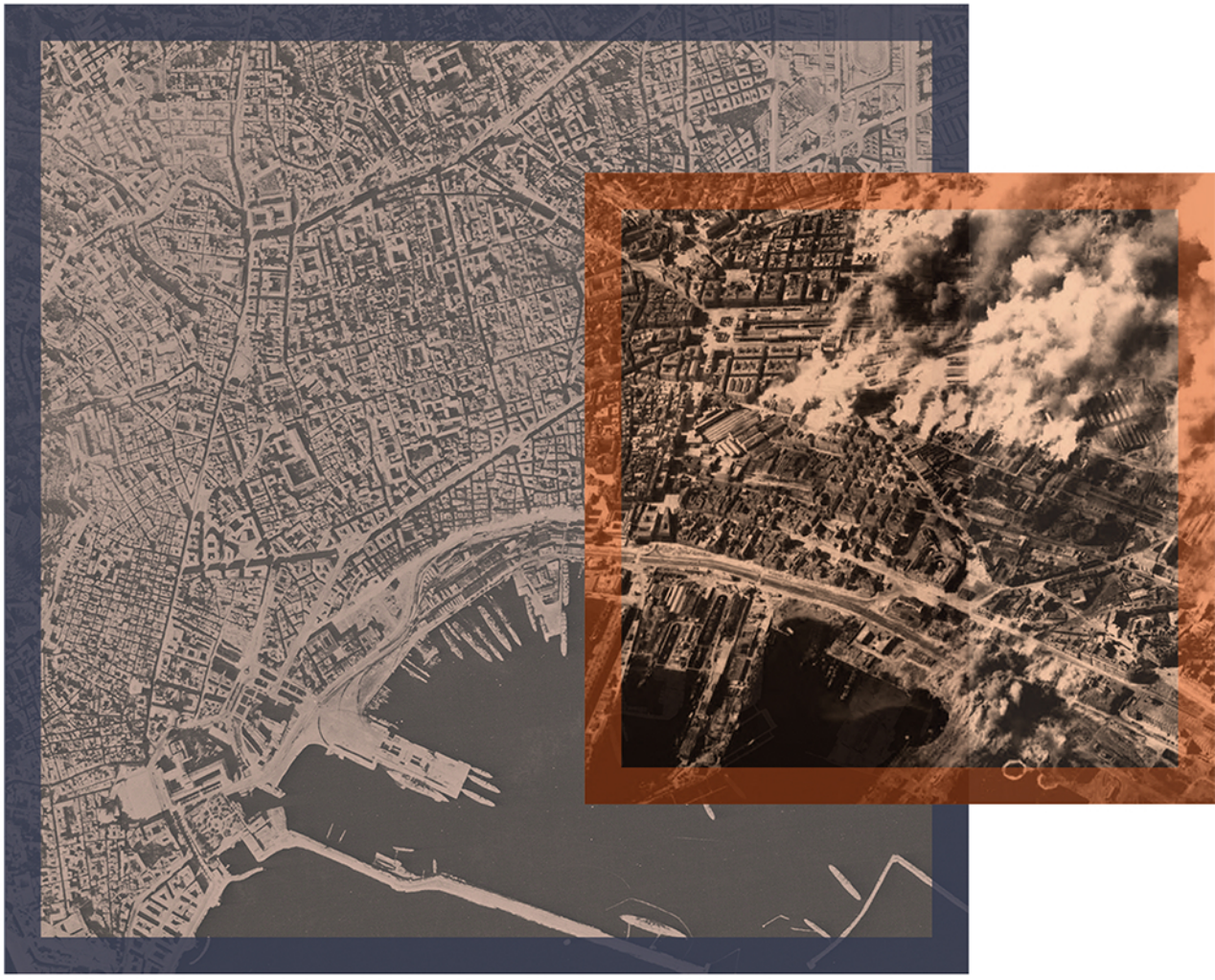
Tomo secondo

# CITTÀ E GUERRA

DIFESE, DISTRUZIONI, PERMANENZE
DELLE MEMORIE E DELL'IMMAGINE URBANA

# CITY AND WAR

MILITARY DEFENCES, RUINS, PERMANENCES
OF URBAN MEMORIES AND IMAGES



# Tracce e Patrimoni

a cura di
Raffaele Amore,
Maria Ines Pascariello,
Alessandra Veropalumbo

Federico II University Press

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# CITY AND WAR

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## MILITARY DEFENCES, RUINS, PERMANENCES OF URBAN MEMORIES AND IMAGES

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Raffaele Amore, Maria Ines Pascariello, Alessandra Veropalumbo

collaborazione alla curatela: Mariangela Terracciano

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*Direzione*
Alfredo BUCCARO
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Francesca CAPANO, Maria Ines PASCARIELLO

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*CITTÀ E GUERRA*
*Difese, distruzioni, permanenze delle memorie e dell'immagine urbana*
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*a cura di* Raffaele AMORE, Maria Ines PASCARIELLO, Alessandra VEROPALUMBO

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# *The post-war 'reconstruction' of the city of Hanover and the restoration of the Aegidienkirche*

**RAFFAELE AMORE**
Università di Napoli Federico II

## Abstract
*The reconstruction of German cities destroyed during World War II took place according to very different logics. Within the variety of solutions adopted, those chosen for the city of Hanover represent a very special case.*
*After outlining the urban development of the capital of Lower Saxony, the text critically examines the processes through which the city's most important monuments were rebuilt and restored, with particular regard to the Aegidienkirche, preserved in the state of ruins.*

**Keywords**
Ruins, Germany, Memory, Second World War.

## Introduction
After World War II, German cities' physical and economic reconstruction of German cities was characterised by highly articulated and diversified choices, significantly influenced by the complex political and cultural scenario at the end of the war and by the heavy legacy of the years of Nazi-Fascist dictatorship.
After outlining the history of the city of Hanover, the capital of Lower Saxony, from its foundation to the transformations at the end of the '30s, this paper examines the urban reconstruction processes involving its re-foundation after the war and, primarily focusing on the preservation of Aegidienkirche as an architectural ruin.

