *Ständiger Wohnsitz. Kasseler Notizen* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1999), pp. 70-76.

"I did not recognize anything and did not want to recognize anything [...] I refused to find the Old Kassel again [...]. In my memory there was nothing but rubble and death."

To Brückner, *Alt-Kassel* as she knew it was not a postcard idyll but a "Nazi town [...]; a war town, dark [and] cold"—memories that even with the passing of time, she insisted, took no trace of golden hue. To this, she contrasted the "incomparable city" she moved to in 1960, which had broken with the past even in the ordering of the city space: "Never before," she extolled, "was the *Friedrichplatz* as beautiful as today! No more marches, no more space for military parades." Whereas she remembered the *Alt-Kassel* of her adolescence as "dark" and "fortified", the new city was light and green, and above all, democratic: "In the new Kassel, a lot belongs to 'us'", she emphasised.⁷⁷

Adopting the genre of essayistic reflection, Manfred Hausmann concurred with Brückner's central contention in his influential *Kassel—Portrait einer Stadt*.⁷⁸ While the bombs had killed and destroyed, they had also liberated the citizenry from the 'chains' of the past. Only through catastrophe had the residents gained the chance to make the one-time *Residenzstadt* or "capital city" their own, and in the process, evolve from subjects into citizens. "It seemed as if the catastrophe was necessary in order to set free forces that had always existed but had not been able to make themselves felt due to unfortunate circumstances", as Hausmann put it.⁷⁹ The *Heimat* of old was in truth an uncanny place, while post-war Kassel was built and owned by the citizenry in a way that Old-Kassel had never been. Without doubt, there were *Kasseler* who disagreed with the characterisation of *Alt-Kassel* as advanced here—a review called Hausmann's thesis "provocative"—but for Hausmann and Brückner to be able to articulate such strident criticism in popular picture books is indicative of shifts in the way that notions of belonging were defined in the Kassel of the 1960s.

The "Painful Scar"—Mourning the Second Destruction, 1975-1995

The celebration of the rebuilt Kassel as functional, youthful and modern proved short-lived. As the dynamism of the 1960s gave way to the stagnation of the 1970s, Kassel as a self-consciously 'modern' city increasingly came to be described in terms of its deficits—as a place lacking in urbanity, beauty and history.⁸⁰ A New Left disquiet over the 'sclerosis' of

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Manfred Hausmann, *Kassel – Portrait einer Stadt* (Hannover: Fackelträger, 1964).

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

⁸⁰ Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory*, pp. 229-31.

the urban environment merged with the traditionalist idea of *Alt-Kassel*, and by the late 1970s, pitted the imagined beauty and homeliness of the pre-war city against the perceived coldness and ugliness of the contemporary environment, eliciting charges of a 'double destruction'.⁸¹

As the polemical tag indicates, more was at stake in the debate over city redevelopment than technical matters such as the closure of gap sites, the development of public squares and the planting of trees in the inner city.⁸² The issue served as a catalyst to discuss wider questions about the relationship between rupture and continuity, loss and mourning, identity and alienation. According to critics such as Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, the contemporary city space amounted to an "architectural memory loss" that reflected the inability of the reconstruction generation to face the past and to mourn loss. "Only people who [...] did not love their city were capable of destroying it in such a way", Hoffmann-Axthelm commented in his report on urban development, "The Failed City".⁸³ What had been lost, he argued, was the identification with the locality as a place of belonging, of Kassel as *Heimat*: "The residents of today, wherever they might come from, live in the city as strangers."⁸⁴ In a less polemical but equally damning critique, museum curator Karl-Hermann Wegner argued in 1985 that the "identity [of the citizens of Kassel] with their own history was lost through the destruction and the reconstruction."⁸⁵

Within the context of the larger debate, the *lieu de mémoire* of 22nd October functioned as an important point of reference for both the defenders and the critics of the contemporary cityscape. While the apologists of the 'new city on old ground' sought to legitimise post-war planning by pointing to the allegedly total devastation occasioned by the air war, the critics shifted attention to the question of local agency. They opined that the iconic date did not mark the end point of the city's destruction but rather the beginning of a process stretching until the 1970s. Hoffmann-Axthelm spoke of the destruction "since 1943" rather than the destruction of 1943, maintaining provocatively, "The air raids achieved what the city planners had hoped that they would achieve".⁸⁶

Beneath the surface of the streamlined media, broadly similar developments were discernible in Magdeburg. Although the alleged beauty of the 'new' Magdeburg remained a stock-in-trade of the official rhetoric,⁸⁷ here too, memories of the pre-war city—no longer

⁸¹ Mitscherlich, *Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte*; Siedler / Niggemeyer / Angress, *gemordete Stadt*. For the context: Klaus v. Beyme *et al.* eds., *Neue Städte aus Ruinen*, pp. 9-31.

⁸² See the official leaflet, Stadt Kassel – Der Magistrat. Amt für Stadtplanung und Stadtneuerung ed., *Zur Diskussion: Innenstadt Kassel* (August, 1986).

⁸³ Hoffmann-Axthelm, *Verpasste Stadt*, p. 57.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 8. See also StAK A.1.10. No. 894. *Stadtentwicklung Innenstadt 1985-1989*, Axthelm to Amt für Stadtplanung, 6-7-86.

⁸⁵ Kassel. *Moderne Stadt mit Tradition* (Kassel: Lometsch, 1985), p. 6.

⁸⁶ Hoffmann-Axthelm, *Verpasste Stadt*, p. 13; 45.

⁸⁷ "Magdeburg ist heute schöner denn je", *Mitteldeutsche Neueste Nachrichten* (15./16.-1-83).

conceived of as a negative foil but imagined as a vibrant and beautiful place—provided, if not a challenge, an alternative to the contemporary 'Socialist metropolis'. The renaissance of *Alt-Magdeburg* was fostered by the work of local amateur historians of the "Section Municipal History" in the League for Culture (*Kulturbund*). Led by Alfred Heidelmayer, the group exploited the leeway in the 'heritage' conception of state cultural policy in order to revive "memories of Magdeburg" by way of public exhibitions that were staged on the return of the *lieu de mémoire* in 1983, 1985, and in different form, again in 1987.⁸⁸

Although, as a rule, post-war developments occupied considerable space as well, the presence of large-size photographs of the Baroque splendour of turn-of-the-century Magdeburg tended to make the rupture of the air war appear in a different light: 16th January 1945 was not the day of birth for a bright present but the "darkest day" in Magdeburg's history, as the bloc-CDU party paper wrote on the occasion of the 42nd anniversary.⁸⁹ Thus, *Alt-Magdeburg*, as a counter-image to the present, was already in place when the deficits of post-war city planning could be openly addressed after the demise of SED-rule in 1989/90.

In post-1989 Magdeburg, no less than in Kassel a decade earlier, the results of the post-war reconstruction were discussed in terms of their deficits as a "creeping" or "double destruction".⁹⁰ Nor did the debate remain confined to technical issues such as the failure of the command economy to meet building needs and to uphold the urban infrastructure. Here, too, notions of belonging and questions of identity assumed central importance. As in Kassel, the *lieu de mémoire* of allied bombing played an important role in this debate, functioning as a point of reference for those arguing that Socialist city planning had been driven by the ideological goal of destroying "the last remnants of identity".⁹¹ Equally important was the date for those who defended the lives' work of the reconstruction generation, if not the results of this work itself.

Lieu de Mémoire as Site of Mourning

"We'll mourn for four weeks", was the inscription on a wreath that was placed in front of the *Brüderkirche* on the night of 22nd October 1981. To underline this message, the angel-

⁸⁸ This was the title of the first two exhibitions staged in 1983 and 1985. "Erinnerungen an Magdeburg. Ausstellung der Fachgruppe "Stadtgeschichte" bis morgen geöffnet", *LDZ* (15-1-83), p. 8. See on the context: Helmut Meier / Walter Schmidt, *Erbe und Tradition. Geschichtsdebatte in der DDR* (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1988).

⁸⁹ "Heute vor 42 Jahren erlebte Magdeburg den schwärzesten Tag seiner Geschichte", *Der Neue Weg* (16-1-87), p. 8.

⁹⁰ Konrad Mieth, "Keine Stadt in der Welt sollte es noch einmal erleben müssen...", *Volksstimme* 16-1-91, p. 17; "Zum 16. Januar: Bilder einer doppelten Zerstörung in unserer Stadt", *Volksstimme* 15-1-93, p. 10.

⁹¹ Peter Dömeland, "Es begann mit der Sprengung der Türme von St. Ulrich", *Volksstimme* 13-1-93.

shaped sculpture on the church wall—which had been erected in 1958 as a memorial to the casualties of the air war in the old town—was covered in black cloth.⁹² Responsible for this symbolic action was not the civil administration but a grassroots citizens' initiative, the *Arbeitskreis für Denkmalpflege und Sanierungskritik*, a group of left-leaning preservationists, architects, and academics living in Kassel. By way of this public gesture, they challenged the hegemonic connotation of the memory place as a day of birth, and by implication, the underlying narrative of achievement and progress. According to the activists, the date of 22nd October was not a symbol of successful overcoming but of continuing loss, calling for mourning, not celebration. Far from being mastered, the legacy of urban destruction had been *verdrängt* or "suppressed", buried under the cold functionality of a car-friendly city space and the superficial hustle of a mindless consumer culture, as the *Arbeitskreis* pointed out with reference to the decrepit state of the site: "The monument is covered up by traffic signs, smudged over by the symbols of a car culture, no longer recognisable as a site of commemoration and admonition", they wrote in an article published in the alternative *Stattzeitung*.⁹³

By the time the residents of Kassel were confronted with the symbolic action of the activists, the emphasis on the deficits of the post-war reconstruction had spread from the pages of the alternative *Stattzeitung* to the mainstream media.⁹⁴ As early as 1977, architectural critic Peter Bode, in a special Kassel issue of the popular *MERIAN* series, had contrasted the "very beautiful medieval Old Town" and the "enchanting" Upper New Town of the pre-war city with the "extremely small-minded mediocrity" of the post-war architecture, which, in places, amounted to nothing less than an "architectural dessert" and an "urban development disaster" [*städtebaulicher Sündenfall*].⁹⁵ Here, as elsewhere, *Alt-Kassel* provided the foil against which the shortcomings of the contemporary city were measured. Radical rupture between the past and the present—the absence of a "thousand years of city history" from contemporary urban space—was identified as the root cause for the present malaise of the inner city, leading, so the argument went, to a lack of identification of the resident population with their urban environment.⁹⁶

There were, of course, also voices who expressed reservations about a revisionist critique that found inspiration in the pre-war city and employed aesthetic rather than functional categories. In a preface to a popular picture book, mayor Hans Eichel (SPD), for example, spoke of the "pride" that the "very interesting" inner-city architecture of the

⁹² Compare chapter three.

⁹³ Arbeitskreis für Sanierungspolitik und Denkmalpflege, "Stört das Denkmal – Denkmalzerstörung in Kassel", *stattzeitung* 10/81 (70), pp. 38f.

⁹⁴ See the press clippings collected in STAK S5 A 531; S5 A 606. *Kassel. Allgemeines 1981ff.*

⁹⁵ Peter M. Bode, "Von der Hand in den Mund geplant. Verpasste Chancen beim Wiederaufbau", *MERIAN Kassel* (Hamburg, 1977).

⁹⁶ *Kassel. Ein Stadtführer.* Von Karl-Hermann Wegner (Kassel: Stauda, 1981), p. 13.

1950s—such as the pedestrian zone of the *Treppenstraße*—inspired even in 1986. At the same time he turned against the "transfiguration" of *Alt-Kassel* as "beautiful" when behind the picturesque facades there had lurked overcrowding and squalor.⁹⁷ Yet, by the 1980s, even the apologists of post-war city planning had abandoned the celebratory rhetoric of successful closure that had characterised local discourse in the 1960s. In his preface, the mayor acknowledged "wounds" that the city still exhibited forty years after the air raid.⁹⁸ More than a decade later, Eichel's successor, Georg Lewandowski (CDU), likewise stressed the long-term effects of allied bombing. "Kassel is a city that still suffers from the wounds of its near-total destruction", he wrote in a preface on selected writings of Christine Brückner.⁹⁹

The Return of Nostalgia

The extent to which the notion of successful overcoming had been displaced by an accentuation of continued loss is perhaps best illustrated by the shifts of emphasis in the work of poet Manfred Hausmann, who had played such a prominent role in the celebratory rhetoric of the 1960s.¹⁰⁰ By the late 1970s, the eighty-year-old Hausmann struck a very different tone. In a contribution to the *MERIAN* special issue on Kassel, the poet revisited the city of his childhood in the spirit of nostalgic yearning.¹⁰¹ Yes, the old town had been overcrowded and unhealthy, but it had also been full of life and above all of incomparable beauty, he wrote in his piece, "The Old Cassel". In contrast to 1964, there was no more talk of 'broken chains' and new-found liberty. On the contrary: Speaking sarcastically of a "total redevelopment" [*totale Sanierung*] of "dreadful thoroughness", Hausmann condemned the air raid as "senseless destruction of a unique [...] treasure" that was both "mournful" and "disgraceful". In 1977, unlike 1964, the *lieu de mémoire* signified nothing but loss—a loss that called for mourning, not celebration.

One should not mourn what is lost and face the future, a saying goes. This is a very questionable dictum. For anybody who has known the old town [...] will never in his whole life cease to mourn [its] passing [...]. Not just Kassel, the whole world has become poorer for it.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Hans Eichel, Vorwort, in: Helmut Brier / Werner Dettmar, *Kassel. Veränderungen einer Stadt. Fotos und Karten 1928-1986*, vol. 1 (Fuldabrück: Hesse, 1986), p. 7.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Georg Lewandowski, "Zum Geleit", in: Christine Brückner, *Ständiger Wohnsitz. Kasseler Notizen*. Ed. with an afterword by Friedrich W. Block (Berlin: Ullstein, 1998), p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ Manfred Hausmann, *Kassel. Portrait einer Stadt* (Hamburg: Fackelträger, 1964), p. 7f.

¹⁰¹ Manfred Hausmann, "Das alte Cassel. In Jahrhunderten gewachsen – in Stunden vernichtet", *MERIAN Kassel* (Hamburg, 1977), pp. 24-29.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 27.

The article was richly illustrated with picturesque photographs of the late medieval old town that aimed to impart both the architectural beauty and the charm of which Hausmann had spoken. This was no coincidence but an indication of the importance that the visual played in the remarkable renaissance of the idea of *Alt-Kassel*. From the late 1970s, a string of picture books, post-card series, calendars and booklets appeared that took the pre-war cityscape as subject matter and conveyed—however much the individual publications differed in tone and intention—a sense of irredeemable loss.¹⁰³ The evolution of the popular picture book, *Kassel before the Firestorm*, renamed *Kassel—then and now* in the revised edition of 1960, provides a case in point. In many ways, the seventh edition of 1981 took up the visual narrative of *Alt-Kassel* that had been elided from the 3rd edition of 1960 and only partially been restored in the 4th edition of 1966.¹⁰⁴ Whereas, in 1960, the editors had drastically reduced the number of photographs from pre-war Kassel in order to make space for the contemporary cityscape, twenty years later, the remaining editor re-included many of the images that had been left out in the 1960s.¹⁰⁵ In the seventh edition of 1981, more than half the photographs showed pre-war motifs, as compared to a ratio of one in four in 1960 and one in two in 1966.

In Magdeburg, the restrictive licensing practices of the ruling SED did not allow for the emergence of a body of literature that would have celebrated *Alt-Magdeburg* in quite the same way. It took until after the fall of Communism for nostalgic sentiments to be reflected in picture books carrying titles such as, "Magdeburg before 16th January 1945" or

¹⁰³ *Kassel in alten Ansichtskarten*, ed. by Herfried Homburg (Frankfurt a.M.: Flechsig, 1978); Wolfgang Hermsdorff, *Ein Blick zurück aufs alte Kassel. 50 ausgewählte Themen der HNA-Serie* (Kassel: Dierichs & Co., 1978); *Kassel in alten Ansichtskarten. Neue Folge*. Ed. by Horst Hamecher (Frankfurt a.M.: Flechsig, 1980); Holger Marsen / Ulrike Kulbarsch / Peter Soltau, *Stadtteilgeschichte als Stadtgeschichte. Kassel. Vorstudien zu einem anderen Stadtführer* (Kassel: Selbstverlag, 1980); *Kassel. Zerstörung und Wiederaufbau. Fotodokumentation von Willi Friedrich* (Kassel-Bettenhausen: Selbstverlag, 1980); Ernst Christopher Metz, *Residenzstadt Cassel. Einführung von Gerhard Seib und Angelika Nold* (Kassel: Lometsch, 1980); Ausstellung der Fachbereiche Architektur und Stadtplanung der Gesamthochschule Kassel ed., *Beiträge zur Stadtentwicklung in Kassel zwischen Jahrhundertwende und Wiederaufbau* (Kassel, 1981); Kurt Milte, *Kassel einst und jetzt* (Kassel: Schneider & Weber, 7th ed., 1981); Wolfgang Hermsdorff, *Kassel 1900 bis heute. Dokumentation mit 144 Eberth-Fotos und 18 Textabbildungen* (Kassel: Schneider & Weber, 3rd ed., 1981); Wolfgang Kemp & Florian Neusüß, *Kassel 1850 bis heute. Fotografie in Kassel – Kassel in Fotografien* (München, 1981); Fritz Lometsch, *Bauten aus dem alten Kassel* (1981); Hans D. Baumann, *Kassel in alten Ansichtskarten* (Europäische Bibliothek: Zaltbommel, 1985); Helmut Brier / Werner Dettmar, *Kassel – Veränderungen einer Stadt I* (Fuldabrück: Hesse, 1986); Frank-Roland Klaube, *Alt-Kassel. Ein verlorenes Stadtbild. Historische Photographien* (Gudensberg-Gleichen: Wartberg, 1988). Karl-Hermann Wegner, *Bilder aus dem alten Kassel. Gemälde und Graphiken 1870 – 1940* (Kassel: Verein Freunde des Stadtmuseums e.V., 1995). The trend continues unabated and has, if anything, accelerated in recent years. See, for example, the video-production, *Die Kasseler Altstadt vor ihrer Zerstörung 1943. Ein Bildspaziergang mit Hans Germanni* (Kassel, 2000).

¹⁰⁴ Rudolf Helm ed., *Kassel vor dem Feuersturm* (Kassel: Schneider & Weber, 1950; ²1953); *Kassel einst und jetzt. Ein Bildbuch mit Beiträgen von Rudolf Helm, Karl Kaltwasser, Kurt Mitte. Zeichnungen von Christian Beyer* (Kassel, 1960; 4th revised edition, 1966; 7th revised edition 1981).

¹⁰⁵ Compare the comment on the dustjacket of the edition of 1960, "In its present form, the book only retains of old Kassel what seems worthy to pass on to the younger generation that has never known the former city. But after that, we look towards the future, towards what is new."

"Magdeburg—a lost cityscape".¹⁰⁶ Yet, nostalgia was not a post-unification development but can be traced to the mid-1980s when various groups started to push the boundaries of the "discursive prison" (Martin Sabrow) of the *SED* regime.¹⁰⁷ Of crucial importance were the activities of the amateur historians of the "Section Municipal History", who used the *lieu de mémoire* of allied bombing in order to popularise cultural memories of the pre-war city. By way of visual representations and contrasts, several exhibitions shifted the emphasis from the contemporary 'Socialist metropolis' to *Alt-Magdeburg*, from successful overcoming to irrevocable loss.

The high point of this activity was reached in 1987 when the amateurs presented an exhibition on the history of the architectural and commercial centre of pre-war Magdeburg, the *Breite Weg*, which had not only been renamed *Karl-Marx-Street* in 1953 but also been changed beyond recognition by the double impact of the bombing war and Socialist city planning. The exhibition, which was staged between 16th and 25th January, met with great popular acclaim and also received extensive coverage in the press of the 'associated' bourgeois parties.¹⁰⁸ According to a report in the *Mitteldeutsche Neueste Nachrichten*, nearly 300 historic photographs illustrated "as to why the street had once been famous well beyond the borders of our city as a boulevard of Baroque artistry".¹⁰⁹ In another report, the *Neue Weg* emphasised the awed reception with which those sections of the exhibition were met that focused on turn-of-the-century Magdeburg.¹¹⁰ In the light of the popular success of this and other exhibitions, the wave of nostalgic publications that appeared on the local book market after the demise of *SED* rule may thus be considered less of a new development than the culmination of a trend that had been in evidence since the mid-1980s.

Exposing the Myth of the Zero Hour

With the new emphasis on loss came a search for reasons. Why did the old city have to be destroyed, and why did the contemporary environment bear so little resemblance to the

¹⁰⁶ "Was da in Schutt und Asche fiel. Magdeburg vor dem 16. Januar 1945", ed. *MZ am Wochenende* (Magdeburg, 1990); Stadtarchiv Magdeburg, *Magdeburg. Ein verlorenes Stadtbild* (Gudensberg-Gleichen: Wartberg, 21993); Ingelore Buchholz, *Der Breite Weg – Magdeburg Geschichten einer Straße* (Magdeburg: Helmuth Block, 1990); Ingelore Buchholz / Maren Ballerstedt / Konstanze Buchholz, *Magdeburg – so wie es war* (Düsseldorf, 1991); Joachim Schütte, *Magdeburg in alten Ansichtskarten* (Würzburg, 1990); Ingelore Buchholz / Maren Ballerstedt und Konstanze Buchholz, *Magdeburg in alten Ansichten* (Zaltbommel, 1992); Joachim Schütte, *Magdeburg in alten Ansichtskarten* (Bindlach, 1995).

¹⁰⁷ Martin Sabrow, "Geschichtsdiskurs und Doktringesellschaft", in: Martin Sabrow ed., *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs. Der Umgang mit der Vergangenheit in der DDR* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2000), pp. 9-35, here: p. 16.

¹⁰⁸ See Maren Ballerstedt, "Daten zur Magdeburger Stadtgeschichte. Mai 1945 bis Oktober 1990", in: *Magdeburg. Portrait einer Stadt*, pp. 161-224, here: p. 215.

¹⁰⁹ "Aus der Geschichte des einstigen Breiten Weges", *MNN* (13-1-87).

¹¹⁰ "Eine Magistrale offenbart ihre 750jährige Historie", *Der Neue Weg* (21-1-87).

pre-war city? In the Kassel of the 1980s, two sets of answers emerged to questions such as these. The first revolved around the nature of World War II; the second around rupture and continuity in urban planning.

To some extent, the accentuation of loss led to a heightened irritation with the conduct of the allied air war. In his reverie on Old-Kassel, poet Manfred Hausmann spoke of a "disgraceful" act of "senseless destruction" with reference to the air raid of 22nd October 1943. In doing so, he implicitly drew on elements of Nazi wartime propaganda: indiscriminate bombing was criminal destruction for its own sake, pure and simple.

Hausmann did not stand alone. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the idiom and interpretive frames of Nazism experienced some kind of limited renaissance. Writers as diverse as novelist Christine Brückner and a group of postgraduate research students used the propaganda term "terror raid" in order to refer to the night of the bombing.¹¹¹ Brückner even went so far as to insinuate that the ultimate goal of the air war had been the annihilation of *Kultur*. "[22nd October 1943 was] one of the terror raids that included the annihilation of the historical and art-historical treasures of a city; the aim was to alienate the population from their city", she wrote in a contribution to a popular picture book.¹¹²

Brückner was a committed Democrat; so were Hausmann and the university students. Their use of National Socialist idiom should therefore not be read as an expression of a revisionist politics but rather as an indication of the extent to which reflections on the loss of the historic city space were emotionally charged. In the same piece, Brückner spoke of the "mourning and confusion" that arose in her when looking at photographs of the bygone city. Author Hans Baumann, in a collection of old postcard motifs, confessed to a "feeling of profound loss", and of "anger".¹¹³

Despite the occasional use of Nazi rhetoric, the main thrust of this anger was not directed at the Western allies but at the German war generation. In the 1980s, a body of writing emerged that looked towards local agency in order to find answers to the question of loss. Reflecting shifts in the wider memory culture, this literature worked from the broad consensus that the bombing must be considered a "logical reaction to the premeditated launching of war, genocide and Holocaust", as university professor Folckert Lüken-Isberner stated emphatically in an exhibition catalogue in 1993.¹¹⁴ Critical attention,

¹¹¹ Marsen / Kulbarsch / Soltau, *Stadtteilgeschichte als Stadtgeschichte*, p. 195, "On the night of 22/23 October, British bombers flew a terror raid against the inner city of Kassel that razed the Old Town to the ground."

¹¹² *Kassel. Moderne Stadt mit Tradition*. Textbeiträge von Christine Brückner, Manfred Hausmann, Hans Werner Kalbfuß, Karl-Hermann Wegner (Kassel, Lometsch, 1985), pp. 7-25, here: p. 8.

¹¹³ Hans D. Baumann, *Kassel in alten Ansichten* (Europäische Bibliothek: Zaltbommel, 1985), Introduction.

¹¹⁴ Folckert Lüken-Isberner, "Von der Gauhauptstadtplanung zur Gigantomie in Trümmern", in: *Leben in Ruinen*, pp. 173-80, here: p. 173. See also the remark by Hans Baumann, *Kassel in alten Ansichten*, Introduction: "In the final analysis, the destruction of Kassel, although caused by the bombers of the former war adversaries, is attributable to the German Nazis and the forces behind them."

however, was turned elsewhere: at an urban planning tradition that had welcomed the destruction of the air war as a "unique opportunity".¹¹⁵ While some knowledge of the fabricated character of the underlying claim of 'total' destruction had existed throughout the reconstruction period, it was in the 1980s that the notion of the air war as a "zero hour" was systematically exposed as a myth. Of crucial importance in this process was the work of a research group from Kassel University, the *Arbeitsgruppe Stadtbaugeschichte*, who popularised their findings on the ideological roots of post-war urban planning in a number of publications and exhibitions.¹¹⁶

According to the revisionist argument, the contemporary cityscape was less the result of radical rupture in the air war than of personal and conceptual continuities in urban planning between the Third Reich and the post-war period. The notion of total destruction was a "fable" that had been cynically invented by urban planners in order to legitimise and implement Nazi-era ideas that deliberately broke with the historic city space.¹¹⁷

Contemporary Kassel, in short, was the result of continuity rather than rupture, of an insufficient break with Nazism in the post-war period and not of any total destruction suffered in the air war. Although some attempts were made to salvage the notion of total devastation against this revisionist challenge, the apologist interventions were defensive in character, indicating the extent to which a central legitimising plank of the post-war years had been eroded by the 1980s.¹¹⁸ As a consequence, not just the pre-1945 activities of the "fathers of the reconstruction", city building officer Erich Heinicke (1892-1964) and chief of the municipal planning bureau Werner Hasper (1911-1993), were brought into sharp focus but also of the reconstruction generation at large.

Indeed, 'generation' indicated an important fault line in this debate.¹¹⁹ Most revisionist critics were born during or after the war, and by addressing the issue of continuity across 1945, highlighted the double identity of their fathers and grandfathers as members of both

¹¹⁵ *Stadtbaurat Erich Heinicke* in 1947.

¹¹⁶ Petra Wettlaufer-Pohl, "Ausstellung zur Stadtplanung in Kassel: 'Stunde Null' gab es nicht", *Hessische Allgemeine* (27-11-87); Folckert Lüken-Isberner, "Kassel: Neue Stadt auf altem Grund", in: Beyme et.al., *Neue Städte aus Ruinen*, pp. 251-266; Folckert Lüken-Isberner, "Von der Gauhauptstadtplanung zur Gigantomie in Trümmern", in: *Leben in Ruinen*, pp. 173-182; Thomas König, "Der Konflikt um die Erhaltung historischer Bausubstanz", in: ibid., pp. 97-102; Hoffmann-Axthelm, *Verpasste Stadt*, pp. 13-24. See also Werner Durth / Niels Gutschow, *Träume in Trümmern. Planungen zum Wiederaufbau zerstörter Städte im Westen Deutschlands 1940-1950*. Zweiter Band: Städte (Braunschweig / Wiesbaden, 1988), pp. 791-809.

¹¹⁷ Hoffmann-Axthelm, *Verpasste Stadt*, p. 23.

¹¹⁸ See for example the contribution by Werner Noell, in the post-war years head of the building construction office [Hochbauamt], "Die Zerstörung unserer Stadt war so vernichtend gewesen...". Gedanken zu Kassels Wiederaufbau", HA (17-6-85).

¹¹⁹ On the concept of 'generation' see Ulrike Jureit / Michael Wildt eds., *Generationen. Zur Relevanz eines wissenschaftlichen Grundbegriffs* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005); Jürgen Reulecke ed., *Generationalität und Lebensgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003). See also the founding text by the sociologist Karl Mannheim, "Das Problem der Generation", in: idem, *Wissenssoziologie. Auswahl aus dem Werk*. Ed. with an introduction by Kurt H. Wolff (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1964), pp. 509-565

the reconstruction generation and the war generation. In a preface to a collection of pre-war photographs, Hans Baumann, born in the late 1940s, spoke of the ambivalence of "respect" and "anger" that he felt towards his father's generation, who "proudly point towards their rolled-up sleeves" but had left a legacy of "urban planning barbarism" to posterity.¹²⁰ Apologists of the contemporary city likewise recognised that inter-generational conflict played an important role in the debate. Journalist Wolfgang Rossbach, for example, used the occasion of the 46th anniversary of the air raid in order to intervene on behalf of the reconstruction generation. In a commentary that appeared in the *Hessische Allgemeine* on 22nd October 1989, he warned against "rash judgement" that "[accuses] a whole generation of a lack of competence and vision".¹²¹

Whereas in Kassel, the highly emotional debate reached its climax in the second half of the 1980s, in Magdeburg similar questions could not be raised until after the demise of *SED* rule. When the debate did finally erupt in the early 1990s, the experience of the second German dictatorship assumed centre stage. While, in Kassel, the critics pointed to the personal and ideological links between the (early) Federal Republic and the Third Reich, in post-Communist Magdeburg, the ideological goals of the *SED* regime—rather than any continuities between the Third Reich and early post-war planning—were held responsible for the "un-*Magdeburgian*" appearance of the contemporary city.¹²² Here, the inclusion of Magdeburg in the centralised planning of the *Nationales Aufbauwerk* in August 1952 made it easy for the post-dictatorial public to construct a simple dichotomy between commendable indigenous efforts on the one hand and catastrophic outside interventions on the other. This interpretation allowed for acknowledging the deplorable state of the urban environment while paying tribute to the efforts of a resident population who increasingly saw their lives' work slandered by the wholesale discrediting of the GDR in post-unification Germany.¹²³

Lieu de Mémoire as Site of 'Healing'

The focus on urban planning to some extent diminished the importance of the air war as a historical event. If the notion of 'total devastation' was an ex-post rationalisation that had served to legitimise a deliberate break with the historic city, then the schemes of urban planners rather than the bombing raids were responsible for the absence of the past in the contemporary urban environment. The growing recognition of this connection did not,

¹²⁰ Baumann, *Kassel in alten Ansichten*, Introduction.

