

MAY 2024  
ISSN 2974-8216

ADH JOURNAL ISSUE N. 02  
HERITAGE CITIES AND DESTRUCTION | VOL. 1

ISSN 2974-8216



**A**

**DH**

ADH  
JOURNAL OF  
ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN  
AND HISTORY

HERITAGE CITIES  
AND DESTRUCTION |  
VOL.1 *ISSUE N.2*

ADH JOURNAL OF ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AND HISTORY  
The Journal of Architectural Design and History is a biannual magazine, undergoing a double-blind peer review process, realized within the framework of the UNESCO Chair in Architectural Preservation and Planning in World Heritage Cities at the Mantova Campus of Politecnico di Milano.



**POLITECNICO**  
MILANO 1863



POLO TERRITORIALE DI  
MANTOVA

#### FOUNDER

Federico Bucci

#### DIRECTOR

Elisa Boeri

#### DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Elena Fioretto and Claudia Tinazzi

#### EDITORIAL BOARD

Samanta Bartocci, Luca Cardani, Luciana Macaluso, Lorenzo Mingardi, Beatrice Moretti, Elena Pozzi, Rosa Sessa

#### EDITORIAL STAFF

Alessandro Benetti, Alberto Bologna, Stefania Campioli, Federica Causarano, Annalucia D'Erchia, Francesca Giudetti, Fabio Marino, Martina Meulli, Michela Pilotti

#### PHOTO BY

Renato Bazzoni, Christian Borchert, Donato Costanza, Emiliano Dante, Margit Kahl, Eletto Luigi, Marco Menghi, Ewa Faryaszewska, John Salmon, Alison and Peter Smithson, Lamberto Vitali, Bert Verhoeff, Zoppini

#### ARCHIVE

Anefo Auteursrechthebbende Nationaal Archief, Archive of St Andrew's Church Avonmouth, Archive of the Holy Redeemer Church, Archives Départementales des Vosges, Archives Nationales, Archivi Storici Politecnico di Milano, Archivio Storico Gardella, British History Online, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Carl Gerges Architects, Civico Archivio Fotografico di Milano, Collection City Archives of Rotterdam, Collections de la ville de Saint-Dié-des-Vosges, Collezione Archivio Amelio-Santamaria, Comune di Milano, Deutsche Fotothek, Fondazione Bruno Zevi, Fondo Ambiente Italiano, Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg - Kulturbehörde, Gabinetto Scientifico Letterario G.P. Vieusseux, Gottfried Böhm and family, Institut für die Geschichte der deutschen Juden, Kunstmuseum Den Haag, Ministry of Culture, Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte, Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Victoria and Albert Museum, Yad Vashem Photo Archive

#### SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Ángela García de Paredes, Jean-Philippe Garric, Ana Tostões, Elisa Valero Ramos, Bianca Gioia Marino, Andrea Sciascia, Filippo Lambertucci, Chris Whitehead

**The editorial staff is available for any acknowledgements of photographic and archival credits that could not be identified.**

#### GRAPHIC LAYOUT

ParcoStudio - Milano

#### WEBSITE

[adh.journal.mantova.polimi.it](http://adh.journal.mantova.polimi.it)

#### HEADQUARTERS

Politecnico di Milano, Polo Territoriale di Mantova

ISSUE N.2 | VOL. 1  
Heritage Cities and Destruction May 2024

PERIODICITY  
Biannual Magazine

ISSN  
2974-8216

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY  
Publi Paolini Via R. Zandonai 9 46100, Mantova



## ESSAYS

ESSAY BY IMAGES | EDITED BY LUCA CARDANI (POLITECNICO DI MILANO), FEDERICA CAUSARANO (IUAV UNIVERSITÀ DI VENEZIA), FRANCESCA GIUDETTI (POLITECNICO DI MILANO), LUCIANA MACALUSO (UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PALERMO) AND MARTINA MEULLI (SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA)

P. 11 **DESTRUCTION INTO FRAGMENTS**  
*THOUGHTS COLLECTED BY MEANS OF IMAGES*

ESSAY FROM THE ARCHIVE | EDITED BY ANNALUCIA D'ERCHIA (UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI BARI), LORENZO MINGARDI (UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI FIRENZE), MICHELA PILOTTI (POLITECNICO DI MILANO) AND CLAUDIA TINAZZI (POLITECNICO DI MILANO)

P. 24 **DURING AND AFTER THE WAR: BRUNO ZEVI AND IGNAZIO GARDELLA ON THE RADIO**

ESSAY | LUIGIEMANUELE AMABILE, ALBERTO CALDERONI (UNIVERSITÀ FEDERICO II DI NAPOLI)

P. 36 **RUINS UPON RUINS ST. KOLUMBA IN COLOGNE**

ESSAY | TOM AVERMAETE (ETH ZURICH), LEONARDO ZUCCARO MARCHI (POLITECNICO DI MILANO)

P. 54 **THE ABSENCE OF THE PAST AS FUTURE FOR THE CITY: RECONSTRUCTION AS SITUATED MODERN URBANISM IN POST-WAR MILAN, ROTTERDAM AND WARSAW**

ESSAY | GIULIA BELLATO (TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE)

P. 70 **BARI AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY A CASE OF MEDIEVAL URBICIDE**

ESSAY | MARIA GRAZIA TURCO (SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA)

P. 84 **ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE BETWEEN  
HUMAN DESTRUCTION AND NATURAL  
DISASTERS** *STRATEGIES FOR  
CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT*

ESSAY | LORENZO GRIECO (UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI ROMA TOR VERGATA)

P. 101 **WHERE THE BRICKS ARE FALLEN**  
*MONUMENTALISATION AND REUSE OF  
RUINED CHURCHES IN POST WAR  
BRITAIN*

ESSAY | LISA HENICZ (ETH ZURICH)

P. 123 **MULTIFACETED DESTRUCTION AND  
RECONSTRUCTION** *HAMBURG'S  
BORNPLATZ SYNAGOGUE AND ITS  
COMMUNITY*

ESSAY | JADE BERGER, ADRIEN MARCHAND, HUGO STEINMETZ (ÉCOLE NATIONALE SUPÉRIEURE  
D'ARCHITECTURE DE NANCY)

P. 134 **LOSING MEMORY** *ORDINARY  
HERITAGE AND MEMORIAL RUPTURE IN  
THE RECONSTRUCTED VILLAGES OF  
SAINT-DIÉ-DES-VOSGES*

# LECTURE



P. 152 **ARCHITECTURE AND  
REPRESENTATION** *ETCHING,  
ENGRAVING, PAINTING*

EDITED BY FABIO MARINO AND ELENA FIORETTO (POLITECNICO DI MILANO)

## REVIEWS BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF

---

P. 160 **Goodbye History, Hello  
Hamburger**

BOOK

---

P. 164 **“Italia da salvare”**

EXHIBITION

---

P. 169 **History of reconstruction -  
Construction of history**

BOOK

---

P. 174 **A Waste of Many Things**

BOOK

---



# THE ABSENCE OF THE PAST AS FUTURE FOR THE CITY: *RECONSTRUCTION AS SITUATED MODERN URBANISM IN POST-WAR MILAN, ROTTERDAM AND WARSAW*

By Tom Avermaete (ETH Zurich) and Leonardo Zuccaro  
Marchi (Politecnico di Milano)

## ABSTRACT

Following the Second World War, numerous European cities grappled with the challenging task of reconstruction. Despite the transformative impact of these reconstruction projects on the urban landscape of Europe, the historiography of urbanism tends to acknowledge them only minorly, often reducing them to the mere creation of new housing developments or city centres.

However, the reconstruction plans for European cities went beyond surface-level planning of neighbourhoods or central city areas. They were intricately connected to specific instances of urbicide and involved elaborate negotiations with pre-existing social, legal, economic, technical and morphological conditions, as well as with prevailing agencies.

Focusing on the cities of Milan, Rotterdam and Warsaw, this article argues that, due to their charged relationship with the existing fabric, urban reconstruction projects appear as alternative approaches to post-war urbanism. They emerge as exemplars of a 'situated modern urbanism' distinct from their counterparts, as they establish a modern urbanistic approach grounded in a highly nuanced understanding of the dimensions of time and agency.

## THE MANY FACES OF URBICIDE: MILAN, WARSAW AND ROTTERDAM

The Second World War caused an annihilation of cities across the European continent. While the initial appearance of the debris in various cities might have seemed similar, the actual manifestations of urbicide varied significantly. The Italian city of Milan, for instance, after the Second World War, was a true 'scattered city' as regards its built fabric and possibly even more as regards its social tissue. To counter the Fascist regime, the Allied

Forces primarily employed psychological warfare as their key strategy. Creating psychological trauma with the Milanese rather than the total physical destruction of the city by so-called ‘terror bombing’ was the approach employed by the British Royal Air Force between 1940 and 1945<sup>1</sup>. It consisted of minor but recurrent attacks, which generated significant psychological and moral impact, anxiety and panic. The effect on Milanese morale was enormous, leading some observers to conclude that “The Italian psychology was unsuitable for war<sup>2</sup>”.

The eradication of morale was paired with a ‘scattered destruction’ of various parts of the built environment. Small pieces of urban fabric were destroyed all over the city, turning Milan into a porous urban entity full of cavities and voids. The scattered pattern of destruction was not only the result of the dispersed character of the ‘terror bombing’ strategy but also of the material qualities of the city. The modern areas with wide streets (some more than 8-9 metres) and the typical use of bricks and reinforced concrete were not affected as much by the bombings and the resulting fire<sup>3</sup>. The older neighbourhoods with their wooden buildings were easily destroyed by fire:

Among the ruins of the ancient houses, the modern concrete buildings which resisted the fire became disproportionally visible. The face of the city became forever deformed<sup>4</sup>.