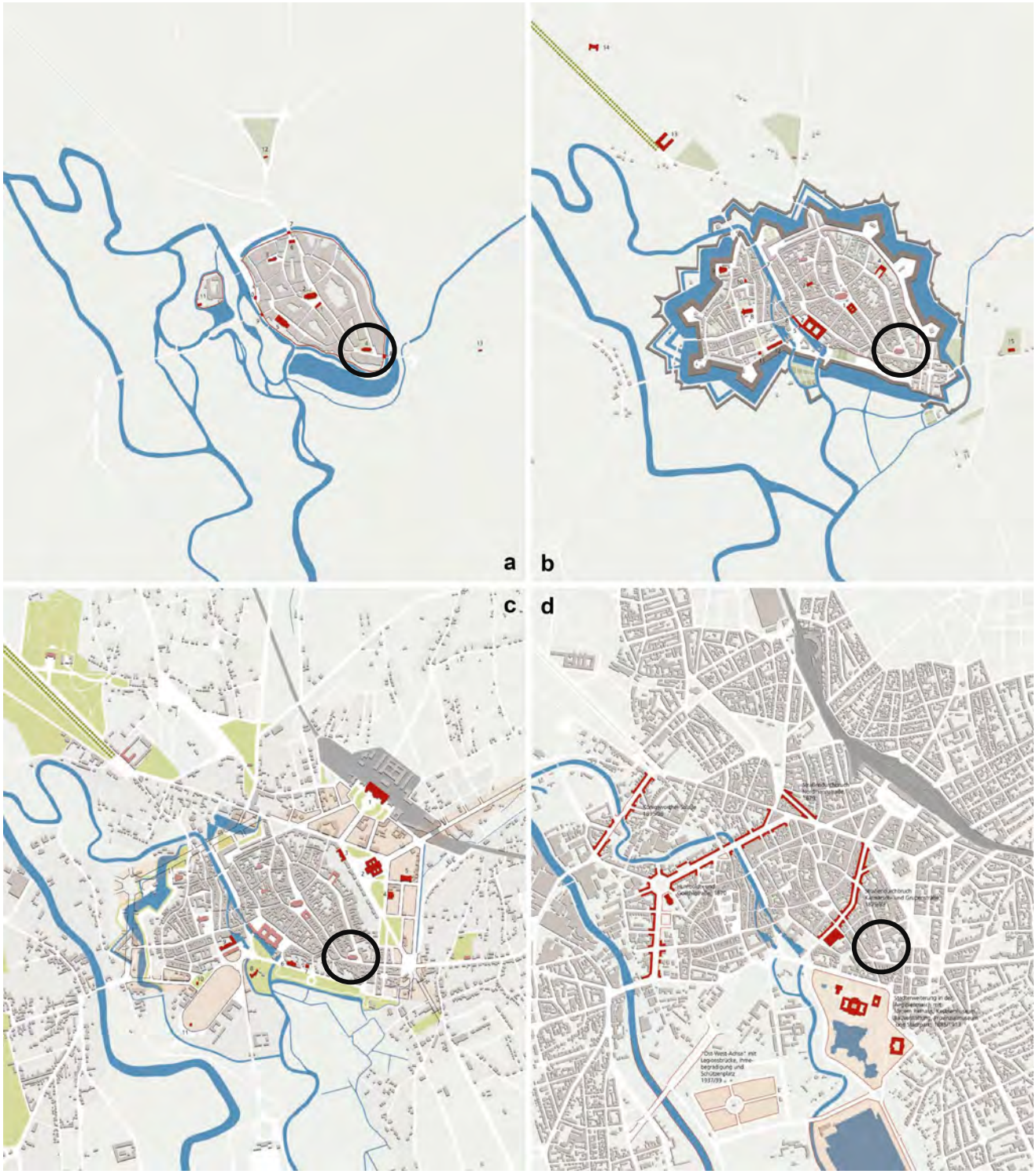
## 1. From its origins to World War II
The city of Hanover developed from the end of the 10th century onwards on the banks of the river Leine and its tributary Ihme, along important land and river trade routes that connected the centre of Germany with the Netherlands and the shores of the Baltic Sea.
Around the middle of the 14th century, the town consisted of a small river island – with the Nikolaikapelle, built around 1325 with an adjoining cemetery – and a main core defended by walls, resulting from the merger of three original villages.
Along the road connecting two of the three city gates – the Steintor to the north and the Aegidientor to the south – the Rathaus and the Marktkirche were built and completed in 1360, except the tower, which was completed a few years later. The other two oldest churches in the city – the Kreuzkirche, near the Steintor, and the Aegidienkirke, near the gate of the same name – were also built in those decades (fig.1a).
In 1636, Duke George of Brunswick-Lüneburg, who also ruled the principality of Calenberg and Göttingen, decided to move his residence to Hanover, creating the homonymous duchy. The city was expanded westwards, incorporating into the new system of fortifications - consisting of moats, bastions and ramparts - the small island where St Nicholas' chapel stood and where the Neustädter Hof and the Stadtkirche St. Johannis were built, as well as the

