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978-1-107-00496-2 - The Allied Air War and Urban Memory: The Legacy of Strategic Bombing in Germany

Jörg Arnold

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The Allied Air War and Urban Memory

The cultural legacy of the air war on Germany is explored in this comparative study of two bombed cities from different sides of the subsequently divided nation. Contrary to what is often assumed, allied bombing left a lasting imprint on German society, spawning vibrant memory cultures that can be traced from the 1940s to the present. While the deaths of half a million civilians and the destruction of much of Germany's urban landscape provided 'usable' rallying points in the great political confrontations of the day, the cataclysms were above all remembered on a local level, in the very spaces that had been hit by the bombs and transformed beyond recognition. The author investigates how lived experience in the shadow of Nazism and war was translated into cultural memory by local communities in Kassel and Magdeburg struggling to find ways of coming to terms with catastrophic events unprecedented in living memory.

JÖRG ARNOLD teaches Modern European History at the University of Freiburg. His publications include *Luftkrieg: Erinnerungen in Deutschland und Europa* ('The Air War: Memories in Germany and Europe') (co-edited with Dietmar Süß and Malte Thießen, 2009).

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In memory
of
Elisabeth Arnold

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Preface

On 1 June 2010, at 9:30 p.m., a huge blast ripped through the quiet university town of Göttingen. The explosion was caused by an aerial bomb that had lain buried in the ground for sixty-five years. It was discovered the week before during earthworks on a piece of little-used ground. Finds such as this were not unusual in early twenty-first-century Germany. Duds from World War II were still unearthed regularly whenever long-neglected plots of land were subjected to redevelopment measures in any larger town. Discovery was usually accompanied by minor scares among the local public, some reporting in the local press and quick removal by technical experts. But this time, the defusing exercise went horribly wrong, triggering an explosion that could be heard for miles around. Three people were killed and two more seriously injured in the incident.

I learnt of what had happened in Göttingen as I revised my manuscript on the allied air war and urban memory for publication. The tragedy served as a terrible reminder that bombs, whatever else they might do, in the first instance kill and destroy. To think about the long-term impact of strategic bombing is to think about the long-term impact of deadly violence. While it can be argued, of course, that in the case of Nazi Germany this violence was well deserved, necessary and, ultimately, beneficial even to the Germans themselves, this does not alter the fact that for German city-dwellers to address the legacy of the allied air war after 1945 was to address legacies of death, destruction and survival amidst catastrophe. As the incident in Göttingen illustrates, the rationalisations for which city-dwellers reached, the idioms that they used and the rituals that they performed were played out in spaces that were themselves saturated with a past that could surface at any time – not just as discourse and text, but as tangible relics and objects that could be as dangerous as ever.

I became interested in the subject of the air war and urban memory through a combination of personal and academic factors. I remember well from my adolescence the stories that I was told about the bombing of

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Kassel. These were stories that did not fit in with self-confident narratives of survival, new beginnings and successful arrival. Indeed, these were stories that did not fit in with anything. They spoke of death, loss and bitterness, and often ended in either uncomfortable silences or bitter arguments, or both. Later, as a history student at Edinburgh, Southampton and Heidelberg, I was increasingly drawn towards the study of Nazism, the war and its aftermath, partly, I suppose, out of a naïve belief that the scholarly scrutiny of the past held definitive answers. So when, after graduation, I was offered the opportunity to read for a doctorate at the University of Southampton, it seemed only natural to explore in greater depth a question that had troubled me for as long as I had been conscious of my own country's horrific past: how did Germans deal with the suffering that had been meted out to them in the context of a war that they themselves had unleashed, prosecuted in a singularly ruthless manner and used as cover for the perpetration of genocide? The present book is the much revised outcome of this enquiry.

During the many years that it took me to complete this study, I incurred numerous debts to a great number of academic institutions and individuals. It is a pleasure to acknowledge their support and to express my sincere gratitude to them.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Neil Gregor (Southampton), who took an exceptional interest in this project throughout the long period of gestation and beyond. I have benefited enormously from his insightful comments, generous advice and warm support, both with the project and, more generally, with the dream of turning a passion for history into a living. Richard Overy (Exeter) and Joachim Schloer (Southampton) were kind enough to act as examiners for the original thesis and to turn the viva into a memorable experience not altogether unpleasant. For both I am very grateful.