Although three million square metres of Milan remained untouched by the bombs and fire<sup>5</sup>, at the end of the war, approximately 6-7% of all buildings were destroyed, and 13-15% were damaged<sup>6</sup>. This implied that about 75,000 dwellings were destroyed (*vani distrutti*) and 162,000 were damaged, which amounted to 237,000 inhabitable dwellings, and a similar number of families on the streets<sup>7</sup>. Around 331.800 people lost their houses during the war, and until 1953, the reconstruction development could only restore less than half the demolished rooms with prolonged and enormous housing hardship caused by the bombings (figg. 1 and 2)<sup>8</sup>.



Figure 1. Ruins in Milan after the bombing in 1943 ©Lamberto Vitali, Fondo Lamberto Vitali Fotografo. Civic Photographic Archive, City of Milan (location: inv. LV 1165)

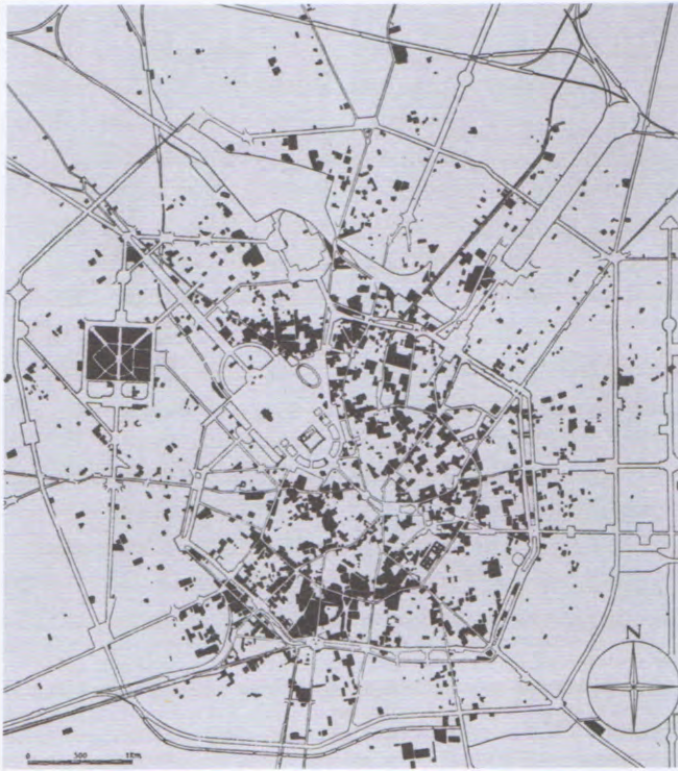


Figure 2. "Tutta la Rovina" - Map of destruction in Milan, in G. De Finetti, Milano, Costruzione di una Città, a cura di G. Cislighi, M. De Benedetti, P. Marabelli, Hoepli: Milano 2002, p. 432

While in Milan destruction had been scattered and recurrent, in the Polish city of Warsaw urbicide took a more encompassing form. During the Second World War, the capital of Poland became the focus of some of the fiercest Nazi policies aimed at the systematic and scientific annihilation<sup>9</sup> of the entire city as a physical, social, industrial, cultural and political centre, including "the biological extermination" of its inhabitants<sup>10</sup>.

A key aspect of this policy involved the complete obliteration of the entire constructed landscape of Warsaw. It aimed to eliminate completely every aspect and component of the urban structure, leaving no exceptions. The devastation extended beyond buildings, streets and infrastructure; even trees were included in the demolition strategy. The overarching goal was a systematic and comprehensive *tabula rasa*. This destruction policy was complemented by two other annihilation strategies: segregation and re-founding. High walls with watchtowers were constructed so that the northern part of Warsaw could be enclosed and segregated from the rest of the city. This new zone was turned into an intra-urban prison, which detained 400,000 Jewish citizens and became known as the Jewish Ghetto (figg. 3 and 4)<sup>11</sup>.

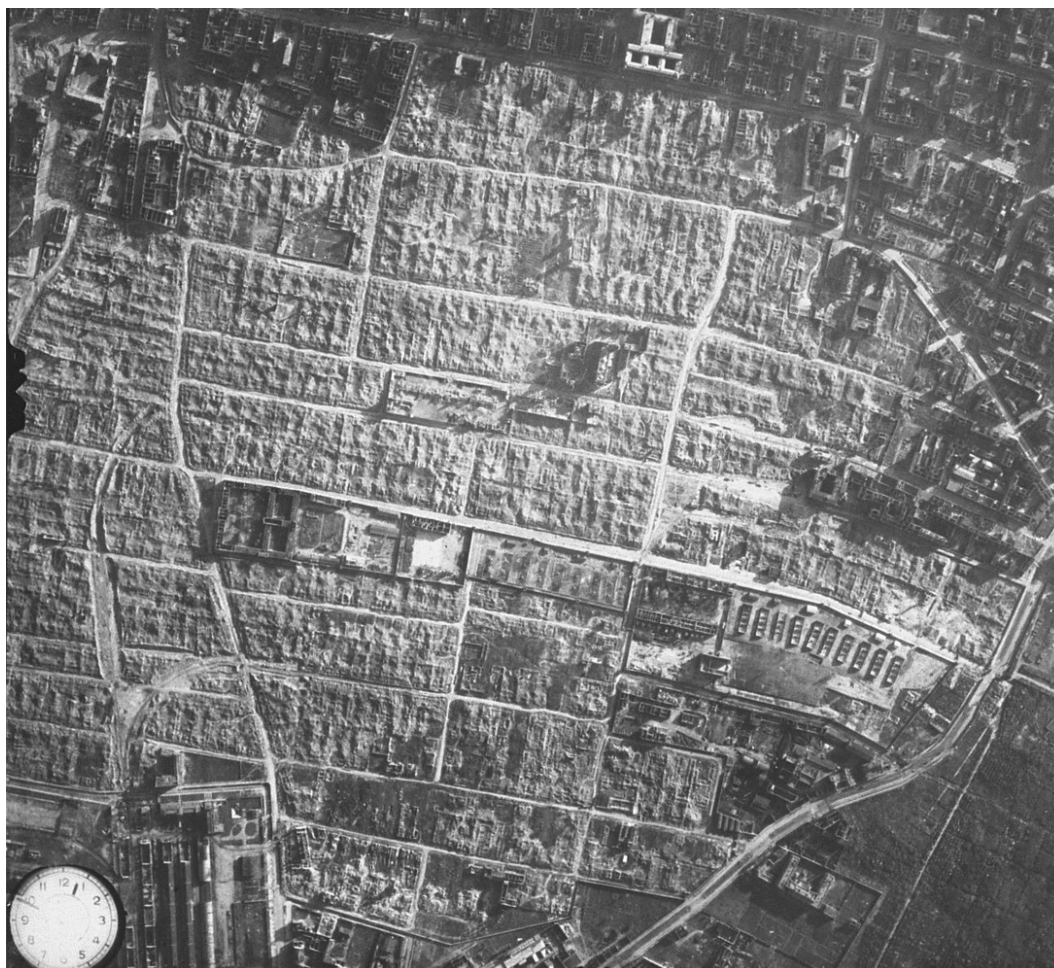


Figure 3. Aerial photograph of northern Warsaw Ghetto area (looking south, north direction located at bottom). In the middle German Concentration Camp in Warsaw (named KL Warschau or KZ Warschau), created in 1943. Public domain, in Wikipedia (accessed on January 20, 2024)



Figure 4. The full destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, as a reaction of Hitler to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943. North-west view, left - the Krasinski's Garden and Swietojska street, photo taken in circa 1950. Public domain, in Wikimedia (accessed on January 20, 2024)

A third element of the Nazi annihilation strategy consisted of the formulation of an entirely new plan for the city. Nazi town planner Friedrich Pabst and his team from Wurzburg considered the tabula rasa as the ultimate basis for the re-foundation of 'Warsaw, the new German City' (*Warschau – die neue Deutsche Stadt*)<sup>12</sup>. The plans envisaged a city that was only 1/20 of the existing Warsaw. This new German city would be inhabited by 130,000 German inhabitants and 80,000 enslaved Polish people, replacing the previous population of 1,310,000 Varsovians.

As a result, Warsaw faced one of the most extensive and totalizing destructions during the Second World War. A capital that took seven hundred years to grow was transformed into a material and social "dead city" in a short

time<sup>13</sup>. More than 250,000 Varsovians were murdered during the battle against the Nazi invasion in 1939<sup>14</sup>. In total, 800,000 citizens of Warsaw died during the war<sup>15</sup>. Next to these personal losses, the built environment was also strongly affected. Between 75% and 85% of the entire city was destroyed<sup>16</sup>. The Polish monuments were almost all destroyed: 782 historic buildings of the existing 957 were demolished. However, the everyday urban fabric of Warsaw was also strongly affected. In 1939, Warsaw counted 595,000 dwellings. In 1945, only 165,000 were still inhabitable<sup>17</sup>.

After the Second World War, Warsaw was no more than a field of rubble. Twenty million cubic meters of rubble and ruins were amassed in the downtown area<sup>18</sup>. Of the total of 3,708 million cubic feet of buildings that Warsaw consisted of before the war, the Nazis demolished no less than 2,600 million. In 1945, Warsaw was confronted with a total amount of rubble of 720 million cubic feet (fig. 5)<sup>19</sup>.