¹²¹ Wolfgang Rossbach, "22. Oktober 1943 – 46 Jahre danach", *HNA* (21-10-89).

¹²² Friedrich Jakobs, "Wie Phoenix aus der Asche", in: Puhle ed., *"Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot..."*, pp. 165-177, here: p. 175.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 172f.; 176.

however, diminish the importance of the air war as a memory place. On the contrary: the *lieu de mémoire* turned into a symbolic space in which the disparate events of total war and of domestic urban planning were commemorated jointly. The civil administrations, in collaboration with citizens' initiatives, chose the day of remembrance in order to lay the foundation for restorative projects that were intended, at long last, to 'heal' the 'wounds' in the urban topography that had been caused by allied bombs and reckless city planning.¹²⁴

In Kassel, the 50th anniversary of the air raid did not only witness unprecedented commemorative activity but also the inaugural event to an ambitious urban development project, the re-founding of the 13th century *Unterneustadt* or Lower New Town. On 23rd October 1993, politicians, city planners and residents assembled in the *Brüderkirche* to open up a discussion process that aimed at "clos[ing] [...] one of the last great wounds" of the air war, as the municipal building officer, Uli Hellweg, stressed in a pamphlet documenting the event.¹²⁵ Like few other urban spaces, the "lost city" of the late-medieval Lower New Town appeared to epitomise the lasting impact of the 'double destruction' to which the city had been subjected:¹²⁶ Devastated by fire in the air raid of 22nd October 1943, the city district was abandoned by post-war city planners and never rebuilt. Fifty years later, the once densely built-up area functioned as an exhibition ground while a four-lane Federal road cut across the ground on which the district church had once stood. Through "critical reconstruction", the project sought to found anew the *Lower New Town*—not by way of a one-to-one replication of the pre-war city but through the critical "re-appropriation" of the historic city space, as Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm explained in his introductory address.¹²⁷ In so doing, the project not only addressed—and to some extent sought to undo—loss but also reflected on the legacy of "50 years of not knowing how to deal with the destruction, 50 years of unrealised mourning over the lost city", as Hoffmann-Axthelm emphasised.¹²⁸

The urban development project of the Lower New Town self-consciously referred to the *lieu de mémoire* of 22nd October in order to regain that which, according to an influential strand in public opinion, had been lost through the air war and the post-war reconstruction: *Bürgersinn* or civic identity. Whatever the factual merits of a diagnosis that identified a lack of historic consciousness as the root cause for the socio-economic problems bedevilling late 20th century Kassel, the same line of reasoning motivated the

¹²⁴ Uli Hellweg, "Wiedergründung der Unterneustadt" – Eine große Chance für Kassel", in: *Wie baut man eine Stadt. Wege zur Unterneustadt. Eine Veranstaltungsreihe der Stadt Kassel* (Kassel, 1994), pp. 5f., here: p. 6.

¹²⁵ *Wie baut man eine Stadt. Wege zur Unterneustadt* (Kassel, 1994), Preface.

¹²⁶ Peter Wisotzki / Karl-Hermann Wegner, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Stadt. Chancen für die Stadtarchäologie in Kassel*. Ed. Freunde des Stadtmuseums (Kassel, 1991).

¹²⁷ Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, "Die Idee der kritischen Rekonstruktion", in: *Wege zur Unterneustadt*, pp. 20f.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Magdeburg city council to undertake a similar, if less ambitious, project. On 13th December 1990, the City Council passed a *CDU* motion on the "conceptual rebuilding" of the ruin of the late-medieval *Johanniskirche*, which had, since 1979, functioned as a memorial site to the destruction in World War II.¹²⁹ As City Councillor for Culture, Löhr, explained in a letter to preservationist Heinz Gerling, the Church of St. John, as the oldest parish church and traditional market church, not only symbolised the "civic self-confidence" [*bürgerliche Selbstbewußtsein*] of the old city but also stood as a symbol of "defiant resistance" to the "ignorance of the past decades", i.e., the shortcomings of Socialist city planning.¹³⁰

Although the projected rebuilding sought to reverse the impact of post-war neglect no less than of the air war, the *lieu de mémoire* of allied bombing—rather than any date connected to Socialist city planning—was chosen to initiate this process. In post-Communist Magdeburg, no less than in Kassel, memories of the destruction wrought by allied bombers were less divisive than memories of the post-war destruction brought about by domestic city planners, and thus more suitable for the "common work of reconciliation".¹³¹ On 16th January 1991, the Committee for the Reconstruction of the *Johanniskirche* held its inaugural meeting in the council chamber of the city hall.¹³² Convened in order to coordinate funding activities and to raise public awareness of the project, the Committee jointly organised the official commemoration of the bombing with the City Council in the following year.¹³³ 'Healing', not confrontation, was the premise underlying the reconstruction—of Magdeburg's silhouette, the deficit in civic identity, and the division of the nation, as mayor Willi Polte (*SPD*) made clear in the preface to a fund-raising publication. Ironically, this "new beginning" drew on a memory place whose history was indelibly linked with the past it sought to overcome.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ StAM Rep. 18/4. *Stadtverordnetenbeschlüsse*. 8th meeting on 13-12-1990, top 12: "Antrag der CDU-Fraktion vom 19.9.1990: Wiederaufbau der Johanniskirche".

¹³⁰ Stadtrat für Kultur to H. Gerling, 20.12.90, StAM Rep. 12U 124. NL Gerling. *Kuratorium für den Wiederaufbau der Johanniskirche 1990-95*, fol. 173-5, here: 173.

¹³¹ "Gemeinsames Versöhnungswerk": in: "Zur Geschichte der Johanniskirche", unsigned manuscript dated 10-5-92, in: StAM Rep. 12U NL Gerling, no. 124, fol. 57.

¹³² See "Magdeburg gedachte der Opfer des 16. Januar", *Volksstimme* (17-1-91), p. 16; StAM Rep. 12U NL Gerling, no. 124, fol. 173-5.

¹³³ StAM Rep 12U NL Gerling, no. 124, fol. 69-80.

¹³⁴ Willi Polte, "Grußwort zur Bildmappe Johanniskirche", in: Kuratorium für den Wiederaufbau der Johanniskirche zu Magdeburg ed., *Die Johanniskirche – älteste Stadtkirche Magdeburgs in Wort und Bild* (Magdeburg, [1990]). Compare also Magdeburgische Gesellschaft von 1990 zur Förderung der Künste, Wissenschaften und Gewerbe e.V., *Festreden zur Eröffnung der Johanniskirche am 2.10.1999* (Magdeburg: Werbung und Marketing Gudrun Seffers, 1999).

Conclusion

As this chapter and the previous chapter have shown, the discourse surrounding the legacy of urban destruction made up a second vector in urban memory cultures of the air war.

Here, the use of the term 'death' stood in as a metaphor for the radical transformation of the built-up environment that had been occasioned by area bombing. In order to make sense of rupture, political and planning elites in the two cities, public intellectuals and ordinary citizens resorted to the familiar ideas of *Heimat* and *Kultur*. Conceptualising the city as an organism, they employed organic metaphors in order to speak about the material impact of aerial warfare, produced statistics on the extent of the destruction, and drew on visual representations both to celebrate and to discredit what had been lost and what was erected in its stead. In the two cities, the trajectory of memory was determined by local traditions, the pace and nature of the reconstruction, and shifts in the wider political, socio-cultural and generational parameters.

Whereas the period of 1940 to 1960 was distinguished by the attempt to master the legacy of urban destruction through 'modern' reconstruction, the period of 1960 to 1995 was marked by the celebration of closure and the subsequent lamentation of continued loss. Although, by the mid-1960s, the material impact of the air war appeared to have been overcome, a mere ten years later, dissonant voices started to perceive the rebuilt city in terms of its deficits, alleging that post-war city planning had, in effect, completed what the bombers had begun. In Kassel, this radical critique of the contemporary urban environment originated among the New Left, which appropriated the nostalgic idea of *Alt-Kassel* in order to formulate a positive vision of the city as a place of belonging. In Magdeburg, sections of the old middle classes likewise turned to the pre-war city in order to posit a visual alternative to the emerging 'Socialist metropolis'. In doing so, they invested the idea of *Alt-Magdeburg* with affectionate and aesthetic qualities that it had not possessed in the immediate post-war period. After the political watershed of 1989/90, both cities—now part of a single nation—, initiated ambitious urban development projects that were intended to reconcile the past to the present. Both the 'critical reconstruction', in Kassel, of the *Unterneustadt*, and the rebuilding, in Magdeburg, of the *Johanniskirche* were designed to make visible again elements of the pre-war city in the contemporary cityscape.

As *lieu de mémoire*, the air war served as an important point of reference in the public debate on the merits and demerits of the post-war reconstruction, and the wider discourse about ways of belonging and modes of identification. In the period up until 1960, the conceptualisation of the memory place as a 'unique opportunity' and a 'new beginning'—as

promoted by Nazi propagandists during the war and by the local political elites and city planners after the war—contended with an alternative view, according to which the *lieu de mémoire* denoted nothing but catastrophic loss and metaphoric 'death'. In the 1960s, with the first phase of the reconstruction complete, the first interpretation attained hegemonic status. Politicians, publicists, and ordinary citizens drew upon the iconic air raid as a founding myth for a bright present, as a 'zero hour' that threw into sharp relief the achievements of the 'reconstruction' generation. From the 1970s, however, different groups in the two cities started to embrace the second interpretation, challenging, and finally, displacing the notion of the 'new beginning'. According to the revisionist challenge, the memory of the air war called for mourning, not celebration, marking the beginning, not of a successful reconstruction, but of a process of continuous destruction that stretched from the Nazi years until the present. By the 1990s, the *lieu de mémoire* of allied bombing had thus turned into a symbol of cultural loss that had been brought about by allied bombs and urban planning in equal measure.

HISTORY

Reconstructing the 'Night of Horror' Local Histories of Allied Bombing, 1940-1970

Introduction

"In many accounts and stories, the memory of the night of horror lives on", observed the author of a newspaper article that the daily *Hessische Nachrichten* published on 21st October 1950 in order to mark the seventh anniversary of the most devastating raid on Kassel in World War II. The piece, which was called "22nd October 1943—From the Secret Report of the Chief of Police", made available to the local public excerpts from the confidential experience report that had been compiled by the then Kassel chief of police in December 1943.¹ Although the journalist contended that the document contained "comprehensive statistical material" that offered a broadly reliable picture of the "extent of the catastrophe", he expressed severe reservations about the figure of 5,830 fatal casualties that the report mentioned.² He argued that the chief of police must have had an interest in downplaying the number of fatalities and proposed that the real figure lay somewhere in between the official death toll and the rumoured figure of 70,000 to 80,000.³ When three years later, the article was reprinted in the *SPD* weekly, *Hessischer Sonntag*, the editors inserted an annotation that went further in privileging the "subjective truth" of personal memory over the documentary evidence.⁴ "Nobody who has lived through the destruction of the old town is willing to believe those figures", they maintained emphatically.⁵

¹ "22. Oktober 1943. Aus dem Geheimbericht des Kasseler Polizeipräsidenten", *Hessische Nachrichten* 244 (21-10-50).

² For a copy of the report see StAK S8 C40. *Erfahrungsbericht zum Luftangriff vom 22.10.43 auf den LO I. Ordnung Kassel*.

³ "22. Oktober 1943", *HN* 244 (21-10-50).

⁴ Aleida Assmann, "Wie wahr sind Erinnerungen?", in: Harald Welzer ed., *Das soziale Gedächtnis. Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001), pp. 103-122, here: p. 104. See also, with reference to Dresden and the controversy over low-flying fighters targeting civilians, Harald Welzer, "Die Bilder der Macht und die Ohnmacht der Bilder. Über Besetzung und Auslöschung von Erinnerung", in: idem ed., *Das Gedächtnis der Bilder. Ästhetik und Nationalsozialismus* (Tübingen: Edition diskord, 1995), pp. 64-84; Götz Bergander, "Vom Gerücht zur Legende. Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland im Spiegel von Tatsachen, erlebter Geschichte, Erinnerung, Erinnerungsverzerrung", in: Thomas Stamm-Kuhlmann et. al. eds., *Geschichtsbilder. Festschrift für Michael Salewski zum 65. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart, 2003), pp. 591-616; Helmut Schnatz, *Tiefflieger über Dresden?* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000).

⁵ "Gedenken und Mahnung: Der Feuertod raste durch die Stadt", *Hessischer Sonntag*, 6/42 (18-10-53).

The episode sheds light on the "interdependence" of history and memory that characterises 'contemporary history' in general but is of special relevance to the sub-discipline of local history.⁶ Here, lay historians and journalists produce historiographical texts for a local audience of which they themselves form an integral part. In the case of the subject of aerial bombing, the post-war attempts to write authoritative accounts of what 'really' happened were undertaken in the context of myriad 'subjective truths' and popular legends that had their origin in a complex interplay of personal experiences, rumours and the stories put into circulation by Nazi propaganda. As the reference to the experience report of the Nazi chief of police shows, the problem of continuity between post-war history and wartime narratives extended to the very documents that served as historical source material. Frequently, post-war accounts drew on the documentary evidence that had been produced under the auspices of Nazi authorities during the war.

This and the following chapter will chart the local historiography on the air war between 1940 and 1995 as a third vector of memory. Conceiving of local history as a distinct genre that is concerned just as much with present-centred considerations of finding 'usable' pasts as with observing the professional standards of academic history,⁷ the chapters seek to answer the following questions: Who wrote about the air war, and what did the authors want to know about this aspect of contemporary history? How did they contextualise their subject matter, and what functions did these historiographical narratives play in the context of the larger memory culture?

In order to analyse local history writing as an integral part of the memory culture, this study makes use of a typology that was proposed by Friedrich Nietzsche in the second of his *Untimely Meditations* in 1874.⁸ In, "On the Use and Disadvantages of History for Life", the philosopher distinguished between three conceptions of history, which he termed 'monumental', 'antiquarian', and 'critical'. "Monumental" history, according to Nietzsche, subordinates the "individuality" of the past to the demands of the present.⁹ It turns history into a storehouse from which "the resourceful and the powerful" derive 'heroic' examples

⁶ Konrad H. Jarausch, "Zeitgeschichte und Erinnerung. Deutungskonkurrenz oder Interdependenz?", in: Konrad H. Jarausch, Martin Sabrow eds., *Verletztes Gedächtnis. Erinnerungskultur und Zeitgeschichte im Konflikt* (Campus: Frankfurt / M., 2002), pp. 9-39; Hans Günter Hockerts, "Zugänge zur Zeitgeschichte: Primärerfahrung, Erinnerungskultur, Geschichtswissenschaft", in *ibid.*, 39-73. Compare Hans Rothfels' famous definition of 'contemporary history' as "the epoch of contemporaries and its scholarly treatment". Hans Rothfels, "Zeitgeschichte als Aufgabe", in: *VfZ* 1/1 (1953), pp. 1-8, here: p. 2. On the context see Winfried Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (München: Oldenbourg, 1989); Nicolas Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker. Erforschung und Erinnerung* (Wallstein: Göttingen, 2003); Sebastian Conrad, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Nation. Geschichtsschreibung in Westdeutschland und Japan 1945-1960* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1999), pp. 219-68.

⁷ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories. The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: UCP, 2001).

⁸ I have used the German text. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*. Reclam-Universalbibliothek Nr. 7134 (Stuttgart: Reclam 2003).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

for their actions.¹⁰ By contrast, the "antiquarian" approach is not concerned so much with the exemplary character of the past but with the 'pious' collection of historical detail for the sake of preservation.¹¹ Finally, "critical" history puts the past on trial, seeking to explode myths by bringing to bear onto received knowledge the analytical tools of source criticism and rational enquiry.¹²

This chapter argues that during the war, Nazism projected a history of the allied air war that was 'monumental'. Nazi propagandists stressed the exemplary conduct of the 'racial comrades' and the Nazi party under aerial bombardment, seeking to preserve and to create documentary evidence that would bear out their interpretation of the unfolding events. In so doing, Nazism influenced the documentary base and the analytical parameters of post-war histories as well. After the demise of Nazism, the task of writing about the air war fell within the remit of local journalists, who produced stories that projected no longer heroism but collective suffering. Despite individual attempts at writing 'critical' histories, an inverted 'monumental' historiography prevailed that subordinated the historical evidence to the demands of the present. While this trend was discernible both east and west of the Iron Curtain, there were also differences. Whereas in Kassel, journalists produced historical accounts that exhibited a tendency towards external and internal pacification, in Magdeburg, the historiographical narratives were put in the service of mass mobilisation. The dominance of 'monumental' conceptions of history did not give way until the 1970s, when a number of 'antiquarian' endeavours were undertaken that also incorporated, to a limited degree, 'critical' elements, as chapter eight will show.

"The True Culprits of this Bloody World War":¹³

Allied Bombing as Anti-Semitic Parable, 1940 to 1945

"When the history of this war is written, a special chapter in the account of this world-revolutionary confrontation will have to be reserved for the Anglo-American bombing war", the Nazi *Gauleiter* of Magdeburg-Anhalt, Rudolf Jordan, wrote in a programmatic article that was published in the local press of Magdeburg in January 1944.¹⁴ The remark may serve as a good starting point for a discussion of the place of allied bombing in Nazi visions of World War II. It underlines the extent to which key protagonists of the Third

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 18-27, here: p. 19.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 27-32.

¹² Ibid., pp. 32-34.

¹³ Gauleiter Rudolf Jordan, "Der Bombenkrieg", in: *Der Mitteldeutsche* (23-1-44), p. 1f.; *Magdeburgische Zeitung* (24-1-44), p. 1f.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Reich self-consciously viewed the present as a future past. Bernd Wegner argues, indeed, that during the final phase of the war, Nazi leaders were motivated above all by a concern about their historical legacy, purposefully stage-managing their demise as a "heroic downfall".¹⁵ Even if one does not follow Wegner all the way, there can be little doubt that the political elites of the Third Reich attempted to influence future histories of the war in their lifetime. In January 1943, for example, Jordan ordered the establishment of a regional archive in order to collect "documentary evidence" for writing the "history, development and politics" of the *NSDAP*, and "contemporary history" more generally.¹⁶ The attempt to shape the historiography of the future was, however, not confined to the creation, preservation and destruction of the source material, but extended also to the analytical parameters, to the frames in which the historical subject matter was discussed.

As the introductory quotation indicates, the Nazi leadership intended to accord a prominent place to the strategic air war against the German Reich in a future history of World War II. While confronting Nazi propagandists with a host of difficulties in their daily representation of the unfolding events,¹⁷ the strategic air war, at the same time, appeared to furnish them with a profitable subject for a future historical treatment of the war. As a theatre of action in which the Western allies systematically violated the spirit—if not the letter—of the rules of war as laid down in The Hague Convention of 1907,¹⁸ the air war was deemed an ideal topic for addressing moral and legal issues about the conflict as a whole. It was singled out in order to illustrate the National Socialist meta-narrative of World War II as a "world revolutionary struggle" in which chivalrous German soldiers faced cowardly enemies bent on wanton destruction and murder.¹⁹

In the early summer of 1943, Goebbels finalised plans for publishing a governmental white book that focussed on the legal side of aerial bombing.²⁰ The booklet was issued in

¹⁵ Bernd Wegner, "Hitler, der Zweite Weltkrieg und die Choreographie des Untergangs", in: *GG* 26 (2000), pp. 493-518.

¹⁶ B.Arch. NS 18/985. Gaupropagandaleitung Dessau, fol. 73-90, here: fol. 73. On the relationship between cultural memory and the archive see Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich: Beck, 2003), pp. 343-407.

¹⁷ Compare the remarks by Joseph Goebbels of 11 August 1942 in: Willi A. Boelcke ed., „*Wollt Ihr den totalen Krieg?*“ *Die geheimen Goebbels-Konferenzen 1939–1943* (Munich: dtv, 1969), p. 269f. See also entries of 12th September 1942 and 10th October 1942, in: *ibid.*, p. 280; p. 289.

¹⁸ Klaus Naumann, *Der Krieg als Text. Das Jahr 1945 im kulturellen Gedächtnis der Presse* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998), p. 34; W. Hays Parks, "Air War and the Laws of War", in: Horst Boog ed., *The Conduct of the Air War in the Second World War. An International Comparison*. (New York / Oxford: Berg, 1992), pp. 310-372; Manfred Messerschmidt, "Strategic Air War and International Law", in: *ibid.*, pp. 298-309. More recent scholarship has shown an increased readiness to go further still and to label indiscriminate bombing, or at least: individual raids such as the one on Dresden, as 'war crimes'. See Donald Bloxham, "Dresden as a War Crime", in: Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang eds., *Firestorm. The Bombing of Dresden 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2006), pp. 180-208; Eric Langenbacher, "The Allies in World War II: The Anglo-American Bombardment of German Cities", in: Adam Jones ed., *Genocide, War Crimes and the West: History and Complicity* (London & New York: Zed Books, 2004), pp. 116-133.

¹⁹ Jordan, "Der Bombenkrieg", *Mitteldeutsche* (23-1-44), p. 1. Compare also "Luftkrieg: Die Kriegsführung der Minderwertigen", in: *Völkischer Beobachter* (Berliner Ausgabe) of 11-3-43, p. 1.

²⁰ B.Arch NS 18 / 1058, fol. 127. "Re: Weißbuch über die rechtliche Seite des Luftkrieges, 1.7.43".

July by the Foreign Office under the title, "Documents on the Sole Responsibility [Alleinschuld] of England for the Bombing War against the Civilian Population".²¹ In several respects, the text differed markedly from the Nazi propaganda as disseminated in the daily press. Academic in tone, the booklet professed to offer an objective evaluation of the issue of guilt on the basis of the available documentary evidence.²² Moreover, the publication claimed to provide a historical dimension to present problems by stressing the continuities in German and British foreign policy across the caesura of January 1933.

According to the white book, the Nazi government stood in a tradition of German attempts at civilising the conduct of war through binding international agreements. In so doing, the text not only exonerated the Nazi leadership from any responsibility for the escalation of the air war but, by extension, for the conflict as a whole,

"This barbarisation [*Verwilderung*] of war could have been avoided if Germany's present enemies had heeded the *Führer's* endeavours for the humanisation of war [...]. The German attempts foundered on the will of our enemies to employ the air terror as a detailed plan for the annihilation of Europe."²³

The referential frame was thus extended both spatially and temporally. Strategic bombing was not a course of action pursued to weaken the enemy in a military conflict but formed part of a premeditated scheme to "annihilate Europe", or so the white book claimed.

Likewise, the vocabulary of 'main guilt' [*Hauptschuld*] and 'sole responsibility' [*Alleinschuld*] evoked associations with article 231 of the treaty of Versailles. Thus, the "bombing war against the civilian population" took on a significance that went beyond the narrow issue of deliberate or accidental bombing of civilian targets: it was presented as a parable for trans-historical 'truths' about the world as conceived by Nazism.

If Nazi propagandists thought that the strategic air war provided them with a lever to deflect attention from their responsibility for the outbreak of war and their genocidal policies, the subject matter appeared attractive for two additional reasons. It was used to privilege the role of the Nazi party on the 'home front' and to illustrate a central plank of the Nazi world view, the alleged culpability of 'the Jew'.

In a circular letter of July 1944, Joseph Goebbels informed high level state and party functionaries of a special Air War Archive, requesting them to supply "written and visual

²¹ Auswärtiges Amt 1943 Nr. 8 [Weißbuch der deutschen Regierung], *Dokumente über die Alleinschuld Englands am Bombenkrieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung* (Berlin: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1943). On Goebbels' reaction see *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, part II, vol. 9, p. 26 (entry of 1st July 1943); p. 63 (entry of 8th July 1943). See also the remarks by Anton Hoch, "Der Luftangriff auf Freiburg am 10. Mai 1940", *VfZ* 4/2 (1956), pp. 115-44, here: p. 140, footnote 111.

²² See also the press coverage, "Englands Alleinschuld am Bombenterror. Die Verbrechen der britischen Regierung im Lichte der Dokumente", *Völkischer Beobachter* 56/188 (7-7-43), p. 1.

²³ *Dokumente*, p. 17.

documents on the air war".²⁴ The propaganda minister justified the initiative with reference to the 'heroism' shown on the 'home front',

"Party and state are engaged in magnanimous relief efforts for the population. [...]

Deeds are recorded that will provide witness to stunned posterity of the bearing and the achievements of our generation."²⁵

In emphasising the 'heroic bearing' of the population under the impact of strategic bombing, the propaganda minister projected a kind of historical writing that might be called monumental in the Nietzschean sense. He envisioned a heroic tale of a racial community welded together by the wanton destruction of allied bombing, triumphing over enormous odds through the leadership of the Nazi party. As a mode of enemy action directed at the 'home front', strategic bombing yielded material for a history of the war in which the Nazi party rather than the army took centre stage. The general absence of mass panics or unrests in the wake of area bombardments could be seized upon as evidence for the effectiveness of Nazi wartime domestic policy. The depiction of the air war would thus be well suited to legitimise the domestic 'war deployment' [*Kriegs-Einsatz*] of the Nazi party, providing retrospective justification for the National Socialist 'revolution' of 1933 and strengthening the prestige of the party among the population and vis-à-vis the army.²⁶

Finally, Nazi propagandists used the 'bombing war' as a parable for a central tenet of Nazi political culture: the obsessive belief that the anti-Hitler coalition was held together by 'International Jewry', which was said to have instigated the war with the sole purpose of destroying its world-historical antagonist, the Aryan race.²⁷ In the leader, "The bombing war", the *Gauleiter* Jordan stressed the unprecedented nature of strategic bombing, which in his view marked a rupture in the "history of warfare of civilised nations".²⁸ At the same time, Jordan strongly opposed any interpretation that viewed the escalation of the air war as accidental. Instead, he claimed that "the barbaric application of the bombing terror against a defenceless civil population" revealed a deeper truth about the nature of this conflict, bringing to light the characteristic features of those "diabolical forces that must be considered the invisible but genuine progenitors of this bloody world war". In Jordan's

²⁴ B.Arch. R55 / 447. *Luftkriegsmitteilungen des Interministeriellen Luftkriegsschäden-Ausschusses beim RMVP*, "LK Mitteilung Nr. 151" (14-7-44), fol. 238f. See also "LK-Mitteilung Nr. 158" of 4th August 1944, fol. 246.

²⁵ BArch. R55 / 447. *Luftkriegsmitteilungen des Interministeriellen Luftkriegsschäden-Ausschusses beim RMVP*, "LK Mitteilung Nr. 151", fol. 238f; "LK-Mitteilung Nr. 158", fol. 246.

²⁶ On the unpopularity of the Nazi party in general and the demise of Hitler's popularity in the second half of the war see Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933–45* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983); idem, *The 'Hitler Myth'. Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), pp. 169–224.

²⁷ Compare Jeffrey Herf, "Der Krieg und die Juden". Nationalsozialistische Propaganda im zweiten Weltkrieg", in: *DRZW* 9/2, pp. 159–202, who stresses the importance of anti-Semitism as a central narrative frame in Nazi political culture against a functionalist interpretation that focuses on the political usefulness of anti-Semitic propaganda.

²⁸ Jordan, "Bombenkrieg", p. 1.

view, the bombing war was but the contemporary expression of "a bloody age-old attempt on the part of the Jewish race to annihilate the substance of the Aryan races."²⁹ Nazism thus turned the strategic air war into an anti-Semitic parable, a tale that professed to hold ontological truths about the origins and nature of the present conflict.³⁰

The "special chapter" that Jordan had envisioned in his leader comment of January 1944 was never written. What remained, however, were the conceptualisations of Nazi propaganda as well as a wealth of written documents, collected as raw material for present propaganda purposes and future histories.³¹ In other words, the contemporary German sources originating from the sphere of party and state were not just 'relics' but often contained elements of 'tradition'.³² In part, they were written and preserved not only for the present but also for 'history'. The extent to which such documents were produced in the first place and remained available to local historiography after the end of the Third Reich could differ considerably, depending on the timing of the area raids, the extent of allied post-war confiscations, and, not least, coincidence. In this respect, Kassel and Magdeburg represented opposite cases. The bulk of the documents produced in Kassel in the wake of the October raid survived the end of the war, whereas in Magdeburg few primary sources were produced in the first place, and fewer still remained available after 1945.

In Kassel, the production of documents was clustered around two time periods: the immediate aftermath of the October raid, and the spring and summer of 1944. In the first phase fell the various 'situation' and 'experience' reports that were composed by local functionaries for superior offices. Naturally, they were prompted foremost by the concerns of the present. In a letter to the mayor of 7th November 1943, the chief of police stressed that "the experience report about the air raid of 22nd October 1943 will be of great importance to other cities [*Luftschutzorte*]".³³ The resulting document ran to 52 pages, containing a wealth of detailed information about the raid itself as well as the rescue and relief measures of the local administration. As much as the report owed its origin to the exigencies of the present, it was also self-consciously drawn up as a historical document. Lamenting the loss of the city's cultural heritage, the authors, in their general introduction, turned the ruins into "witnesses" of a "senseless anger of destruction".³⁴

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ See also Joseph Goebbels, "Der Luft und Nervenkrieg", *Das Reich* (14-6-42); "Die Juden sind schuld", *Das Reich* (16-11-41); Hans Schlitzberger, "Der jüdische Terror", *KLZ* (13-10-43), p. 1; "Amokläufer", *KLZ* 14 / 252 (27-10-43); "Zerstörerkraft gegen Schöpfergeist", *KLZ* 14 / 267 (13/14-11-43), p. 1.

³¹ This transitional stage is documented in, *Der anglo-amerikanische Bombenkrieg. Tatsachen und Stimmen (aus der Presse des In- und Auslandes). Materialsammlung* (no place: no date [Oct. (?) 1944]).

³² Compare Klaus Arnold, entry "Quellen", in: *Lexikon Geschichtswissenschaft. Hundert Grundbegriffe*. Edited by Stefan Jordan (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002), pp. 251-55, here: p. 253.

³³ StAK S8 C44, chief of police to mayor, 7th Nov. 1943.

³⁴ StAK S8 C40. *Erfahrungsbericht* of 7th Dec. 1943, p. 13.

In the second phase of the spring and summer of 1944, the creation of documents as historical source material played a larger role. In the spring, the city employee and trained art historian, Dr. Karl Paetow, started collecting personal accounts as related by local residents who had lived through the air raid. At the time, Paetow was serving as head of the Enquiry Office for Missing Persons, but his initiative appears to have been spawned by his previous position as the town's "municipal researcher" [*Stadtforscher*], where he had emphasised the strong affinity of his research with the ideas of Nazism.³⁵ In a complementary step, the city administration, in July, requested all departments to submit a report on the "perceptions, experiences and actions" following the "terror raid of 22nd October".³⁶

By contrast, no similar initiatives were undertaken in Magdeburg after 16th January 1945. Here, the air raid elicited no more than routine responses. The obligatory experience report by the local chief of police of 5th March 1945 was a case in point. It consisted of no more than two pages, plus a lengthy appendix. This owed in all likelihood to the rapidly deteriorating military situation as well as to the lack of interest of superior offices in an event that was repeated almost daily all over the *Reich*. Whereas the post-war historiography in Kassel could thus draw on a wealth of contemporary documents that bore, in one way or another, the imprint of Nazism, history writing in Magdeburg was, in theory, less burdened with this legacy while facing the difficult task of reconstructing the past on the basis of ex-post accounts. In practice, however, the interpretive categories of Nazism played an equally, if not more, important role in the local post-war historiography of Magdeburg as they did in Kassel, as the following sections will make clear.