synagogue, which the Nazis destroyed on the night of 9-10 November 1938. The new Leine Castle was built near the third medieval city gate, the Leintor mit Brücke (fig.1b).
In 1664, work began constructing the summer residence of the Dukes of Hanover (Herrenhäuser) north of the city centre, which was connected to the city in 1726 by constructing a scenic tree-lined boulevard. From 1748 onwards, the fortifications were decommissioned and demolished. To the southeast of the town, near the old Aegidientor, the Aegidienvorstadt developed. It had an orthogonal urban layout, with a small square – the Hundemarket – in the centre.
With the construction of the railway station (1846), the city expanded eastwards. Georg Ludwig Friedrich Laves designed the new district between the station and the city. Three radial streets branched off from the pentagonal forecourt in front of the station designed by Laves. The central one, Bahnhofsstraße, defined an ideal axis connecting the station, Leine Castle and the Waterloosäule area, a large parade ground with a commemorative column built on the remains of the fortifications to celebrate the victory of Great Britain, the Duchy of Hanover, and Prussia against Napoleon's army at the Battle of Waterloo.
To the east of the city's medieval core, the Operahaus was built, as well as a further expansion area connecting with the Aegidienvorstadt mentioned above. To the west and north, the aforementioned arch. Laves designed two new thoroughfares, Goethestrasse and Humboldtstrasse, which would be developed starting from the last quarter of the 19th century. Between 1879 and 1892, Karmarschstrasse was built to physically connect the Bahnhofsstrasse mentioned above with the Castle, demolishing part of the city's medieval fabric. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the New Town Hall, the Kestren Museum – today Landesmuseum – and the Maschpark were constructed towards the south.
In 1871, G. Egestorff founded Hannoversche Maschinenbau AG (Hanomag) to produce locomotives, trucks, cars and agricultural tractors. Thus, the town was involved in a significant industrial development, leading to a sudden demographic growth and, consequently, an expansion of the urban fabric around the old core (fig.1c).
During the years of National Socialism, major works were carried out to improve the course of the river Leine. The promulgation of the law of 4 October 1937 for the Neugestaltung deutscher Städte prompted the then-town planning officer of Hanover, Arch. Carlo Elkart, to draw up a plan for the reorganisation of the city. It was submitted to the Führer in 1939 but was never implemented [Durt Gutschow 1988, 712], except for the renovation of Ballhofsplatz[1] (fig.1d).

## 2. A Destroyed City

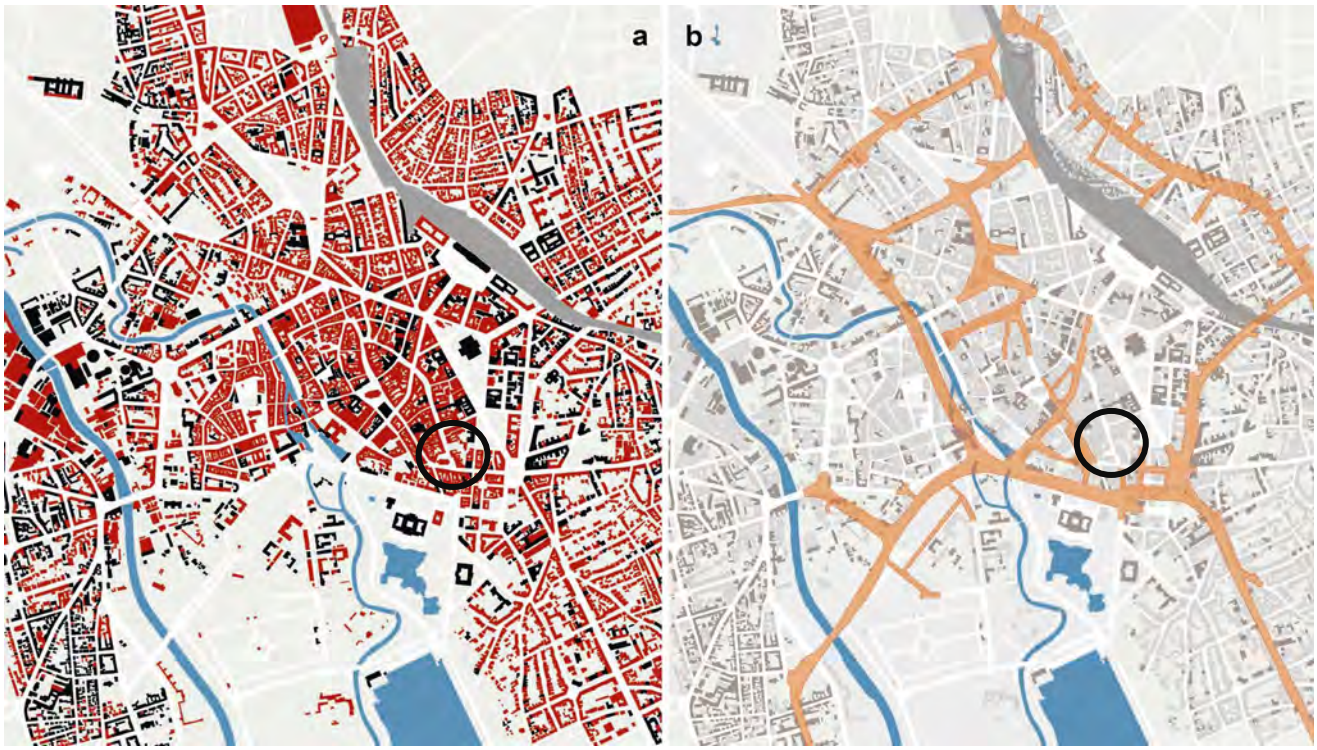
During World War II, Hanover was subjected to numerous British and Allied air raids. At the beginning of the conflict, they targeted the important industrial areas of the city, where – with the conversion of Hanomag into a military factory - tyres for aircraft and military trucks were produced. This production also employed thousands of prisoners of war held in the satellite camps of the Neuengamme concentration camp. Later, the Allied air force also struck the central areas of the city. Throughout the whole conflict, the city was bombed eighty-eight times, and almost seven thousand civilians died, even though as many as fifty-seven underground bunkers had been built. The air raid on the night between 8 and 9 October 1943 produced enormous damage: the many half-timbered buildings in the medieval city centre and the Calenberg Neustadt caught fire, and about ninety per cent of the old city was destroyed.