Figure 5. Rare Agfacolor photo (invention from 1936) dated August 1944 taken in Warsaw, Poland in the Old Town Market Place (Zakrzewski's Side) during the fight of Poles against the German Nazis called the Warsaw Uprising. Author Ewa Faryaszewska. Public domain, in Wikimedia (accessed on January 20, 2024)

A similar image of vast destruction characterized the Dutch city of Rotterdam as a result of the accumulated bombings by Nazis and the Allies. The former bombed the city centre on 14 May 1940 as a way to provoke the capitulation of the Netherlands. The latter conducted a raid on the western side of Rotterdam in 1943 to halt its function as a logistic hub for the Nazis. After the first Nazi attack, the city centre appeared as a complete tabula rasa with only a few buildings left and the majority of homes, department stores, factories, workshops, warehouses, schools, hospitals, churches and stations entirely destroyed<sup>20</sup>. The destroyed city covered an area of 258 hectares<sup>21</sup>. The urban fabric of the historical centre of Rotterdam was turned into a vast open field. The social fabric saw the disappearance of 850 citizens, while 80,000 people or

13% of the population, were left homeless. The estimated cost of the damage was about 420 million Dutch guilders, corresponding to over three billion euros in today's money<sup>22</sup>. In the Allied raid in 1943, a further 2,600 homes were destroyed, and approximately 1150 citizens died<sup>23</sup>. As a result, at the end of the Second World War, Rotterdam was the most damaged city in the Netherlands (figg. 6a and 6b; figg. 7a and 7b).

The different patterns of annihilation soon became the canvas on which a set of modern urban design approaches for reconstruction would be developed. While these reconstruction efforts were very different, retrospectively, they all appear as forms of 'situated modern urbanism' that differ from their contemporary counterparts in that they were based on nuanced attitudes to the temporal and agency dimensions of the city.



Figure 6a. Rotterdam, Coolsingel before bombardment, 1933. Collection City Archives of Rotterdam, collection 4232, specific number III-168-03-9, 1933

Figure 6b. Rotterdam, Coolsingel after bombardment, 1946, specific. Collection City Archives of Rotterdam, collection 4232, specific number III-254-2-1, 1946



Figure 7a. Rotterdam, Oude Haven before bombardment, 1933. Collection City Archives of Rotterdam, collection 4232, specific number 1970-483, 1933

Figure 7b. Rotterdam, Oude Haven after bombardment, 1946. Collection City Archives of Rotterdam, collection 4232, specific number III-257-19a, 1946

## **(RE)PRESENTING THE MEMORY OF THE ANNIHILATION**

A first temporal dimension with which many of the reconstruction projects engaged was the traumatic memory of the recent past. Paradoxically, the 'tabula rasa' of the Second World War would not lead to celebrating a progressist dimension in urbanism, as so many architects and designers of the modern movement had claimed, but rather to a sophisticated engagement with what existed before. Though this engagement with an annihilated past

seems a common denominator of many reconstruction projects, it took many forms.

In the city of Milan, it took the form of an urbanistic census. Eight so-called neighbourhood commissions were given the duty to analyse the character of urban destruction in their respective areas. In order to gain knowledge rapidly about the reconstruction, the city administration had developed the so-called Urbanistic Census (*Censimento Urbanistico*), which would act as an essential analytical tool for the registration by the various Neighbourhood Committees. The Urbanistic Census consisted mainly of a Statistical Scheme [*scheda statistica*], comprising an A3 page with a neighbourhood plan (scale 1:2000) and a table in which the damage could be described in numbers or percentages. The data on the plans of various Statistical Schemes were subsequently rewritten and summarized in one Main Plan of Milan (1:5000-1:2000)<sup>24</sup>. The Urbanistic Census was undertaken in no less than 45 days and offered in this short period a solid reference basis for the conception and development of reconstruction plans<sup>25</sup>.

While the engagement with the recent past took the form of a quantitative analysis in Milan, in Rotterdam, the symbolic dimension was paramount. At a very early stage, the city government realized that the trauma of the war needed two types of monuments. It commissioned memorials such as the sculpture 'The Destroyed City' (1951) by the Russian-born French sculptor Ossip Zadkine (fig. 8), which symbolized the blood and horror of the war with a void in the body like the destroyed heart of the city<sup>26</sup>. At the same time, however, the city government erected another type of monument that illustrated the solidarity that the annihilation had provoked. A good example was the illuminated sign on the main Coolingsel street with the text 'Get to work' [*Aan den Slag*] (1945), which encouraged the citizens of Rotterdam to join in collaborative action for the reconstruction of the city. As an observer remarked,

Amidst the memorials erected to those who fell in the war, this monument will rise and call us to work. Before us lies the main task of building a new city. Employers and workers must join together and persevere. They must work and create work. May this memorial urge them on and inspire them<sup>27</sup>.



Figure 8. Rotterdam, Monument "Verwoeste stad" by Ossip Zadkine in new location. ©Verhoeff, Bert / Nationaal Archief/CC0 2.24.01.05 Bestand 927-6843

## ALTERING HISTORICAL URBAN CONDITIONS AND PLANNING CULTURES

Next to representing the memory of the recent past, urban reconstruction projects also seem to be characterized by a positioning vis-à-vis historical urban conditions and planning cultures. In Milan, for instance, radical reconstruction was not a new phenomenon. Before the Second World War, Italian prime minister Benito Mussolini had already implemented the politics of ‘disbowelment’ or *sventramento*. It was aimed at radically modernizing the existing urban structure with new roads, new urban public spaces and new buildings by using the pickaxe and evacuating the residents from the city centre (“Sfollare le città”)<sup>28</sup>. Prominent architects, such as Piero Portaluppi and Marco Semenza, won in 1926 the competition for a new urban plan of Milan, which was “based on the idea of the almost total destruction of the actual city, for the reconstruction of a new one”<sup>29</sup>. Some of these plans were implemented and caused the loss of almost 60,000 dwellings in the city centre<sup>30</sup>.

This existing culture of demolition and reconstruction created a unique openness to develop new architectural forms, which had already gained momentum in the interwar period in the name of hygienic principles, social betterment, progress and innovation<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, the previous celebration of the ‘pickaxe’ had also installed an attitude which looked upon destruction as a profitable condition from which the modernization of the city could emerge. As the renowned Italian architect Nathan Ernesto Rogers maintained in 1945, in Milan the urban voids were looked upon as sites of new possibilities:

For years and years we have used the pickaxe to develop new logical principles of science and art. The fatal laws of war have replaced it and devastations with unacceptable proportions are the result. Hopefully, all of this disaster is not in vain. Let’s profit as much as possible<sup>32</sup>.

The numerous demolitions of Milan initiated a unique theoretical debate amongst architects, urban planners and politicians on the relationship between modernity and tradition, about how new buildings relate to the forms and practices of the historical past. This debate would culminate in discussions about context (*contesto*), ambience (*ambiente*) and pre-existing ambience (*preesistenze ambientali*). These concepts allowed architects and urban planners to relate to the past without copying historic buildings and neighbourhoods<sup>33</sup>. In other words, urban designers and architects could conceive of the past as a ‘context’ or an ‘ambience’ that would be complemented and further developed by their new buildings and neighbourhoods<sup>34</sup>. The complementarity between tradition and modernity embraced the reconstruction process and debate<sup>35</sup>, and it will upsurge as a symbolic presence in Milan with the BBPR’s Torre Velasca (1958)<sup>36</sup>, the emblematic counterforce to abstract modernism at the last CIAM meeting<sup>37</sup> and a “homage to a historical centre virtually destroyed by real estate speculators”<sup>38</sup>, for Manfredo Tafuri. This attitude of openness towards the past was not only a matter of single buildings but also of neighbourhoods and even of the entire city. As architect Giuseppe De Finetti maintained in 1946, “The war is cursed: but there is also a merit (...) it could liberate Milan without further delay from the regulatory plan that is so deleterious for its economy, for its life”<sup>39</sup>. Hence, the destruction of war was seen by many of De Finetti’s contemporaries as an excellent reason to abandon previous urban plans and to modernize the radio-concentric *forma urbis* of Milan, which had passed



from a metropolis to a megalopolis with a parasitopoli of uncontrolled expansion in the periphery<sup>40</sup>. From this perspective, the destruction of the war became an opportunity to restructure the entire city<sup>41</sup>.

In the Polish city of Warsaw, reconstruction was similarly considered as a counterproject for the dwelling conditions in the city before the Second World War. In the interwar period, the city's development was strongly affected by the speculative logics and rules of private enterprises. Critics had pointed out that this mode of urban development created substantial social disparities. Some of them observed that the large luxury bourgeois flats "had at least ten times as much light and air as the inhabitant of a one-room flat<sup>42</sup>". Also the density of inhabitants per flat was criticized and open for improvement<sup>43</sup>. Reconstruction became an important moment for improving the living conditions, particularly for the working class. The reconstruction plans can be considered a 'counterproject' for the existing dwelling conditions that aimed to resolve issues of overcrowding, as well as to guarantee better standards of light and air, and better hygienic conditions. Generally, the reconstruction process was conceived as a transition from a capitalist mode of urban development to socialist values and ways of urban planning.