This study could not have been written without the funding that I received from several institutions. Awards from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the University of Southampton provided for my maintenance during my years as a PhD student. In the early stages of this project, I was also granted a one-month doctoral fellowship by the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, in order to undertake archival research in the National Archives at College Park, Maryland. Financial security, but also intellectual stimulus, was provided by the institutions for which I have had the privilege to work since I received my doctorate in 2007. The Department of History, Classics and Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh is a wonderful institution in a breathtaking city. I enjoyed greatly my year as a teaching associate in 2007/8, and

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valued very much the help and suggestions that I received from my colleagues. Equally supportive, and living in an environment no less beautiful, have been the staff members of the Historisches Seminar at the University of Freiburg. I owe special thanks to Ulrich Herbert for his continuing support and, not least of all, his patience with a project the conclusion of which dragged on for much longer than anticipated when I joined the department in 2008. During the latter stages of the revision in particular, the assistance of Jörg Michael Klenk and Sebastian Schöttler has been invaluable.

I would also like to thank the members of staff at the numerous libraries and archives that I consulted during the course of my research. Throughout, I was received kindly and my numerous requests were dealt with swiftly and efficiently. In particular, I should like to mention Roland Klaube (now retired) and his team at the Stadtarchiv Kassel, as well as Maren Ballerstedt and the members of staff at the Stadtarchiv Magdeburg, for their help. In addition, I am grateful to the many individuals in Kassel, Magdeburg and elsewhere who shared their thoughts with me and allowed me to make use of their private collections. Particularly valuable support has been provided by Werner Dettmar, Karin Grünwald, Rudi Hartwig, Maik Hattenhorst, Domprediger Giseler Quast and Manfred Wille. Thanks are also due to the institutions and individuals who have kindly granted permission to reproduce images from their various collections. I should especially like to mention Gerhard Potratz, Petra Hartmetz-Groß, Renate Klein at the picture archive of Verlag Dierichs, Friedhelm Fenner at the Amt für Vermessung & Geoinformation Kassel and Jan Böttger at the Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

Conference audiences at Southampton, Washington, DC, Magdeburg, Jena, Bochum and Freiburg have given me the opportunity to present aspects of my work. I am grateful for their comments both encouraging and critical. Jan Eike Dunkhase, Dietmar Süß and Malte Thießen have read through the entire manuscript. I appreciate greatly their helpful comments. The same holds true of the two anonymous readers at Cambridge University Press, whose detailed reports made me aware of the differences between a thesis and a monograph. I am grateful to the Syndics of the Press and the general editor of the series, Jay Winter, for accepting my manuscript for publication. I owe a special debt of gratitude to senior commissioning editor Michael Watson, assistant editor Chloe Howell, copy editor Carol Fellingham Webb and production editor Sarah Roberts for all their patience and hard work.

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Christian Schneider; my brother, Michael Arnold, and my sister, Sandra Bergmann. I will always be grateful to Meg Ross and her family for the warm hospitality with which they received me when I first came to stay in the UK in 1994, and for the generous support that they have extended ever since. To my parents, Gerda and Helmut Arnold, I owe more than I can say; and also to my grandparents, who were a constant presence during my childhood and adolescence.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Ilona Arnold, for her friendship, love and trust. We met during the research for this book in Magdeburg in 2004. Since then, two worlds have become one. In 2009, we were joined by our baby daughter, Emilia Charlotte, who teaches us daily of the beauty of discovery.