[1] Ballhof und Nationalsozialismus - Zukunft heisst erinnern (zukunft-heisst-erinnern.de).




*1: The urban development of Hanover. (a) 1360; b) 1750; (c) 1854; d)1854-1937. From Hannover city (2009). The black circle identifies the Aegidienkirche.*

Only thirty-two of the 1,600 historic buildings were still usable (fig.2a); the population halved, from over 400,000 in 1940 to just over 200,000 in 1945 [Auffarth 2010, 155]. On 10 April 1945, the city was conquered by the US Army and shortly afterwards came under the control of British forces.




*2: The urban development of Hanover. (a) 1945. Buildings that have been destroyed or have more than 60% damage are in red. In black, those with damage of less than 60%; b) 1945-1960. In yellow dotted the new road system inside the historic center built after the war. From Hannover city (2009).*
*The black circle identifies the Aegidienkirche.*

## 3. The *Reconstruction* of German Cities

After the end of the war, several years of Allied occupation followed for Germany, and the challenging task of clearing away the rubble and counting the damage to the buildings and infrastructure heritage of the various cities began. At the same time, many architects and conservationists began to question possible intervention strategies, giving rise to an interesting debate in which the theme of the interpretation of ruins played a central role. Besides individual responsibilities, in the very early post-war period, Germans had to reckon with a sense of dismay and guilt for the horrors perpetrated by the Third Reich [Jasppers 1996; Vees-Gulani 2003; Mitscherlich, Mitscherlich 1975]. This required a spiritual rebirth, even before a ph ysical reconstruction. However, this rebirth had to deal with the physical signs of defeat, the ruins of buildings, and the modalities of physical rehabilitation for the destroyed cities [Falser 2009, 62-64].
After 1949, strong differences in reconstruction processes and methods could be seen throughout the urban contexts, even significantly, without a unified strategy. This was due to several factors, such as the split into two states with distinct political, economic and social models, the 'normalisation' process of West German society after the Nuremberg Trials, and the majority's will to rebuild the country. Within a couple of decades, following autonomous logic and paths, German cities in both East and West were affected by major urban reconstruction and expansion plans to reorganise the entire productive, economic and social fabric.
Consequently, concerning restoration typologies, very diverse interventions were carried out. These were studied systematically by German critics only in the mid-1980s, except for the initial surveys of destroyed or damaged buildings [Neu 1958, Deiters 1978]. One of the first contributions on this subject was by Niels Gutschow: in 1985, he published an essay on the urban reconstructions of four

West German cities - Münster, Hannover, Darmstadt, and Freudenstadt. Two years later, Klaus von Beyme [von Beyme 1987] presented the first comparative account of reconstruction policies in the two Germanies, emphasising the many points of convergence. In 1988, two critical volumes were published: Niels Gutschow and Werner Durth's [Durth, Gutschow 1988] catalogue entitled *Träume in Trümmern*, relating to the cities of West Germany, which was followed by a 1993 publication about the cities of the German Democratic Republic, edited by Josef Nipper and M anfred Nutz [*Kriegszerstörung und Wiederaufbau deutscher Städte*1993] and by the two volumes by Hartwig Beseler and Niels Gutschow [Beseler, Gutschow 1988].

## 4. 1945-1960. Rudolf Hillebrecht's Ideal City

At the end of the conflict, the aforementioned arch. Elkart resigned as head of the Technical Office in Hanover. One of his collaborators, Otto Meffert, was appointed in his place. Meffert, supported by a committee of experts from the city's Technical University (*Technische Hochschule*), called the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Lösung wissenschaftlicher, künstlerischer und wirtschaftlicher Fragen beim Wiederaufbau von Hannover*[2], drafted some of proposals for the reconstruction of the city [Durth, Gutschow 725; Zalewski 2006, 87], which were not implemented. Meanwhile, many refugees from Eastern Europe arrived in the city, and economic and social conditions deteriorated further.