In Rotterdam, reconstruction was considered an improvement strategy for historical urban conditions from its inception. The urbicide of the Second World War was generally regarded as the perfect opportunity to address many of the problems of industrial pre-war Rotterdam, including overcrowded and impoverished neighbourhoods and the absence of broad-scale modern infrastructures in the existing city. The old medieval centre of Rotterdam was poorly built and highly criticized for its chaotic and haphazard planning. Reconstruction was a major occasion for modernizing the city. This desire for modernization was already palpable among politicians, architects and urban planners even before the war<sup>44</sup>. The urban destruction was regarded as an occasion to improve the hygienic and spatial qualities of the old urban structure. In the reconstruction plans, an image of a new city was created that was characterized by openness, spaciousness and air, transforming the ratio of open space in the city centre from 44.5 % to 69.4%<sup>45</sup>.

## DEFINING THE MULTIPLE TEMPORAL LAYERS OF THE FUTURE CITY

Not only an engagement with the recent memory of the city and its history characterizes the urbanism of the reconstruction projects, but also a vision of the temporal layers of the city. Rethinking the future of the entire city as a 'matter of reconstruction' was, from the very beginning, an ambition in Milan. In 1942, a new National Urban Law (No. 1150) was ratified, which paved the way for a new planning instrument: the General Regulatory Plan or *Piano Regolatore Generale* (PRG). Specific for the PRG was that it considered the entire city. It defined reconstruction as a matter of various temporal layers of urban development, establishing an equivalence between areas that had to be preserved, transformed, rebuilt or expanded. In order to approach the city as this simultaneity of temporal urban layers, the PRG provided the legal basis for expropriation and for the firm embeddedness of plans for single neighbourhoods within the vision for the wider urban territory. Above all, however, the *Piano Regolatore Generale* was an instrument for considering the various actors and logics that could contribute to the development of the various temporal layers of the city. The plan offered a detailed overview of the investments to be made by the city government to safeguard the collective interest and decide which ventures could subsequently be left to private and individual investors (fig. 9)<sup>46</sup>.

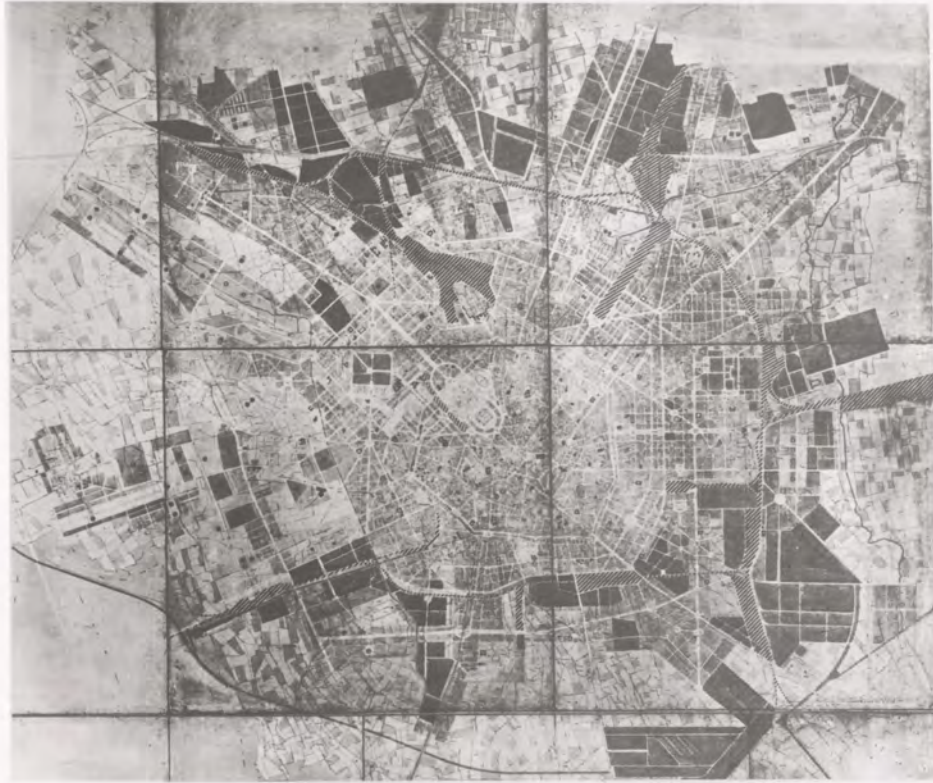


Figure 9. PRG of Milan, area outside the ring road, project of the urban planning division, 1944-45. Luigi Lorenzo Secchi Archives Fund. Unit: Section A, 18, File 2, Historical Archives and Museum Activities Service, Politecnico di Milano, ACL

In Warsaw, the multiplicity of temporal layers was also at the heart of the urbanistic approach to reconstruction. Under the heading “Functional Warsaw”, a notion already proposed in the 1930s by the modernist architects Jan Chmielewski and Szymon Syrkus, the Polish capital defined its urban reconstruction strategy. This encompassed the rapid development of new neighbourhoods that were based on adaptations of pre-war CIAM principles of the so-called ‘functional city’ such as the Kolo I housing estate (1948-49), which was composed of prefabricated elements, open ground floors and green spaces in between buildings. At the same time, however, Functional Warsaw also envisaged the rebuilding of the entire historic centre, including the reconstruction of eight hundred demolished buildings and the exact reproduction of numerous historical monuments, as a counterforce to the Nazi attempt to eradicate Polish identity and culture<sup>47</sup>. The reconstruction of Warsaw illustrates a modern urbanistic approach in which different temporal layers coexist: the immediate construction of new housing neighbourhoods combined with the equally important reconstruction of the historical city’s memory and identity.

This coexistence of temporalities required a firm legal basis also in Warsaw. Following the Decree of 26 October 1945, all the land within the borders of Warsaw was transferred to municipal property. The municipalisation of land was considered a basic prerequisite for the capital’s reconstruction, restoration and development. Unlike in Milan, this implied that the state was the sole actor of the reconstruction, engaging with the different temporal regimes of the city. As some observers noted, it deprived private owners of

their direct, active contribution to the development of the city<sup>48</sup>. At the beginning of the 1950s, all of the central districts belonged to the city, while the surrounding belt was mainly privately owned.

In the Dutch city of Rotterdam, the various temporal layers of the future city were also at the heart of the reconstruction plans. Already during the Second World War, plans for rebuilding were drawn up and all the ruins were cleared. After demolishing unrepairable buildings and removal of the rubble, emergency housing and shopping facilities were erected. An essential characteristic of these extremely rapid reconstruction processes was the existence of clear-cut but flexible plans that allowed for immediate action but also encompassed the necessary elasticity to adapt to evolving conditions. City architect Willem Gerrit Witteveen was tasked with a new reconstruction plan just four days after the bombing on 18 May 1940.

Profiting from the ongoing debates on city modernization, city architect Witteveen swiftly formulated his proposal for the initial Reconstruction Plan. A pivotal aspect of his plan was its characterization as a flexible framework. This framework not only aimed to delineate the contours of future urban development but was also conceived as a document intended to stimulate discussions with the various stakeholders engaged in the city's reconstruction.

However, in July 1942, the occupation authorities mandated a halt to all construction activities. This mandated pause prompted a re-evaluation of the initial plans and instigated a renewed focus on functional modernization. Six years after the inception of the first plan, in 1946, the Basic Plan devised by the new city architect Cornelis van Traa was officially adopted. Like its predecessor, Van Traa's Basic Plan took the form of a flexible framework rather than a rigid plan. Notably, only 31% of the land was earmarked for rebuilding, allowing significant portions of Rotterdam to remain open for prospective urban transformation and development.

In addition to their distinctive approach to the temporal dimensions, urban reconstruction projects often also displayed a specific attitude towards the question of agency in urbanism. While urban planners or urban designers typically were seen as the unquestioned main agents in post-war urban projects, a conception that would only be fully questioned in the late 1960s, the scope of the agency was often broadened and multiplied in the reconstruction plans of the 1940s and 1950s.

One approach to expanding the concept of agency in urbanism involved incorporating a diverse range of expertise. In the case of Milan's reconstruction, a notable decision was made not to base the planning and design process only on the 'internal knowledge' held by the functionaries of the city administration and city planning offices. Instead, Milan's mayor and vice-mayors opted to activate the collective expertise available in the city, encompassing private individuals, associations and firms outside of the administration. To achieve this, the mayor established the Study Group for the New Plan of Milan, also called *Il Parlamentino* by Mayor Grippi, comprising 125 members, the majority of whom were external. These members were organised into 20 Commissions, each responsible for different aspects of the reconstruction process<sup>49</sup>. This expansive apparatus of commissions enabled Milan to leverage expertise well beyond what was contained within existing city planning offices, ultimately accelerating and enhancing the quality of the reconstruction. This significant reservoir of expertise played important roles in various stages of urban reconstruction.

In contrast, Warsaw's first president-mayor, architect Marian Spychalski, centralized most of the technical decisions and implementation for the city's reconstruction<sup>50</sup>. Several governmental agencies were established to coordinate and direct the various stages of the process. The Bureau for the

Reconstruction of the Capital (BOS), installed by the Polish National Council and the inaugural government agency responsible for rebuilding Warsaw, undertook pivotal roles such as damage assessment, debris removal coordination, masterplan drafting and historical building research. Similarly to Milan, BOS sought expertise beyond the existing city administrations, attracting architects, experts and even students who worked on design projects related to Warsaw's reconstruction<sup>51</sup>. This collective expertise converged within BOS, which was responsible for crafting the blueprint of the new Warsaw and initiating the reconstruction.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AS A FULLY-FLEDGED ASPECT OF MODERN URBANISM**

A second way to multiply agency in urbanism, involved initiating public participation in the planning process. While mainstream urban design culture began to emphasise participation only in the late 1960s, public involvement appears to have been a prerequisite in the context of urban reconstruction, particularly in Milan.