Freiburg im Breisgau

March 2011

Abbreviations

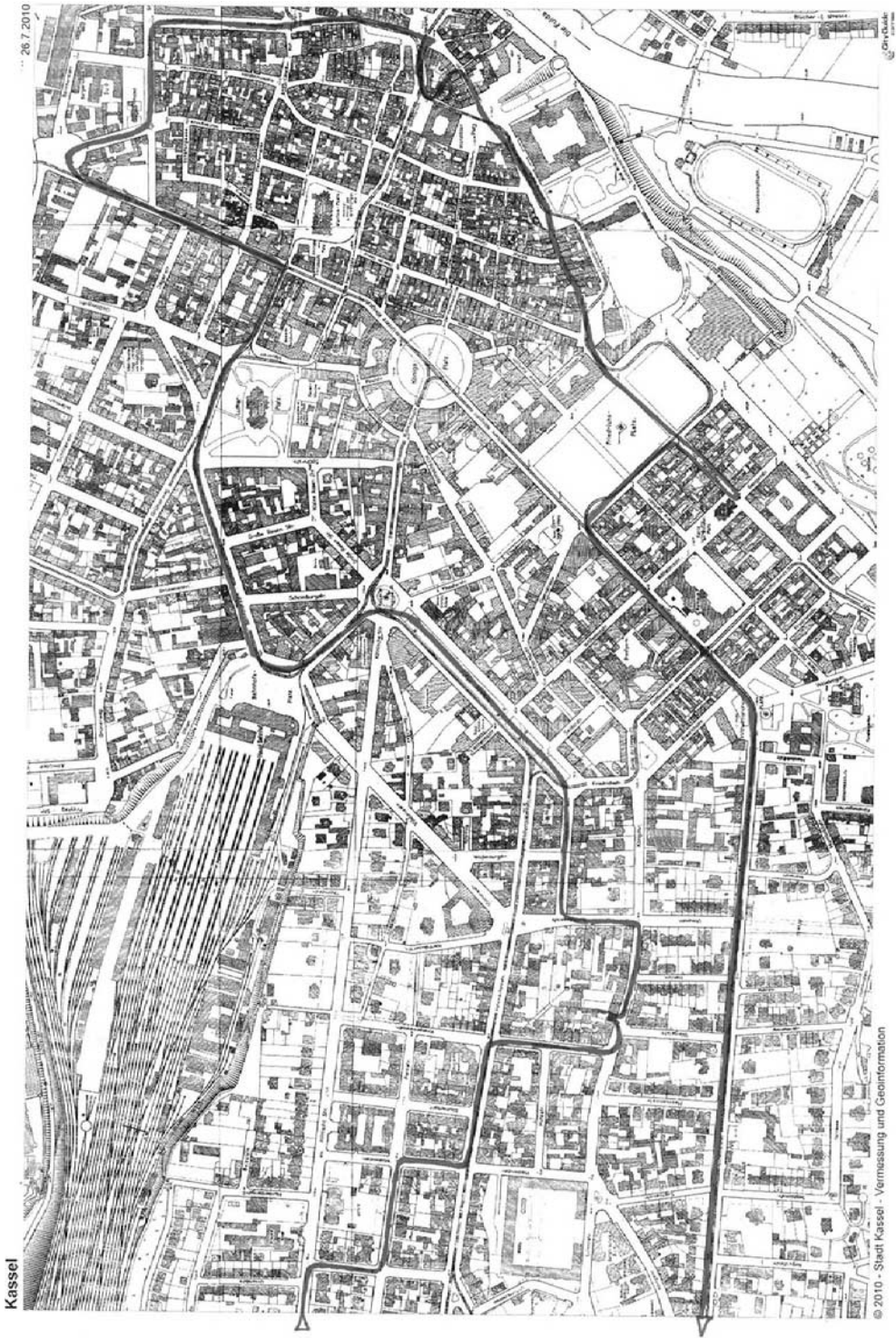
AfS	Archiv für Sozialgeschichte
AHR	<i>American Historical Review</i>
AKPS	Archiv der Kirchenprovinz Sachsen
APuZ	<i>Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte</i>
BA	Bundesarchiv
BGM Kassel	Brüder Grimm Museum, Kassel
BHE	Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
CEH	<i>Contemporary European History</i>
DNVP	Deutschnationale Volkspartei
DRZW	<i>Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg</i>
EKD	Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland
EKG	<i>Evangelisches Kirchengesangbuch</i>
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
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>
IMS	<i>Informationen zur modernen Stadtgeschichte</i>
IWM	Imperial War Museum
JCH	<i>Journal of Contemporary History</i>
KHM	Kulturhistorisches Museum, Magdeburg
KLZ	<i>Kurhessische Landeszeitung</i>
KNN	<i>Kasseler Neueste Nachrichten</i>
KP	<i>Kasseler Post</i>
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands
KZ	<i>Kasseler Zeitung</i>
LA	Landesarchiv

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LDP(D)	Liberal-Demokratische Partei (Deutschlands)
LDZ	<i>Liberal-Demokratische Zeitung</i>
LHA	Landeshauptarchiv
LKA	Landeskirchliches Archiv
MNN	<i>Mitteldeutsche Neueste Nachrichten</i>
NA	National Archives
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NL	<i>Nachlass</i>
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
NSV	Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt
POW	Prisoner of War
PWG	Partei Freie Wählergemeinschaft
RAF	Royal Air Force
SB	Sekretariat Bischof
SD	Sicherheitsdienst
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
StA	Stadtarchiv
StAK	Stadtarchiv Kassel
StAM	Stadtarchiv Magdeburg
StMK	Stadtmuseum Kassel
SVZ	<i>Sozialistische Volkszeitung</i>
TRE	<i>Theologische Real-Enzyklopädie</i>
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	Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht
ZfG	<i>Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft</i>

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Map 1. The old town of Kassel before World War II showing Gebhard Niemeyer's journey through the devastated city on 23 October 1943.