Serving the Present:

'Monumental' History between Pacification and Mobilisation, 1945-1960

The strategic air war played a negligible role in the academic scholarship of the early Federal Republic. Although the journal of the Munich Institute of Contemporary History, in 1956, carried an article by Anton Hoch on the controversial Freiburg raid of 10th May 1940, the subject of World War II bombing remained largely outside the purview of professional history.³⁷ As a consequence, the war in the air became the preserve of non-

³⁵ Karl Paetow, "Drei Jahre Stadtforschung", in: StAK A.4.41 No. 455.

³⁶ See the reports collected in StAK S8 C48.

³⁷ Anton Hoch, "Der Luftangriff auf Freiburg am 10. Mai 1940", in: *VfZ* 4/2 (1956), pp. 115-144. Compare also Dietmar Süß, "Massaker und Mongolensturm". Anmerkungen zu Jörg Friedrichs umstrittenem Buch 'Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940-1945', in: *Hist. Jahrbuch* 124 (2004), pp. 521-543, here: 536-543.

professional writers, such as ex civil-defence functionaries,³⁸ former *Luftwaffe* generals,³⁹ war correspondents,⁴⁰ and lawyers.⁴¹ Between 1958 and 1962, the Ministry of Expellees, Refugees, & War Damaged published the multi-volume, *Documents of German War Losses*,⁴² which also contained, in two supplements, a collection of contemporary and post-war experience reports as well as newspaper accounts about selected air raids.⁴³ In partial adaptation of the wartime propaganda narrative, the volumes drew a picture of a "community of fate" engaged in a "heroic defensive battle". Here, 'non-political' civil functionaries had replaced the Nazi party while the impersonal dynamics of modernised warfare had taken the place of human agency.⁴⁴

While the historiographical landscape of the Federal Republic in the 1950s was characterised by a wealth of popular literature and very limited professional research, GDR historiography paid even less attention to the strategic air war.⁴⁵ Despite the significance of the subject in the official rhetoric, no historical study was published in order to legitimise the claims of state propaganda. The leading historical journal of the GDR, the *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, was content with issuing a riposte to Hoch's article about the Freiburg raid. Interestingly, the author, Dietrich Zboralski, did not attack Hoch's findings about the accidental bombing of the town by German planes as a whitewash of the Western conduct of the air war—as might have been expected in the light of the political rhetoric of the 1950s—but insisted on the plausibility of the earlier thesis that had indicted Hitler for ordering the attack.⁴⁶

Locally, historiographical treatments of the air war started to appear in Kassel from the late 1940s and in Magdeburg from the early 1950s. The most prominent place was the

³⁸ See the publications by Hans Rumpf, during the war *Generalinspektor des Feuerlöschwesens* with the rank of major general, *Der hochrote Hahn* (Darmstadt: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, [1952]); idem, "Luftkrieg über Deutschland", in: *Bilanz des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Erkenntnisse & Verpflichtungen für die Zukunft* (Oldenburg / Hamburg: Gerhard Stalling, [1953]), pp. 159-175; idem, *Das war der Bombenkrieg. Deutsche Städte im Feuersturm. Ein Dokumentarbericht* (Oldenburg / Hamburg: Gerhard Stalling, 1961).

³⁹ Adolf Galland, *Die Ersten und die Letzten. Die Jagdflieger im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (München: Franz Schneekluth, 1953).

⁴⁰ K. Bartz, *Als der Himmel brannte. Der Weg der deutschen Luftwaffe. 1940-45* (Hannover: Sponholtz, 1955).

⁴¹ Eberhard Spetzler, *Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit. Die völkerrechtliche Stellung der Zivilpersonen im Luftkrieg* (Göttingen: Messerschmidt Verlag, 1956); Maximilian Czesany, *Nie wieder Krieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung. Eine völkerrechtliche Untersuchung des Luftkrieges 1939-1945* (Graz: Selbstverlag, 1961).

⁴² *Dokumente Deutscher Kriegsschäden. Evakuierte, Kriegssachgeschädigte, Währungsgeschädigte. Die geschichtliche und rechtliche Entwicklung* Ed. Bundesminister für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte, 5 vols., (Bonn: Zentraldruckerei, 1958-62).

⁴³ *Dokumente. Beiheft 1: Aus den Tagen des Luftkrieges und des Wiederaufbaues: Erlebnis- und Erfahrungsberichte* (1960); *Beiheft 2: Der Luftkrieg im Spiegel der neutralen Presse* (1962). Vol. 1 contained also a summary account of the course of the air war by Georg W. Feuchter, "Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland", in: *Dokumente*, vol 1: *Die geschichtliche und rechtliche Entwicklung* (Bonn: Zentraldruckerei, 1958), pp. 5-66.

⁴⁴ Compare Dietmar Süß, "Erinnerungen an den Luftkrieg", in: *APuZ 60 Jahre Kriegsende*, 18-19 (May 2005), pp. 19-26, here: p. 20f.

⁴⁵ Günter Paulus, "Zur Verfälschung der Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges in der westdeutschen Geschichtsschreibung" *ZfG* 1/3 (1953), pp. 445-465, does not mention the air war.

⁴⁶ Dietrich Zboralski, "Zum Luftangriff auf Freiburg am 10. Mai 1940", *ZfG* iv/4 (1956), pp. 755-57.

daily press, where journalists not only reported on the commemorative activity of the local elites but also produced historical accounts of their own in order to mark the memory place.

In Kassel, the air war was treated as an aspect of municipal history, without taking much heed of the larger West-German "master narrative of the air war".⁴⁷ Partly, this was because none of the national accounts dealt in any detail with local events in Kassel. More important, local enquiries were motivated by a different set of questions from the national literature: Here, the air war was conceptualised as a disaster, not an opportunity for heroism: "want and horror, thousands of deaths, loss of *Heimat* and possessions, the destruction of a town of thousand years [...]. This is the balance sheet of 22nd October 1943", the journalists Herta Pehnt and Wilhelm Blank wrote in characteristic fashion in an article that was published in the local *Hessische Nachrichten* on 22nd October 1947.⁴⁸ Local lay researchers were less interested in generals' tales about the 'tragedy' of the German fighter force or casuistic deliberations on the legality or otherwise of area bombing than in the reconstruction of events as they unfolded on the ground. At the same time, they subordinated the "disciplined quest for truth" (Hans Rothfels) of scholarly history to the goal of 'semantic pacification' of a traumatised and fragmented society.⁴⁹

In Magdeburg, local journalists shared in the attempt to reconstruct the events of the air war as they unfolded in the locality. They sought to achieve this goal through the systematic collection of memories ex post—an initiative that was both triggered and made irrelevant by the emergence of 'Dresden' as a national memory place in the early 1950s.⁵⁰ With the escalation of the Cold War, local events were retold in a national context; local experiences displaced by the parameters of the Dresden narrative. The results of local inquiries were ignored in favour of a largely fictional account that placed Magdeburg second to Dresden. Rather than semantic pacification, the historiographical stories aimed at mass mobilisation.

⁴⁷ Süß, "Erinnerungen", p. 20. For example, the efforts by Hans Rumpf to rehabilitate the anti-Semitic propaganda term, 'terror raid', as a technical term for indiscriminate area bombing found little resonance among the protagonists of the local historiography. See Rumpf, *Das war der Bombenkrieg*, p. 39.

⁴⁸ Herta Pehnt & Wilhelm Blank, "4 Jahre danach", *Hessische Nachrichten* No. 135 (21-10-47), p. 4.

⁴⁹ Rothfels, "Zeitgeschichte als Aufgabe", in: *VfZ* 1/1 (1953), pp. 1-8, here: p. 5. The concept of 'semantic pacification' is derived from German Studies Association, 28th annual conference, session 52, "Semantik der Befriedung deutscher Nachkriegsgesellschaften im Vergleich". See *Program of the Twenty-Eighth Annual Conference. German Studies Association. October 7-10, 2004*, p. 45.

⁵⁰ On Dresden see Olaf Groehler, "Dresden: Kleine Geschichte der Aufrechnung", in: *Blätter für deutsche & internationale Politik*, Heft 2 / 1995, S. 137-41; Gilad Margalit, "Der Luftangriff auf Dresden. Seine Bedeutung für die Erinnerungspolitik der DDR und für die Herauskristallisierung einer historischen Kriegserinnerung im Westen", in: Susanne Düwell / Matthias Schmidt eds., *Narrative der Shoah. Repräsentationen der Vergangenheit in Historiographie, Kunst und Politik* (Paderborn / München / Wien / Zürich: Schöningh, 2002), pp. 189-207; Matthias Neutzner, "Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern. Die Erzählung vom 13. Februar", in: Oliver Reinhard / Matthias Neutzner / Wolfgang Heese, *Das rote Leuchten. Dresden und der Bombenkrieg* (Dresden: Druckhaus Dresden, 2005), pp. 128-163, here: pp. 139-144.

In both cities, the dominant approach to the past thus remained 'monumental', albeit in inverted form. Where Joseph Goebbels had envisioned a tale of collective heroism, the local post-war historiography constructed a tale of collective suffering. The most important medium in this process was the eyewitness account, which was used to homogenise different experiences and to legitimise a narrative that focused on the effects of allied bombing rather than its causes.

"An Individual Fate that Speaks for many Thousands":

The Eyewitness as Collective Mouthpiece

In both cities, publicists relied on eyewitness accounts in order to narrate the events of the air war from a local perspective. Rather than approaching those voices with the tools of source criticism, asking who speaks when, where and why, local historical writing tended to use selected accounts as a medium through which to construct a collective experience. Local historiography showed a strong tendency to replace the first person pronoun with the collective singular, to recast individual memories as an experience shared by the memory-group as a whole. "An individual fate that speaks for many thousands", was the subtitle of an account by Sophie P. on the air raid of 16th January 1945, which appeared in the SED-daily, *Volksstimme*, on the sixth anniversary in 1951.⁵¹ In Kassel, the first journalistic attempt at narrating the events of the most devastating air raid on the city dated from 21st October 1947. It was the above mentioned article by Pehnt and Blank, which used the impersonal 'one' [*man*] to describe attitudes and reactions on the ground.⁵² The text formed part of the broader coverage of the anniversary in the local *Hessische Nachrichten*, which devoted a whole page to the memory place under the heading of, "4 years after".⁵³ It merits closer consideration because it showed many elements that were typical of the genre as a whole.

Pehnt and Blank related the events of 22nd October as a story of collective overpowering. In their account, routine disintegrates in the face of unprecedented catastrophe, giving way to multiple disjunctions, of subjective time and external time, sense-perception and cognition. Characteristically, the point of view is strictly localised. Wider developments are taken into consideration only insofar as they help to elucidate local developments. In employing the construct of the 'ordinary Kasselner', the article draws a picture of non-political city dwellers standing at the receiving end of extreme violence, targeted by the impersonal forces of mechanised warfare, deceived and in fear of

⁵¹ "Mein Mann verbrannte nebenan! Ein Einzelschicksal, das für viele Tausend spricht", in: *Volksstimme* (16-1-51), p. 4.

⁵² Herta Pehnt / Wilhelm Blank, "4 Jahre danach", *Hessische Nachrichten* 135 (21-10-47), p. 4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

the Nazi leadership. As a structural device, the text employs juxtapositions to translate extreme perceptions into a coherent narrative: the beauty of an autumn day is contrasted to the 'inferno' of the night; the silence among the 'air raid community' to the thundering roar of the approaching bombers; the darkness in the shelter to the glow of the fires in the streets.⁵⁴

In the account by the two journalists, the air raid does not come unexpectedly. The authors speak of an "angst psychosis" among the population, caused by the recent raids on Hamburg and Hanover.⁵⁵ Precautionary measures by the Nazi welfare organisation (NSV) and the police only serve to heighten this state of collective anxiety. Pehnt and Blank go on to describe collective responses as the futile attempt to bring the 'social knowledge' of a militarised population to bear on unprecedented violence:⁵⁶ while the sound of the sirens elicits the usual precautionary measures and customary jokes "against the *Führer*", routine soon gives way to trepidation. Confronted with an existential threat, the social cohesion of the 'air raid community' disintegrates into smaller units as purposeful activity gives way to helpless coping strategies: "Mothers clasp their children, frightful crying, loud prayers", they write. In those conditions, survival becomes dependent on personal determination, chance, and—the text implies—recklessness. The narrative does not develop the ethical implications of personal survival that depends in part on the indifference to the fate of others, preferring to remain descriptive,

"One cannot breathe anymore and must try to save oneself through the burning house, over the burning street, through the firestorm. Many hesitate—and pay for their hesitation with their lives."⁵⁷

In the Kassel of the late 1940s and early 1950s, eyewitness accounts formed an important element in the attempts to describe the events of 22nd October 1943 historically. The majority were drawn from the collection of "survivors' reports" that Karl Paetow had produced in the spring of 1944. The circumstances of their origin privileged those voices that had lost close relatives and friends over those who had lived through the raid without suffering personal injury. Moreover, the collection reproduced the racial segregation of the Third Reich between the "racial comrades" on the one hand and *Gemeinschaftsfremde* or "community aliens" on the other. In so doing, it denied a voice to the thousands of foreign slave labourers, the remaining Jews, and the imprisoned opponents of Nazism.⁵⁸ From a

⁵⁴ See the example of other cities and time periods, Jörg Arnold, "Sammelrezension Bombenkrieg", in: *Historische Literatur* 2 (2004), 2 (April - June), pp. 17-38.

⁵⁵ "4 Jahre danach", *HN* 135 (21-10-47), p. 4.

⁵⁶ On the concept of 'social knowledge' see Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten – nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis – Kriegserfahrung 1939-1945* (Paderborn et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1998), p. 92 (with further literature).

⁵⁷ "4 Jahre danach".

⁵⁸ Compare the classic study by Detlev Peukert, *Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde: Anpassung, Ausmerze und Aufbegehrten unter dem Nationalsozialismus* (Köln: Bund-Verlag, 1982).

collection of 100 accounts, only one was by a foreigner, a Dutch national from Rotterdam.⁵⁹ To the art historian Karl Paetow, the (Eastern European) forced labourers as well as the Italian military internees were objects to be photographed but not subjects to be interviewed about their experiences.⁶⁰

Yet, the wartime accounts were not transferred verbatim into the post-war memory culture. Rather, newspaper editors subjected them to varying degrees of cleansing and revision. When the conservative *Kasseler Post*, for example, published a statement by the industrialist Sch. in October 1950, the text was heavily edited, doing away with all elements that stressed purposeful fire-fighting activity. Moreover, the term 'terror raid' was dropped from the account, as was an invective against Churchill that had served to categorize the air raid in the original.⁶¹ In cleansing the account of both agency and political bias, the editing illustrated the extent to which the historical source material was made to fit 'usable pasts' in the 1950s.

In subsequent years, the three *Kassel* newspapers repeatedly returned to the "survivors' reports" of 1944, reworking them to fit the emphases and silences of the larger memory parameters. In 1953, on the 10th anniversary, the left-leaning *Hessische Nachrichten* published a special commemorative page, "Ten Years ago in Kassel", which contained three accounts drawn from Paetow's collection.⁶² The reports were not reproduced in the I-narration of the original but related in the more neutral third person. Harrowing anecdotes found in the original source material were left out, as in the case of Clara H., who had given the following nightmarish account to Paetow about her experiences in a collapsed shelter, where she had fallen unconscious,

"[When I regained consciousness] I realised that I was in the shelter. I tried to rise up and reach behind me; but it was very slippery [...]. I didn't know what it was. I had a torch light in my pocket, took it out and switched it on. Then I saw that I had touched two dead people. Their heads were green and there was foam in front of their mouths. [...]. When I reached the drain, I got a big scare: the strong iron plate had been removed from the hole. A woman was lying in the drain; she was dead. There was a chair placed on top of the woman and a man was sitting on the chair; he was alive."⁶³

By contrast, the same scene was rendered in 1953 as follows, "When she regains consciousness [...] she reaches for the torch light in her pocket: there are dead bodies

⁵⁹ Compare *Überlebensberichte*, no. 20 (p. 39f.).

⁶⁰ See the images reproduced in *Leben in Ruinen*, pp. 75f.

⁶¹ "Schicksal eines Hauses in der Wolfhager Straße", *Kasseler Post* 21/22-10-50, p. 6. Compare the original text in: *Überlebensberichte*, no. 70 (pp. 95-99).

⁶² "In Kassel vor 10 Jahren: Erlebnisberichte Kasseler Einwohner", in: *Hessische Nachrichten* 246 (22-10-53). Compare the original accounts in *Überlebensberichte* no. 74 (pp. 103-105); 81 (pp. 117-119); 60 (pp. 83f.). The special commemorative page featured also three contemporary interviews with a physician, a pastor, and a trade unionist.

⁶³ See *Überlebensberichte* no. 74 (pp. 103-105), here: p. 104.

above and below her.⁶⁴ Such editing was not confined to the *Hessische Nachrichten* but carried out by the other Kassel dailies as well. In the reproduction of an account by a local tailor, for example, the editors of the conservative *Kasseler Post* replaced the phrase, "killed in action", with the de-militarised "deceased".⁶⁵ From the same account, a reference to Jewish residents who had been caught up in the raid was left out in the newspaper version of 1953.⁶⁶

There was a broad consensus among the local media concerning the cleansing of personal accounts of both politically compromising aspects as well as the horrific details of death. This consensus extended beyond the realm of written documents to the visual sphere as well. The post-war representation of Kassel in the Third Reich bore no resemblance to the "City of Reich Warrior Days" of the 1930s and early 1940s. The absence of the insignia of Nazism denazified the local community and recast them as victims of a natural catastrophe. Equally important, the local press refrained from reproducing images of the dead despite their easy availability in the municipal archive. In an illustrated article of 1949, the journalist Friedrich Herboldt justified the selective use of visual material with considerations of propriety, "Of the many dreadful pictures which the photographer took on the day after the disaster, only a few are fit for publication", he wrote.⁶⁷

On the remembrance day of the previous year, the *Hessische Nachrichten* had published a drawing that illustrated both the priorities and the boundaries of the mnemonic discourse as practised in the daily newspapers (fig. 15).⁶⁸ The drawing depicts a dramatic scene of escape from an apocalyptic event: a woman with panic-stricken features clutches three children and runs in the direction of the observer on a street littered with debris. The central group of figures is framed by crumbling buildings ablaze with raging fires. In this gendered view, a woman with her children stands in for the citizenry as whole, testifying to their collective victimhood. This was not an optimistic survival story but a tale of escape by the skin of one's teeth, with the wide-open eyes suggesting that the experience has left scars for life.

⁶⁴ "Der Sohn hörte ihr Klopfen zuerst", in: *HN* 246 (22-10-53).

⁶⁵ "Schicksalstag der tausendjährigen Stadt", *KP* 22-10-53, puts "umgekommen"; *Überlebensberichte* no. 98 (pp. 146-48, here: 146), has "gefallen".

⁶⁶ Ibid. *Überlebensberichte*, p. 146, reads, "There were also two boys, the children of the widow M. (quarter-Jews). They were laying in the laundry, and a soldier dug them out."

⁶⁷ "22. Oktober 1943. Die Nacht, in der Kassels Altstadt unterging", in: *HN* (22-10-49), p. 3. The one exception appeared in the SPD-weekly *Hessischer Sonntag*, in the context of a polemic against the conservative press. See "Zwei Rezepte – ein Doktor", *Hessischer Sonntag* (15-1-1950).

⁶⁸ *HN* 22-10-48, p. 1.



FIGURE 15. "Never again!", reads the caption of an illustration of the "night of horror" that appeared in *HN* on 22-10-48.

While the local media manipulated eyewitness accounts in order to make them conform to a tale of collective suffering, the conservative press made use of the official war-time source material in yet another way. The *Kasseler Post* and the *Kasseler Zeitung* on occasion reprinted Nazi wartime documents without any editorial comment. In 1953, for example, the *Kasseler Post* published, as part of the extensive special coverage of the 10th anniversary, the official Communiqué of the German High Command of 23rd October 1943.⁶⁹ By letting the sources 'speak for themselves', the newspaper re-introduced the vocabulary of the war into public discourse, opening up the referential frames of Nazism without disclaiming or endorsing them. On occasion, this idiom also entered the language of the contemporary press reports, as in the descriptive article, "The 16th raid on Kassel", which was printed on the same special page as the Communiqué. It employed the term, "terror raid" in order to refer to the attack of 22nd October 1943.⁷⁰ Against the backdrop of the rearmament debate, both middle class papers also revived a (denazified) version of the

⁶⁹ "Der Wehrmachtbericht meldet", *Kasseler Post* 22-10-53, p. 4.

⁷⁰ "Der 16. Angriff auf Kassel", *KP* 22-10-53, p. 4.

'heroic' wartime narrative, stressing the relief efforts of the *Wehrmacht* and emphasising the "unknown heroism" of 'ordinary Kasselner'.⁷¹

In Kassel, local publicists sanitised wartime eyewitness accounts in order to legitimise a tale of collective victimhood that fit the mnemonic parameters of the 1950s. In Magdeburg, the evidence of eyewitness accounts was likewise subordinated to the demands of the present. Here, the accounts were created ex-post and subsequently rewritten in order to fit revisions in the official interpretation of the memory place, as they occurred with the escalation of the Cold War in 1948/9. The extent to which the same source material could be made to serve different contexts is well reflected by an experience account that appeared in the *Volksstimme* of 15th January 1948, and again, in the *Volksstimme* of 1st September 1949. In 1948, the account by the restaurant owner, Otto K., formed part of the press coverage on the third anniversary of the "night of horror", which occupied half a page and was headed, "Memento: Magdeburg, 16th January 1945".⁷² In September 1949, a modified version appeared on a special page that marked the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II with the headline, "41 Million Dead Admonish".⁷³

In the article of 1948, Otto K. relates his odyssey through the burning city on 16th January 1945 under the heading of, "A man is looking for his wife".⁷⁴ Otto K. is presented as a purposeful man who overcomes tremendous obstacles in order to be reunited with his wife. After having dug himself out of a collapsed shelter, the protagonist rescues fellow *Magdeburgers* who have lost their nerve. Otto K. sees fire fighters being condemned to idleness due to the lack of water, and residents frantically escaping from their shelters underneath burning buildings. At the end of his journey through the burning city, he finds that his home has been destroyed but is reunited with his wife. Otto K.'s is a survival story with a happy ending, full of optimism despite the loss of material goods. As such it fitted well in the political narrative of the local elites in the immediate post-war years: the built-up environment had collapsed, but Magdeburg as a social formation had survived, free to embark on a new beginning: "One final glance at the smouldering grave of my possessions, one last sigh, then a determined about-turn, and—the woman who I thought dead is standing in front of me", the text concluded.⁷⁵

⁷¹ "Helfer in bitterster Not: 24000 Soldaten. Die Wehrmacht bei den Rettungsarbeiten in Kassel – Hilfeleistung in eigener Verantwortung", KP 21/22-10-50; "Kradmelder im Feuersturm. Wassergassen in der brennenden Kasseler Altstadt – Oberfeuerwehrmann Kollien berichtet für viele", KZ 272 (22-10-53), p. 4.

⁷² "Memento: Magdeburg, 16. Januar 1945", *Volksstimme* 12 (15-1-48), p. 4.

⁷³ "41 Millionen Tote mahnen †", *Volksstimme* of 1-9-49.

⁷⁴ "Wie sie es überlebten / Berichte von der Schreckensnacht", *Volksstimme* 12 (15-1-48), p. 4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

18 months later, the same experience was retold in the same newspaper in a very different register.⁷⁶ Under the heading of "The night of hell in Magdeburg", the narrator emphasised death, not survival, relating harrowing tales of residents who tried in vain to escape from air raid shelters by using their bare nails and teeth. He thus evoked an image that might have been familiar to some readers from the American picture reports about the atrocity at Gardelegen in April 1945, where concentration camp prisoners had been locked up in a barn and burnt alive.⁷⁷ Whereas in the 1948 account, Otto K. was motivated by the desire to find his wife, in the rendition of September 1949, he was presented as an antifascist resistance fighter who escaped from his "dungeon prison" amidst the "smell of gas". He does not just bear witness to a dying world around him, saving fellow *Magdeburgers* from self-destruction, but also assumes the world-historical mission of proving to the world that "during the Nazi years there were two types of people: Brown beasts and fighting antifascists".⁷⁸ In this altered version, re-unification with his wife becomes a mere footnote. Instead, a scene takes centre stage in which a group of forced labourers from France, Belgium and the Netherlands dig in the rubble for their friend, Otto K. When he reveals himself to them, he "sheds tears over their loyalty and sacrifice for the little bit of love that I had given to them as a restaurant owner".⁷⁹

Under the double impact of Stalinisation and the escalating Cold War, eyewitness accounts in Magdeburg started to abound with anecdotes of violent mass death. The shift from an emphasis on survival to an emphasis on death was reflected in the visual sphere as well, as a look at the photographs that accompanied the two accounts of Otto K. in the *Volksstimme* illustrates. In 1948, the textual narrative was illustrated with three images, all of which stressed survival: residents leaving the city after an air raid; a deserted street lined with ruins; and a frontal view of the sculpture of 'Magdeburg in mourning'.⁸⁰ One and a half years later, the iconography of survival had been replaced by the iconography of death. "The night of hell in Magdeburg" showed two images. The first was an atrocity photograph, depicting a row of dead children stretching in a diagonal line across the frame (fig. 16).⁸¹ The caption read, "After 16th January 1945: Children's corpses accuse!", suggesting that this was the scene of a crime. The second image depicted a fare-well letter carved into a piece of wood by an eighty-year old carpenter, who had been trapped in a

⁷⁶ "Die Höllennacht in Magdeburg", in: *Volksstimme* 204 (1-9-49), p. 5.

⁷⁷ Compare Amerikanisches Kriegsinformationsamt im Auftrag des Oberbefehlshabers der Alliierten Streitkräfte, *KZ. Bildbericht aus fünf Konzentrationslagern*, (no place, no date [1945]), [pp. 15ff.]; Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung. Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern nach 1945* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), pp. 46-82.

⁷⁸ "Höllennacht".

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ "Memento: Magdeburg, 16. Januar 1945", *Volksstimme* 12 (15-1-48), p. 4.

⁸¹ On the history of atrocity photography see Habbo Knoch, *Die Tat als Bild. Fotografien des Holocaust in der deutschen Erinnerungskultur* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001), pp. 49-75.

burning shelter, "There's no more hope. It burns down from above, and one is suffocating".⁸² Both motifs became part of the stock visual representation of the "night of hell" in the 1950s.

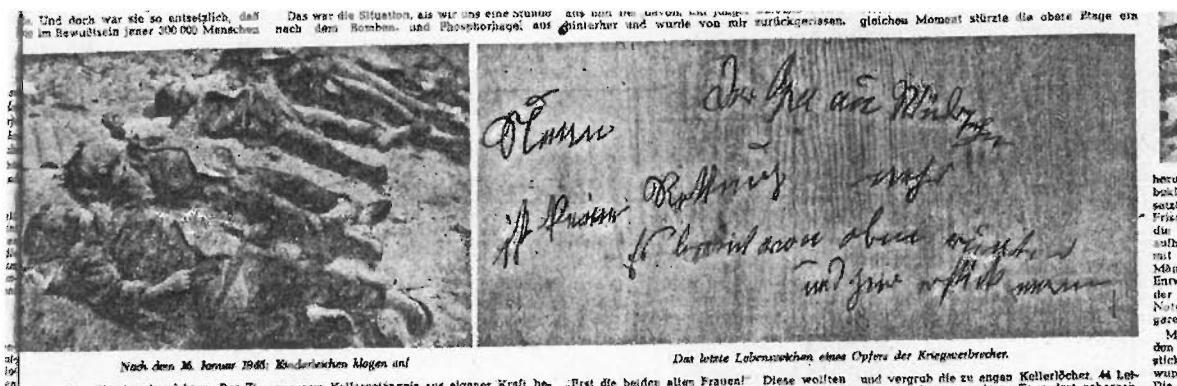


FIGURE 16. Visual illustration of Otto K.'s eyewitness account of 16th January 1945, *Volksstimme* 1-9-49.

Next to the representation of a collective experience by means of eyewitness accounts and through visual material, there were also attempts in both cities to reconstruct the events from a more scholarly or critical perspective. These efforts were faced with different pre-conditions. Whereas in Kassel, a substantial amount of documentary evidence had survived into the post-war era, in Magdeburg, the primary source base was thin, and appears to have been diminished further by the activities of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey in the summer of 1945.⁸³ In Kassel, local journalists strove to make available to a wider public the official documents produced during the war, while their colleagues in Magdeburg were faced with the difficult task of retrieving information from post-war recollections.⁸⁴

Reconstructing the "Night of Horror" as 'Critical' History?

In Kassel, the first historian of the air raid was the journalist Friedrich Herbordt (1899-1958). In some respects, Herbordt was an unusual candidate for writing about a subject that, on the national level, was used by the Far Right in order to downplay the crimes of Nazism.⁸⁵ As a locally-born resident with socialist convictions, Herbordt had spent over six and a half years in prison during the Third Reich for alleged "preparation of high treason". After the war, he joined the staff of the American-licensed *Hessische Nachrichten*, where

⁸² "Höllennacht".

⁸³ See the material collected on Magdeburg by the USSBS in: NA II RG 243 E-6, files 394-399, containing, for example, a copy of the official 'experience report' of 5th March 1945, which did not become available again to local historians until 1995, when a copy was brought back to Magdeburg from the National Archives, Washington.

⁸⁴ See Friedrich Herboldt, "Aus dem Geheimbericht des Kasseler Polizeipräsidenten", *HN* 244 (21-10-50).

⁸⁵ Gerhard Zumbach, "Todesmühlen und öffentliche Meinung", in: *HN* (13-3-46), p. 1.

he specialised in art criticism and local history.⁸⁶ On the occasion of the sixth anniversary of the raid in 1949, he published a piece of investigative journalism that may be considered the first serious attempt at treating the events of 22nd October 1943 historically. Despite his personal experiences under Nazism, Herbordt—in his public statements at least—did not consider the air raid to have made a contribution to the defeat of the Third Reich. Instead, he anchored the event firmly in municipal history without any regard to the larger context.⁸⁷ Embracing the disaster narrative, Herbordt unequivocally categorised 22nd October as the "darkest day in the thousand-year-old history of the city of Kassel".