The idea of collective participation into the decision-making for Milan's reconstruction gained broad acceptance and urgency after the war<sup>52</sup>. This shift towards participation was driven by the new democratic spirit that followed the liberation from fascist dictatorship, marked by events "such as the first democratic administrative consultation after twenty years, the free political elections, the referendum<sup>53</sup>". To facilitate this participation, a design competition was considered the most appropriate approach, allowing various ideas for reconstruction to be discussed with the wider citizenry. Hence, an ideas competition was launched by the Municipality of Milan in November 1945, attracting 96 proposals from 106 teams, including renowned architects and urban planners<sup>54</sup>. These teams were invited to discuss their projects in a public meeting at Castello Sforzesco, fostering a broad civic open discussion to engage the entire city. As a result, the first *Piano Regolatore Generale* of Milan (1948 - Piano Venanzi), drew upon the competition entry by the AR team (Architetti Riuniti- Albini, Belgiojoso, Bottoni, Cerutti, Gardella, Palanti, Perresutti, Pucci, Putelli and Rogers) whose proposal became a frame of reference for the city's reconstruction. Moreover, it introduced the proposal of a second centre of the city as a counterforce to the existing monocentric, opening a further discussion for "following studies on the polycentric city as an urban model of development<sup>55</sup>" (fig. 10).



Figure 10. "New city plan, planimetry of the centre as at 2000". The 1948 town plan: planimetry of the centre, within the circle of the bastions. Luigi Lorenzo Secchi Archive Fund. Unit: Section A, 18, File 2, Historical Archives and Museum Activities Service, Politecnico di Milano, ACL

In Warsaw, the city government recognised the invaluable reservoir of enthusiasm, initiative and perseverance within the returning population. Agencies involved in the reconstruction saw this enthusiasm as a crucial resource to be harnessed. Warsaw employed various means to bring the urban reconstruction project to the citizens and make it a collective effort. The nationally distributed illustrated magazine *Stolica* (Capital city), an official publication of the Bureau for the Reconstruction of the Capital (BOS), served as a weekly progress report. Articles, reports on cultural activities, and editorial commentary published in *Stolica* kept the public informed on all matters connected to reconstruction. The resulting engagement of the public in Warsaw's rapid reconstruction was evident in their contributions of "fifty million man-hours," particularly in rubble removal<sup>56</sup>.

In the city of Rotterdam, participation was also considered an essential dimension of urban planning. To sustain public involvement, Rotterdam's municipality initiated tours. These so-called 'Reconstruction Rides' organized by the RET - the city transport service - were very popular with both professionals and the wider public from 1946 onwards<sup>57</sup>. In addition, the municipality invested intensively in publications that could generate enthusiasm for the reconstruction with different private investors and the broad public. Magazines like *Rotterdam Builds!* and *The City on the Maas*, along with films such as *And Still...Rotterdam!* and *Keep At It!* showcased the ongoing reconstruction process and conveyed ideas for the city's development to

citizens<sup>58</sup>. Tours, publications and movies were not only means for involving the public in the reconstruction but also served to acquaint them with the new identity of their city, fostering enthusiasm, pride, hope and optimism among Rotterdammers.

## RECALIBRATING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE AGENCIES

In reconstruction projects, the broadening and widening of urban agency not only involved the inclusion of unconventional expertise and the involvement of the wider public in urban planning decisions but also the recalibration of the relationship between public and private agencies. In the early stages of Milan's reconstruction, the state assumed a firm regulatory role. As an observer of the early reconstruction efforts in Milan noted, "Since the bombing, private capital in Milan has built more cinemas than new homes<sup>59</sup>". In response, the Municipality of Milan determined that certain aspects of the built environment should not be entirely left to private initiative, with housing being a particular focus of public attention. As a result, the municipality started acting as a regulator and took a prominent role in directing the reconstruction process that guided private initiatives.

A distinctive facet of this regulatory role was the municipality's decision to introduce a period of 'calm down' in reconstruction activities. This strategy involved freezing construction resources for a specified period, allowing for the development of qualitative reconstruction plans. Implemented in Milan until 1946, this suspension strategy halted major building activities to prevent the dispersion of construction materials, the overuse of the transport system, and the scattering of workers. The legal approval of the 'release' (*lo sblocco*) occurred in 1947, coinciding with the legalisation and implementation of the first General Master Plan. This strategic approach enabled Milan to formulate a coherent reconstruction strategy, ensuring that private initiatives did not obstruct collective interests and the long-term vision for the city's development.

In Rotterdam, the implementation and development of the Witteveen plan were orchestrated through two government agencies: ASRO (Advisory Office for Rotterdam City Plan) and DIWERO (Rotterdam Reconstruction Department). These agencies were responsible for formulating reconstruction plans and the actual rebuilding<sup>60</sup>. These agencies could immediately make concerted action since the destroyed land in the centre was expropriated and requisitioned by the municipality of Rotterdam. Private owners were granted a new building site with an equivalent economic value to the previous one if they committed to rebuilding. Compensation for lost buildings was contingent upon the completion of the reconstruction, calculated based on the selling value during the destruction with added interest<sup>61</sup>.

However, planning the reconstruction of Rotterdam was not only a matter of state initiative. A group of local businessmen led by Cees van der Leeuw, the director of the Van Nelle factory – a symbol of industrial and architectural modernization - founded "Club Rotterdam." Collaborating with progressive modern architects of the Opbouw group, they influenced the design of a new functionalist plan for Rotterdam and actively engaged with the Advisory Office for the Rotterdam City Plan. In Rotterdam, the private sector collaborated with the architectural community and became an important agent in the reconstruction process. The Club Rotterdam ensured that the city's economic interests were integral to urban reconstruction.

## A SITUATED MODERN URBANISM

This concise examination of urban projects in Milan, Warsaw and Rotterdam reveals the rich spectrum of modern urban design approaches developed during the reconstruction processes following the Second World War. The radical absence of the past, due to the vast spatial and social annihilation of the war, seems to have induced a different type of modern urbanism that stands out because of its unconventional engagement with the dimensions of time and agency.

Distinguishing themselves from contemporary urban planning ventures, the urban reconstruction initiatives in Milan, Warsaw and Rotterdam uniquely address the temporal strata of the city. In these urban reconstruction projects, urban design is firmly anchored in the memory of the city, its history and the coexistence of different temporal layers, including future ones.

Simultaneously, these reconstruction endeavours stand out for their unconventional conceptualization of agency in urbanism. Unlike other post-war European urban planning projects that primarily vested agency in state actors, the reconstruction efforts in Milan, Warsaw, and Rotterdam demonstrate an atypical commitment to broaden the scope of urban expertise, to include the wider public in urban decision-making and to recalibrate the relationship between state and private actors.

This dual focus on time and agency outlines the tenets of what we propose to term 'a situated modern urbanism.' Such urbanism not only illustrates the complex challenge of reconstructing cities after the spatial and social annihilation of war. It also illuminates how, within the precarious and charged context of reconstruction, the tenets of a different urbanistic approach were formulated that offered an alternative to the general incapacity of modern urbanism to engage with multiple time dimensions and diverse agencies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research paper is written in response to an invitation from UNESCO and the World Bank.