The situation changed radically with the appointment of Rudolf Hillebrecht as the city's new city planner on August 2, 1948. Within a few years, Hanover was rebuilt according to a new organisational model centred on car mobility. Hillebrecht considered it a priority to divert the transit traffic around the city centre resulting from the construction of the new European motorway network in the Marshall Plan through an o uter ring of motorways, the so-called Außentangenten (outer bypasses) [Zalewski 2006, 91; Zalewski 2012, 297]. In Hillebrecht's plans, this ring, regulating any traffic leaving and entering the city, was compounded by a second, more inner one, running all around the consolidated city. It consisted of wide circular streets and squares based on similar proposals implemented in Dresden. Their realisation had a significant impact on the pre-war road network [Zalewski 2006, 91].

Based on these guidelines, Hillebrecht initiated an i ntensive dialogue with various *ante litteram* stakeholders, first and foremost the landowners [Zalewski 2006, 89-90]. Between 1951 and 1952, he promoted almost one hundred and fifty public meetings. Together with his collaborators - among them Konstanty Gutschow, who in those years was considered, not only locally (he was also active in the reconstruction of Hamburg), a leading figure in the field of town planning – he elaborated two memoirs [Auffarth 2010, 162], serving as a basis for the various ideas competition organised to move from town planning to architectural realisation.

Apart from any judgement on the development model of the new city, all based on the movement of private vehicles, it should be not ed that Hillebrecht succeeded in carrying out a very complex undertaking. Indeed, the well-known journal 'Der Spiegel' dedicated a long article to him in 1959 with the title *Das Wunder von Hannover* (The Miracle of Hannover) and the cover [Zalewski 2006, 91, Auffarth 2010, 160-161].

For the historic centre of Hanover, the plan envisaged a subdivision of the urban fabric within the aforementioned inner ring road into zones with distinct uses, in line with the practice of zoning, and a drastic reduction of the residential function. When works were completed, the centre's inhabitants fell from around 20/25,000 to less than 10,000.

Contrary to the reconstruction of almost all German cities [Rappaport 1946, 3-5], the existing street network was not always respected in Hanover, even within the historicised urban fabric. The urban

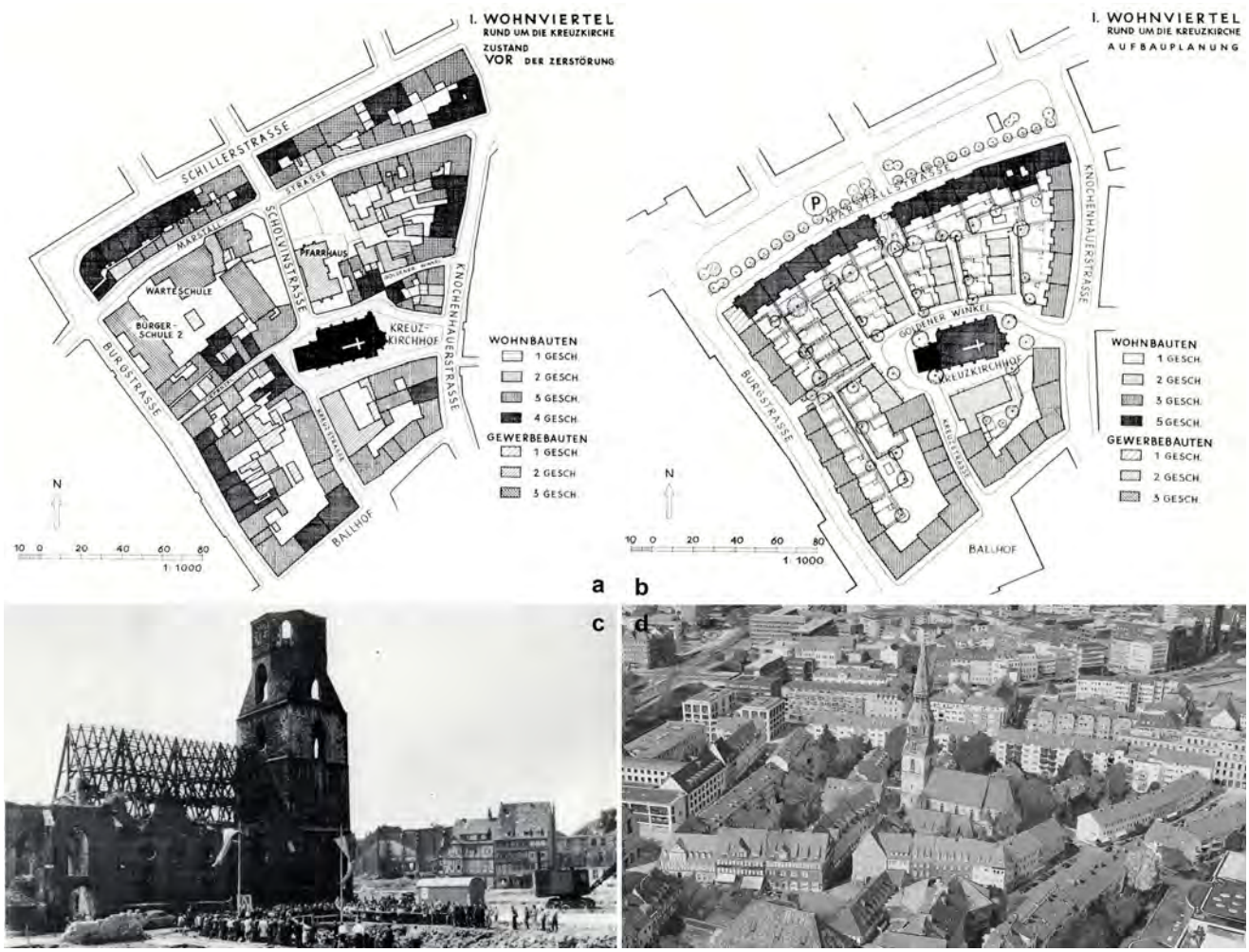
[2] *Working Group for the Solution of the Scientific, Artistic and Economic Problems of the Reconstruction of Hanover*.