From a perspective 'from below', Herbordt focused on a single episode. In his article, he attempted to reconstruct the events in an air-raid shelter that had turned into a mass grave, the public house, *Pinne*, where about 400 people lost their lives on 22nd/23rd October 1943. Anticipating the objectives of 'contemporary history' as famously formulated by Hans Rothfels in 1953, Herbordt aimed to dispel "rumours and legend" by means of a critical enquiry.⁸⁸ On the basis of the available documentary evidence, interviews with survivors and a visit to the scene, Herbordt argued for structural defects and unfortunate chance as the cause of mass death in what appeared to be a well-provisioned shelter. The journalist took great pains to exonerate the air-raid warden from any blame for the "tragedy". With the authority of the historical evidence, he declared, "Rumours have circulated about his [i.e., the air-raid warden's] bearing during the night in question, which the accounts of the survivors show to be pure invention".⁸⁹

In a similar vein, Herbordt assured his readers that the victims had died painlessly, with death coming as deadly sleep in the wake of carbon monoxide poisoning, "The physician confirms that this state does not cause any unpleasant feelings or ailments. In darkness and silence death walked the cellars of the *Pinne* [...]." In arguing thus, the journalist ignored the eyewitness accounts that had spoken of an erupting panic in the shelter as smoke entered the cellar.⁹⁰ For all his careful research, Herbordt subordinated historical knowledge to the demands of the present. Through his enquiry, he sought to heal internal divisions and to console mourning residents. In 1950s Kassel, even critical approaches to the past did not challenge the larger mnemonic parameters, as Herbordt himself acknowledged in the introduction to his piece: "About the horrifying individual and

⁸⁶ On Friedrich Herbordt see StAK S1 No. 184, containing a copy of the sentence by the Kassel district court of 1937; Herbert Freiherr von Buttlar, *Trauerrede für Friedrich Herbordt gehalten am 12. Mai 1958* (Kassel, [1958]).

⁸⁷ Friedrich Herbordt, "22. Oktober 1943. Die Nacht, in der Kassels Altstadt unterging", *HN* (22-10-49).

⁸⁸ Hans Rothfels, "Zeitgeschichte als Aufgabe", in: *VfZ* 1/1 (1953), pp. 1-8, here: p. 5.

⁸⁹ Herbordt, "22. Oktober 1943".

⁹⁰ See *Überlebensberichte* no. 43 (p. 65) & no. 55 (p. 79). Compare also report by chief of police of 20-7-1945, p. 5. In: NA II RG 243 E-6 # 64b p (3) (box 575).

collective fates no survivor can bear witness. They will forever be shrouded in merciful darkness", he wrote.⁹¹

While the investigative journalism of Friedrich Herbordt approached the subject analytically, two contradictory tendencies characterised developments in 1950s Magdeburg. On the one hand, the local archive started an initiative that called for the sending-in of eyewitness accounts from the population. In so doing, it sought to establish the empirical basis that was necessary for any historical research on the subject. On the other, the guided media popularised a sensational tale that freely combined historical knowledge with rumour.

On 13th October 1950, the *Liberal-Demokratische Zeitung*, the party-paper of the associated Liberal Party (*LDP*), published an article called, "The Destruction of the City of Magdeburg in 1945".⁹² The article appeared in the run-up to the general election of the First People's Chamber [*Volkskammer*], in which the electorate, for the first time, cast their vote on the basis of unified lists of candidates.⁹³ Within the context of the establishment of a Stalinist dictatorship, the newspaper drew on the past in order to legitimise the present, as the introductory paragraph made clear,

"The Magdeburg night of horror of 16th January 1945 must be preserved to keep alive the hatred against war for generations to come. [...] Today we publish some scenes of the dreadful annihilation to drive home to every *Magdeburger* why he must attend elections on Sunday."⁹⁴

Written by the young teacher and free-lance journalist, Manfred Rolle (1929-2005), the article established a mode of representation that remained influential in the local historiography well into the post-unification period.⁹⁵ Emotive in tone, "The Destruction" offered scenic description instead of analysis, freely combining established knowledge with rumour and invention. The text fell into three parts, plus an introduction.

Part one, "The way it began", stressed the element of surprise, advancing the improbable proposition that the population of one of the major industrial towns of central Germany was taken by complete surprise by the raid of 16th January 1945. To back up this claim, Rolle argued that many residents erroneously believed that they would be spared

⁹¹ Herbordt, "22. Oktober 1943".

⁹² "Die Zerstörung der Stadt Magdeburg 1945", *LDZ* (13-10-50), p. 3.

⁹³ Hermann Weber, *Geschichte der DDR* (München: DTV, 2¹⁹⁹⁹), p. 174; Erhardt Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949-1989* (Bonn: bpb, 2²⁰⁰⁰), pp. 55-59.

⁹⁴ "Zerstörung", p. 3.

⁹⁵ The article was reprinted, abridged and revised, in: *LDZ* 15/16th Jan. 1955 under the title of, "Als das Inferno über Magdeburg hereinbrach". Compare also by the same author, "Magdeburg überwand den Tod", in: *Volksstimme* (16-1-59); the series, "Großangriff auf Magdeburg – Hilfe!", in: *Mitteldeutsche Neueste Nachrichten* of 16-1-65; 19-1-65; 20-1-65; 21-1-65; 22-1-65; 23-1-65; 26-1-65; 27-1-65; 28-1-65; 29-1-65; 30/31-1-65; "Die Nacht des Grauens", in: *Volksstimme* (16-1-70); "Stadt in Flammen". Eine Serie von Manfred Rolle", in: *Bild* of Jan. 1995; "Die Schreckensnacht", *Magdeburger Kurier* 12 (1/2005), p. 9.

because of the strong socialist tradition of the town. Interestingly, he did not make this point—as might perhaps be expected—in order to accuse the Western allies for attacking the wrong target but in order to criticise the behaviour of the resident population: "Despite the warning by the *Gauleiter* headquarter [...], parts of the population did not deem it necessary to go to the shelters."⁹⁶

Two scenes stressing death and human agency stood at the centre of the narrative. The first, "tragedy of *Jakobi* bunker", recounted an episode in which the doors of a bunker were shut well before all the residents of the surrounding area had found shelter, leaving "hundreds" of latecomers exposed to the falling bombs. In desperation, they huddle in front of the bunker and fall victim to the attack. Their dead bodies obstruct the door, preventing the people crammed into the bunker from leaving their prison shelter, "Only when the corpses are violently ripped apart from the outside, the way opens", Rolle writes. While the author may have exaggerated the death toll, the incident itself appears to be factual, featuring prominently in several eyewitness accounts.⁹⁷

By contrast, the second scene, "In the Cathedral", had no evidence to support it.⁹⁸ The episode made a point about human agency that was aimed at the Protestant middle class readership of the *Liberal Demokratische Zeitung*. In drastic language, the text told of the death, by falling debris, of the cathedral congregation in their place of worship in the night of 16th January 1945, "Ripped apart and torn to pieces are all the people who had looked for shelter in this house of God from the satanic deeds of humans". Despite the faith of the believers, God had been powerless to protect his flock from an atrocity that "no devil could have initiated [...] but humans did", Rolle declared. In so doing, he presented a morality tale in the guise of history. The scene might also have served the additional purpose of de-legitimising a popular story that told a very different tale. According to several eyewitnesses, the interior of another church, the burnt-out *Katharinenkirche*, had served as a place of refuge amidst the conflagration for hundreds of people fleeing their shelters in the Old Newtown.⁹⁹

Within the context of state-wide campaign that revolved around the slogan of 'the fight for peace', the guided media not only published the first historical account of the 'night of horror'. They also initiated steps to collect documentary evidence about the events of the air war. In August 1950, October 1950 and again in May 1952, the city archive published appeals in the local papers for eyewitnesses to come forward and write up their experiences

⁹⁶ "Zerstörung", p. 3.

⁹⁷ See StAM. ZG 55.3. *Akte 15. Januar*. Report by Erwin St., "Brandnacht 1945"; Erich T., "Die Hölle über Magdeburg am 16. Jan. 1945".

⁹⁸ The cathedral pastor, Ernst Martin, makes no mention of the incident in his memoirs. See "Memento", in: Herbert Martin ed., *Ernst Martin. Aus seinem Leben* (Bad Harzburg: Ms., 1979), pp. 57-61.

⁹⁹ For the *Katharinenkirche* serving as a shelter for survivors see StAM ZG 55.3. *Akte 16. Januar*, reports by Frieda H. of 24th August 1950; H. M. of 14th September 1950.

for a 'city chronicle'.¹⁰⁰ The goal was political, as the press notice of October 1950 emphasised,

"*Magdeburger*, what did you experience during the night of horror of 16th January 1945? Write it up for the city chronicle! It must become a memento to peace. Grandchildren and great grandchildren must know about it!"

Altogether, some 40 reports were sent in to the archive over the course of the autumn and winter of 1950/51.¹⁰¹ "There must be many more reports about the day of the destruction", an internal assessment noted with some disappointment.¹⁰² While the anonymous writer opined that perhaps not enough time had passed since the catastrophic event, he did not take into consideration that the limited response also might have been indicative of the unwillingness of (middle class) residents to contribute to an initiative with a clear anti-Western bias. Instead, the assessment criticised some accounts for their failure to live up to the expectations as laid out in the press appeal. In particular, the author deplored the disappointing response from ex civil-defence functionaries. Just one official had replied, and his report "bore all the traces of an adulation of superior offices", as he remarked critically.¹⁰³

The anonymous author conceived of the history of allied bombing as a negative exemplum, a "memorial for peace", but wondered if one could really learn lessons from the past. After all, he objected, the people of Magdeburg had had a similar memento before, the destruction of 1631, "Therefore everybody had been warned; and still the misfortune has happened again." Adopting a historical-materialist stance, he inferred from the local example that one had to change the fabric of society if there was to be a chance of putting an end to the cycle of destruction, "Our task must be to build a social order which does no longer know the word 'war', or any other term describing the murder of nations and the annihilation of human life."¹⁰⁴

The evaluation did not just take exception to the lack of political awareness among the respondents. It also wondered about the factual value of the accounts, noting that they contained many different—and at times—contradictory claims and observations. "These differences may lead one to the conclusion that the truth is not always honoured", the author remarked. Reiterating the standard rhetoric of the national master narrative, he asserted that, despite their differences, all the reports concurred in their assessment of the air raid as a "crime against humanity",

¹⁰⁰ StAM ZG 55.3. *Akte 15. Januar*.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., cover sheet.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

"This mad deed cannot be justified as a necessary act of war because the war was already decided at this moment. Perhaps, the explanation lies in the [...] carving out of occupation zones, and on the part of America and England there was no interest in preservation but on the contrary in total annihilation."

The assessment concluded by drawing a parallel between the past and the present, between World War II and the Cold War, "Any humanistic considerations never enter those peoples' minds, neither back then nor today."¹⁰⁵

A substantial number of the respondents had indeed employed the interpretive frame of 'air war as crime' in order to contextualise their personal memories. Some explicitly invoked the official terminology of the ruling elites, mixing the jargon of Nazi propaganda with the idiom of class warfare. They spoke of 'gangsters of the air', lauded the 'peaceful Soviet army' and condemned the 'war mongers', while stressing the lesson of 'never again'.¹⁰⁶ The eighty-year old Bernhard M., for example, insisted that due to the absence of an effective defence in 1945, the air raids had turned into "harmless Sunday rides of murder and annihilation", "a sadistic show" that no longer bore any resemblance to war.¹⁰⁷ Some saw the press appeal as a chance to draw attention to present grievances. Paul L., while violently denouncing the "flying murderers in their lust for blood", added shrewdly that he was still without a flat of his own six years after the end of the war.¹⁰⁸ Others appear to have been motivated by a genuine desire to make a contribution to peace. Anni K., for example, wrote that the traumatic events of the bombing night had turned "many people into fanatical fighters for peace", and concluded on the rallying cry, "Let us always remember and never allow another war to happen".¹⁰⁹

Taken together, the accounts not only accorded insights into a wealth of narrative strategies that eyewitnesses used to communicate their experiences, into the different literary genres and idioms that they employed, from lyrical poetry to prosaic report, from affective mode of writing to neutral description. They also furnished a quarry of personal memories from which a wealth of factual information could have been retrieved if the local authorities had so desired.¹¹⁰ The death toll provides a case in point. By the early 1950s, the political elites had started to emphasise that during the night of 16th January 1945, 16,000 people had died. In so doing, they popularised a figure that may have been rumoured in the immediate aftermath of the attack but lacked any documentary evidence to

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ StAM ZG 55.3. *Akte 15. Januar*, passim.

¹⁰⁷ Bernhard M., "Brandnacht 1945", StAM ZG 55.3. *Akte 15. Januar*.

¹⁰⁸ StAM ZG 55.3. *Akte 15. Januar*. Report by Paul L. (1-11-1950). See also report by Walter B.

¹⁰⁹ StAM ZG 55.3. Anni K., "Betrifft 16. Januar 1945".

¹¹⁰ On the value of retrospective eyewitness accounts as historical source see Hans J. Markowitsch, "Die Erinnerung von Zeitzeugen aus Sicht der Gedächtnisforschung", BIOS 13/1 (2000), pp. 30-47.

substantiate it.¹¹¹ One of the people to send in a report was Erwin St., gardener at the main cemetery during the war. In his account, he spoke of 1,700 burials at the cemetery, thus producing a figure that anticipated the findings of the early 1990s.¹¹² In a similar vein, the ex-police captain, Peter M., declared that as of April 1945, 2,900 casualties had been buried while 2,000 people were still considered missing.¹¹³ Yet, the evidence contained in the local accounts was not allowed to interfere with the official figures and rationalisations, which owed more to the dominance of 'Dresden' in the national memorial culture than to empirical knowledge derived from local research.

In Magdeburg, the 'antiquarian' initiative of the city archive did not lead to a critical re-evaluation of the received knowledge; the factual information contained in the 40 or so eyewitness accounts remained unused throughout the 1950s. In Kassel, too, even the 'critical' approach of Friedrich Herboldt legitimised rather than challenged the larger mnemonic parameters.

Continuity and Change: The 1960s and the Rise of the 'Documentary Account'

In the 1960s, local histories of the "night of horror" were produced against the backdrop of shifting "memory regimes" as well as broader social, cultural, and generational changes in both German societies.¹¹⁴ Just when some kind of provisional closure had been reached on the social and material legacy of World War II,¹¹⁵ a number of anti-Semitic scandals and a series of well-publicised trials against low and mid-level SS perpetrators ushered in the "return" of the Nazi past,¹¹⁶ putting, for the first time since the early post-war period, the Nazi politics of annihilation at the centre of public perceptions of World War II.¹¹⁷ While

¹¹¹ A private letter of 21-1-45 gives a figure of 14,000 deaths. In: KHM A 5499b.

¹¹² StAM ZG 55.3. Erwin St., "Brandnacht 1945".

¹¹³ Ibid., "Protokoll des ehemaligen Luftschutzkommandeurs von Magdeburg".

¹¹⁴ For the term see Eric Langenbacher, "Changing Memory Regimes in Contemporary Germany?", in: *German Politics and Society*, issue 67, vol. 21, no. 2 (summer 2003), pp. 46-68. Recent literature locates the turning point, for West Germany, between the restorative return to 'normalcy' and the embrace of 'modernity' in the second half of the 1950s. See Axel Schildt, "Nachkriegszeit. Möglichkeiten und Probleme einer Periodisierung der westdeutschen Geschichte nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg und ihre Einordnung in die deutsche Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts", in: *GWU* 44 (1993), pp. 567-584, here pp. 573f.; Arnold Sywottek, "Wege in die 50er Jahre", in: Axel Schildt, Arnold Sywottek eds., *Modernisierung im Wiederaufbau. Die westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 50er Jahre* (Bonn: Dietz, 1993), pp. 13-39.

¹¹⁵ See Axel Schildt / Detlef Siegfried / Karl Christian Lammers eds., *Dynamische Zeiten. Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften* (Hamburg: Christians, 2000); Edgar Wolfrum, *Die geglückte Demokratie* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006), pp. 187-326; Stefan Wolle, *Aufbruch in die Stagnation. Die DDR in den Sechzigerjahren* (Bonn: bpb, 2006).

¹¹⁶ Detlef Siegfried, Zwischen Aufarbeitung und Schlussstrich. Der Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten 1958 bis 1968, in: Schildt / Siegfried / Lammers eds., *Dynamische Zeiten*, pp. 78-113, here: p. 83; Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich: Beck, 2001), pp. 138-181.

¹¹⁷ Neil Gregor ed., *Nazism* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 335f.; Ulrich Herbert, "Vernichtungspolitik. Neue Antworten und Fragen zur Geschichte des 'Holocaust'", in: idem ed., *Nationalsozialistische*

historians from the Institute of Contemporary History acted as expert witnesses in the Auschwitz trial of 1963 to 1965,¹¹⁸ philosophers and psychoanalysts raised wider issues about Germany's "unmastered past".¹¹⁹ Meanwhile, academic historians debated the thorny question of a catastrophic 'special path' in German history in the *Fischer* controversy, while lamenting a general "loss of history".¹²⁰

What, if any, was the impact of these wider shifts on the local air war historiography of Kassel and Magdeburg? Did, as Gilad Margalit has speculated with reference to the memory place of Dresden, a subtext enter local narratives that aimed to relativize 'Auschwitz' by pointing to the death toll in the air war?¹²¹ Or did, on the contrary, local historiographical narratives remain unaffected by changes in the larger memory culture? As this section will show, in the 1960s, the protagonists of local historiographical discourse made no attempt to play off the bombing war against the Nazi Judaeocide. Although, in Kassel in particular, the gradual shift in the supra-local culture from a preoccupation with German victimhood to a concern for the victims of the Germans had local repercussions, the memory place of 22nd October served to legitimise rather than to obstruct these developments.¹²² While this tendency was most pronounced in the commemorative practices of the political elites, the historical representations of the air war continued to neglect the larger context of Nazi genocidal policy, focussing instead on local catastrophe, and increasingly, military history.

In Magdeburg, likewise, there was a considerable degree of continuity between the 1950s and the 1960s despite the fact that the public culture of the GDR had undergone a shift of emphasis from the denunciation of 'Western Imperialism' to the uncovering of the

Vernichtungspolitik 1939-1945. Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen (Frankfurt a.M.: fischer, 4th ed., 2001), pp. 9-66, here: pp. 13-19; Norbert Frei, "Deutsche Lernprozesse: NS Vergangenheit und Generationenfolge seit 1945"; in: idem, *1945 und wir. Das Dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen* (Munich: Beck, 2005), pp. 23-40, here: pp. 34-37; Knoch, *Die Tat als Bild*, pp. 589-916; Michael Lemke, "Instrumentalisierte Antifaschismus und SED-Kampagnenpolitik im deutschen Sonderkonflikt 1960-1968", in: Jürgen Danyel ed., *Die geteilte Vergangenheit: Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), pp. S. 61-86; Olaf Groehler, "Der Holocaust in der Geschichtsschreibung der DDR", in: Ulrich Herbert / Olaf Groehler, *Zweierlei Bewältigung* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1992), pp. 41-66.

¹¹⁸ Hans Buchheim / Martin Broszat / Hans-Adolf Jacobsen / Helmut Krausnick, *Anatomie des SS Staates*. 2 vols. (Olten u.a.: Walter-Verl, 1965/66). Compare Berg, *Holocaust*, pp. 311-322.

¹¹⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?" [1959], in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10.2. *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II.*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), pp. 555-572; Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. Ein Bericht von der Banalität des Bösen* (Munich / Zurich, [1963] 1992; Alexander und Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich: Piper, [1967] 1969).

¹²⁰ Alfred Heuss, *Verlust der Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1959). See Aleida Assmann / Ute Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit. Geschichtsversessenheit. Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1999), pp. 212-14. On the Fischer-controversy see Konrad H. Jarausch, "Der nationale Tabubruch. Wissenschaft, Öffentlichkeit und Politik in der Fischer-Kontroverse", in: Sabrow / Jessen / Große Kracht, *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte*, pp. 20-40.

¹²¹ Gilad Margalit, "Der Luftangriff auf Dresden. Seine Bedeutung für die Erinnerungspolitik der DDR und für die Herauskristallisierung einer historischen Kriegserinnerung im Westen", in: Düwell / Schmidt eds., *Narrative der Shoah*, pp. 189-207, here: p. 205.

¹²² See chapter three above, conclusion.

'fascist' roots of the Federal Republic.¹²³ To a limited degree, these changes impacted the local historiography of the air war. This was despite the fact that the lay journalist Manfred Rolle remained the authoritative voice on the subject. Throughout the 1960s, the scenic account of October 1950 formed the backbone of historical writing on the 'night of horror'. His article was reproduced, with small but significant alterations, in 1959, 1961, 1962, 1965, and again in 1970.

In the version of 1959, "Magdeburg has overcome death", some of the gross exaggerations of earlier editions had disappeared, while the death toll was revised to conform to the official figure of 16,000.¹²⁴ Although all versions retained the anti-transcendental bias of the original text, later editions introduced the Nazi leadership as additional villains alongside the Western bomber crews. "Murderers had arrived by plane, but murderers were also [amongst us] in the town", as the version from 1965 put it.¹²⁵ By 1970, Rolle went so far as to concede that with the air raid, the violence of war had returned to its place of origin. Here, the destruction had become a "consequence of a mad war instigated by German Imperialists and Fascists".¹²⁶

In Kassel, shifts in the larger memory regime of the Federal Republic had local repercussions but a very limited influence on the historiography of the air war. As early as in the autumn of 1957, the adult education centre [*Volkshochschule*] ran a lecture series on Germany's "un-mastered past", with individual papers by distinguished scholars such as Werner Conze, Dietrich Bracher, Hans Buchheim, Helmut Krausnick, and Hans Rothfels, amongst others.¹²⁷ In 1960, the Communist activist, Willi Belz, published his memoirs on the (Communist) resistance in Kassel during the Third Reich.¹²⁸ In the following year, the Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation, in cooperation with the adult and youth education centres, presented an exhibition on the fate of Jewish children at *Theresienstadt* concentration camp.¹²⁹ Yet, the impact of these early confrontations with the Nazi past on local culture should not be overestimated.¹³⁰ The archivist Robert Friderici, who started collecting material for a "future municipal history" in the early 1960s, was the same person

¹²³ Lemke, "Instrumentalisierter Antifaschismus", in: Danyel ed., *Die geteilte Vergangenheit*, pp. 61-86.

¹²⁴ "Magdeburg überwand den Tod", *Volksstimme* 14 (16-1-59), p. 3.

¹²⁵ "Magdeburg am 16. Januar 1945 (Schluss). Bomben verschonten Rüstungswerke", *MNN* No. 26 (30/31-1-1965), p. 6.

¹²⁶ Manfred Rolle, "16. Januar 1945. Die Nacht des Grauens", in: *Volksstimme* (16-1-1970), *supplement*.

¹²⁷ *Volkshochschule*, *Herbst Trimester 1957*, p. 4f. In: StAK S4 L15. 1947-1958.

¹²⁸ Willi Belz, *Die Standhaften. Über den Widerstand in Kassel 1933-1945* (Ludwigsburg: K.J. Schromm, 1960).

¹²⁹ StAK A.1.10. No. 607. *Reden [OB Lauritzen]* 39: "Eröffnung der Ausstellung "Hier fliegen keine Schmetterlinge".

¹³⁰ For a critical re-evaluation of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as diachronic 'success story' see Neil Gregor, "The Illusion of Remembrance: The Karl Diehl Affair and the Memory of National Socialism in Nuremberg, 1945-1999", in: *The Journal of Modern History* 75 (September 2003), pp. 590-633.

who, in 1943, had been charged by the Nazi mayor with documenting the history of Kassel during the war.¹³¹

With regard to air war historiography, change did not come from inside the local culture but from outside. In the 1960s, scenic description—not unlike the work of Manfred Rolle in Magdeburg—replaced the analytical approach as practised by Friedrich Herboldt in his investigative journalism. At the same time, the purely local perspective receded in favour of a greater emphasis on the military context. This shift owed only in part to the premature death of Herboldt in 1958. More important was the influence of a popular history of strategic bombing, *Und Deutschlands Städte starben nicht*, by the young David Irving.¹³² Before its publication in monograph form, the so-called 'documentary report' had already been serialised in the illustrated weekly, *Neue Illustrierte*. Two instalments dealt with the events of October 1943 in Kassel.¹³³ A local advertisement, possibly produced for news agent stalls, carried an image of the ruins of the *Martinskirche* that was coloured in red, together with the sensational title, "Carpet bombs on Kassel, From the Secret Archives of the Royal Air Force" (fig. 17).¹³⁴

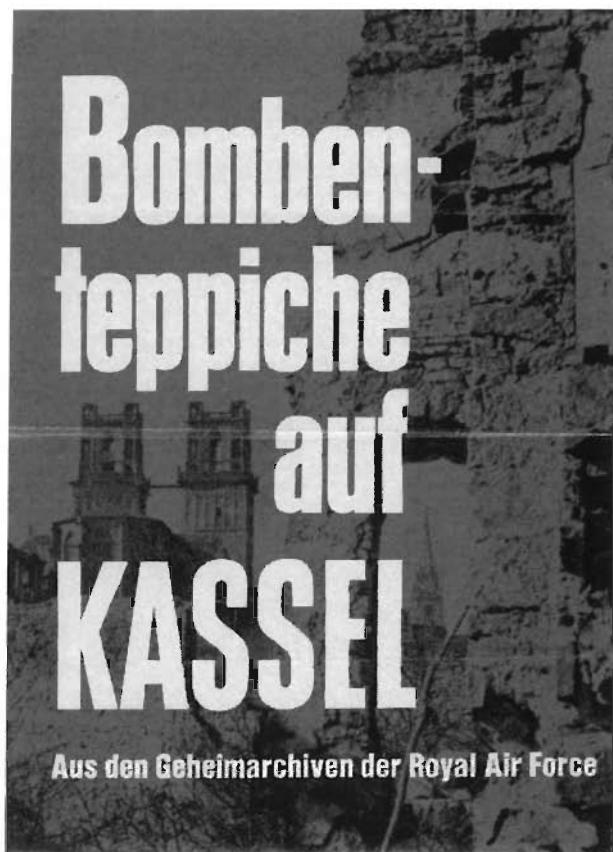


FIGURE 17: An advertisement for David Irving's account of the destruction of Kassel, *Neue Illustrierte*, 1962.

¹³¹ StAK A.4.415. No. 152. *Stadtarchiv: Verwaltung, Geschichte u.a. I* (1943-1971).

¹³² David J. Irving, *Und Deutschlands Städte starben nicht. Ein Dokumentarbericht* (Zurich: Schweizer Druck- und Verlagshaus, 1963).

¹³³ *Neue Illustrierte* 17/10 (1962), pp. 28-35; 17/11 (1962), pp. 28-35.

¹³⁴ StAK S5 P97.

Irving's account quickly became the defining historical text on the 'destruction of Kassel', exerting a decisive influence on local publications as well as local research efforts. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary in 1963 and again on the 25th in 1968, the local press published special reports, copying verbatim long passages from David Irving.¹³⁵ In 1968, the city-sponsored publication, "Our Town", simply reprinted Irving's article in a special section that was designed to document the city's 'success story' "from downfall to rise". In doing so, the city turned the piece into the authoritative historical treatment of the bombing of Kassel.¹³⁶ Irving's work must be considered the single most influential text in the local memory culture of Kassel, with a decisive impact on the indigenous research that got underway in the following decades. Why was this? As a close reading will suggest, the popularity of Irving's 'documentary report' owed to the ways in which the text appeared to re-affirm, with the authority of the international scholar, central tenets of the local memorial culture, while relocating local catastrophe within the context of an 'honourable' war.

The text drew on British and German primary sources as well as the standard research literature of the time.¹³⁷ It was carefully composed, describing the course and consequences of the air raid from different perspectives, the British air staff, the local civilian population, the bomber crews, and the Nazi leadership. As its main compositional elements, the text employed juxtaposition and scenic description. In the first instalment, "Carpet bombs on Kassel", the introduction described the 22nd October 1943 as the 'dying day' of Kassel, thus confirming the dominant local conceptualisation of the air raid. In order to lend authority to this assessment, Irving quoted from the 1952 memoir by Hans Rumpf, *Der hochrote Hahn*, who had spoken of a 'funeral pyre' and 'crematorium' in relation to the attack. For the sake of illustration, Irving also cited extensively from an eyewitness account drawn from the Paetow collection of 1944. Shifting perspective, the text quoted from the official British history and the Goebbels' diaries in order to establish 'objectively' the destructiveness of the raid.

¹³⁵ Wolfgang Hermsdorff, "22.X.43. 20 Jahre danach", in: *Hessische Allgemeine* (22-10-43); *Kasseler Post* (22-10-63); Egon E. Vogt, "Heute vor 25 Jahren: So starb Kassel. Der 22. Oktober 1943", in: *Hessische Niedersächsische Allgemeine* (22-10-68); *Kasseler Post* (22/10/68). See also Kurt Mohr, "Bombenkrieg und Kassels Zerstörung 1943 (I)-(III)", in: *feldgrau. Mitteilungen einer Arbeitsgemeinschaft* 14/2-4 (1966), pp. 33-40; 64-74; 93-100.

¹³⁶ See David J. Irving, "Das Chaos einer Nacht", in: *Sonderbeilage Unsere Stadt 1943 bis 1968*. Hrsg. vom Magistrat der Stadt Kassel (1968).

¹³⁷ Irving referred to the following works, Hans Rumpf, *Der hochrote Hahn* (Darmstadt: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, [1952]), pp. 102f. Rumpf wrote, "From the high furnace of this murder fire [Mordbrand], not many managed to escape". Irving quoted the passage but left out the term *Mordbrand*; Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany*. Vol. II (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1961), pp. 161f.; 267f. In contrast to Irving, Webster /Frankland categorised the performance of the German night fighter force on 22nd October as a 'major success' (p. 203). Irving quoted extensively from the Police Report of 7th December 1943 and used three eyewitness accounts from Paetow's collection. In addition, Irving quoted from the Goebbels diaries. His British sources are not referenced but in part appear to be based on interviews.

Yet, the text did not just validate local voices with the help of the national literature but went on to offer an answer to a central question of local enquiries, the reasons for the catastrophe. Unlike Herbordt in 1949, who had looked for structural defects in the civil-defence provisions, Irving's explanation in 1963 focused on the 'war of the air waves'. He gave a dramatic description of British attempts at deceiving the German night fighter force through intercepting their radio intelligence. Kassel, the argument went, had fallen victim to British officers imitating the German *Funkleitoffiziere*. This thread was taken up in the second instalment, "Kassel in the Zero Hour", in which Irving gave an account of a confrontation between a bomber crew and a German fighter plane. In order to illustrate the devastating impact of the raid, he quoted extensively from the police report of 7th December 1943, lauding the German fire police for their 'courage'. While the scenic arrangement was completed with another eyewitness account, the article concluded by dealing with the issue of guilt. It stressed that ultimate responsibility for the destruction of Kassel lay with Hitler for starting the war, as well as with Goebbels for allegedly suppressing knowledge about its destructiveness.