NOTES

- [1] See: Pertot, Gianfranco. 2016. "Premessa. Milan alla fine della Guerra". In *Milano 1946. Alle origini della ricostruzione*, edited by Gianfranco Pertot, Roberta Ramella et al., 11. Milan: Silvana Editoriale.
- [2] Gribaudi, Gabriella. 2005. *Guerra totale. Tra bombe alleate e violenze naziste: Napoli e il fronte meridionale, 1940-1944*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 48.
- Quoted in Baldoli, Claudia. 2010. "I bombardamenti sull'Italia nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale. Strategia anglo-americana e propaganda rivolta alla popolazione civile". In *DEP Deportate, esuli, profughe. Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile 13-14*, 39.
- [3] See: Pertot, Gianfranco. 2016. Op. Cit., 14.
- [4] De Finetti, Giuseppe. 2002. *Milano. Costruzione di una città*, edited by Giuseppe Cislighi, Mara De Benedetti, Piergiorgio Marabelli, 436. Milan: Hoepli.
- [5] *Ivi*, 451.
- [6] See list of destroyed buildings: Ramella, Roberta. 2016. Op. cit., 307.
- [7] *Ibid.*
- [8] Consonni, Giancarlo. 2022. "La risposta al problema della casa a Milano negli anni della Ricostruzione (1945-53)". *Territorio 102: 7-13*. Consonni Giancarlo, and Graziella Tonon. 1979. "Le condizioni abitative dei ceti popolari e le lotte per la casa dal 1943 al 1948". In *Milano tra guerra e dopoguerra*, edited by Gabriella Bonvini and Adolfo Scalpelli, 639-702. Bari: De Donato.
- [9] See: Popiołek-Roßkamp, Malgorzata. 2018. "Warsaw: A Reconstruction that Began Before the War." Conference Proceedings. In Haddad, Elie (Chair), Butelski, Kazimierz, El-Daccache, Maroun. El-Khoury, Roula, and Boguslaw Podhalański. *Post War Reconstruction. The Lessons of Europe* (Beirut: Lebanese American University, 2018), 44-52.
- [10] Ciburrows, Adolf. 1964. *Warsaw. A City Destroyed and Rebuilt*. Warsaw: Polonia Pub. House, 44.
- [11] *Ivi*, 46.
- [12] *Ibid.*
- [13] *Ivi*, 56. W. Tomkiewicz, Straty kulturalne Warszawy (Warsaw's Cultural Losses), Warsaw 1948.
- [14] *Ivi*, 7.
- [15] *Ivi*, 62.
- [16] These numbers depend upon sources: 75% is mentioned in: Dziejwski, Stanislaw, and Stanislaw Jankowski. 1957. "The Reconstruction of Warsaw." *The Town Planning Review* 28, no. 3 (October): 63; 85% is the number stated in Ciburrows, Adolf. 1964. Op. cit., 62.
- [17] Dziejwski, Stanislaw, and Stanislaw Jankowski. 1957. Op. cit., 64.
- [18] Chmielewski, Jan Maciej, and Monika Szczypiorska. 2015. "Could Warsaw be differently rebuilt - alternative history of the city." Accessed December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023. [http://www.kaui.pan.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=446&kaui-1-2015-jm-chmielewski-m-szczypiorska-abstract&catid=80:1-2015&Itemid=56](http://www.kaui.pan.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=446&kaui-1-2015-jm-chmielewski-m-szczypiorska-abstract&catid=80:1-2015&Itemid=56).
- [19] Ciburrows, Adolf. 1964. Op. cit., 56-62. See: Wólkowski, Wojciech. 2021. "Architecture in Warsaw, 1939-1944." *Journal of East Central European Studies* 70: 689-708.
- [20] The Nazi air raid of the 1940 destroyed 25,479 homes, 31 department stores, 2,320 smaller shops, 31 factories, 1,319 workshops, 675 warehouses, 1,437 offices, 13 banks, 69 schools, 13 hospitals, 24 churches, 10 charitable institutions, 25 city and state buildings, 4 stations, 4 newspaper headquarters, 2 museums, 517 cafés and restaurants, 22 party venues, 12 cinemas, 2 theatres and 184 other commercial buildings.
- [21] Plan Witteveen, the first reconstruction plan <https://www.wederopbouwrotterdam.nl/en/tijdlijn/plan-witteveen/>; See McCarthy, John. 1998. "Reconstruction, regeneration and re-imaging. The case of Rotterdam." *Cities* 15, no. 5: 337-344.
- [22] Fact sheet 75 years of post-war reconstruction in Rotterdam, 2, [www.rotterdamviertdestad.nl](http://www.rotterdamviertdestad.nl).
- [23] Fact sheet 75 years of post-war reconstruction in Rotterdam, 1, [www.rotterdamviertdestad.nl](http://www.rotterdamviertdestad.nl). See Couperus, Stefan. 2015. "Experimental Planning after the Blitz. Non-governmental Planning Initiatives and Post-war Reconstruction in Coventry and Rotterdam, 1940-1955." *Journal of Modern European History* 13, no. 4: 516-533.
- [24] See: Ramella, Roberta. 2016. Op. cit., 158.
- [25] *Ivi*, 38.
- [26] See also Meyer, Hans. 2002. "The promise of a new, modern society in a new, Modern city, 1940 to the present". In *Out of Ground Zero: case studies in urban*, edited by Joan Ockman, 86. New York, Munich: Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture, with Prestel.
- [27] Statement by Karel Paul van der Mandele, 1945, in "Post-War Reconstruction". Accessed December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023. <https://www.wederopbouwrotterdam.nl/en/post-war-reconstruction/>.
- [28] See Pertot, Gianfranco. 2016. Op. cit., 75.
- [29] *Ivi*, 18.
- [30] *Ivi*, 77.
- [31] *Ivi*, 76.
- [32] *Ivi*, 102. E. N. Rogers, "L'architettura e il cittadino", 18 July 1945.
- [33] These debates took amongst others place in the Milanese architectural magazine *Casabella-Continuità* (before *Costruzioni-Casabella*) edited by Ernesto Nathan Rogers in the 1950s.
- [34] After the war, this debate was still undeveloped and the quantitative dimension of the destruction revealed the cultural inadequacy in the fields of restoration, urban design to face it. Finally, as De Finetti remarks "the profane thought of rebuild the ancient buildings as they were, ... is the only one that has been affirmed with great force in Milan". De Finetti, Giuseppe. 2002. Op. cit., 436.
- [35] About the reconstruction of historical buildings, like the Santa Maria della Pace convent in Milan, by Ignazio Gardella and Giovanni Romano, see Barazzetta, Giulio, Guerritore, Camilla, and Marco Simoncelli. 2023. "An Exemplary Case Study of Post-WWII Reconstruction in Milan." *Nexus Network Journal* 25: 319-338. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00004-022-00639-3>.
- [36] See also Neri, Raffaella. 2019. "Milan 1945, the Reconstruction: Modernity, Tradition, Continuity." Conference proceedings. In Haddad, Elie (Chair), Butelski, Kazimierz, El-Daccache, Maroun, El-Khoury, Roula, and Boguslaw Podhalański, *Post War Reconstruction. The Lessons of Europe* (Beirut: Lebanese American University, 2018), 31.
- [37] See Zuccaro Marchi, Leonardo. 2018. *The Heart of the City: Legacy and Complexity of a Modern Design Idea*. London: Routledge, 100.
- [38] Originally in Italian: "Omaggio a una Milano che la speculazione aveva praticamente distrutto". Tafuri, Manfredo, and Francesco Dal Co. 1976. *Architettura Contemporanea*. Milano: Electa, 339.
- [39] De Finetti, Giuseppe. 2002. Op. cit., 451.
- [40] With the war, the last urban plan by Albertini ("Milano del duemila" - 1934) was abandoned. The war highlighted the necessity of concrete plans and sanctioned the rejection of megalomaniac, huge, unrealistic, utopian urbanization of the all Milanese territory (13,100 hectares) designed for a population of 2-3 millions of inhabitants (1,139,000 inhabitants in 1939 in Milan). Other variations already tried to reduce and reframe the plan before the war, such as the plan by Luigi Lorenzo Secchi.
- [41] After the war, the new mayor- Antonio Greppi- and all the vice-mayors have been previously involved in the Resistance against fascism. There was strong political will to contrast the previous regime, which was mirrored in the planning process as well. The abandonment of the previous plans was also expression of a political position. One of the vice-mayors - Vincenzo Rigamonti - was directly dealing with "War damage" issue ("Danni di Guerra"). Pertot, Gianfranco. 2016. Op. cit., 17.
- [42] Boleslaw, Bierut. 1951. *The six-year plan for the reconstruction of Warsaw*. Warsaw: Ksiazka i Wiedza, 91.
- [43] *Ibid.* In 1939 small flats - one/two rooms - were the 68.6% of the total flats. The density of the one-room flat was 3.8 persons per room, the three-room flat was 1.6 and the six-room flat was only 0.9.
- [44] See Meyer, Hans. 2002. Op. cit., 89.
- [45] Reinhardt, Hans. 1955. *The Story of Rotterdam. The city of today and tomorrow*. Rotterdam: The Public Relations Office of the City of Rotterdam, 31.
- [46] See: Ramella, Roberta. 2016. Op. cit., 37.
- [47] See: Mumford, Eric. 2000. *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 182-183.
- [48] Chmielewski, Jan Maciej, and Monika Szczypiorska. 2015. "Could Warsaw be differently rebuilt - alternative history of the city." Accessed December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023. [http://www.kaui.pan.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=446&kaui-1-2015-jm-chmielewski-m-szczypiorska-abstract&catid=80:1-2015&Itemid=56](http://www.kaui.pan.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=446&kaui-1-2015-jm-chmielewski-m-szczypiorska-abstract&catid=80:1-2015&Itemid=56).
- [49] *Ibid.* One Central Commission [Commissione Centrale], 13 members, coordination role, definition of zoning and functional distribution in the city; Eight Neighborhood Commissions [Commissioni di quartiere], 44 members; Nine Technical Consultative Commissions [Commissioni consultive tecniche], 53 members; One Advisory Board of the Regulatory Plan for completing the permitting applications to build [Commissione consultiva di Piano regolatore], 15 members; One General Inspection board [Commissione generale di controllo], 19 members.
- [50] Ciburrows, Adolf. 1964. Op. cit., 66.
- [51] *Ivi*, 144.
- [52] Until the period of reconstruction, there were three methods for commissioning urban plans that were adopted in Milan: the direct commissioning to well know professional figures, the design by technical bureaucracy, and the ideas competition. The first methods was ill judged because cultural reasons and inopportune political influences. The bureaucratic choice was in stark contrast with the idea of "urban plan as an art work" and with the necessity of fresh innovative ideas. The idea competition remained the main methods for a new plan of reconstruction.
- [53] See Ramella, Roberta. 2016. Op. cit., 37.
- [54] Riboldazzi, Renzo. 2016. Op. cit., 61.
- [55] See: Neri, Raffaella. 2019. Op. cit., 34. See: Bonfante, Francesca, and Cristina Pallini. 2015. Op. cit., 142-160.
- [56] Ciburrows, Adolf. 1964. Op. cit., 147.
- [57] "Fact sheet 75 years of post-war reconstruction in Rotterdam", 1, [www.rotterdamviertdestad.nl](http://www.rotterdamviertdestad.nl).
- [58] "Post-War Reconstruction". Accessed December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023. <https://www.wederopbouwrotterdam.nl/en/post-war-reconstruction/>.
- [59] De Finetti, Giuseppe. 2016. Op. cit., 441.
- [60] Engineer Johan Ringers was the government minister who oversaw the entire reconstruction. "Plan Witteveen, the first reconstruction plan". Accessed December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023. <https://www.wederopbouwrotterdam.nl/en/tijdlijn/plan-witteveen/>.
- [61] Reinhardt, Hans. 1955. Op. cit., 8.