area around the Kreuzkirche mentioned above (Kreuzkirchhof), partially destroyed in 1943 and rebuilt between 1959 and 1961 in simplified forms by Ernst Witt, is exemplary [Beseler, Gutschow 1988, 256-257].
Before the war, this area was characterised by a dense fabric of residential buildings from the Middle Ages, which was then completely razed to the ground by bombing [Gutschow, 11-13]. While respecting the external contours of the area – except for the one along Schillerstrasse, where the outer edge of the new buildings was set back from the existing ones to make room for a car park – the new design has a completely new character and geometry. The fifty-four owners of building land formed a special company and agreed to construct three-storey buildings (those facing Burgstrasse, Ballhof and Knochenhauerstrasse), five-storey buildings (those facing Schillerstrasse), and low-terraced houses with small private gardens within the block (fig.3). A much smaller number of buildings and thus houses were built than before the war, characterised by sober modernity, with smooth façades and sloping roofs in line with «the petty-bourgeois mentality of the citizens and their inclination towards traditional values» [Auffarth 2010, 165].

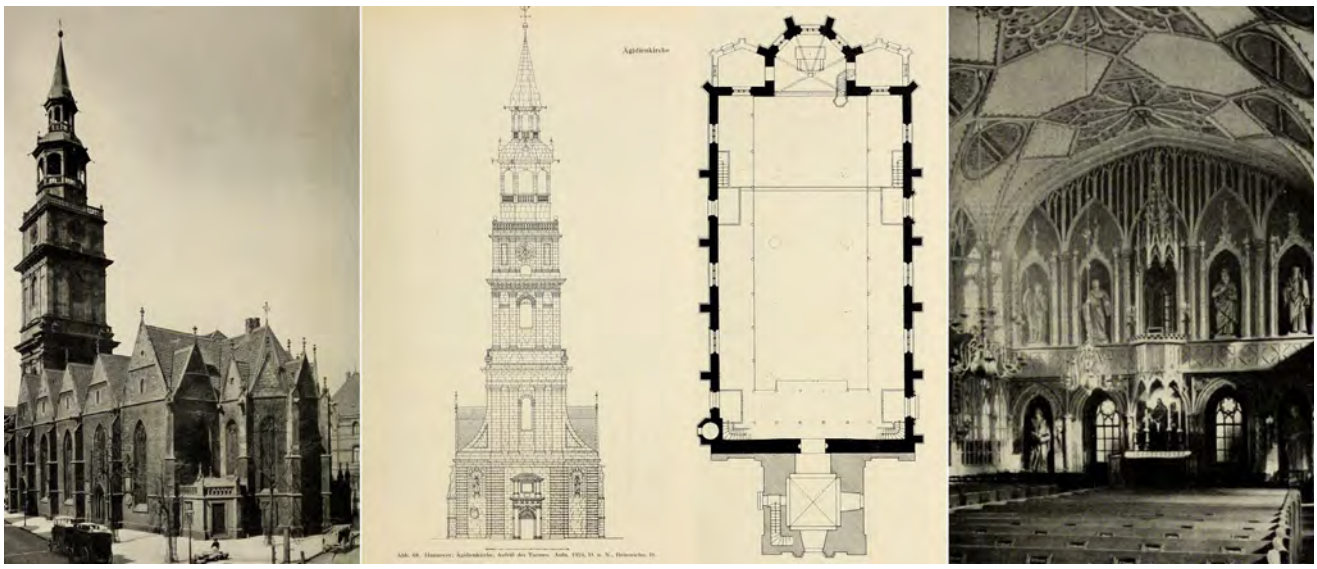
## 5. New Hanover and *Ancient* Monuments

Because of the extensive damage suffered and the aforementioned reorganisation choices of the urban fabric, few historic buildings (almost no civil ones) in Hanover survived the war and were restored [Beseler, Gutschow 1988, 250-278]. Generally, the criteria adopted do not deviate significantly from those implemented in other German cities. In particular, architect Dieter Oesterlen [Dengler 2003, 43-253] partially reconstructed the aforementioned Marktkirche [Dengler 2003, 144-161] in simplified forms with modern additions. He transformed the Leineschloss into the new seat of the regional parliament of Lower Saxony [Dengler 2003, 174-190; *Parlamentsgebäude für den Niedersächsischen Landtag* 1964], significantly altering the surviving structures of the castle.
The reconstruction (with significant contemporary additions) of the Opernhaus was entrusted to the architects Werner Kallmorgen, Klaus Hoffmann, and Adolf Zotzmann [Beseler-Gutschow 1988, 256-257], who won a competition participated by dozens of architectural firms.
Two other churches, the Stadtkirche St. Johannis and the Clemenskirche, were rebuilt in the 1950s in simplified forms without retaining the decorative interior party [Beseler, Gutschow, 1988, 256-257]. More recently, in the ‘80s, philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s house was reconstructed quite faithfully for use as a student residence at the University of Hannover and as a conference centre; then, between 2011 and 2013, after a long process and many second thoughts, the Volkswagen Foundation reconstructed Herrenhausen Castle[3], re-proposing the neoclassical design that arch. Laves had imprinted on the pre-existing factory.
Instead, the Nikolaikapelle and the Aegidienkirke have been preserved in ruins. Nowadays, the remains of St. Nicholas Chapel consist of a few parts of the Gothic choir room and a few tombstones of the adjoining cemetery: the street layout transformations of the ‘50s greatly changed the area and required the partial further demolition of parts of the chapel that were not bombed.
The remains of the Aegidienkirke are more interesting and better preserved. The church was built - in Deister sandstone - from 1347 ‘per magistros dictos Wittemeyger’ [Noldeke 1932, 115], on the remains of an older Romanesque building. It originally had a three-nave ground floor plan with a choir and bell tower on the façade. It was repeatedly altered over the centuries. In detail, Sudfeld Vick rebuilt the bell tower between 1703 and 1711; between 1825 and 1827, Georg Ludwig Friedrich Laves significantly transformed the interior: the pillars of the nave and