In his account, Irving retold the air raid as part of a confrontation between British bomber crews on the one hand and the German *Luftwaffe* and civilians on the other, in which 'honourable' exploits were performed on both sides. The role of the villain, by contrast, was assigned to the Nazi leadership. Thus, the text re-shifted the emphasis from a purportedly 'natural' disaster to a military confrontation and its consequences. At the same time, Irving reaffirmed the central conceptualisation of the local memorial culture. In an air war waged in isolation from World War II, the city was depicted as a victim of forces beyond its control. In the serialised version, the narrative went so far as to claim that even in the 1960s, Kassel still suffered from the wartime secrecy campaign by Joseph Goebbels,

"The 22nd October 1943 is the day of death of a German city, whose annihilation was covered up by Goebbels so effectively that even today many Germans have no idea of the extent of this horrifying bombing raid."¹³⁸

¹³⁸ "Bombenteppiche auf Kassel", in: *Neue Illustrierte* 17/10 (1962), p. 30.

Conclusion

If academic history can be said to function as a "rational check" on collective memory, then the reverse held true for the local historiography of the air war in the first decades after the war.¹³⁹ Here, collective memory disciplined history. In Kassel no less than in Magdeburg, local journalists, in their endeavours to re-create the past, manipulated the historical source material and homogenised disparate experiences in order to construct usable pasts that served the needs of the present. In both cities, the historiography of the 1950s may be characterised as an inversion of the 'monumental' conception that had characterised the Nazi years: the privileging of the 'heroic' gave way to an emphasis on victimhood; the exemplary character to deterrence. The most important building stone for this kind of history was the eyewitness account, the "single fate that speaks for many thousands", which symbolised the experiences of the memory group as a whole. Whereas in Kassel, local historiography was put in the service of pacification, in Magdeburg, local history served the task of mobilisation.

Local air war historiography did not stand at the centre of the mnemonic controversies that slowly reconfigured the broader cultural parameters in the 1960s. In both cities, local historiography continued to emphasise the victimhood of the local community, without paying much attention to the broader context in which the air raids had taken place. Next to continuity, there was, however, also change. In Magdeburg, the central text on the air raid was modified in order to cast blame for the destruction of the city on German Fascism as well as on American Imperialism. In Kassel, meanwhile, the impact of David Irving's work led to a re-contextualisation of local disaster within the history of the air war.

¹³⁹ Konrad H. Jarausch, "Zeitgeschichte und Erinnerung. Deutungskonkurrenz oder Interdependenz?", in: Jarausch / Sabrow eds., *Verletztes Gedächtnis. Erinnerungskultur und Zeitgeschichte im Konflikt* (Campus: Frankfurt a.M., 2002), pp. 9-39, here: p. 21.

The "Greatest Event in Municipal History"¹ Local Research as 'Antiquarian' Endeavour, 1970-1995

Introduction

The process of ossification and decline that characterised the memorial culture in the 1970s did not affect all vectors of memory in equal measure. Despite the scaling back of commemorative activity,² the date of the most destructive air raid retained its significance as an important point of reference for local historiography. When Herfried Homburg published his cultural history, *Kassel—the Intellectual Profile of a Thousand Year Old Town*, in 1969, he dedicated his work "in remembrance of 22nd October 1943".³ The same perspective was shared by Willi Belz, a Socialist who explicitly invoked the memory place in the preface to his autobiographical study of (Communist) resistance in Kassel, which he signed, "22nd October 1960, in remembrance of the tragedy of 22nd October 1943".⁴ In Magdeburg, too, the date of 16th January 1945 remained an important marker in local historical writing, although perhaps not quite to the same extent as in Kassel. The official *History of the City of Magdeburg*, published by the City Council in 1975, devoted a subchapter to the attack, linking the event to the end of the war.⁵

More remarkably, both cities witnessed attempts to write authoritative local histories of the air war at the very time that the social dynamic of public memory had reached a low point. These efforts were undertaken by members of the "sceptical generation" of the age cohorts born around 1925, who had experienced the war as flak auxiliaries or young

¹ Werner Dettmar, in: Manfred Schaake, "Alt-Kassel ging in einem Feuersturm ohne Beispiel unter", *Hessische Allgemeine* 16.10.82.

² Between 1975 and 1977 the Kassel daily, *Hessische Allgemeine*, did not mark the return of the date of 22nd October with a commemorative article. With the exception of 1972, the Magdeburg daily, *Volksstimme*, continued to refer to the memory place of 16th January throughout the 1970s but in rudimentary form only.

³ Herfried Homburg, *Kassel – das geistige Profil einer tausendjährigen Stadt* (Kassel: Schneider & Weber, 1969; [21977; 31993]), p. 3.

⁴ Willi Belz, *Die Standhaften. Über den Widerstand in Kassel 1933-1945* (Ludwigsburg: K.J. Schromm Verlag, 1960), p. 6.

⁵ "Die Zerstörung Magdeburgs am 16. Januar 1945 und die letzten Kriegstage in der Stadt", in: Rat der Stadt Magdeburg ed., *Geschichte der Stadt Magdeburg. Von einem Autorenkollektiv unter Leitung von Helmut Asmus* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1975), pp. 320-331.

soldiers.⁶ In February 1975, the Kassel city employee, Werner Dettmar (born 1927), went public in the local *Hessische Allgemeine* with an appeal for documents and eyewitness accounts, while one month previously, the Magdeburg journalist, Rudi Hartwig (born 1932), had published preliminary results of his investigation into the raid of 16th January 1945 in the SED-daily, *Volksstimme*.⁷ Conceived in the 1970s, these research efforts came to fruition in the fundamentally different political and historiographical climate of the 1980s, amidst a flourishing peace movement and a turn to the 'history of the every day'.⁸

In the 1980s, Dettmar on occasion cooperated with a group of professional historians and students who were working on a critical history of National Socialism, but he shared neither in their generational and professional background nor in their research interests.⁹ Despite these differences, any notion of a mutually exclusive hierarchy of victimhood was not yet an issue for the main protagonists of local historiography. Dettmar's 'antiquarian' approach was not conceived as a commentary on a 'critical' history of Nazism, nor vice versa. Whereas in Kassel, the air war remained the preserve of non-professionals, in Magdeburg, the journalistic work of Rudi Hartwig was incorporated into a 'professional' framework through the collaboration with a historian from the local teacher training college, Prof. Manfred Wille (born 1934).¹⁰

This chapter argues that the mid-1970s marked a turning-point in the history writing on the air war. Drawing, in part, on the earlier writings of David Irving, the period spawned two modes of representation that were to dominate the 1980s and 1990s, the 'documentary account' and the 'historical exhibition'. On the conceptual level, the historiography no longer functioned as crude legitimisation for the narratives that had been developed by the protagonists of public memory. In Nietzschean terms, the 'monumental' conception of the

⁶ Norbert Frei, "Deutsche Lernprozesse. NS-Vergangenheit und Generationenfolge seit 1945", in: *1945 und wir. Das Dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen* (München: Beck, 2005), pp. 23-40, here: p. 27. The term derives from the sociologist Helmut Schelsky, *Die skeptische Generation. Eine Soziologie der deutschen Jugend* (Düsseldorf / Köln: Diederichs, [1957] 1963). Compare also Rolf Schörken, *Luftwaffenhelfer und Drittes Reich. Die Entstehung eines politischen Bewusstseins* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984); Dirk Moses, "Die 45er. Eine Generation zwischen Faschismus und Demokratie"; in: *Die Sammlung* 40 (2000), pp. 233-264.

⁷ "Phasen der Bombennacht nachgespürt. Werner Dettmar sammelt Dokumente über Zerstörung Kassels im Jahr 1943", *HA Stadtausgabe* 39 (15-2-75), Stadt; Rudi Hartwig, "In der Glut des Feuersturms. Untersuchung des Luftangriffs auf Magdeburg am 16. Januar 1945", *Volksstimme* (17-1-75), supplement, p. 2.

⁸ On *Alltagsgeschichte* see Thomas Lindenberger, " 'Alltagsgeschichte' oder: Als um die zünftigen Grenzen der Geschichtswissenschaft noch gestritten wurde", in: Martin Sabrow / Ralph Jessen / Klaus Große Kracht eds., *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte* (Munich: Beck, 2003), pp. 74-91; Detlev J.K. Peukert, "Das 'Dritte Reich' aus der 'Alltags'-Perspektive", in: *AfS* (1986), pp. 533-556.

⁹ On the gestation of this city-sponsored project see StAK A. 4. 415. No. 163. *Forschungsprojekt "Kassel in der NS-Zeit" II* (1979-1982); ibid., no. 174. *Stadtgeschichtliches Forschungsvorhaben: Kassel unter dem Nationalsozialismus I* (1979-1987). The results were published in the two-volume *Volksgemeinschaft und Volksfeinde. Kassel 1933-1945*. Ed. Wilhelm Frenz, Jörg Kammler & Dietfrid Krause-Vilmar. Bd. 1 (1984): Dokumentation; Bd. 2 (1987): Studien (Fuldarück: Hesse GmbH, 1984/1987). Prof. Krause-Vilmar, the doyen of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Kassel, was born in 1939.

¹⁰ Rudi Hartwig / Manfred Wille, *Magdeburg im Feuersturm. Ein Dokumentarbericht. Zur Geschichte der Zerstörung der Stadt durch anglo-amerikanische Bombenangriffe im zweiten Weltkrieg* (Magdeburg: Dr. Volksstimme, 1985).

1950s and 1960s gave way to an 'antiquarian' approach, which sought to document, but not necessarily to explain. In some respects, historical re-creation became a mode of engagement in which the experience-generation sought to preserve 'their' memories against the paradigm shift in public commemorations, where a younger generation had started to frame local disaster within the broader context of the German war of annihilation. For the period of the 1980s, however, this tension should not be exaggerated. Against the backdrop of a cultural climate in which fears over an 'Atomic Holocaust' still existed side by side with the (re-)discovery of the historical Holocaust, this *Flak auxiliary* historiography coexisted easily with 'critical' studies of Nazism. This was to change only after the end of the Cold War, when the 'antiquarian' approach to aerial warfare came under increasing criticism as revisionism in disguise.

Air War Historiography as 'Documentary Account'

In the Kassel of the late 1970s, there were several contenders for writing a definitive account of the "greatest event in municipal history", the city's destruction on 22nd October 1943.¹¹ Next to the city employee Werner Dettmar, there were the art historian and former 'municipal researcher', Dr. Karl Paetow (1904-1993), and Horst Wagner (born 1926). Only Dettmar succeeded while the efforts by Paetow and Wagner did not progress beyond the manuscript stage. Despite these differences, all shared two important features in common, setting them apart from another group of historians who had embarked on elucidating the history of the every day under Nazism. Falling in the age cohorts between 1904 and 1927, they were older than their colleagues, having lived through World War II as adults or adolescents. In addition, they also had personal memories of the air raid of 22nd October, Dettmar as a flak auxiliary on duty, Wagner as a young marine on holiday leave, and Paetow as a city employee in charge of the Bureau of the Missing. This section argues that success or failure in getting published did not just owe to differences in the quality of the research but to different modes of engagement with the past. A comparative reading of the approaches by Paetow, Wagner, and Dettmar can therefore help to reconstruct the parameters of local air war historiography in the 1980s.

In many respects, Dr. Karl Paetow was the obvious candidate for writing the history of Kassel's destruction in World War II. As a university-educated art historian with a publishing record, he possessed the relevant skills and experience. Moreover, as the city's

¹¹ Werner Dettmar, in: Manfred Schaake, "Alt-Kassel ging in einem Feuersturm ohne Beispiel unter", *Hessische Allgemeine* 16-10-82.

official 'researcher' during the Third Reich and head of the Bureau of the Missing in 1944, he had collected over 100 eyewitness accounts that could have furnished the empirical basis for a history 'from below'. Possibly encouraged by the great success of David Irving's writings on Dresden and other German cities, Paetow started work on a local history of the bombing in the 1970s.¹² In an undated outline, the art historian sketched the central ideas of a project that he called, "Kassel in the Melting Furnace of Time" (*Kassel im Schmelzofen der Zeit*).¹³

In this projected story of an "end of a thousand-year-old history" and the "beginning of a new epoch", the eyewitness accounts from 1944 were to occupy centre stage, as the subtitle, "Eyewitnesses report on the demise of a City", indicated. In addition, the visual was to play an important role as well, as a handwritten addition made clear. By contrast, Paetow wanted to avoid any discussion of responsibility, as he emphasised with the injunction, "Do not throw up the issue of guilt!" Instead, Paetow insisted on the "non-political" nature of the book, which he wanted to be understood as a "town chronicle". To this purpose, he invoked a trans-historical "law of fate" as an explanatory device for the destruction of the city in World War II.¹⁴

In the worked-out manuscript, Paetow added the subtitle, "The Destruction and Reconstruction of a City", thus indicating the temporal and conceptual frame of his project.¹⁵ In the preface, he spoke of a "peaceful community" that had suddenly been engulfed by "History". His book was to give testimony to the "capacity of suffering" and the "will to survive" of a town that had been forced into "a tragedy of the greatest scale" by the "destructive force of modern weaponry". Paetow conceptualised the air raid in familiar terms as the destruction of *Heimat* by a (natural) disaster, suggesting that the eyewitness accounts be read as the "swan song" of Kassel, which had found "her poet [...] in destruction". Clearly, Paetow was not interested in analysing his source material critically. Instead, he apotheosised the collection as the voice of "the people", casting himself as a "chronicler" who had merely arranged the source material. While insisting that no meaning could be derived from the air raid, Paetow still contended that the death of "12,000 innocent victims" could have a cathartic effect on posterity. Might not, he asked, "yield the self-destructing madness of humanity [...] to the warm recognition of shocked hearts? May this be the message of Kassel".¹⁶

¹² See Paetow's collection of press clippings on Irving and others in BGM Kassel. Nachlass 7. 'Stiftung Karl Paetow', Mappe 58, "Kassel im Schmelzofen der Zeit, Die Stadt in der Hölle, Zeitungsartikel, masch. & hs", fol. 1-8.

¹³ Ibid., fol. 10.

¹⁴ All quotations *ibid.*

¹⁵ Ibid., fol. 11.

¹⁶ Ibid., fol. 13-15.

As the preface indicated, Paetow had no intention of either writing a scholarly history or of producing a critical edition of historical documents. Rather, he wanted the collection of eyewitness accounts to be understood as a folk tale, as the "voice of the common people" that had been collected and saved from oblivion just like the Brothers Grimm had collected their fairy tales in the 19th century. Whatever the appeal of such a 'romantic' conception of history to a scholar whose main research interest lay with German fairy tales, Paetow's prospective publishers at the *Motorbuch Verlag* were not impressed. In a letter of 16th November 1981, a lector told Paetow that he only saw chances for publication if excerpts from the reports were "integrated into a broader frame which does not only touch on human experiences but also on all other aspects of the air war [...], as preparation of the attack, relief measures, organisation, technical issues, and so on".¹⁷ Not the blatant self-victimisation but the disregard of the military context stood in the way of publication. What the publisher looked for was local military history as, for example, Hans Brunswig had written about the raids on Hamburg, rather than a folk tale.¹⁸ Despite the setback, Paetow pursued the project for some time after that, but when attempts at cooperating with Dettmar did not materialise and the mayor of Kassel, Hans Eichel (SPD), refused to support the project financially, he finally abandoned his plans in 1982.¹⁹

At about the same time that Paetow offered his "Kassel in the Melting Furnace of Time" up to *Motorbuch Verlag*, Horst Wagner (born 1926) finished a draft manuscript that shared in common the underlying perspective. Like the art historian, Wagner sought to describe the experience of the air raid from below. Rather than sifting through a private archive as Paetow, Wagner searched his own memory, producing an autobiographical text that recalled his experiences as a young marine on home leave in mid-October 1943.

"The Firestorm" (*Der Feuersturm*) was the personal account of a man nearing retirement age who looked back on his youth during the war. The text was scenic rather than analytical, and despite the objectifying third-person brimmed with strong emotions, extreme judgements and present-centred reflections. Of the 200 manuscript pages, only about one third dealt with the experiences of the protagonist during the October raid, while the bulk of the manuscript offered a dense description of a seventeen-year-old negotiating different social roles and attitudes: Horst as proud marine on leave, looking down on the 'auxiliary soldiers' of the *Heimat* (p. 36) and bragging to his family about his knowledge of air raid damage in other cities; Horst as rebellious youth in pursuit of pleasure, unwilling to

¹⁷ Ibid., Mappe 62, fol. 1-19. "Briefwechsel und geplante Veröffentlichung", here: fol. 7.

¹⁸ Compare Hans Brunswig, *Feuersturm über Hamburg. Die Luftangriffe auf Hamburg im 2. Weltkrieg und die Folgen* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch, 1978).

¹⁹ Letter Paetow to Motorbuch Verlag, 5-4-1983, in: StAK S8 E5. *Ausstellung 1983 (III)*; Nachlass Paetow, Mappe 62, fol. 11-15.

accept the hierarchies of old; and Horst as teenager falling in love with his childhood sweetheart in times of war.

Just like Paetow, Wagner embedded his story in a paratextual frame, where he established a context and demonstrated the relevance of his experiences to the present. The preface illustrated the ease with which a critical perception of the re-escalating Cold War of the early 1980s could serve to depict World War II as indiscriminate "mass murder".²⁰ Wagner constructed an analogy between the concept of nuclear deterrence of the 1980s and German rearmament in the 1930s, and concluded with a bizarre logic, "Despite his enormous rearmament efforts, Hitler was unable to prevent the war".²¹ Employing an interpretation that distinguished between government and the governed but recognised no historical causation, he contended that politicians of all countries had unwittingly led their peoples into a war that had known "only losers, and those were the common people".²² Within this frame, the (allied) air war became nothing but deliberate "murder of human beings".²³ If this interpretation illustrated that the paradigm of 'air war as crime' was by no means the preserve of the official politics of memory of the GDR, Wagner went further still, drawing a parallel between the allied air war, the Holocaust, and the expulsion of the Germans from the East.

Wagner demanded that the "millions of victims of bombing" ought to be considered equal "to the cruel genocide in the *KZ*'s" and "the millions of deaths among the refugees and expellees in all the world", and went on to lament what he perceived to be a difference in the public representation of the various victim groups,

"To us Germans, the last epoch of German history has been suppressed for years.

But instead [we have been] confronted again and again with the atrocities of the Third Reich. Still today, on Memorial Sunday, there are no more than a few meaningless words of remembrance about the innocent victims of the bombing war."²⁴

Problematic as this line of reasoning was, it revealed more than the author's unwillingness to recognise the categorical difference between victims of war and victims of genocide. It illustrated the extent to which the parameters of public remembrance were changing in the 1980s. Wagner no longer compared the casualties of allied bombing to soldiers killed in action, as was common in the 1950s, but likened them to the victims of the "cruel genocide". Even in rejection, Wagner thus acknowledged the extent to which the

²⁰ Wagner uses the plural, "Massenmorden". See Horst Wagner, "Der Feuersturm", preface, p. 1. Unpublished manuscript, in: StAK S3 No. 379.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p. 3.

²³ Ibid., p. 2.

²⁴ Ibid.

Holocaust had assumed a pivotal place in the public memory culture of the Federal Republic by the 1980s.²⁵

Throughout the second Cold War of the 1980s, however, fears of an "Atomic Holocaust" loomed just as large in public consciousness as concerns over the historical Holocaust.²⁶ The popularity of a pacifist sentiment that condemned war in general as an act of mass murder, made it easy for writers such as Wagner to fuse critical comments about the contemporary East-West confrontation with apologetic revisionism of World War II. Contrasting what he perceived to be the 'mastered' past of Nazi genocide with the 'unmastered' past of the bombing war, he asserted, "The person responsible for the genocide has been sought and found. About the murder of human beings [*Menschenmorden*] there is embarrassed silence". Wagner went on to draw his own conclusions, intimating that there existed a link between the alleged suppression of the air war and the arms race,

"This murder of defenceless civilians has apparently long been forgotten. How else is it possible that today games are played again with the strategic and tactical possibilities of modern means of destruction?"²⁷

Despite Wagner's insistence on the criminality of the air war, he wanted his account to be read as a "memento" to the future rather than an indictment of the past. He dedicated the text to the "many innocent victims of the air war", remembering in particular his own mother and sister who had died in the October air. In the epilogue, Wagner defined the victim group he had in mind. In an "interchangeable representation" (Alon Confino) of the locality and the nation, the suffering of the resident population represented "the suffering and the pain of a whole people", i.e., the Germans.²⁸

However widespread Wagner's sentiments may have been, there was no space for this blend of autobiographical memoir and apologetic revisionism in the public historiography of Kassel in the 1980s. The personal experience report remained unpublished, although Wagner himself continued to play a role in the public conversation about the air war, collaborating with Werner Dettmar on the 1983 exhibition and depositing his manuscript in the municipal archive.²⁹ While the failure to have the manuscript published may not be regretted given its crude reasoning, the text does not just deserve attention as a document of the local memory culture, revealing the amalgam of apologetic revisionism and emotional intensity with which contemporaries remembered the bombing of their

²⁵ See chapter four above.

²⁶ For the term see Petra Kelly, "In der Tradition der Gewaltfreiheit (1983)", in: Eberhard Ratgeb ed., *Deutschland kontrovers. Debatten 1945 bis 2005* (Munich / Vienna: Carl Hanser, 2005), pp. 311-314, here: p. 313.

²⁷ Wagner, "Feuersturm", p. 2.

²⁸ Ibid., Epilog, p. 191.

²⁹ See also StAK S8 C51, Letter of Horst Wagner to HNA Lokalredaktion, 8-10-03.

hometown forty years after the event. The memoirs also contained a wealth of observations that could have provided valuable material for a social history of the war. On page 140, for example, Wagner described the carping that he overheard in a shelter immediately after the attack,

"Some were just sitting there and sobbing quietly. Others swore at the Tommies, the Nazis, the grandfathers and grandmothers [...]. They swore at everybody and everything, even at God, who was responsible for everything. Only they were making no efforts to help themselves."³⁰

What the observation suggests is that grumbling was a (helpless) way of coping with the emotional and physical stress of bombing, while the object of the invective was interchangeable, and to a large degree, irrelevant.

Neither Paetow's romanticising apotheosis of the 'voice of the people' nor Wagner's revisionist memoirs went beyond the manuscript stage. Local historiography of the air war came, instead, to be associated with the name of Werner Dettmar. During the course of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the employee of the Bureau of Cultural Affairs established himself as an authority on strategic bombing whose advice and comment were sought whenever the subject attracted public attention. Like Paetow and Wagner, Dettmar was a local resident and an eyewitness of the air raid. In the autumn of 1943, he was deployed as a young flak auxiliary in the vicinity of Kassel but experienced the attack in a shelter north of the city centre because he was on weekend leave.³¹ Unlike his fellow historians, however, Dettmar did not make personal memories the centre point of his historical writing. Instead, he approached the subject from an 'objective' angle, aiming to produce a "comprehensive documentation" of the "destruction of Kassel in October 1943", as the dusk jacket of his 1983 publication put it.³²

To this end, Dettmar went public as early as February 1975 with a newspaper appeal for contemporaries to come forward.³³ While Dettmar sought to tap local knowledge, he showed no interest in retrospective eyewitness accounts. He positioned himself as a scholar who approached the subject dispassionately, undertaking research trips to British archives, collecting and sifting through historical documents in order to find answers to such 'technical' questions such as the position of the anti-aircraft batteries around Kassel.³⁴ There was no emotional language in Dettmar's public appeal, no talk of the 'voice of the

³⁰ Wagner, "Feuersturm", p. 140.

³¹ See "Chronist der Zerstörung. Werner Dettmar: Ausstellungsmacher und Autor", in: *Kassel kulturell* (October 1993), pp. 8-12.

³² Werner Dettmar, *Die Zerstörung Kassels im Oktober 1943. Eine Dokumentation* (Fuldabrück: Hesse, 1983), flapjacket. The book was based on the exhibition of the same name. See below.

³³ "Phasen der Bombennacht nachgespürt. Werner Dettmar sammelt Dokumente über Zerstörung Kassels im Jahr 1943", in: *HA 39 (15-2-75)*, Stadt.

³⁴ Ibid. Compare the visual illustration of the article: Dettmar was shown studying documents.

people' or 'war crimes'. In the objectified language of the scholar, Dettmar described the air raid of 22nd October 1943 as "the biggest event in the city's history".³⁵

Drawing on the (popular) research literature of his time and a wealth of primary sources, Dettmar wrote the history of 'the destruction' as a blend of *Heimat* history and military history. In his 1983 "documentation", *The Destruction of Kassel in October 1943*, chapters on "Old Kassel in old postcards" were followed by sections on the "German air raid defence". The text dealt with the strength and tactics of British Bomber Command but also contained a casualty list of all 6,000 registered victims of the bombing raid. Following David Irving, Dettmar put the air raid in the context of the history of air warfare, without paying any attention to the genocidal character of the German (land) war of 1939 to 1945.³⁶

Remarkably, the historians' voice was barely audible in Dettmar's text. Making no overt attempt at interpreting the events of October 1943, he documented but did not offer historical explanations. In the preface, for example, Dettmar posed the question about the reason for "all those deaths" but neither the section on the industrial importance of Kassel nor the chapter on the local civilian defence offered any answers. He abstained from subjecting the source material to critical analysis, suggesting that the documents "speak for themselves" (p. 54). Yet, as Detlev Peukert has pointed out, conventional explanations tend to take over where the historian refrains from doing his or her job.³⁷ Here, this was particularly the case with the rich visual material, which suggested a narrative of a 'beautiful' town (pp. 10-26) being defended by child soldiers and men of retirement age (pp. 27-48) but overwhelmed by a superior enemy whose crews shared much in common with the youthful defenders (pp. 84-117). The air raid resulted in unprecedented human suffering (p. 160ff.), the destruction of the cityscape (p. pp. 201f.) and the legacy of mass death (pp. 257ff.).

In analogy to Nicolas Berg's characterisation of German Contemporary History as a "fellow traveller narrative" [*Mitläufers-Erzählung*], one might speak of a flak auxiliary historiography which reproduced the contemporary fascination with the technical process of destruction while accepting the (air) war as a 'natural' aspect of life.³⁸ Characteristically, the diary entries of the Flak auxiliary, Gebhard Niemeyer, were the central ego-document of a text that mainly reproduced official documents such as the British raid assessments

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Of the 40 footnotes 19 referred to David Irving, *Von Guernica nach Vietnam* (Munich: Heyne, 1982). See Dettmar, *Zerstörung*, p. 254.

³⁷ Compare the remarks by Detlev J. Peukert, "Das 'Dritte Reich' aus der 'Alltags'-Perspektive", *AfS* (1986), pp. 533-556, here: p. 538f.

³⁸ Berg, *Holocaust*, p. 424; Schörken, *Luftwaffenhelfer im Dritten Reich*, p. 36; 121-132.

and the experience report by the German police.³⁹ To some extent, this narrative exhibited a greater degree of empathy with the British bomber crews than with the local resident population. Quoting from an unreferenced source (Irving?), Dettmar depicted the British crews as a mirror image of the German flak auxiliaries, "Thus most of them started night after night with fear in their hearts to do no more and no less than was their mission".⁴⁰

While the historiography of Kassel in theory aimed at integrating catastrophic rupture into the continuum of municipal history, and in practice, offered description rather than analysis, the historiography of Magdeburg was both more ambitious in scope and less concerned with the empirical evidence. It sought to link local developments to a world-historical context, to uncover the motive-forces of the strategic air war and to answer the issues of guilt and responsibility, past and present. When the journalist Rudi Hartwig published his account of the air raid on Magdeburg in 1975, he cast his piece as an 'inquiry', arguing that Magdeburg was destroyed for political rather than military reasons.⁴¹ Here, as elsewhere, local events were made to fit a political master narrative that had been developed for the national *lieu de mémoire* of Dresden.

The function of historical research in the GDR as self-avowedly 'biased' [*parteilich*] scholarship was to provide 'scientific' legitimacy for the historical narrative of the political elites.⁴² Thus Olaf Groehler, the leading air war historian of the GDR, argued that during the final phase of World War II, strategic bombing was no longer aimed at defeating Nazi Germany but had turned into a political campaign for pre-empting the spread of Communism in the post-war period.⁴³ In his *History of Air Warfare, 1910-1975*, he put his case as follows:

"The nature of the Western-allied war effort began to change. Instead of remaining a part of the just campaign of the anti-Hitler coalition, it turned increasingly into an instrument of the anti-Soviet plans for world domination of the most reactionary forces of American and British Imperialism."⁴⁴

For Groehler, the Dresden raids of 13th/14th February 1945 constituted both the symbol and climax of this campaign. He argued that in late January 1945 allied strategy underwent a

³⁹ Dettmar, *Zerstörung*, pp. 76f; 210-13.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 84.

⁴¹ Rudi Hartwig, "In der Glut des Feuersturms", in: *Volksstimme* (17-1-75), supplement.

⁴² On the *Parteilichkeit* of historical research in the GDR see Martin Sabrow, "Geschichtsdiskurs und Doktringesellschaft", in: Sabrow ed., *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs. Der Umgang mit der Vergangenheit in der DDR* (Cologne / Weimar / Vienna: Böhlau, 2000), pp. 9-35. For the context see Georg G. Iggers, Konrad H. Jarausch, Matthias Middell und Martin Sabrow eds., *Die DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft als Forschungsproblem* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1998).

⁴³ Olaf Groehler, *Geschichte des Luftkrieges 1910 bis 1970* (Berlin (Ost): Militärverlag der DDR, 1975; 21977).

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 453f. Compare also Gilad Margalit, "Der Luftangriff auf Dresden. Seine Bedeutung für die Erinnerungspolitik der DDR und für die Herausbildung einer historischen Kriegserinnerung im Westen", in: Düwell / Schmidt eds., *Narrative der Shoah*, pp. 189-207, here: p. 201.

decisive shift. In the light of the stalemate on the Western front and the simultaneous disintegration of the German armies on the Eastern front, the British and American air staff revived plans for a decisive knock-out blow from the air, codenamed 'thunderclap'. These plans, Groehler claimed, focused deliberately on the cities in the future Soviet zone of occupation, being motivated by the political consideration of demonstrating the strength of Western air power to the Soviet Union. The result, according to Groehler, was a "massacre from the air", as evidenced in the Dresden raids of February 1945.⁴⁵

Whatever the heuristic strengths and weaknesses of a 'political' explanation of the Dresden raids,⁴⁶ the anachronistic assumptions underwriting Groehler's interpretation were all too obvious: World War II strategic bombing had been re-contextualised as an aggressive act of the Cold War.⁴⁷ For Magdeburg, however, there existed the additional problem that the city played no role in this narrative. In his standard history, Groehler made no mention of 16th January 1945, and subsumed attacks on Magdeburg under the rubric of "similar terror raids", implying that the decisive raid post-dated the attacks on Dresden.⁴⁸ Local historians were thus faced with the impossible task of integrating the raid of 16th January 1945 into a politically-licensed frame that had been developed for a different historical setting. While Dresden may or may not have been an important military target in the spring of 1945, Magdeburg clearly was, boasting key war industries of the highest priority. Dresdeners may or may not have been thinking that they inhabited an 'oasis of peace', but Magdeburgers had no reason to do so, with over 500 hundred alarms and constant raids throughout 1944.⁴⁹

Local historiography sought to resolve this tension between national master narrative and empirical evidence by re-arranging the historical chronology of events. In his 'inquiry' of January 1975, Hartwig predated Groehler's thesis about a shift in allied policy to

⁴⁵ Groehler, *Geschichte des Luftkrieges*, pp. 456ff.