# BARI AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY A *CASE OF MEDIEVAL URBICIDE*

By Giulia Bellato (Trinity College, Cambridge)

## ABSTRACT

In 1156, King William I of Sicily mounted a campaign of destruction against the city of Bari, in Apulia, intending to punish its inhabitants for their insubordination. Despite the citizens' pleas, "the most powerful city of Apulia, celebrated by fame and immensely rich, proud in its noble citizens and remarkable in the architecture of its buildings" was swiftly transformed into piles of rubble, as a contemporary chronicler recounts. Focusing on the twelfth-century destruction of Bari, this paper engages with the theme of urban destruction in the past. The study of destruction in its various forms, be it because of natural catastrophes, conflicts, economic rapaciousness, or urban renovation, is a topic which has been garnering an increasing amount of cross-disciplinary interest in recent years. Within this context, a vibrant current of work examines the concept of urbicide, or the wilful destruction of a city's buildings deliberately undertaken to destroy urbanity. While this concept has been employed productively to study modern-day examples, it has been applied much more cautiously to the study of cities in the pre-modern world, leaving a significant gap in the scholarship. Yet, the framework of urbicide can be a valuable tool for understanding destruction in the past. When applied to the Middle Ages, for instance, it can help highlight what constituted "a city" and "urbanity" in the perspectives of a medieval urban resident and allow us to explore the motivations of the destroyer as well as the reactions of observers and contemporaries. Utilizing a combination of chronicle, documentary and material evidence, this paper will explore the destruction of Bari, focusing on its violent transformations and on the significance of the buildings that were targeted. It will argue that the destruction aimed not so much at obliterating the city in its entire physical entity, but rather specifically at erasing its urbanity, effectively committing an act of temporary urbicide.

## INTRODUCTION

*Having won this victory, the king [William I of Sicily] led his army up to Bari; the population of the city came out to meet him without weapons, and begged him to spare them. But looking at the ruins of the royal citadel which the people of Bari had destroyed, he said, 'My judgement against you will be just: since you refused to spare my house, I will certainly not spare your houses [...] the walls were first brought down to ground level, and the destruction of the entire city followed. That is why the most powerful city of Apulia, celebrated by fame and immensely rich, proud in its noble citizens and remarkable in the architecture of its buildings, now lies transformed into piles of rubble.*

Hugo Falcandus<sup>1</sup>

This dramatic narrative recounts the events that marked the final stages of a large-scale rebellion led by the city of Bari, among others in Apulia, against the Norman power centred on the Sicilian court of Palermo. At the time of these events, Bari had been under Norman control for about 85 years, since Robert Guiscard's conquest of the city in 1071, but had displayed little tolerance for Norman authority during this period. The city not only possessed a rich history as a Byzantine provincial capital, but also boasted a strong tradition of local politics which had, on occasion, led to periods of independent rule. About a year before the events narrated above, its citizens had allowed a Byzantine army to enter the city and use it once again as their Apulian foothold, from which to mount a broader and more generalised offensive against Norman control over the region<sup>2</sup>. This passage is the most renowned and frequently cited account of the city's destruction, ordered by the Sicilian ruler William I, after regaining control of the city. Its author, (pseudo) Hugo Falcandus<sup>3</sup>, was a contemporary writer based at the Palermitan court and he is generally recognised as possessing considerable insight into the political events of his time, notwithstanding his significant biases. Falcandus depicts a clear "eye for an eye" dynamic of destruction: the splendid architecture of the former Apulian powerhouse being razed in retaliation for the destruction of William's own stronghold within the city, the Norman fortress, which had been damaged during the insurrection.

The deliberate, targeted destruction of the built environment featured frequently in the medieval world as a tool of political violence, as it still does today. Medieval chronicles are rife with reference to urban towers, rural castles, city walls, and other significant monuments being destroyed during struggles for power. These acts were not always, and often not primarily, driven by strategic military necessities but instead stemmed from a more complex dynamic involving both symbolic and practical rationales. While deliberate political destruction is still being investigated in a rather piecemeal fashion by medieval historians and archaeologists, it is of great significance to the study of medieval politics and urban life. Studying the logic behind destruction allows us to understand better not only the tangible manifestations of power and violence in relation to the materiality of the built environment, but also the less tangible world of ideas: about space, authority, and identity more broadly. Combining these elements then allows us to look at those complex phenomena that inextricably link the physical and social fabrics of the city with the collective memories and identities of its inhabitants.

This paper will explore the destruction of Bari, focusing on the types of buildings that were targeted during the attack. Medieval sources testifying to destruction are notoriously hard to interpret: narrative accounts often employ rhetorical language when describing episodes of destruction, intentionally drawing parallels with famous ancient examples (e.g. Troy and Carthage) or biblical ones (e.g. Shechem, Babylon, or Jericho). At the same time, the archaeological evidence presents its own set of issues. Even when traces of destruction are identifiable during excavations or surveys, there are substantial methodological risks in attempting to link them precisely to historical events and ascribing them to deliberate actions, particularly within urban settings<sup>4</sup>. Despite these challenges, the destruction of Bari is well documented by a wealth of textual sources produced both from within and outside the city. These have been meticulously examined by historians, with the objective of comprehending the repercussions of King William's fury on

the city's structures. In addition, archaeological findings contribute to our reconstruction of the medieval city. Utilizing a combination of these sources, the initial section of this article will provide an overview of Bari's urban landscape at the time of the attack. Then, it will focus on its violent transformations and on the significance of the buildings that were targeted, arguing that the destruction aimed not so much at obliterating the city in its entire physical entity, but rather specifically at erasing its urbanity, effectively committing an act of temporary urbicide.

## URBICIDE

The concept of urbicide has gained increasing prominence since the 1960s, particularly, though not exclusively, within the work of architects, sociologists, journalists, geographers, and contemporary historians. It has been used to study a variety of phenomena relating to the destruction of a city not just in its physical manifestations, but also as a living organism and as a political community<sup>5</sup>. The primary objective of an act of urbicide is understood to be that of "destroying urbanity" by eradicating the structures that define a city as such and which embody civic life and ideals<sup>6</sup>. It thus provides a valuable framework for examining a particular form of urban destruction in which demolition is carried out as a type of political violence aimed at affecting the inhabitants in practical, ideological, and cultural terms, through the targeted destruction of the buildings. The urbicide framework found particular resonance in relation to the urban destructions undertaken during the Yugoslavian conflicts of the 1990s, but in recent studies it encompasses a broader spectrum of cases and causes (from warfare to speculative developments, industrialisation/deindustrialisation, ideology, and more)<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, its reception within studies of deliberate destruction in the ancient and medieval past has been more cautious. Part of the reason is linked to the kind of resources, in terms of time, expenditure, and technological abilities required for effective urbicide. In a recent volume on city destruction in Ancient Greece, for instance, the editors rightly remarked on the rarity of urbicide in the ancient Greek world. They noted that "the notion of victors systematically razing constructions to the ground is a vivid and efficient literary symbol, but it is far removed from the realities and efforts it implies"<sup>8</sup>. This is clearly also linked to the matter of the reliability of the written sources, which are not necessarily accurate in quantifying the extent of the damage, or at least impossible to verify. Finally, contemporary scholars have also at times expressed hesitancy regarding the possibility of using the concept of urbicide to explain destruction in the past. That it is because it relies on a specific cultural construction of the city that encompasses an idea of 'urbanity' which might not always be fitting the context of historical cities<sup>9</sup>.

This paper will assess the applicability of the urbicide framework to medieval city destruction. It does not aim to serve as a definitive test for the universal validity of any specific model of urbicide applied to cities in the past. Instead, it employs urbicide as a lens to highlight distinct characteristics of medieval urban destruction. This framework allows us to reflect more deeply on the concept of urbanity as understood by medieval urban dwellers, as well as highlighting the significance and the underlying principles of a destructive practice which appears pervasive in the medieval world.

## BARI IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY

Medieval Bari occupied the small peninsula known today as “Bari Vecchia”, encircled by the sea to the north, west, and east, and protected by defensive walls (Fig. 1). During the early medieval period, the city underwent periods of Lombard, Islamic, and Byzantine rule, all while maintaining a robust tradition of local political activity. By the time of its destruction, it had enjoyed centuries of political and economic significance, in virtue of its historical role as the capital of the Byzantine *thema* of Longobardia, of its economic and trading networks, and its advantageous position on the Adriatic Sea coast. This political tradition and the city’s enduring wealth, in addition to the presence of an active and well-established Jewish quarter, all contributed to a twelfth-century urban space marked by centuries of diverse influences.



Figure 1. Plan of Bari following Musca’s hypothesis on the location of the twelfth-century walls. Image by the author, based on Musca 1981: 37, Nuzzo 2015: 26

Before the conquest by the Normans, the political heart of the city had been the *praetorium*, also known as the catepan’s court, a complex comprising several structures and most likely fortified<sup>10</sup>. After Guiscard’s conquest, however, this area underwent a significant transformation into a religious centre, with the construction of the St. Nicholas Basilica, aimed at housing the relics of the saint which had been brought from Myra in 1087 (Fig. 2). The construction of the Basilica resulted in a city that revolved around two major religious centres (in addition to an array of smaller churches), the Cathedral of St. Sabinus and the new Basilica. This conversion of the old Byzantine praetorium area into a religious centre carried a significant political message from the new authority and St. Nicholas became a prominent pilgrimage destination, enjoying substantial patronage not only from the Normans but also from the papacy in Rome, especially in the person of Urban II<sup>11</sup>. The Norman castle, which was located near the port, one of the most vital assets of the city, served as another focal point of political authority and the sources show that civil judges operated here at least from 1100<sup>12</sup>.