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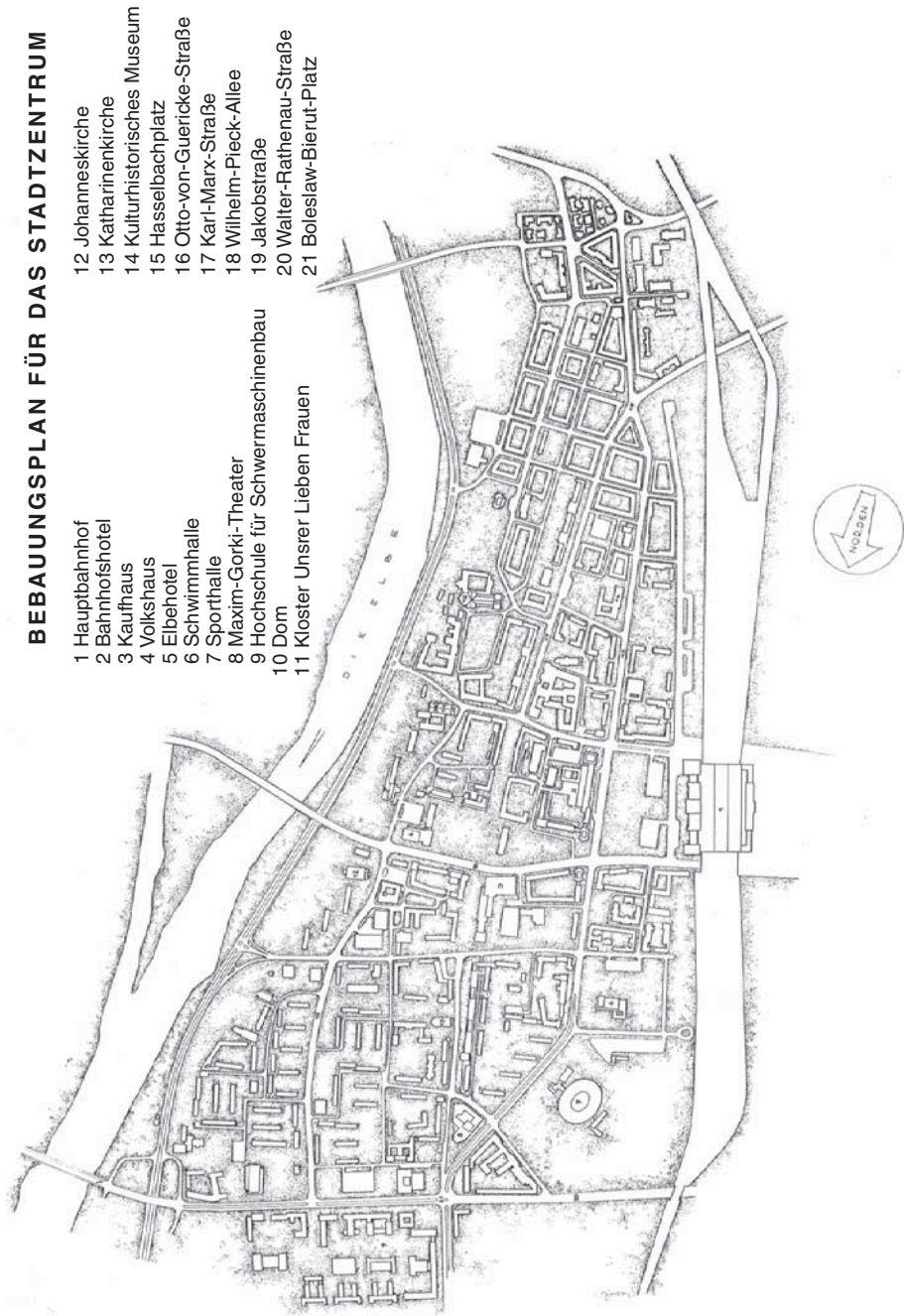


Map 2. The 'new city on historic ground': the old town of Kassel after the rebuilding in 1964. Note the new Kurt-Schumacher-Straße cutting through the historic old town and the virtual disappearance of the Lower New Town (*Unterneustadt*) on the right bank of the river Fulda.

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Map 3. Map of the city of Magdeburg in May 1945, indicating the damage inflicted during the war.



Map 4. The 'Socialist metropolis' under construction. Magdeburg street map, 1959.