⁴⁶ For good discussions of the decision making process of the Dresden raids see Götz Bergander, "Vom unattraktiven zum besonders lohnenden Ziel. Dresden in den Luftkriegsplanungen der Alliierten", in: Oliver Reinhard / Matthias Neutzner / Wolfgang Heese eds., *Das rote Leuchten. Dresden und der Bombenkrieg* (Dresden: edition Sächsische Zeitung, 2005), pp. 44-57; Sebastian Cox, "The Dresden Raids: Why and How", in: Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang, *Firestorm. The Bombing of Dresden 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2006), pp. 18-61.

⁴⁷ Compare Groehler's own post-1989 critical comments in, *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1990), p. 450f.; Olaf Groehler, "Dresden: Kleine Geschichte der Aufrechnung", in: *Blätter für deutsche & internationale Politik*, Heft 2 / 1995, pp. 137-41.

⁴⁸ See Groehler, *Geschichte des Luftkriegs*, p. 458: "Similar terror raids were directed against Magdeburg, Chemnitz, Dessau, Leipzig, Halle and Bitterfeld." Interestingly, the former *Gauleiter* of Magdeburg-Anhalt, Rudolf Jordan, also confused the chronology of events in his memoirs, published in 1971. See Rudolf Jordan, *Erlebt und erlitten. Weg eines Gauleiters von München bis Moskau* (Leoni am Starnberger See: Druffel, 1971), p. 232.

⁴⁹ The Junkers aero-engine works and the Krupp Gruson works were rated 1+ targets in the Bombers' Baedeker, Polte gun manufacturer was rated 1 while Bergius hydrogenation plant Braunkohle (Brabag) was a primary oil target. See the information collected by the USSBS in NA RG 243 E-6 # 39 1-19. Manfred Wille, "Tod und Zerstörung durch Luftbombardements im zweiten Weltkrieg", in: "Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot", pp. 38-73. See StAM ZG 122.6 (9). *Tagebuch Trimborn*, entry of 30-1-47, for contemporary rumours that sought to account for the absence of devastating raids in 1944.

November 1944, selectively quoting from a Bomber Command target list of 1st November 1944.⁵⁰ Moreover, he constructed a causal link between target selection and the allied agreement of September 1944 on the joint occupation of post-war Germany:

"These cities [from the target list, J.A.] were situated on the territory of the future Soviet zone of occupation [...]. Harris knew of the government agreement of 12th September 1944 where the allied powers had agreed on the borders of the future zones of occupation".⁵¹

By contrast, the emphasis in allied documents on the industrial and military importance of Magdeburg was dismissed as mere rhetoric, as a "cover-up", as Hartwig claimed.⁵² In order to underline the significance of the city in the overall political design, he construed a further link, between the raid of 16th January 1945 and allied plans to bring the war to an end through air power alone. Where Groehler had argued that the raid on Berlin of 3rd February 1945 was the first implementation of this strategy, Hartwig simply exchanged the city on the river Elbe for the Reich capital, stating that Magdeburg had become the first victim of the operation 'thunderclap'.⁵³ Echoing Groehler's verdict on the Dresden raid, he claimed that Magdeburg had been destroyed for "power-political" reasons.

Local historiography thus legitimised the claims that were made by the political elites during commemorative ceremonies. In elevating the raid of 16th January 1945 from a local event to an important turning point in world history—the first aggressive act of the Cold War—historical writing also provided the municipal authorities with a powerful myth that was useful to position the city on the international stage. Mayor Werner Herzig (SED), for example, derived special authority from Magdeburg's purportedly special role in World War II in order to speak out at an international conference of so-called "martyr cities" in 1987.⁵⁴ However, for the voice of the city to be raised with confidence in international affairs, it was not enough to show that Magdeburg had been singled out as a target. Historiography also needed to demonstrate that the city had suffered exceptionally in the air war, equalling the experience of the most ravaged cities in World War II and history.

This was unproblematic for the local historiography as far as the material devastation was concerned. In his article of January 1975, Hartwig put the index of destruction for Magdeburg third among the cities of the former German Reich, "behind Dresden and

⁵⁰ Webster and Frankland consider the directive of 25-9-44, which accorded priority to oil and transport, as a turning point that ushered in "the beginning of the final air offensive". By comparison, they regard the directive of 1 Nov. 1944 to have "closely followed" the lines of its predecessor. Webster / Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive*, vol III, pp. 42-74, for the quotations: pp. 63; 73. For the wording of the November directive see *ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 177-9. It demanded that "particular emphasis" be given to targets in the Ruhr area. For the Bomber Command target list of 1 Nov. see Groehler, *Bombenkrieg*, p. 356.

⁵¹ Rudolf Hartwig, "In der Glut des Feuersturms", *Volksstimme* (17-1-75).

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Groehler, *Geschichte des Luftkriegs*, p. 457; Hartwig, "In der Glut des Feuersturms".

⁵⁴ Compare StAM Rep 41/701. "Rede des Oberbürgermeisters auf der Konferenz der Märtyrerstädte vom 27.4. bis 29.4.1987 in Madrid."

Cologne but before Berlin".⁵⁵ With regard to the human cost of the air war, however, the empirical results of historical research came into conflict with the political narrative of the *SED*. Interestingly, this owed as much to a growing intransigence on the part of the local elites as to fresh insights by empirical research. By the early 1980s, there had long existed a certain degree of incongruity between the official death toll of 16,000 casualties on 16th January 1945 and the empirically verifiable figure. Interviewees in 1950 had spoken of 2,000 to 4,000 deaths of the January raid, and Manfred Rolle, in 1950, had put the death toll at 8,223.⁵⁶ As long as these figures remained confined to archives and to the media of the associated 'bourgeois' parties, the local *SED* was prepared to tolerate the apparent inconsistency.

Conflict ensued when the parameters of the memory culture began to change in the 1980s. At a time when the discursive power of the *SED* came under challenge by an increasingly vocal opposition that found institutional support among the Christian churches,⁵⁷ the local leadership turned to the 'victim identity' of Magdeburg in order to raise the profile of the city nationally and internationally. The figure of 16,000 casualties was crucial in this effort to establish the city second to Dresden as the 'Nagasaki' of the GDR. When Hartwig challenged this central plank in 1985 on the basis of his findings, pointing out that the verifiable number of fatalities numbered only 2,680, the *SED* intervened and stopped the delivery of the official 40th anniversary publication, "Magdeburg in a Storm of Fire".⁵⁸ In spite of the historical evidence, the official casualty rate was upheld until the demise of the *SED* regime in 1989.⁵⁹ Surprisingly, perhaps, the mythical figure of 16,000 refused to go away even in unified Germany, provoking a minor controversy in 1995.⁶⁰ Characteristically, post-reunification historians played down the

⁵⁵ Rudolf Hartwig, "In der Glut des Feuersturms", *Volksstimme* (17-1-75).

⁵⁶ See chapter 7 above.

⁵⁷ For the context see Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949-1989* (Bonn: bpb, 2000), pp. 335-903; Sabrow, "Einleitung: Geschichtsdiskurs und Doktringesellschaft", in idem ed., *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs*, pp. 9-35.

⁵⁸ Rudi Hartwig, "Magdeburg verglühete im Feuersturm", in: *Volksstimme* (11-1-85), supplement, p. 2; Rudi Hartwig, "Bomben auf Frauen und Kinder. Zu den anglo-amerikanischen Luftangriffen im zweiten Weltkrieg auf Städte im Territorium des heutigen Bezirks Magdeburg", in: *Magdeburger Blätter* (1985), pp. 4-13, here: p. 7; Rudi Hartwig / Manfred Wille, *Magdeburg im Feuersturm. Ein Dokumentarbericht* (Magdeburg: Dr. Volksstimme, 1985), p. 69. Author's conversation with Prof. Manfred Wille, 21st Jan. 2005; conversation with Ms Karin Grünwald, *Kulturhistorisches Museum*, 16th Feb. 2005; letter of Rudi Hartwig to author, 29th December 2005. Compare also Groehler, *Bombenkrieg*, p. 451.

⁵⁹ See for example, StAM Rep. 41/699. "Interview des OB mit der Zeitschrift "Panorama /Kommunal" zum Thema "Die Stadt für den Frieden", anlässlich des 40. Jahrestages der Zerstörung Magdeburg".

⁶⁰ See "Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot"; "Hintergrund: 16.000 oder 2.000 – wie viele starben am 16. Januar 1945?"; "Studium des Buches der Bombenopfer. Wieviele Menschen starben am 16. Januar 45?; in: *Volksstimme* 10-1-95; 16-1-95; 27-1-95.

significance of the death toll, treading very quietly where the SED regime had produced a lot of noise before 1989.⁶¹

Exhibition as Medium, 1983 to 1995

Next to the 'documentary account', the historical exhibition became the central medium through which the subject of allied bombing re-entered historical discourse in the latter phase of the 20th century. Both cities staged public displays on the occasion of the 40th anniversary in 1983/85 and again on the fiftieth anniversary in 1993/95, each time to spectacular success.⁶² Exhibitions are a mode of representation that put material objects rather than texts at their centre, inviting the audience to 'experience' the past through its relics. "[The exhibition] wants to give the visitor the opportunity to comprehend through the visual", as a draft paper by the Municipal Museum Kassel expressed the idea in characteristic fashion in 1993.⁶³ Public displays aim to reach historical understanding through the senses just as much as through the mind. Eliciting affective responses, they invite the audience to see, feel, and imagine.⁶⁴ "Sensual perception should stand at the beginning of all learning and experience in this historical exhibition", the above mentioned paper ascertained.⁶⁵ As Ute Frevert has argued, the public display of material objects is a medium that allows the audience to engage with the past 'creatively', to respond to the exhibits in a variety of ways that cannot be anticipated or controlled by the goals and intentions of the exhibition makers.⁶⁶ In their polyvalence, they resemble photographs, and

⁶¹ To give a recent example: Maren Ballerstedt / Konstanze Buchholz, *Es regnet Feuer. Die Magdeburger Schreckensnacht am 16. Januar 1945* (Gudensberg-Gleichen: Wartberg, 2003), p. 43: "Precise figures about the death toll could never be established. The thin source base makes this difficult."

⁶² 1983: Stadt Kassel, "Die Zerstörung Kassels im Oktober 1943. Eine Dokumentation im Bürgersaal des Rathauses", 22.10.83-10.11.83 [extended until 20-11-83]; Rat der Stadt / Kulturbund / Haus der DSF, "Erinnerungen an Magdeburg – der 16. Januar 1945"; Museen der Stadt Magdeburg, "Mahn- und Erinnerungsstätte für die Zerstörung Magdeburgs", permanent exhibition. 1995: Stadtmuseum Kassel, "Leben in Ruinen. Kassel 1943 bis 1948", 22.10.1993-22.10.1994; Kulturhistorisches Museum Magdeburg, "Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot... 'Die Zerstörung Magdeburgs am 16. Januar 1945", 15.1.1995-14.5.95. Compare also the similar developments in Hamburg: Malte Thiessen, "Gedenken an 'Operation Gomorrha'. Zur Erinnerungskultur des Bombenkrieges von 1945 bis heute", in: *ZfG* 1/05, pp. 46-61, here: p. 54ff.

⁶³ "Kassel vor 50 Jahren. Leben in Ruinen. Zur Konzeption einer Ausstellung", p. 2. In: Stadtmuseum Kassel (StMK). Ausstellungen. *Leben in Ruinen. Kassel 1943-1948. Planung / Organisation [I]*. I would like to thank Dr. Alexander Link for making this material available to me.

⁶⁴ Ute Frevert, "Geschichte als Erlebnis: Wege aus der Geschichtsmüdigkeit", in: Aleida Assmann / Ute Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit. Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1999), pp. 250-54.

⁶⁵ StMK, "Kassel vor 50 Jahren", p. 2.

⁶⁶ Frevert, "Geschichte als Erlebnis", p. 252.

indeed, visual representations often form a core element in displays on contemporary history.⁶⁷

The local exhibitions of the 1980s and 1990s drew on several influences, reflecting recent shifts in the supra-local culture as well as indigenous traditions. Firstly, there was the impact of contemporary developments: Since the late 1970s, the exhibition as a medium of historical representation had experienced a spectacular revival, silencing cultural critics that had lamented a lack of interest in the national past. In 1977, the public display about "The times of the *Hohenstaufen*", staged in Stuttgart, attracted some 700,000 visitors. Four years later, half a million people travelled to Berlin in order to see material relics of the state of Prussia.⁶⁸ Second, there was an element of continuity on the local level. Municipal authorities had long used the medium to document transformations in the cityscape—the 'death' and 'rebirth' of the material environment—and to foster a sense of civic identity. In 1946/47, the post-war plans for reconstruction had been presented to the public in the form of elaborate displays; and some twenty years later, the city administrations had returned to the medium to document the successful reconstruction.⁶⁹ Finally, there was a more sinister influence as well, going back to the war-time efforts of the Nazi party to mobilise the population and to strengthen their morale in the face of strategic bombing. In early 1942, an "air raid protection" exhibition was staged in Kassel. Two years later, in March 1944, the *NSDAP* district leader for Magdeburg opened the travelling exhibition, "The terror from the air".⁷⁰ Both used material objects, and in particular air war ammunition, in much the same way as the exhibitions of the 1980s would four decades later: as symbolic illustration of the threat from the air and 'war trophy' alike.⁷¹

While a combination of factors thus predisposed the exhibition as the favoured medium for historical representations of the air war, another factor was crucial for its popular success: the curators to an unusual degree involved their core audience, the local public, in the making of the exhibitions. In appealing for source material in the local press or through informal channels, the organisers turned all contemporaries of the war into potential 'eyewitnesses', personal memories into historical documents, and everyday material objects into precious exhibits.⁷² In Kassel in 1983 and 1993, and in Magdeburg in 1995, and to a

⁶⁷ The most prominent example is the *Wehrmacht* exhibition by the Hamburg Institut für Sozialforschung. See Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung ed., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941-1944*. Ausstellungskatalog (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995).

⁶⁸ Frevert, "Geschichte als Erlebnis", p. 251.

⁶⁹ See chapter 6 above.

⁷⁰ "Der Luftterror. Eine Ausstellung in Magdeburg", in: *Magdeburgische Zeitung* (21-3-44), p. 3; Ballerstedt / Buchholz, *Es regnet Feuer*, p. 31.

⁷¹ See, for example, *Kasseler Sonntagsblatt* 64/4 (25-1-42), p. 5.

⁷² See "Unterlagen und Zeugen gesucht", HA 16-10-82; "Leben in Ruinen. Kassel '43 bis '48", HNA 24-5-93, p. 23; "Als die 'Halifax' die Weihnachtsbäume brachten...", *Volksstimme* 22-12-84; "Ausstellung zum 16.

lesser extent also in 1985, the public representation of the past was thus 'created' by a great number of local residents who had contributed their memories and relics. This was a reciprocal process: just as individuals influenced the overall make-up of the exhibition through their personal artefacts, the event in turn prompted other residents to search their attics, to write down their memories and to voice their views on the meaning of aerial warfare.

"Petting instead of Pershing": Contexts

Why this unusual degree of public interest and personal investment in the reconstruction of an event that only a decade earlier seemed to have become all but irrelevant to urban culture? An examination of the popular responses to one well-documented example from Kassel, the city-sponsored display of 1983, "The Destruction of Kassel", may help to sketch some of the personal motives and social contexts that accounted for the revival of interest in aerial warfare in the late 20th century. Although "The destruction of Kassel" showed little more than some World War II bombs, miniature models, and old photographs, the exhibition was a spectacular success, attracting close to 90,000 visitors in the course of four weeks, statistically almost one in two of the resident population.⁷³

On the basis of an examination of the visitors' book and semi-private letters to the exhibition's organiser, this section argues that the resurgence of interest in aerial warfare owed to a complex interplay of generational, cultural and political factors, making the subject relevant to different age-cohorts and political persuasions for different reasons.⁷⁴ Broadly speaking, three modes of engagement may be distinguished. The first was personal, deriving its impetus from primary experience; the second was cultural, reacting to recent shifts in the public representation of World War II; and the third was political, responding to the potential threats of the re-escalating Cold War.

On 30th October 1983, the driving school instructor, Heinz R. (born 1927), wrote a letter of thanks to Werner Dettmar, the exhibition's curator,

"The exhibition and your book [...] have left a deep impression on me—no, I wasn't just impressed but deeply moved, shaken even!"

The writer went on to provide a synopsis of his war experiences, starting with childhood memories of a "wonderful time" between 1939 and 1942. He continued by relating his

Januar in Vorbereitung: Museum sucht Zeugen des Bombenüberfalls", *Volksstimme* 17-1-1994; "Zeitzeugen gesucht", *Volksstimme* 13-1-95.

⁷³ Figure according to Dettmar, in: StAK S8 E 12. Letter of Dettmar to Adolf Sp., 29-11-1983.

⁷⁴ This section is based on some 50 letters collected in: StAK S8 E3-5. *Ausstellung* 1983.

experiences during the air raid when he lost his home, and concluded by outlining his service as a *Flak* auxiliary, labour service, *Luftwaffe* soldier, and finally, prisoner of war.⁷⁵

To people like Heinz R., the exhibition on Kassel's 'destruction' was a deeply emotional affair, actualising personal memories of events that stretched back half a lifetime. These memories could be intensely painful, as with Ms. Maria A. (born 1923), a native-born *Kasseler* now living in the GDR, who wrote in after having listened to a radio feature on the subject, "I have personally experienced the dreadful night of 22nd October 1943. The tears are welling in my eyes as I write".⁷⁶ In a similar vein, the pensioned civil servant, Erwin S., told Dettmar that he often took the book in hand, looking at the images and reading through the casualty list "with the many names of people who are still alive in [my] memory". He proceeded to relate memories that he insisted he had never talked about before, about his work at the municipal cemetery in the aftermath of the raid where he had been charged with retrieving valuables from the corpses by sawing off their body parts.⁷⁷

The renaissance of interest in the historical subject matter in Kassel was carried by members of the 'sceptical generation' of the age cohorts born around 1925, who had experienced the catastrophic raid as young mothers, flak auxiliaries, or soldiers. Reaching retirement age by the mid-1980s, they were old enough to find the spare time to revisit their past and young enough to make an active contribution to the memory culture of their day. The bulk of the eyewitness accounts, photographs and other memory artefacts were sent in by members of this generation. As much as some contributors stressed that they had been motivated by the wish to prevent future wars, their primary motivation appears to have been personal rather than political. They were driven by the desire to 'record for posterity' their personal memories, that is, to have primary experiences recognised as historical documents. This actualisation of personal memories could come without further contextualisation but could also go with a violent denunciation of the air war, as the following examples make clear.

Indeed, some residents used the public eyewitness appeal as an opportunity to engage in a full-scale attack on the emerging prioritisation, since 1979, of Holocaust memory, and more generally, on the culture of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as it had been institutionalised since the early 1960s.⁷⁸ In a letter of 22nd November 1982, the retired lieutenant Karlheinz H. spoke of the "Holocaust in Kassel", called the air raid a "war crime" and offered to pass on the 'fruits' of "his basic research".⁷⁹ Voicing a variation on

⁷⁵ StAK S8 E4, Letter H.R. to Dettmar, 30th October 1983.

⁷⁶ StAK S8 C51, Letter of Ms. Maria A. to City Council, 21-10-1983.

⁷⁷ StAK S8 E5, Letter of *Regierungsdirektor* A.D. Erwin S. to Werner Dettmar, 12-3-84.

⁷⁸ Compare Norbert Frei, "Deutsche Lernprozesse. NS-Vergangenheit und Generationenfolge seit 1945", in: *idem, 1945 und wir. Das Dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen* (Munich: Beck, 2005), pp. 23-40.

⁷⁹ StAK S8 E3. Letter of Karlheinz K. to Werner Dettmar, 22-11-82.

the theme of 'you did it too' apologetics, Curt H. sent in twenty manuscript pages about the "criminal terror raids in World War II", claiming that the raids on Dresden alone had cost 300,000 lives.⁸⁰ A third writer accused the exhibition of a leftist bias, asserting that the Western allies had been motivated by the desire to "annihilate the German people" long before the onset of World War II. Construing a Babylonian captivity of a *Volk* "betrayed" and "ridiculed" by the "enemy re-education" and "plagiarising money historians", he posed as defender of a "tortured people" against "bootlickers" and "traitors".⁸¹ Another indignantly rejected any suggestion of a historical parallel between the November pogrom of 1938 and the air raid on Kassel, giving free rein to his anti-Semitic sentiments, "But for the Jews 'shalom' is totally inappropriate. Impudently they still build more settlements, despite all agreements."⁸²

These voices, too, came from members of the war generation. While they made up a rather small minority of the letters preserved in the city archive, it must remain an open question just how widespread such views really were. There are, however, a number of indications which suggest that the conceptualisation of the air raid as a (war) crime was not a primary concern for the majority of local residents even if they shared the sentiment. Ms. Annemarie A., for example, agreed that the air raid was appropriately labelled "insane mass murder", but wrote to commend Dettmar on his efforts "to document a sad piece of the history of our hometown" and to share primary memories of survival amidst mass death.⁸³ Furthermore, all the above examples carried a clear defensive undertone: however widespread their revisionist views may have been among the population of Kassel, the writers felt marginalised. Curt H. complained that for the past twenty years he had tried in vain to place "enlightening articles" in the newspapers, while M.W. sent off his anti-Semitic diatribe in response to an article by the local deacon on the causal link between anti-Semitism and urban destruction. Even Karlheinz K.'s explicit use of the term 'Holocaust' may be read as an indication of the extent to which the genocide of European Jewry had already been established as a central mnemonic reference point by the early 1980s. Indirectly, Curt H. also acknowledged this shift when in 1979 he responded to tabloid coverage of the TV series, "Holocaust", with the rhetorical question, "Why does nobody produce movies that publicly denounce the dismal crimes of Germany's wartime enemies [...]?"⁸⁴

⁸⁰ StAK S8 E3. Letter of Curt H. to Werner Dettmar, 20-10-82; ibid. "Anlage zum Brief".

⁸¹ StAK S8 E5. Letter of Toni W. to Werner Dettmar, 24-10-83.

⁸² StAK S8 E3. Letter of M. W. to Werner Dettmar, 23-10-83.

⁸³ StAK S8 E3. Letter of Annemarie A. to Werner Dettmar, 17-10-82.

⁸⁴ StAK S8 E3. Letter Curt H. to Dettmar 20-10-82, p. 19. "Bezugnahme auf den Artikel der BILD-Zeitung v. 24.1.1979".

Through their active involvement, members of the 'sceptical generation' revisited the air raid as a historical event that had left a deep impact on their biographies during a formative phase of their lives. To some extent, the revisionists focused on the past as well, trying to renegotiate the balance sheet between German crimes and alleged crimes against Germans in World War II. Yet, the spectacular success of the exhibition, "The Destruction of Kassel", cannot solely be explained with reference to generational factors. It struck a chord because many residents felt that the subject matter of 'apocalyptic destruction' was of relevance to their present, regardless of personal involvement in the historical event.

Several writers commented on the large number of adolescents attending the exhibition, while teachers arranged guided tours for their pupils. To people concerned about the dangers of atomic deterrence, the destruction of Kassel in World War II featured above all as a warning to the present. Among them were members of the experience generation, as for example, Ms. Ursel Martin (born 1927), who handed over Dettmar's book to the American delegation at the Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1983.⁸⁵ On the whole, however, the peace movement was a youth movement, which drew its supporters from a generation that had been socialised in the post-war world.⁸⁶

In a letter, a representative of the "Kasseler Citizens for Peace" (*Kasseler Bürgerinnen und Bürger für den Frieden*) commended Dettmar on the exhibition and proceeded to draw a link between the past and the present,

"[The exhibition] has demonstrated the horror of the past destruction but has also raised the question: what has happened since then [...] in order to prepare another—in all likelihood final—war? [...] we are of the opinion that the look back must open our eyes for the contemporary dangers of war".

He went on to suggest that Dettmar participate in a public discussion about the present relevance of past destruction.⁸⁷ A present-centred view on the dangers of nuclear destruction made up the decisive political context for the reception of the exhibition in the 1980s. The visitors' book was filled with slogans from the peace movement, such as, "Petting instead of Pershing", "waffles instead of weapons", or "sexual intercourse instead of Federal army [*Geschlechtsverkehr statt Bundeswehr*]. Here, (nuclear) war in itself was a crime, regardless of its goals and intentions. Espousing a present-centred view of the past, the peace movement was interested in the causes and consequences of strategic bombing only insofar as they helped to further their goals of (nuclear) disarmament in the present.

⁸⁵ For the text of the covering letter, signed by mayor Hans Eichel, see StAK S8 E12, "To the delegation of the United States of America at the Geneva Disarmament Conference".

⁸⁶ For the different groups that made up the organised peace movement in Kassel see: AG Kasseler Friedenswochen ed., *3. Kasseler Friedenswochen. Vom 6. bis zum 27. November 1982. Programmzeitung der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kasseler Friedenswochen* (1982), p. 8.

⁸⁷ StAK S8 E5. Letter of Ulrich Schedensack, "Kasseler Bürgerinnen und Bürger für den Frieden", to Dettmar, 23-11-83.

"Nothing is more important to us than peace", the manual of the "Third Kassel Peace Weeks", stated in a problematic formulation that set 'peace' as a moral absolute.⁸⁸

It appears that similar generational factors were at work in Magdeburg although the dearth of documentary evidence makes empirically sound conclusions difficult.⁷⁶ residents responded to an appeal in the local *SED* daily, *Volksstimme*, in December 1984 to write down their "memories and experiences" of the air raid of 16th January 1945.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, these letters have not been preserved. As in Kassel, a number of contemporaries of the war used the media coverage to send in personal memory artefacts to the archive, most notably Lucien Ranson, a Belgian painter who had experienced the air raid of 16th January 1945 as a forced labourer.⁹⁰ The exhibitions' organisers, however, did not respond to suggestions 'from below' to quite the same extent as in Kassel. Ranson's memories, for example, did not gain public currency until ten years later, when he published a German translation with a local publishing house.⁹¹

Themes

If one changes the analytical focus from the level of reception to a comparison of contents, then different emphases within broadly similar modes of representation are thrown into sharp relief. The Kassel exhibition of 1983 revolved around two major themes, loss and war. The first was the irretrievable loss of human life and the built-up environment as a consequence of aerial bombing. The second theme was aerial warfare as a military confrontation, a stand-off between youthful defenders and equally youthful bomber crews. By contrast, the two exhibitions that were organised in Magdeburg on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the city's destruction revolved around a double narrative of cause and effect and 'destruction as opportunity'. The two exhibitions were, however, not identical in their point of view, illustrating the extent to which the political culture of the late GDR was characterised by a greater degree of diversity. The first, "Memories of Magdeburg", had been planned by amateur historians organised in the "Section Municipal History" of the Culture League (*Kulturbund*), while the second, a permanent exhibition housed in the ruin of the *Johanniskirche*, was conceived and put together by the professionals of the municipal museum.⁹² In stressing the 'criminal' nature of the raid, the permanent exhibition of the professional curators remained wedded to the political narrative of the 1950s and

⁸⁸ AG Kasseler Friedenswochen ed., *3. Kasseler Friedenswochen*, p. 2.

⁸⁹ See "Leser schreiben zum 16. Januar", *Volksstimme* 15-1-85, p. 8.

⁹⁰ StAM Rep. 41 / 481. Lucien Ranson to Mayor, 7-11-84.

⁹¹ Lucien Ranson, *Vom Zwangsarbeiter zum Freund* (Magdeburg: Scriptum, 1994).

⁹² I owe this information to Ms. Karin Grünwald, *Kulturhistorisches Museum*, Magdeburg. I would like to thank her for making available to me uncatalogued material of Ordner Johanniskirche.

1960s. By comparison, the exhibition by the amateur historians put the air raid in the context of the "Imperialist war policy of German fascism". With the air raid, the organisers argued, violence had finally 'returned' to its place of origin.⁹³

Kassel

The characteristic features of the Kassel exhibition are best illustrated by its core exhibits. Upon entering the exhibition room, the visitor looked at a large-size photograph of two bombed-out survivors of the air raid, which was fixed to a partition wall. Taken by a German photographer in the aftermath of the October raid, the picture derived from an album deposited in the Imperial War Museum in London, and was (re-)introduced into the local memory culture by Dettmar after one of his archival research trips (fig. 18).⁹⁴

The camera focuses on two unknown female figures, both sitting on suitcases. The woman to the left looks straight at the photographer, and thus at the observer, clutching a gas mask in her left hand and a bundle of blankets under her arm. Her facial expression is one of distress and exhaustion. Next to her sits another woman, burying her head in her hands. In the background, other air raid victims are visible against a backdrop of buildings covered in smoke. Reproduced on both the official invitation cards and the dust jacket of the accompanying publication, the motif became the defining icon of Kassel's 'destruction' in the 1980s. In displacing Walter Thieme's 1946/7 panorama view of the destroyed city (which was reproduced on the same partition in smaller size), the image reflected a shift in the visual representation of the air war from the material to the human costs. It invited positive identification with the war generation as 'survivors' of an apocalyptic event that had caused wounds that "even today, after forty years, had not healed", as the introductory text on the same partition informed the audience.⁹⁵

While the image asked the local audience to empathise with the victims of the bombing of 22nd October 1943—that is, with themselves and/or their mothers, fathers, grandparents as 'survivors' and 'witnesses'—the image was unspecific enough in its referential frame (the two women were never identified) to extend its meaning both in space and time. "When British bombers destroyed Kassel on 22nd October 1943, 50,000 Britons had already lost their lives in German air raids and over 50,000 Germans in British raids", the text explained. Suffering had been a universal characteristic of World War II, and so it would be of future wars, the narrative went on to suggest. "The destruction" of Kassel had been

⁹³ KHM *Ordner Johanniskirche*, "Konzeption zur Ausstellung 'Erinnerungen an Magdeburg – der 16. Januar 1945'".

⁹⁴ IWM, London, GSA 387. Air Raid Damage in Germany 1943. RAF raids on Kassel, July & October 1943. HU 43974.