[3] https://jk-architekten.com/schloss-herrenhausen.




*3: Hannover, Kreuzkirchhof. (a) 1940; (b) the reconstruction project; (c) the Kreuzkirche in 1950 [Gutschow 1985]; d) Kreuzkirchhof oggi. View from Googlemaps 2023.*



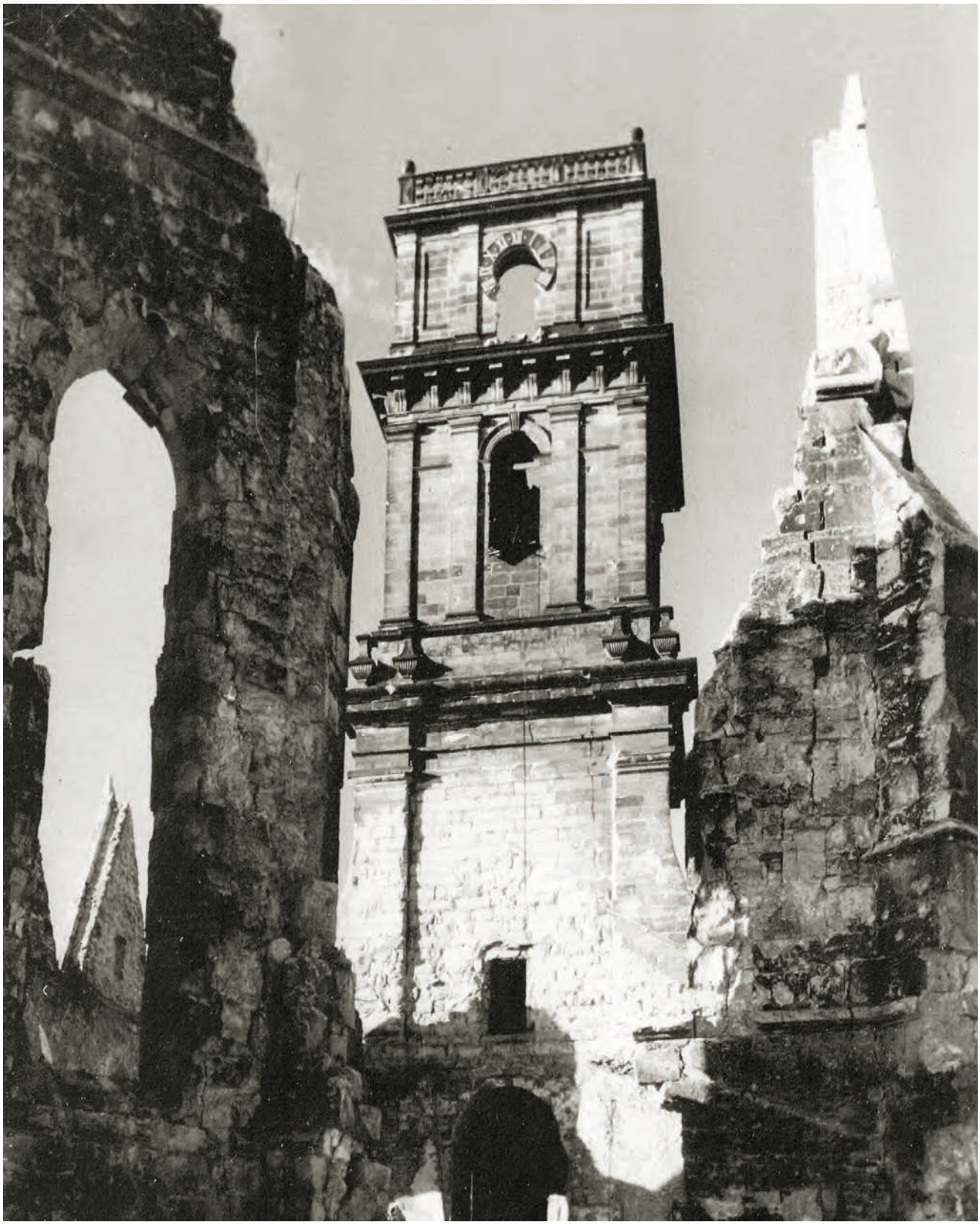
*3: Hanover, Aegidienkirche. View from the street, elevation, plan and interior [Noldeke 1932].*