⁹⁵ For the text see StAK S8 E9 [Textvorlagen].

the consequence of an air raid with "conventional weapons", the text pointed out, adding that "meanwhile the technical advances [...] have led to an unimaginable rise in the capacity for destruction". In opening up the referential space of nuclear apocalypse, the text linked the past to the present.⁹⁶

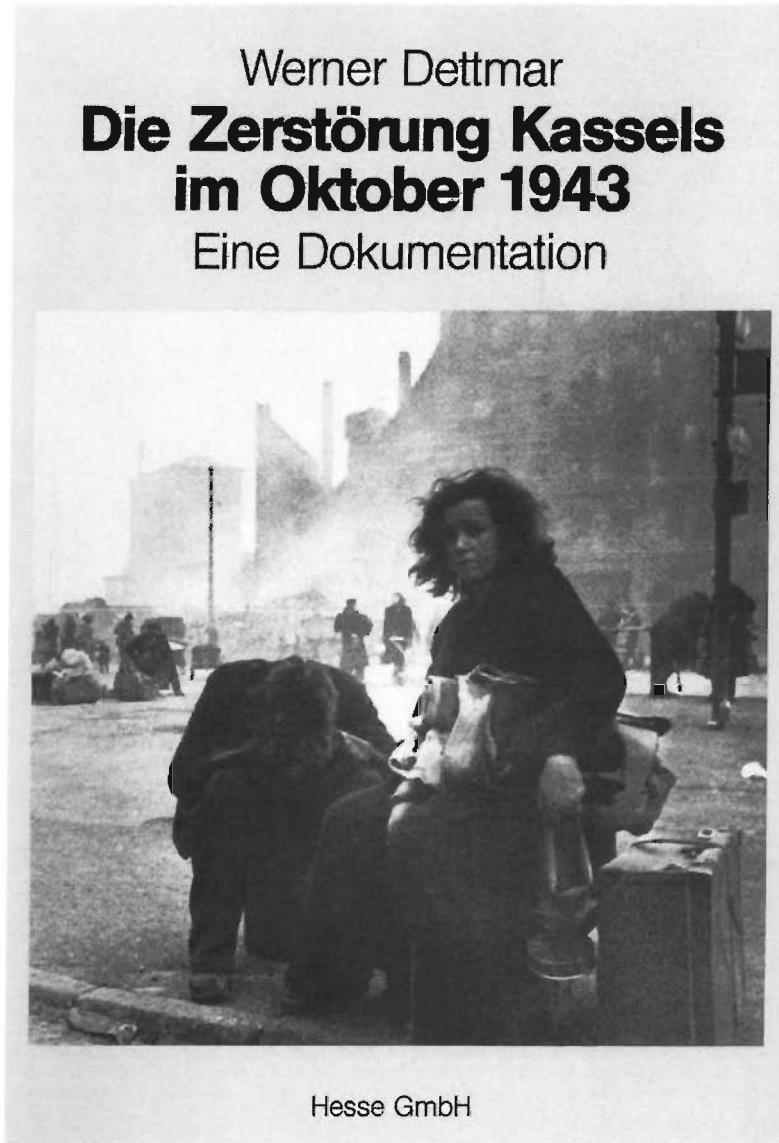


FIGURE 18. An image of dishevelled survivors after the air raid of 22nd October 1943, reproduced on the cover of W. Dettmar, *Die Zerstörung Kassels* (1983).

While the exhibition emphasised death and scarred survival as a consequence of bombing, it did not neglect the material consequences, depicting the destruction through a host of photographs as well as an architectural model of the devastated cityscape.⁹⁷ Images of the post-war reconstruction, however, were conspicuously absent. This was not a triumphal narrative of successful overcoming but rather a melancholic view of past beauty irretrievably lost. If the exhibition was characterised by its emphasis on loss, it also put

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ See StAK Bildarchiv, *Ausstellung* 1983.

great stress on the operative planning and the technical aspect of urban destruction, showcasing original bombs as used by RAF Bomber Command in World War II, and presenting miniature models of British heavy bombers, German fighter air craft and flak positions. The bombing war, the exhibition suggested, was also a military confrontation, in which youthful defenders faced youthful bomber crews. Rather than casting blame (or looking for responsibilities), the visual and textual narrative stressed the common war experience of German and British crews and flak auxiliaries, even introducing the crew of a British aircraft that had participated in the raid. The central exhibit of this technical narrative was a glass cabinet containing one incendiary bomb and 400,000 matches as symbolic visualisation of the number of incendiary bombs dropped on Kassel.

Magdeburg

While the Kassel exhibition offered a detailed description of the operational procedures as an explanation for the city's destruction, both Magdeburg exhibitions showed less concern for the technical detail but presented a coherent meta-narrative. In contrast to "The Destruction of Kassel", they also accorded broad space to the reconstruction, affirmatively emphasising "the great achievements of the Magdeburg workers under the leadership of the workers' party in rebuilding Magdeburg as a blossoming socialist city", as the draft paper of "Memories of Magdeburg" put it.⁹⁸

While the draft paper of the amateur exhibition by the "Section Municipal History" insisted that the destruction had been "pointless", it showed a keen awareness of cause and effect, conceptualising the raid as "the consequence of the Imperialist war policy of German Fascism".⁹⁹ This was reflected in the selection and arrangement of the exhibits: according to the conception, the first exhibition room showed photos and documents of the effects of German air raids on "cities destroyed by German fascism, as for example Warsaw, Leningrad, Rotterdam, Coventry".¹⁰⁰ In addition, the room emphasised the importance of Magdeburg as an armaments centre, giving a survey of the local war industries.

By contrast, the professional exhibition in the ruins of the *Johanniskirche* continued to speak of the "Anglo-American air terror" and explicitly denounced the attack of 16th January 1945 as a "terror measure". It construed a crude opposition between "German fascism", "monopoly industries" and the "air terror" on one hand and the "Red army" and

⁹⁸ KHM *Ordner Johanniskirche*, "Konzeption zur Ausstellung 'Erinnerungen an Magdeburg – der 16. Januar 1945'".

⁹⁹ KHM *Ordner Johanniskirche*, "Konzeption", p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

"the people" on the other. As the textual commentary put it, "This toll of lives that the people had to pay to the Fascists was increased by the victims of the air war".¹⁰¹ Whereas "Memories of Magdeburg" focused on World War II and its aftermath, the permanent exhibition drew a link between the city's first destruction in the Thirty Years War and the second destruction in World War II, interpreting the town's ruptured history as evidence of the "inhumane nature of the exploiter societies", to which the post-1945 "socialist reconstruction" was contrasted.¹⁰²

Professionalisation and Differentiation: The 1990s

The exhibitions of the 1980s established a precedent for the historical representation of the air war in the 1990s. In both cities, costly exhibitions formed the core around which an increasingly diverse historiographical discourse—lecture series, film screenings, discussion evenings, student competitions—revolved.¹⁰³ On the 50th anniversary of the raid of 22nd October, the Kassel City Museum opened an exhibition called "Life in Ruins, Kassel 1943-1948", which was to run for one year and consisted of a permanent exhibition plus complementing special exhibitions. Fifteen months later, the *Kulturhistorisches Museum* Magdeburg embarked on a similar venture, opening the doors to "When the heavens turned crimson red...", which was scheduled to run until May but was later extended until July due to public demand.

In both cities, there were considerable continuities between the 40th anniversary and the 50th anniversary exhibitions despite the socio-political rupture of 1989. This owed in part to the medium itself. Core exhibits of the 1980s were again accorded a prominent place in the 1990s. The 1993 Kassel exhibition, for example, reserved an entire room for the model of the 'destroyed city', which had already played a prominent role in 1983. The room was decorated in order to strike a balance between "historical documentation [...] and the solemn atmosphere of a memorial", as the conception described it.¹⁰⁴ In Magdeburg, as well, central exhibits of the permanent exhibition of the 1980s, as for example the model of the destroyed cityscape and the World War II bombs, were again used in 1995.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, an element of continuity rested also with the protagonists of historical research.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., "Texte: Ausstellung Johanniskirche".

¹⁰² Ibid., "Konzeption", p. 1.

¹⁰³ Compare Kulturamt Kassel ed., *50. Jahrestag der Zerstörung Kassels am 22. Oktober 1943. Veranstaltungsübersicht* [Kassel, 1993]; Landeshauptstadt Magdeburg / Büro für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit und Protokoll ed., *Magdeburg 16. Januar 1945 / 16. Januar 1995. Programm* [Magdeburg, 1995].

¹⁰⁴ StMK. *Ausstellungen. Leben in Ruinen. Kassel 1943-48. Planung, Organisation [I].* "Anmerkungen zu Aufbau und Gestaltung der Ausstellung", p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ KHM Ordner Johanniskirche. "Grundriß Gruft St. Johannis".

In Kassel, Werner Dettmar contributed the article on the 'bombing war' in the exhibition catalogue to 'Life in Ruins'.¹⁰⁶ Despite the demise of the GDR, this was also the case in Magdeburg where Manfred Wille, co-author of the 1985 documentary account by Rudi Hartwig and historian at the teacher training college, wrote an essay on the air war for the exhibition catalogue.¹⁰⁷

At the same time, there were important changes: firstly, increased professionalism; second, a turn towards a social historical approach; and finally, a diversification of opinions and responses. With the approach of the 50th anniversary celebrations, the local political and cultural elites took the historical representation of the events firmly in their hands. In Kassel, the town councillor for culture, Ms. Schleier, convened a committee made up of representatives from the Bureau of Culture, the City Museum, various archives, Werner Dettmar and others in order to coordinate the various projects well in advance.¹⁰⁸ A similar step was taken in Magdeburg.¹⁰⁹ Whereas the exhibitions of the 1980s had derived in large measure from the efforts of amateurs, the historical exhibitions of the 1990s were conceived and implemented by the professionals of the municipal museums. This did not just result in improved standards of representation, including the publication of catalogues, but also provided the financial resources for further research. Thus, the material compiled by the USSBS in the summer of 1945 was made available to the local public of Magdeburg through a research trip by the director of the Magdeburg Museum to the National Archives in Washington D.C.

Professionalisation also entailed an increasing convergence between academic scholarship and local history. In Kassel, Dettmar's emphasis on the operational planning of the raid gave way to a social historical approach that sought to document aspects of the everyday life in the wake of catastrophe. In accordance with shifting research paradigms in scholarly history, the time period under investigation changed as well: the rubble years of 1943 to 1948 rather than a single day came into focus.¹¹⁰ Although the conception stressed emphatic identification with the "pain" and "suffering" of the war generation as one goal, the cooperation with specialists from Kassel University ensured that the representation of the urban war society no longer remained congruent with the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*. Reflecting the recent empirical turn in the scholarly research on Nazi extermination

¹⁰⁶ Werner Dettmar, "Kassel im Luftkrieg", in: *Leben in Ruinen*, p. 11-22.

¹⁰⁷ Manfred Wille, "Tod und Zerstörung durch Luftbombardements im zweiten Weltkrieg", in: "Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot", pp. 38-73.

¹⁰⁸ Compare the minutes in: Stadtmuseum Kassel, *Ausstellung 'Leben in Ruinen'*. See also StAK A.4. 415 No. 357/1. 50. Jahrestage.

¹⁰⁹ StAM Rep. 18/4. *Stadtverordnetenbeschlüsse*. "Sitzung des Komitees zur Vorbereitung der Gedenkfeierlichkeiten der Zerstörung Magdeburgs am 12.9.94".

¹¹⁰ See Martin Broszat, Klaus-Dietmar Henke and Hans Wollner eds., *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform: Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 3rd ed., 1990).

politics, the exhibition catalogue devoted a separate chapter to the practice of forced labour in Kassel, while the exhibition documented extensively the spheres of local consent and coercion during the Third Reich.¹¹¹

In Magdeburg, too, the exhibition of 1995 adopted the perspective of the 'everyday', claiming "for the first time to place the destruction of Magdeburg in a larger historical context".¹¹² Here, the meta-historical props of the GDR historiography were quietly abandoned while individual elements of this narrative remained. In the preface, the Social Democratic mayor, Polte, mentioned the British target list of November 1944, without, however, claiming any longer that this date marked a decisive turning point in the strategic air offensive. In comparison to Kassel, the representation of hitherto marginalised groups remained underdeveloped. The exploitation of forced labour, for example, was documented with a few exhibits, the main function of which appears to have been to absolve 'ordinary' *Magdeburger* from any blame. In an echo of the socialist narrative of international solidarity, the exhibition catalogue stressed that Magdeburg workers helped "their foreign colleagues" by secretly passing on food to them.¹¹³

It was indicative of changes in the political culture of the 1990s that the traditional historical representations of the air raid no longer went unchallenged. In Kassel, Werner Dettmar's contribution to the exhibition catalogue, in which he sought to trace the development of aerial warfare between 1918 and 1945, was subjected to harsh criticism in an article in the alternative city magazine, *Stattzeitung*. The author, Peter Adamksi, argued that Dettmar—unwittingly or not—contributed to a German myth of victimhood by downplaying the *Luftwaffe* raids of 1939 to 1941 and neglecting the broader historical context.¹¹⁴ In another intervention, Esther Hass, "Museum educationalist for the History of the Jews in Kassel",¹¹⁵ stressed the significance of the date of 1933, arguing that the history of destruction needed to be written with that date in mind.¹¹⁶ In a similar way, critical voices in Magdeburg contended that the exhibition had failed to live up to the self-professed goal of documenting the ultimate causes of the destruction. Ironically, those criticisms came from the successor organisation of the *SED*, the Party of Democratic Socialism, which claimed a critical tradition for itself without reflecting on the political

¹¹¹ See *Leben in Ruinen*, pp. 57-88. On the 'empirical turn' in academic scholarship on Nazism since the mid-1980s see Ulrich Herbert, "Vernichtungspolitik. Neue Antworten und Fragen zur Geschichte des 'Holocaust'", in: idem ed., *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik. Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1998), pp. 9-66, here: pp. 19ff. Compare also the same author's pioneering study on forced labour, Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter. Politik und Praxis des "Ausländer-Einsatzes" in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches* (Bonn / Berlin: Dietz, 1985; 31999).

¹¹² "Dann färbte sich...", p. 5.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 197.

¹¹⁴ Peter Adamski, "Anmerkungen zum Sieg im Luftkrieg", *Stattzeitung* (Nov. 1993), p. 2.

¹¹⁵ Museumsprädagogin für die Geschichte der Juden in Kassel

¹¹⁶ Esther Hass, "Die Zerstörung begann 1933", *Hessische Allgemeine*, 22-10-93.

usage of the subject in the GDR.¹¹⁷ To be sure, these critical voices remained a minority, but they were indicative of the extent to which some residents were no longer prepared to treat the destruction of the hometown in isolation from the larger context of Germany's genocidal conduct in World War II.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

By the early 1980s, the ossified memory of allied bombing had been infused with a new dynamic that owed to a complex interplay of generational, cultural and political factors. Against the backdrop of the NATO twin-track decision of December 1979, the 'sceptical' generation revisited a formative experience of their adolescence and made available their memories of urban destruction as 'authentic' memory artefacts to a receptive public in fear of atomic annihilation. To some contemporaries of World War II, the revival of interest in aerial warfare also accorded an opportunity to voice their resentment and to preserve 'their' pasts against shifts in the broader memory culture, which, since the late 1970s, had started to confront the history of Nazism in the locality and to prioritise the memory of the Holocaust.

With the renaissance of the 1980s, the relationship between different vectors of memory changed as well. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s, history had served collective memory, in the following decades, history attained a degree of autonomy in the memory culture. Historical writing in the 1980s and 1990s no longer followed a 'monumental' approach that modified the historical evidence to accommodate present-centred usable pasts. Instead, the historiography of the 1980s and 1990s tended to be 'antiquarian' in nature, collecting documents and letting the source material 'speak for itself'. More often than not, however, such an approach resulted in the subcutaneous perpetuation of conventional narratives that homogenised urban war society and universalised victimhood.

¹¹⁷ F. Berfelde, "'Dann färbte sich der Himmel blutrot...' Fragen nach einem Ausstellungsbesuch", *PDS-Journal* 20-1-95.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Klaus Naumann, *Der Krieg als Text. Das Jahr 1945 im kulturellen Gedächtnis der Presse* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998).

Conclusion

This study has broken down the urban memory culture into three discursive fields or 'vectors' of memory. While the differentiation between the themes of death, destruction, and history provides a model for situating different responses to the human and material impact of indiscriminate bombing within their respective narrative traditions, it is important to remember that, in practice, the various discourses frequently overlapped. In the poem analysed in the introduction, for example, the lyrical speaker employs the term 'death' both descriptively in order to relate the act of dying and metaphorically in order to convey the destruction of a place of belonging. Likewise, the bishop of *Kurhesse-Waldeck*, in an address held on 22nd October 1951, commemorated the "Kassel victims of the bombing" but emphasised that mourning extended to the "end" of "our city" as well. In the same speech, the bishop also referred to the people who had first-hand experiences of the "dreadful night" and were compelled "over and over to tell about the most dreadful [experiences] of all the horrors" that they had gone through.¹ By way of conclusion, this section pulls together the various commemorative threads in order to sketch the evolution of the broader memory culture in the period of the mid-1940s to the mid-1990s. After that, some remarks will be offered about continuity and change in contemporary discussions about the 'bombing war'.

Experience and Memory

Indiscriminate area raids as carried out by the RAF against Kassel on 22nd October 1943 and against Magdeburg on 16th January 1945 confronted the resident populations with death and destruction on a scale that was without precedent in living memory. Catastrophic rupture was, however, not experienced by ahistorical "civilians" within a socio-political vacuum but by members of a brutalised society whose hegemonic voice was Nazism, the very force that had been responsible for the unleashing of a world-conflagration in the first place.² Although individual responses to the bombing varied considerably, depending on religious and political dispositions, the place of the individual within the Nazi racial hierarchy and a set of circumstantial factors, there was a tendency to frame the catastrophe

¹ LKA Kassel. SB Wüstemann No 22. *Ansprache zum 22. Oktober 1951*.

² See Dietmar Süß's critique of Jörg Friedrich's use of the term "civilian" (*das Zivil*) in: Dietmar Süß, "Massaker und Mongolensturm". Anmerkungen zu Jörg Friedrichs umstrittenem Buch *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940-1945*", *Hist. Jahrbuch* 124 (2004), pp. 521-543, here: p. 525, footnote 17.

in 'traditional languages', that is, in the interpretive categories and with the cultural repertoire that was available to German city dwellers of the mid-twentieth century.

Wherever possible, the dead were retrieved from the rubble, identified, and buried, while their graves—real and imagined—were adorned with symbolic offerings and their date of death commemorated. Meanwhile, the catastrophic transformation of the built-up environment was conceptualised in terms of the place of residence as a 'hometown', that is, a place of belonging. Finally, attempts were made to translate primary experiences into narratives, to tell stories about what had happened and why. While all of these coping strategies fed on well-established traditions—the Christian cult of the dead, *Heimat* discourse, local historiography—their wartime enunciation occurred within the context of a culture that was permeated with the idiom, ideas, and practices of Nazism.

In public commemorations, the dead were collectively identified as victims of a 'Jewish' crime, while their obituaries and graves bore the insignia of a militarised racial community. Local propagandists both denounced the destruction of *Heimat* as a crime against German culture and celebrated it as proof of the resilience of the 'home front'. Meanwhile, city planners were busy to exploit the material impact of aerial warfare as an unprecedented 'opportunity' for re-ordering the historic city space. Finally, state and party officials seized on the legal and ethical problems of indiscriminate bombing in order to present World War II as an eschatological struggle of annihilation between a 'chivalrous' Aryan race and its 'criminal' antagonist, 'the Jew'. At the same time, initiatives were undertaken to create, collect and preserve historical documents that told a 'heroic' tale of triumph over adversity.

Although Nazism enjoyed hegemonic status in the public articulation of the meaning of death and destruction throughout the duration of the war, the double conceptualisation of allied bombing as a criminal "terror raid" and a supreme "test of resilience" did not go unchallenged. The Christian churches embraced an interpretation that put the notion of "affliction" at the centre of their attempts to explain what had happened. On this view, local catastrophe was a punishment by a wrathful God for sins on the part of the we-group. Focusing on the nexus between cause and effect, such an interpretation carried critical potential but served primarily to shore-up the idea of an all-powerful and ultimately benevolent higher being against the problem of theodicy. Meanwhile, a semi-public undercurrent or counter-narrative prioritised the catastrophic impact over questions of causation. This perspective 'from below' was captured in the term "night of horror", which conveyed a horrifying experience from which there was no escape, without making any references to agency.

In their endeavours to overcome the legacy of the air war, the post-war agents of public memory were thus not only faced with vast-scale material and social devastation but also with a plethora of circulating stories, appellations, and interpretations. In other words, the search for 'useable' pasts took place within the context of a *milieu de mémoire* that was saturated with personal memory traces, popular legends, and the fragments of Nazi propaganda. In consequence, the post-war protagonists of public memory were not free to 'construct' any narrative they saw fit but were compelled to address a set of recurring questions about the reasons for the catastrophe, its meaning, and the lessons that could be derived for the present. Moreover, the range of possible answers was not only limited by audience expectation and present expediency but also by the boundaries and traditions of the discursive fields in which they were given. A commemorative speech that addressed a mourning congregation about the loss of loved ones belonged to a different genre from a historical inquiry that sought to uncover the reasons for the massive loss of life. Likewise, a lecture by a city planner on the reconstruction drew on different narrative traditions than a lyrical poem that mourned the loss of the 'hometown'.

Cycles of Memory

In a temporal perspective, two cycles of memory may be distinguished, which roughly corresponded to broader political, socio-cultural and generational shifts in both German societies. Cycle one extended from the early 1950s to the late 1960s; cycle two stretched from the 1970s to the 1990s. While cycle one witnessed the institutionalisation of a set of commemorative practices that revolved, first and foremost, around the commemoration of mass death, cycle two was characterised by a greater emphasis on the historical reconstruction of events. Although the developments in Kassel and Magdeburg followed a broadly similar trajectory, there were also important differences. In Kassel, by the end of the war, the air raid of 22nd October 1943 had already attained the status of a collective memory place, whereas in Magdeburg, the emergence of the air raid of 16th January 1945 as a *lieu de mémoire* owed to a larger degree to the politics of memory of the post-war civil administration, which singled out the event in order to draw an analogy between World War II and the city's infamous destruction in the Thirty Years' War. Next to differences in timing and local tradition, there was the impact of the Cold War. With the escalation of international relations in 1948/49, the carriers of public discourse in Magdeburg sought to tap local memory in order to mobilise the resident population in the 'struggle for peace', whereas their counterparts in Kassel aimed at a 'quiet remembrance' in which questions of historic causation were subordinated to a politics of pacification.

In the public memory culture of the 1950s and 1960s, there were two main protagonists: on the one hand, the local elites, and on the other, a broad section of local society that comprised of people who had suffered emotional and / or material injury in the air war, in particular the bereaved and the evacuees. In Kassel, this second group was crucial in establishing an annual commemorative tradition that formed the backbone of public memory. Through their organisational voice of the League of Air Raid Victims, the bereaved and evacuees pressurized the reluctant elites of church and state into commemorating the return of 22nd October on an annual basis. Whereas in Kassel, the institutionalisation of the memory place was the result of pressure 'from below', in Magdeburg, annual commemorations were introduced 'from above' in response to the emergence of 'Dresden' as a national memory place in the GDR.

In both cities, the protagonists of public discourse identified the casualties of aerial warfare, and by extension, the local community at large, as victims of forces beyond their control rather than as an integral part of a perpetrator society. Although commemorative practices in both cities also drew on older traditions—which were of Christian, Socialist, and at times, also of Nazi origin—they reflected heavily the political and ideological battle lines of the Cold War. In Kassel, the political and religious elites aimed at semantic pacification through the de-contextualisation, de-politicisation, and Re-Christianising of commemoration. In Magdeburg, by contrast, the *SED*-led elites re-contextualised and re-politicised public memory in order mobilise the local population for a politics of hatred against Western 'imperialism'. Whereas in Kassel, all the dead of the air war—be they, in the Nazi terminology of the Third Reich, 'racial comrades' or 'racial aliens'—were homogenised under the category of 'our dead', in Magdeburg, the casualties were depicted both as victims of a crime and as (Socialist) sacrificers.

While public remembrance of the dead constituted a vector of memory in which local politicians and clerics sought to endow premature violent death with meaning and to console the bereaved, the discourse on the material legacy of the air war revolved around a different set of issues, involving a slightly different set of protagonists. Here, memories of the air war and the pre-war cityscape informed the debate on the progress and result of the post-war reconstruction, which affected the resident and evacuee populations in equal measure. Positing a zero hour, city-planning experts and local politicians argued that the impact of the bombing on the urban environment must be considered less of a catastrophe than a unique 'opportunity' to rebuild the 'hometown' in a modern and functional way—"more beautiful than ever", as a popular phrase in Magdeburg expressed it. Although the progressive rhetoric of the Socialist planning elites in Magdeburg and of the Social-Democratic elites in Kassel met with little popular opposition, sections of the population

turned to representations of the pre-war city as a place of longing. This kind of 'reflective'—rather than 'restorative'—nostalgia was particularly pronounced in Kassel, where a group of middle-class intellectuals, some of whom had had strong affiliations with Nazism prior to 1945, drew on turn-of-the-century notions of *Alt-Kassel* in order to imagine the pre-war city as a place of beauty, harmony, and innocence. In Magdeburg, by comparison, the notion of *Alt-Magdeburg*, which had been of marginal importance in pre-war discourse, did not gain wider currency until the 1960s when the demolition of several inner-city churches provoked opposition from sections of the old Protestant middle-classes.

In comparison to the commemoration of the dead and the debate on the reconstruction, the historical recreation of the past played a subservient role in public memory throughout the period. The local historiography was not produced by specialists but by journalists who manipulated and sanitised their sources in order to produce narratives that fitted in with the broader mnemonic parameters of their environment. Eyewitness accounts that spoke of overpowering and suffering, but also of perseverance in the face of adversity, were used in order to construct a collective experience of a homogenous community victimized by forces beyond its control. In short, the local historiography in the period did not function as a critical corrective to collective memory but in order to stabilise a narrative that stressed collective victimhood.

Involving—through personal experience and personal loss—broad sections of urban society, the air war occupied an important place in the broader discourse on the recent past throughout the 1950s, and to a lesser degree, in the 1960s. As *lieu de mémoire*, bombing did not only play a role east of the Iron Curtain, as a popular thesis would have it,³ but also, locally, in Western Germany. In Kassel, where 10,000 people attended the central commemorative ceremony on the 10th anniversary in 1953, the memory place of 22nd October rivalled the Day of National Mourning in importance, surpassing any commemorations that were held in remembrance of the victims of Nazism. In Magdeburg, attendance at the commemorations was lower, especially when considered against the backdrop of mass mobilisation on other occasions. But the eagerness with which the local political elites sought both to tap memories of the bombing, and, at the same time, to circumscribe gestures of mourning, attests to the importance that the memory place held for many *Magdeburgers* as well.

By the mid-1960s, the first cycle of memory was coming to an end. Although a core set of ritual practices continued to be performed annually, the much pro-claimed "end of the post-war period" turned memories of urban destruction into a foil against which to measure

³ Klaus Naumann, "Leerstelle Luftkrieg. Einwurf zu einer verqueren Debatte", in: *Mittelweg* 36 2/98, pp. 12-15; Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories. The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: UCP, 2001), p. 5.

the achievements of the present, while the emergence of 'Auschwitz' as a symbol of Nazi criminality was starting to re-centre attention from German victims to the victims of the Nazis. In both cities, public memory of the air war reached a low point in the 1970s. The following decade, however, ushered in a renaissance of local memory cultures that stretched until the 50th anniversary commemorations of the mid-1990s. This second cycle of memory owed to a combination of political, cultural and generational factors that, in different ways, had repercussions on all three vectors of memory.

Within the context of rising anxiety over the possibility of an all-out atomic war, the commemoration of indiscriminate mass death in aerial warfare attained a new relevance for many contemporaries in the 1980s. In Magdeburg, the local *SED* responded to the NATO twin-track decision of December 1979 by reinventing the *lieu de mémoire* as a 'fighting day' of organised mass protest, which involved an unprecedented number of local residents in the anniversary commemorations of 1980 and 1985. In Kassel, the pacifist potential of the memory place of 22nd October was rediscovered by the peace movement, which cast the events of 1943 as a 'prelude' to the total annihilation facing the present. In this, the peace movement was supported by the Social Democratic city administration, whereas the local Church leadership was more cautious about the merging of memory and protest.

Although the resituating of World War II bombing within the context of the second Cold War initially reaffirmed the emphasis on victimhood that had been characteristic of the memory culture of the 1950s, the simultaneous emergence of 'Holocaust'-memory called into question the nexus between destruction and victimhood. In both Magdeburg and Kassel, it was the Church who first addressed this issue within the context of public commemorations. Drawing on an older interpretive framework that had conceptualised local catastrophe as an 'affliction', clerics explored the connection between the persecution and deportation of local Jewry and the destruction of the 'hometown', and increasingly, came to represent indiscriminate bombing as some kind of 'retribution' suffered for the misdeeds of the (non-Jewish) local community during the Third Reich.

While the second Cold War provided the political catalyst for a revival of interest in the human costs of World War II bombing, a post-modern concern over the "inhospitality" (A. Mitscherlich) of the modern city redirected attention to the material legacy of the air war. In Kassel, a New Left critique of the contemporary cityscape fused with the traditional idea of *Alt-Kassel*, leading to a radical re-evaluation of the reconstruction of the 1950s and 1960s. Rather than representing an achievement, the "new city on historic ground", the critics argued, amounted to nothing less than a denial of history and identity. Worse, the deplorable state of contemporary Kassel was less the result of a total destruction brought about by aerial bombing but of personal and conceptual continuities

between Nazi-era and post-war city planning. In short, the 'zero hour' was a myth—cynically invented by the post-war planning elites to engineer a 'second' destruction in the name of modernity. Although, in Magdeburg, *SED*-control of the public sphere did not allow for the emergence of an equally critical discourse, here too, the notion of *Alt-Magdeburg* experienced a renaissance in the 1980s. In public exhibitions, amateur historians pushed the boundaries of the "discursive prison" (M. Sabrow) of the GDR by presenting the pre-war city as a visual alternative to the 'Socialist metropolis' of the present. The slogan of the 'second destruction', current among *Magdeburgers* living in West-Germany since the 1960s,⁴ entered local discourse after the demise of *SED*-rule, where it referred to the goals and practices of Socialist city planning rather than, as in Kassel, to the continuities across the watershed of 1945.