the roof vaults were demolished and replaced by a cast-iron structure and a wooden roof (fig.4, fig.5). Architect Conrad Wilhelm Hase completed the interior of the church in 1886 [Noldeke 1932, 115-129; Leonhardt 1947]. It was severely damaged in the autumn of 1943: the 19th-century structures burnt down; parts of the older outer walls and a large part of the bell tower remained standing (fig.6). Only some sacred interior furnishings survived: the brass baptismal font from 1490, which is now in the Marktkirche, and three chandeliers now in the Kreuzkirche, as well as a series of Baroque tombstones and epitaphs, and the so-called Siebenmenschenstein - a relief panel with seven praying men. According to legend, the latter refers to the Spartans of Hanover [Noldeke 1932, 126-127], who invoked the city's help in 1490 during an attack by Duke Welf Heinrich on the Döhren Tower. Today, it is kept in the Hanover Historical Museum[4].
In the post-war period, after the necessary safety interventions, the city authorities decided to keep the Aegidienkirke in its ruined state as a memorial to the victims of the wars. In 1952, partial reconstruction and consolidation of the outer walls and bell tower was completed. A 15-metre high steel structure supporting twenty-five bronze bells was added to it in 1958. In 1959, a sculpture by Kurt Lehmann entitled *Demut* (*Humility*) was placed in the nave. Subsequently, on 27 May 1983, a twinning was sealed with the city of Hiroshima, which was notoriously destroyed by the first atomic bomb dropped on Japan. As a result of this initiative, the authorities of the Japanese city donated a peace bell to those of the German city, which was placed in the Aegidienkirke and is rung on the anniversary of the atomic blast that destroyed Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. Then, in 1993, artist Dorothee von Windheim created in the church a work called *Schattenlinie*[5], a white line made of white limestone blocks placed in the pavement, which marks on the ground the shadow that the south façade of the church casts every year on 6 August at 8.15 am.

## Conclusions

For several political, economic, and social reasons, the reconstruction of German cities after World War II was based on very different criteria. Within the variety of solutions adopted, those chosen for the town of Hanover represent a very special case with specific interesting features. The modernisation process of the urban layout and its road infrastructure was pursued with the support of large population groups and was completed in an extraordinarily short time. With the same speed, it was questioned as early as the 1960s, when the city decided to realise a metro line to improve collective mobility, and later, with a constant revision of urban planning choices (Mein Hannover 2030)[6].
From an architectural point of view, only a few of the most representative historical buildings were restored, with very few cases of complete reconstruction. Most of the residential fabric was built ex novo, with a 'modernist' architectural language, characterised by figurative elements referring to the local building tradition and moderate volumes.
The uniform and orderly character of the post-war buildings contrasts with the 'Gothic' forms of the rebuilt churches and those of the few surviving historic buildings, denouncing the profound laceration that the war brought about in the city's history.
This laceration is even more evident in the area around the ruins of the Aegidienkirche, which stand out against a relatively anonymous building fabric due to their singularity and regained monumentality, enlivening the memory of the war victims.

[4] https://www.hannover.de/Kultur-Freizeit/Museen-Ausstellungen/Museumsf%C3%BChrer/Top-Museen/Historisches-Museum-Hannover.
[5] http://welt-der-form.net/Hannover/Windheim-Schattenlinie-1993-02.html.
[6] https://www.hannover.de/content/download/716799/file/MH%202030%20ENGLISCH.pdf.



*4: Hannover, Aegidienkirche 1945 [Koberg1985].*

*5: Hannover, Aegidienkirche 1947 [Koberg1985].*

*6: Hannover, Aegidienkirche 2006.*

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## Sitography

Ballhof und Nationalsozialismus - Zukunft heisst erinnern (zukunft-heisst-erinnern.de) (aprile 2023)
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In un momento così significativo per la storia europea e mondiale, questo volume vuole essere la raccolta di riflessioni scientifiche condotte sui rapporti tra le scelte politiche, le azioni militari e la fisionomia delle città e del paesaggio urbano, sull'evoluzione delle strutture e delle tecniche di difesa, sulla rappresentazione della guerra e dei suoi effetti sull'immagine urbana, sul recupero delle tracce della memoria cittadina.
Da una parte il campo delle Digital Humanities apre nuove prospettive per studiare l'immagine della città prima, durante e dopo la guerra, dall'altro le tecnologie digitali impegnano studiosi e ricercatori di varie discipline: in particolare nell'ambito del disegno viene esplorato il ruolo della rappresentazione nella formulazione dei progetti urbani di difesa e nella documentazione degli eventi bellici e delle tracce lasciate dai conflitti, mentre nell'ambito del restauro vengono approfondite le sfide teoriche e pratiche imposte dai danni arrecati dai conflitti ai centri storici, passando in rassegna casi studio, soluzioni e dibattiti relativi alla conser vazione del patrimonio urbano coinvolto in azioni di guerra, con un'attenzione particolare all'identità e alla memoria collettiva.

*At such a significant moment in European and world history, this volume aims to be a collection of scientific reflections about the relationships between political choices, military actions and the physiognomy of cities and the urban landscape, about the evolution of defence structures and techniques, about the representation of war and its effects on the urban image, and about the recovery of the traces of city memory.*
*On the one hand the field of Digital Humanities opens up new perspectives to study the image of the city before, during and after the war, on the other hand digital technologies engage academics and researchers from various disciplines: In particular, in the area of drawing, the role of representation in the formulation of urban defence projects and in the documentation of wartime events and the traces left behind by conflicts is explored, while in the area of conservation, the theoretical and practical challenges imposed by the damage caused by conflicts to historic centres are explored, reviewing case studies, solutions and debates relating to the conservation of urban heritage involved in wartime actions, with a focus on identity and collective memory.*