Finally, the second cycle of memory was characterised by an upsurge of interest in the historical recreation of the past. In both cities, historical exhibitions were staged on the occasion of the 40th anniversary in the mid-1980s, and again on the 50th anniversary in the mid-1990s, each time to exceptional popular success. The historical engagement with the past, while no longer wholly subservient to collective memory, may be characterised as a flak auxiliary historiography that was 'antiquarian' rather than critical in nature. It was carried by the contemporaries of the historical events, who made an effort to preserve 'their' memories against the backdrop of generational change. Whereas in Kassel lay historians produced 'documentary accounts' that oscillated between the genres of military history and *Heimat* history, parallel efforts in Magdeburg were both more ambitious and more ideologically loaded. They sought to explain where their counterparts in Kassel were content merely 'to let the sources speak for themselves'.

Although local historiography in Magdeburg remained wedded to the anachronistic view according to which World War II strategic bombing was but the first act of aggression in the Cold War, the empirical findings also challenged received wisdom, most notably on the issue of mass death in the air raid of 16th January 1945. As with the renaissance of *Alt-Magdeburg*, the 1980s marked a turning point for local historical writing, eroding the discursive dominance of the *SED* and laying the seeds for developments that came to fruition in the 1990s when the historiographies in both cities developed a greater receptivity to the questions and findings of academic history. As a consequence, there was both a broadening of the temporal perspective—an effort to situate local catastrophe within the continuum of history—and a greater willingness to take into account the experiences of those sections of urban society that had been victimized by the

⁴ Alfred Laeger, *Vereinigtes Dom- und Klostergymnasium Magdeburg. Gedenkschrift* (Frankfurt / M.: Wolfgang Weidlich, 1967), p. 142f.

'racial community', in particular of foreign slave labour and local Jewry. At the same time, the uncritical hypostatising of the 'authentic' voice of the eyewitness provided for the continuation of a narrative that accentuated the suffering and victimhood of 'ordinary' *Kasseler* and *Magdeburger* in the "night of horror".

A 'Turn of the Tide'?—Continuity and Change in the Early 21st Century

If one considers the contemporary boom in representations of German wartime suffering from a local perspective, then many elements of continuity strike the eye. In the early 2000s, the residents of cities such as Kassel or Magdeburg did not suddenly 'discover' a long-tabooed subject. Rather, they commemorated the 60th anniversaries of particularly devastating bombing raids within the continuity of well-established memory places that had brought forth, since the 1950s, a set of tropes, rituals, photographs and texts. When, for example, the local *Hessische Allgemeine*, on 22nd October 2003, devoted a special section to the memory of the air raid on Kassel, the newspaper did so by printing a (sanitised) version of the poem, "Thus died my Hometown". Moreover, the same page reproduced two photographs that had long been integral elements of the local memory culture. The first was a panoramic view of the devastated city, taken by Walter Thieme in 1946 and reproduced many times since then. The second image was a close-up of two dishevelled female survivors, which had been popularised by Werner Dettmar in the 1980s. Likewise, when two archivists from the Magdeburg municipal archive, in 2003, put together a picture book on the raid of 16th January 1945, they used the well-established term "night of horror" (*Schreckensnacht*) in order to refer to the experience of bombing.⁵

While there was nothing new or unexpected about many of the historiographical and commemorative activities that surrounded the 60th anniversary of the memory place, there were, at the same time, other developments that transcended the established boundaries of public discourse. These developments were marked by the refusal to ascribe any cathartic function to indiscriminate bombing: Neither did the destruction of Kassel or Magdeburg provide an opportunity for the building of a 'modern' or 'more beautiful' city. Nor did the suffering in the air war 'atone' for any of the crimes committed by the Germans during World War II. On this view, the memory place stood for irredeemable loss, nothing else.

Carried by the generation of '68' and their fellow contemporaries who had rediscovered (and reconciled) themselves as 'war children', this narrative fused the 1950s emphasis on victimhood with the tone of moral righteousness that had characterised the New Left

⁵ Maren Ballerstedt / Konstanze Buchholz, *Es regnet Feuer! Die Magdeburger Schreckensnacht am 16. Januar 1945* (Gudensberg-Gleichen: Wartberg, 2003).

interventions of the 1980s in the debate about the shortcomings of the post-war reconstruction. Although the historical connection between German genocidal war and domestic destruction was freely acknowledged, embraced even, the main thrust of the irritation was no longer directed at Nazism—whose culpability was taken for granted—or at continuities in domestic city planning, but at the allied conduct of the air war.

"Ambassador, when are you going to pull down the statue to Bomber Harris?", a heckler called on the British ambassador as he left the auditorium after having given a commemorative address on the 60th anniversary of the bombing of Kassel. The heckler, who may have been in his forties or fifties, added, "After all, we don't put up a statue to Hermann Goering, either."⁶ Although the challenge may be seen as an instance of relativising apologetics, the underlying assumption appears to have been that post-war Germany had faced her criminal past whereas Britain still had a lot of work to do.

While an opening up of the memory culture towards a critical discussion of indiscriminate bombing may be considered a welcome development, the events in Magdeburg two years later showed just how susceptible such tendencies were to the politics of the extreme Right. Here, the initiative, "Against Forgetting", which was supported by Neo-Nazi 'comradeships' from all over the Federal Republic, used the occasion of the 60th anniversary of 16th January 1945 in order to stage a "funeral march" through Magdeburg. Although a broad coalition of the local elites, citizens' initiatives and Leftists organised a number of counter-events that eventually succeeded in cutting short the march, the Neo-Nazi slogans were closer to some of the positions advanced in the recent debate on the 'bombing war' than the anti-Nazi demonstrators were wont to admit. Moreover, banners such as "The Bombing Holocaust must never be repeated", or "Allied Terror since 1943—murder remains murder" also fed on local traditions of memory as they had been expounded throughout the time of the GDR.

Of course, neither the denunciation of strategic bombing as a crime nor the emphasis on irredeemable loss were new, as the investigation of the trajectory of public memory between 1940 and 1995 has shown. What was new within the context of the Federal Republic, however, was the vehemence with which such views were voiced publicly. It remains to be seen if these trends accelerate and usher in a 'turn of the tide' in Germany's engagement with its past.

⁶ Quote from personal memory. I attended the ceremony on 22nd October 2003 in the Kassel City Hall. See also Helmut Dick, letter to the editor, "Die Taten anderer. Zur Diskussion um Schuld und Sühne", *Werra Rundschau* 298 of 23-12-2003.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: *So starb meine Heimatstadt Kassel*¹
Thus died my hometown of Kassel

Line

- 1 *Frau Chasalla*² trägt schmerzvoll ein Trauerkleid,
Frau Chasalla wears a mourning dress,
- 2 *in ihren Mauern*³ birgt sie unsagbares Leid
in her walls she harbours unspeakable pain
- 3 *was Menschengeist einst [hat]⁴ ersonnen*
what the human spirit once conceived
- 4 *was fleiss'ge Hände*⁵ einst vollbracht
what industrious hands once accomplished
- 5 *vor tausend Jahren schon*⁶ begonnen
what was started a thousand years ago
- 6 *vernichtet war's*⁷ in einer Nacht
has been annihilated in a single night
- 7 *O Nacht voll Schrecken und voll Grauen,*
Oh night of horror and terror
- 8 *viele*⁸ Riesenvögel musste sie schauen
many giant birds she was forced to see
- 9 *sie*⁹ nahten mit unheimlichem Dröhnen und Klingen
they approached with frightful rumbling and noise
- 10 *Tod und Verderben der Stadt zu bringen,*
to bring death and ruin to the city
- 11 *zwar krachen und donnern*¹⁰ die Flakhaubitz
the flak artillery thundered and rumbled
- 12 *deutsche Jungen möchten die Heimat schützen*¹¹
German youths wanted to protect the homeland
- 13 *sie*¹² kämpften tapfer mit Heldenmut
they fought bravely with the courage of heroes
- 14 *viele vergossen ihr junges Blut.*
many shed their young blood.
- 15 *Doch die Übermacht war riesengroß*
But the superiority was enormous
- 16 *Und bald brach*¹³ die reinste Hölle los,
and soon all hell broke loose,
- 17 *am Himmel grellroter Feuerschein*
in the sky the red reflection of fire
- 18 *unzählige Brandbomben schlugen bald ein*

¹ This transcript is a collated version from the copies making up group A. Textual basis is the version A1, "So starb meine Heimatstadt Kassel", signed 'Kassel, 23rd October 1943' while variations occurring in A2 ("So starb meine Heimatstadt") and A3, "So starb Kassel 1943" are given in square brackets or in the footnotes.

² A2: *Meine Heimatstadt Kassel* [My hometown of Kassel]

³ A2: *Armen* [arms]

⁴ Only in A2 & A3

⁵ A2: *was fleißiger Händewerk vollbracht* [what the industrious work of hands achieved]

⁶ A3: *einst* [once]

⁷ A2: *ward*; A3: *wardes*

⁸ A2: *zahlreiche* [numerous]

⁹ A2 & A3: *die* [they]

¹⁰ A2: *krachten donnern* [rumbles thunderously]; A3: krachten und donnern (rumbled and thundered)

¹¹ A2: *deutsche Jugend mächte die Heimat schützen* [German youth wants to protect the homeland]

¹² A3: *die*

¹³ A2: *so brach bald die reinste Hölle los* [thus soon all hell broke loose]

19 in no time countless incendiary bombs struck
*Ein Zittern der Erde, ein Wanken und Schwanken*¹⁴
 the earth trembled, swayed and shook

20 *Sprengbomben, dass die Häuser zusammen sanken*
 High explosive bombs made the buildings cave in

21 *Tausende gerieten in bittere¹⁵ Not*
 Thousands were plunged into severe anguish

22 *Tausende fanden den Flammentod*
 Thousands suffered death by fire

23 *Tausende für die es keine Rettung mehr [gab]¹⁶*
 Thousands who could not be rescued

24 *fanden unter den Trümmern ein ewiges Grab*
 found an eternal grave under the rubble

25 *Feuerstürme tobten die Straßen einher*
 firestorms rush through the streets

26 *das Herz der Stadt gleicht einem Feuermeer¹⁷*
 the heart of the city equals a sea of fire

27 *In der Unterstadt [bald]¹⁸ das gleiche Entsetzen*
 In the Low Town soon the same horror

28 *Flammen, Flammen, die Menschen hetzen*
 flames, flames, people rush

29 *zum Friedhof, da¹⁹ könnte noch Rettung sein,*
 to the churchyard, where rescue might still be possible

30 *dort drang der Feuersturm nicht ein*
 the firestorm did not enter there

31 *Im Rauch, der auch hier fast den Atem nahm*
 in smoke, which made breathing difficult here as well

32 *lagen sie frierend bis endlich der Morgen kam*
 they lay shivering until the morning broke at last

33 *Schmerz wurde tausendfach geboren,*
 Pain was born a thousand times,

34 *drei Kleine²⁰ haben die Mutter verloren*
 three young children lost sight of their mother

35 *sie faßten sich tapfer bei der Hand*
 they bravely took each other by the hand

36 *und suchten nach Ihr in Rauch und Brand²¹*
 and looked for her in smoke and flames

36a *[Die Not des Ältesten war riesengroß!]²²*
 [The anguish of the oldest was enormous]

37 *Doch ließ auch der Tod selbst die Kleinen nicht los²³*
 But even death would not let go of the little ones

38 *noch angefaßt, die blonden Löckchen versengt*
 still holding each other, the blond curls scorched

39 *die Füßchen verkohlt, so hat man sie später herausgeholt*
 the little feet charred – thus they were later pulled from the rubble²⁴

¹⁴ A2: *ein ein [sic] Wanken und Schwanken*; A3: *ein Wanken ein Schwanken* [sways, shakes]

¹⁵ A2: *bitterste* [most severe].

¹⁶ Only in A2 & A3; A2: *Tausende für dies keine Rettung mehr gab*; A3: *tausende für die es keine Rettung gab*.

¹⁷ A2: *ein Flammenmeer*; A3: *einem Flammenmeer* [sea of flames].

¹⁸ Only in A2 & A3.

¹⁹ A2 & A3: *dort*.

²⁰ A3: *drei Kinder*.

²¹ A2: *Qualm und Brand*.

²² Only in A2.

²³ A2: *Doch ließ er im Tod selbst die Kleinen nicht los* [But even in death he would not let go of the little ones]; A3: *Doch lies [sic] auch der Tod die Kleinsten nicht los* [But even death would not let go of the littlest ones].

40 *Kindergesichtchen vom Schmerz und Entsetzen²⁵ entstellt*
 Children's faces disfigured by pain and agony

41 *Ergreifende Anklage dieser Welt²⁶*
 Moving indictment of this world

42 *Ein Mann trägt keuchend Frau und Kind*
 A man breathes heavily carrying woman and child

43 *Gottlob, dass sie geborgen²⁷ sind*
 Praised be God that they are save

44 *doch wehe²⁸ nicht die vertrauliche Stimme klingt an sein Ohr*
 But woe, not the familiar voice reaches his ear

45 *eine Fremde trägt²⁹ er zum Leben empor.*
 a stranger he has carried to life.

46 *Der starke Mann wankt, hört kaum noch wie sie stammelnd ihm dankt,³⁰*
 The strong man shakes and hardly hears her thanking him,

47 *längst eilt er den Weg noch einmal zurück,*
 he has long since hurried back,

48 *zu spät, nur Trümmer begraben sein Liebstes, sein Glück.*
 too late – rubble has covered his dearest, his happiness

49 *Ein Soldat³¹ der freudig auf Urlaub kam*
 A private, happy to be on leave

50 *der Flammen Tod Frau und Kinder ihm nahm³²*
 death by fire has taken wife and children from him

51 *Erschüttert³³ steht er am Sarg*
 Shocked, he stands by the coffin

52 *der all seine Lieben auf einmal barg*
 that keeps all his loved ones

53 *Ein anderer von Feuersglut [sic]³⁴ umloht*
 Another surrounded by fire

54 *vor ihm sein Haus, das mit Einsturz droht³⁵*
 his house is threatening to collapse in front of him

55 *da liegt am Wege, hab Erbarmen, ein Säugling gefallen*
 there by the wayside, have mercy, a baby

56 *aus Mutterarmen, sein Koffer oder ein junges Leben³⁶*
 has fallen out of her mother's arms - his luggage or a young life

57 *ein langes Besinnen darf es nicht geben,*
 there can be no long pondering

58 *schnell hebt er das Kindlein³⁷ zu sich empor*
 He quickly picks up the child

²⁴ Lines 38f. according to A2: *Noch angefaßt, die Lökchen versengt die Füße verkohlt / so hat man sie später herausgeholt*; in A3: *noch angefasst, die blonden Lökchen versenkt [sic], die Füßchen verkohlt / so hat man sie später heraus geholt*.

²⁵ A2: *von Schmerz und Entsetzen*; A3: *von Schmerz und Entsetzen [sic]*.

²⁶ A2: *Ergreifendste [sic] Anklage des Mordes dieser Welt!* [The most moving indictment of the murder of this world!]; A3: *Ergreifendste Anklage gegen die Welt*.

²⁷ A2: *gerettet*.

²⁸ A2: *wehe*.

²⁹ A2: *trug er ins Leben empor* [he carried back to life]; A3: *trägt er in's Leben empor*.

³⁰ A2: *... hört kaum noch wie sie stammelt Dank* [barely hears her stammer thanks]; A3: *... schwankt ... dank[t]*.

³¹ A2 & A3: *ein Hauptmann* [a captain].

³² A2: *... Frau und Kinder nahm*.

³³ Only in A2 & A3; A1 has *erschütternd* [shocking].

³⁴ A2: *Feuersglut*; A3: *Ein anderes on Feuersglut umt[?]*.

³⁵ A2: *Vor ihm ein Haus das mit Einsturz droht* [A house is threatening to collapse in front of him]; A3: *war ihm ein Haus, das mit Einsturz droht* [There was a house that was threatening to collapse].

³⁶ Lines 55f. in A2: *Da liegt am Wege, kennt er Erbarmen? Ein Säugling gefallen aus Mutterarmen* [There lies by the wayside a baby fallen out of her mother's arms. Does he have mercy?]; A3: *da liegt am Wege, er hat Erbarmen, ein Säugling gefallen aus Mutterarmen* [There lies by the wayside a baby fallen out of her mother's arms. He shows mercy].

³⁷ A2: *Kind*; A3: *Kindchen..*

59 *zwar weiß er, dass er alles verlor*³⁸
 although he knows that he has lost everything

60 *Vielleicht, dass einer Mutter Freudentränen*³⁹
 Perhaps a mother's tears of joy

61 *mit seinem Opfer ganz versöhnen*⁴⁰
 will reconcile him with his sacrifice

62 *Menschen stehen auf den Straßen umher*⁴¹
 People are standing on the streets

63 *Sie retten ihr Leben und sonst nichts mehr*⁴²
 They have saved their lives but nothing else

64 *Im Herzen die Sorge um all Ihre Lieben*
 In their hearts they worry about all their loved ones

65 *Angst, dass allein man ist übrig geblieben*⁴³
 They fear that they alone have remained

66 *Des Phosphors gierige Flammen zerbrachen Menschenglück*⁴⁴
 Phosphorous flames have destroyed human happiness

67 *sie schlagen als Hasses-Flammen [auf England]*⁴⁵ zurück
 As flames of hatred they will fall back on England

68 *Der Hass in solch einer Nacht geboren*⁴⁶
 Hatred born out of such a night

69 *hat zur Gemeinschaft uns erst recht verschworen*
 has sworn us in as one community

70 *Die Funken wirbeln wie toll umher*
 Sparks are flying through the air

71 *denn Häuserrisse bersten nur schwer*⁴⁷
 because cracked buildings break slowly only

72 *Nach Stunden erst ist die Vernichtung vollbracht*
 Only hours later the destruction is complete

73 *Öde Fensterhöhlen zeugen vom Schrecken der Nacht*
 Empty window frames are witness to the horror of the night

74 *Dann*⁴⁸ beim ersten Morgengrauen
 With the first crack of dawn

75 *sind überall rauchende Trümmer zu schauen*
 smoking heaps of rubble are everywhere

76 *Ein Bersten und Krachen erfüllt die Luft*
 the air is filled with the sounds of bangs and crashes

77 *Ein Bild des Jammers, das*⁴⁹ nach Vergeltung ruft!
 A picture of misery that calls for retaliation

78 *Die Sonne beginnt ihren Tageslauf*
 The sun starts her daily round

79 *In ewiger Schönheit steigt sie auf*⁵⁰
 She rises in eternal beauty

80 *doch schnell verhüllt sie ihr Angesicht*⁵¹

³⁸ A2: *Zwar weis [sic] er, das [sic] er alles verlor*; A3: *Er weis [sic], dass er nun alles verlor*.

³⁹ A3: *Vielleicht dass einer Mutter Tränen*.

⁴⁰ A2: *mit seinem Opfer ihn erst ganz versöhnen*; A3: *an seinem Opfer ihn nicht [sic] ganz versöhnen* [will not entirely reconcile him with his sacrifice].

⁴¹ A2 & A3: *Menschen ziehen auf der Straße umher* [People are moving around on the street].

⁴² A3 leaves out *und*.

⁴³ A2: *Angst, dass man allein noch übrig geblieben*; A3: *Angst, dass allein man ist übrig geblieben*.

⁴⁴ A2: *Des Phosphors gierige Flammen Menschenglück zerbrochen*.

⁴⁵ Only in A2.

⁴⁶ A2 & A3: *in solcher*.

⁴⁷ A2: *die Häuserriesen wanken nur schwer* [the high-rise buildings sway only slowly]; A3: *denn Häuserriesen sterben nur schwer* [because high-rise buildings die slowly].

⁴⁸ A3: *denn*.

⁴⁹ A2: *dass*.

⁵⁰ A2: *herauf*; A3: *nun auf*.

⁵¹ A2: *doch weinend verhüllt sie ihr Angesicht* [but she cries and covers her face].

81 But quickly she covers her face
 Sie sucht eine Stadt und findet sie nicht!
 She looks for a town but cannot find her!

Significant Variants in Group B⁵²

Line

7 *O' Nacht voll Schrecken und voll Grauen*
 O night of horror and terror

8 *Tausend Riesenvögel mußte sie schauen*
 Thousand giant birds she was forced to see⁵³

[...]

29 *Zum Friedhof – dort könnte noch Rettung sein*
 To the churchyard where rescue might still be possible

30 *Hier drang der Feuersturm nicht ein*⁵⁴
 The firestorm did not enter here
 [B2: *Aber auch hier drang der Feuersturm ein*
 But here the firestorm entered as well!
 [B3, B7, B8, B12: *doch drang der Feuersturm auch dort ein*
 The firestorm entered there as well]

[...]

82 *Nur Trümmer hört sie zum Himmel schrei'n*
 Rubble cries out to heaven

83 *"Krieg kann nur der Wahnsinn der Menschheit sein"*⁵⁵
 War is madness

 [B2: *Nur Steine hört sie zum Himmel schrein*
 Bricks cry out to heaven
 *solch Krieg kann nur der Wahnsinn der Menschheit sein!*⁵⁶
 such a war is madness]

[B4: *Wie kann der Krieg doch so grausam sein*
 How can the war be so cruel]⁵⁷

[B10: *Krieg kann nur Dummheit der Menschheit sein*
 War is stupidity]

Significant Additions in Group C⁵⁸

Variant C1: "So starb meine Heimatstadt, 22.10.1943"

Line

68 *Not in solcher Nacht geboren*
 The misery born out of such a night

[...]

77 *Ein Bild des Jammers, das nach Hilfe ruft!*

⁵² Altogether 12 copies can be subsumed in group B, which post-dates group A but pre-dates the end of the war. Textual basis is the version sent into the archive by Ms. B.N. on 22/9/1983, "So starb meine Heimatstadt!" (B1).

⁵³ Also in B3, 7-9, 12; B2 has: *1300 Riesenvögel*; B4 & 11: *Schwärme von Bomben* [swarms of bombs]; B5: *zahlreiche* [many]; B6: *viel hundert* [many hundred]; B10: *Schwärme von Riesenvögeln* [swarms of giant birds]. Emphasis added.

⁵⁴ Similar: B5, 6, 9, 10; B4 & B11 omit the lines altogether.

⁵⁵ Similar: B5-9; 12.

⁵⁶ Similar: B3.

⁵⁷ Similar: B11.

⁵⁸ Group C is made up of 4 copies which do not share much in common except that they contain post-1945 alterations.

A picture of misery that calls for **help!**⁵⁹

Variant C2: "So starb Kassel...1943"⁶⁰

Additional Lines

84 *Es darf, und es soll nicht mehr so werden.*
This must not and will not be repeated

85 *Drum Jugend in Kassel, denkt immer daran,*
Therefore youth in Kassel always be wary

86 *Kein Krieg mehr, nur Frieden, dann sind*
No more war just peace, then we

97 *wir besser dran*
will be better off

98 *Denn Kassel ist heute eine schöne Stadt*
Because Kassel today is a beautiful city

99 *die einst die Sonne suchte*
that was once looking for the sun

100 *und jetzt wieder hat*
and has found her again.

⁵⁹ Both lines carry annotations that read, "the original put 'vengeance"'; "the original put 'retaliation'".

⁶⁰ C2 is signed K.P.

Appendix 2: *Kasseler Heimatlied*⁶¹
 [Das Lied vom leidgeprüften Kassel]
 Kasseler Heimat Song
 [The Song of the Sorely Afflicted Kassel]

Line

1 *Wo die Dächer liegen auf den Straßen rum*
 Where the roofs are lying on the streets

2 *Wo man hört der Flieger feindliches Gebrumm*
 Where you hear the hostile droning of the fliers

3 *Wo man muss verdunkeln, löscht die Lampen aus*
 Where one blacks out, extinguishes the lamps

4 *Da ist meine Heimat, Kassel an der Fuld.*
 [Da ist meine Heimat, da bin ich zuhause.]
 There is my home, Kassel on the river Fulda
 [There is my home, there I am at home.]

5 *Wo die Bomber kreisen nachts am Firmament*
 Where the bombers circle on the firmament at night

6 *Wo mitunter ein ganzer Stadtteil brennt*⁶²
 Where an entire city district might burn

7 *Wo Ruinen stehen auf weitem Feld*⁶³
 Where ruins are all around

8 *Da ist meine Heimat, Kassel an der Fuld*⁶⁴
 There is my home, Kassel on the river Fulda.

9 *Wo der böse*⁶⁵ *Tommy mordet Frau und Kind*
 Where the wicked Tommy murders wife and child

10 *Wo so viele Opfer zu beklagen sind*
 Where so many victims are lamented

11 *Wo die feuchten Augen sind so tränenschwer*
 [Wo so viele Augen sind so traurig, schwer.]
 Where the wet eyes are heavy with tears
 [Where so many eyes are sad and heavy.]

12 *Oh, du meine Heimat, wie lieb ich dich so sehr*
 [Kassel, meine Heimat, dich kenn ich nicht mehr.]
 O my home, I love you so much.
 [Kassel, my home, I don't recognize you anymore.]

13 *Wo die große*⁶⁶ *Not zum Himmel schreit*
 Where great pain cries out to heaven

14 *Wo in Trümmern liegt alles weit und breit*
 [wo die Menschen sind so voller Kummer, Leid]
 Where everything for miles around has been reduced to rubble
 [Where the people are in so much pain and sorrow]

15 *Wo ich hab' geopfert all mein Hab und Gut*
 Where I have sacrificed all my possessions

⁶¹ StAK S8 C53. There are two copies, which contain different versions. The transcript is based on version A, "Kasseler Heimatlied", while the variations of version B, "Das Lied vom leidgeprüften Kassel", are given in square brackets or in the footnotes.

⁶² B puts, "Wo mitunter hier und da ein Stadtteil brennt".

⁶³ B has, "Wo Ruinen stehen viel auf weiter Flur."

⁶⁴ B puts, "Da ist meine Heimat, an der schönen Fuld."

⁶⁵ B reads, "der grause Tommy"

⁶⁶ B puts, "große, große Not"

16 *Kassel, meine Heimat, lieb ich wie mein Blut*
[*Kassel, meine Heimat, sag: 'Es ist genug.'*]
Kassel, my home, I love like my blood.
[Kassel, my home, say, "it is enough"].

Appendix 3: *Mein Kassel*, by Fritz Stück, in: *KLZ* 265/14 (11-11-43), p. 3.

Line

1 *"Den Toten Dank und Abschiedsgruß zuvor,*
 Thanks and Farewell to the Dead,
2 *den Helden, die mit ihrem Leben zollten;*
 To the heroes who paid with their lives;
3 *ein Händedruck dem Freunde, der verlor,*
 A handshake to the friend who lost
4 *was ihm als Liebstes, Teuerstes gegolten!*
 his most beloved, his dearest!

5 *Durch Deine Straßen zieht der grause Tod;*
 Dreadful death walks Your streets
6 *in Deinen Trümmern wacht die Hessentreue.*
 in Your rubble Hessian loyalty stands guard.
7 *Ich liebe Dich in dieser tiefsten Not;*
 I love you in this deepest sorrow;
8 *sie weckt den heil'gen Schwur, den ich erneue:*
 it calls forth the holy oath that I renew:

9 *Nicht Mordlust je, noch der Vernichtung Wahn*
 Neither lust for murder nor the madness of annihilation
10 *bereiten uns'rem Vaterland das Ende,*
 will spell an end on our fatherland,
11 *kein Feuermeer hemmt uns'res Aufbaus Plan;*
 no sea of flames will stand in the way of our reconstruction;
12 *frei vor uns tagt des Siegesmorgens Wende!*
 the morning of victory is in sight!

13 *Mein Kassel wird einst, einem Phönix gleich,*
 One day, my Kassel will rise, like a phoenix,
14 *aus Trümmern, Schutt und Asche rings entsteigen:*
 from the rubble, debris and ashes all around:
15 *mein Kassel, Stadt an selt'ner Schönheit reich,*
 my Kassel, rich in rare beauty,
16 *vor der sich noch die Enkel stolz verneigen.*
 the grandchildren will bow proudly before you.

17 *Ging auch verloren, was jahrhundert'lang*
 Although we lost what for centuries
18 *uns heiligstes Vermächtnis war geworden,*
 we regarded as our holiest legacy,
19 *nicht eine Stunde naht uns, zukunftsbang*
 we are not afraid, not even for a single hour
20 *und Leben wächst aus dem Verbrechen, Morden.*
 and new life rises from the crime, the murder

21 *Mein Kassel lebt! Sein stolzer Wälderkranz*
 My Kassel is alive! Its proud ring of forests
22 *umschirmt der Heimat schmerzelad'ne Erde*
 guards the Heimat earth, heavy with pain
23 *Doch aus dem grauenhaften Totentanz*
 But out of the dreadful dance of death
24 *wird Leben blühen und ein neues "Werde"!*
 new life will blossom!

Appendix 4: "Fünf Jahre danach – Gedanken zum 22. Oktober", KZ 22-10-1948.
By August Heldmann

Line

- 1 *In dem lieben, alten Kassel, an dem schönen Fuldastrand*
In dear old Kassel, on the banks of the beautiful Fulda river
- 2 *liegt mein Vaterhaus, das teure, kriegszerstört und ausgebrannt*
there lies my dear father's house, war-ravaged and burnt-out.
- 3 *Stolze Bauten, schöne Plätze, dichte Straßen dieser Stadt*
proud buildings, beautiful squares, narrow alleys of this city
- 4 *fanden wie gar viele Menschen, durch den Krieg ein frühes Grab*
found an early grave through the war, just like so many people
- 5 *Wo ich meinen Blick hinwende, she' ich Trümmer, Schutt und Not*
Wherever I turn my eye, I see nothing but rubble, debris and want
- 6 *Wohlstand, Reichtum sind entschwunden, reiche Ernte hielt der Tod*
prosperity, wealth have disappeared; death had a rich harvest
- 7 *Jeder Frohsinn scheint gestorben, tiefster Ernst nahm dessen Platz*
Happiness seems to have died, seriousness took its place
- 8 *Trauer um ein liebes Wesen, Trauer um den letzten Schatz. –*
We mourn a beloved being, we mourn the last treasure
- 9 *Gern gedenk' ich froher Kreise, wo gesungen und gelacht,*
I remember happy company, where we sang and laughed,
- 10 *wo man schmauste ohne Sorgen tief hinein oft in die Nacht*
where we feasted without sorrow until deep into the night.
- 11 *Einst das Leben in den Straßen pulste wie des Herzens Schlag*
Once upon a time life in the streets pulsated like the beat of a heart;
- 12 *schaffte täglich neue Werte, brachte Freude jeden Tag. –*
brought forth valuable objects every day, brought forth happiness every day.
- 13 *Dennoch woll'n wir nicht verzagen, fest im Glauben weit und breit!*
But we must not despair, faithful everywhere!
- 14 *Uns're Hoffnung soll nicht schwinden, Wunden heilen mit der Zeit.*
Our hope must not fail us; wounds heal with time.
- 15 *Hat der Krieg uns auch genommen, was das Leben uns geschenkt:*
Although war has taken from us what life had given:
- 16 *Soll durch Fleiß uns Neues werden, und die Notzeit wird verdrängt.*
With diligence we will build anew, and the time of want will be pushed aside.