Figure 2. Basilica of St Nicholas, late 11th century (photograph by Eletto Luigi, with kind permission)

The residential network of the city was dense and compact in its layout<sup>13</sup>. By the twelfth century, the typical middling house in Bari was a *casa/domus orreata*, a two-storey building often organized around a shared court that could house wells and *guttae* for water collection and waste disposal. A staircase, often external and sometimes made of stone (*scala petrinea*), offered access to the upper floor. A notable architectural feature frequently mentioned in the written sources was the *guayfo*, a large terraced platform or balcony that overlooked either the courtyard or the public road. References to upper floors, staircases and *guayfi*, along with frequent mentions of arches, indicate a city where building by exploiting the space vertically was the norm. This architectural model, inherited from the Byzantine period, appears to have persisted even during the Norman era, alongside an increasing proliferation of towers and of tower-houses, a kind of structure which started appearing in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and would then become characteristic of the 12<sup>th</sup>. Several later examples of Bari tower-houses can still be observed in locations like Vico della Torretta, via Martinez, via Palazzo di Città, and Piazza Cola Gualano, although these structures have undergone modifications over the centuries (Fig. 3)<sup>14</sup>. The changing forms of the buildings are accompanied also by changes in the arrangement of the residential patterns: during the twelfth century, written sources document a growing agglomeration of buildings in *insulae* and in *vicinii*, dense neighbourhoods organized around a pole of attraction which could be an élite residence or a (sometimes private) church. The concentration of the urban environment is further testified by the presence of houses and tower-houses built right against the defensive walls of the city, once again indicating a dense, compact style of living<sup>15</sup>.



Figure 3a. Medieval tower house in via S. Sebastiano (13th century), (photographs in the public domain, Catalogo Generale dei Beni Culturali)

Figure 3b. Medieval tower house in via della Torretta (12th-13th century), (photographs in the public domain, Catalogo Generale dei Beni Culturali)

## THE DESTRUCTION

When the destruction began, the first structure to be destroyed seems to have been the city walls, as reported by Falcandus. It is worth noting that this was not the first instance of the Normans destroying Bari's defensive walls. In 1139, a previous attack led by Roger II using siege machinery had caused substantial damage to the walls, so much that it had also resulted in the collapse of the adjacent residential buildings<sup>16</sup>. We have other evidence, beside Falcandus' report, that the walls were heavily compromised in the 1156 attack, including the collateral (perhaps partial) destruction of a monastery which was situated by the fortifications, S. Bartolomew *iuxta antitum muri*. An inscription commemorating the monastery's restoration in 1180 explicitly stated that this reconstruction was deemed necessary due to its "*diruta sorte gravi*"<sup>17</sup>. The precise extent of the wall's destruction is difficult to estimate, due to the lack of definitive archaeological evidence, though a combined study of extant architectural and written evidence has shed light on a section of their likely location (fig. 4)<sup>18</sup>.



Figure 4. Reconstruction of the most likely location of part of the medieval walls, following the curvature of the buildings (images by Paolo Perfido, reproduced with kind permission)

The destruction of the city walls was significant beyond its military implications. The *murum urbis* constituted a key element in the citizens' conceptualisation of their own city. While certain neighbourhoods, houses, and churches could extend beyond the physical confines of the city walls, the walls were the visible marker that defined a city as such and helped define its inhabitants as citizens. Consequently, they often became prime targets during medieval urban destructions<sup>19</sup>. In the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century, for example, Lombard king Rothari attacked a series of Ligurian cities and, after their defeat, he stripped them of their defensive walls. The chronicler Fredegarius, documenting these events, noted that the king “destroyed the walls to the foundations, so that those cities would be called villages”<sup>20</sup>. The destruction of the walls effectively transformed the cities into something lesser, effectively negating their ‘cityness’. In the case of Bari, the *Annales Ceccanenses* records that in the year 1156 King William of Sicily fought against the Greeks near Brindisi, and he defeated them. Then he went to Bari and destroyed it, and “*fecit ex eo villas*”<sup>21</sup>. Some have interpreted this passage to mean simply that the population was dispersed into the countryside, which indeed was the case, as we will see below. However, when comparing this passage with the earlier one by Fredegarius, it becomes evident that the destruction of Bari’s walls was also understood to mean a symbolic vilification in the same vein as that which befell the Ligurian cities, transforming it from a great city to a more rural place through the destruction of its boundaries.

The demolition of the city walls was also part of a deliberate effort by the king to forcibly alter the status of its inhabitants, effectively stripping them of their citizenship by erasing both the conceptual and practical boundaries of their city. A few documents dated to the years immediately following the destruction, recording the transactions of former citizens who had relocated to neighbouring Apulian areas, bear witness to the profound impact of this attack on both their identity and legal standing. For example, in 1157, when a certain Kiramaria decided to sell her properties to someone named Iohannes, both parties are described as “*olim barenses*”, meaning “formerly Bari citizens”. In 1158, it is Bisantius Struzzus, son of Bisantius who describes himself as “*olim civitatis Bari*”. Similar formulations can be found in various documents from the same period<sup>22</sup>. In normal circumstances the agents involved in these transactions would be referred to as simply ‘Bariots’ or ‘citizens of Bari’, typical of the formulaic language employed by the notaries registering the acts. The modification of these formulae is thus made even more significant by the fact that it disrupts an established notarial custom and can thus be perceived to have specific legal significance. It can be seen as an attempt at committing to written memory the former juridical status of the individuals, essentially resisting its loss and the associated loss of the legal rights and privileges that came with it.

The erasure of the status of ‘city’ for Bari through the destruction of its walls also meant an erasure (or, at least a temporary suspension) of the status of citizens for its former inhabitants, visible in their notarial activities. At times, we also get a glimpse of the emotional dimension of the destruction, most likely a reflection of individual feelings: two fragments of charters include the sentences: “*Ut barenses Barum revertantur*” and “*si ex indulgentia predicti domini nostri regis iamdicta civitas recuperata fuerit*”, expressing the wish to be able to return to the city<sup>23</sup>.

It was not solely through the destruction of the city walls that this transformation was enforced, but also through that of the residential environment of the city.

As the chroniclers report, the king granted the citizens two days to vacate the city with their belongings before embarking on the demolition of buildings: “The king arrived with his army, a strong hand, and an outstretched arm and he forcefully besieged the city and he captured it, though he allowed them [the citizens] to depart freely, moved by compassion<sup>24</sup>”. “They were allowed a truce for two days, during which period they were to leave, taking all their things with them<sup>25</sup>.” The choice to let some time lapse, between the capitulation of the city and its destruction, underscores the fact that this was executed as a deliberate act of systematic political violence, rather than being driven by military necessity.

Evaluating the extent of the destruction within the city’s residential network is an endeavour fraught with significant challenges. From the point of view of the material evidence, one of the foremost difficulties lies in the practicality of conducting extensive archaeological investigations, particularly in an urban centre like present-day Bari, where the constraints of space, infrastructure, and development make large-scale excavations virtually unfeasible. The other is the methodological challenge posed by the attempt to connect with certainty any evidence of destroyed residential buildings with specific historical events that might have caused their ruin. Indeed, no indisputable trace of the 1156 destruction has ever been found in the archaeological record of the city. The clear evidence of medieval residential buildings uncovered through excavations in the old city centre, for instance, is now believed not to be directly linked to the 1156 events, but rather to urban restructuring<sup>26</sup>. The documentary evidence is also of difficult interpretation. If we look at some



surviving documents dated to the first decade after the destruction, we find records of property transactions involving houses that appear to have survived relatively unscathed<sup>27</sup>, providing a contrasting perspective to the image of the city as a “pile of rubble,” as described by Falcandus. At the same time, other documents produced in the same years do include references to properties within the city that were either destroyed or damaged. For example, Kiramaria, whom we encountered earlier, mentioned in one of her property sales a “*casili diruto quo est intus diruta civitate Bari*”<sup>28</sup>. A foreign eyewitness, the Jewish author Benjamin of Tudela, passed through Bari less than five years after the destruction, during his Mediterranean journey and described it as a “great city destroyed by King William of Sicily”. He added that by then, it was “not only devoid of Israelites but also of its own people, and entirely ravaged”<sup>29</sup>. Some years later, we find people selling destroyed houses within the city<sup>30</sup>, and even at the turn of the century there are still mentions of destroyed properties in the sources: in 1199 a *casa diruta* was confiscated and in 1200 the noblewoman Laupa sold “*unam domum in maiori parte diruta*”, located in an aristocratic neighbourhood<sup>31</sup>. These accounts suggest that at the close of the twelfth century, there were still visible scars on Bari’s urban landscape resulting from William I’s demolitions, in the form of partially destroyed private buildings. Rather than treating this varied evidence as contradicting, turning to the concept of urbicide can be a useful way to approach the issue of understanding the impact of the residential destruction, provided we approach it in a qualitative, rather than quantitative, manner. As mentioned above, one of the difficulties in applying the concept of urbicide to the pre-modern world is that complete and utter destruction was hard to achieve in practical terms, contrarily to what can be achieved with modern-day tools. This is especially true for twelfth-century Bari, since, by the time of the 1156 event, many of the buildings in the city centre would have been constructed from stone rather than perishable materials. Systematic destruction of these structures would have been a lengthy and costly undertaking. However, I posit that achieving large-scale destruction was not necessary to accomplish the goal of erasing urbanity. Especially when combined with forced exile, the targeted destruction of a few significant buildings would have been sufficient to dismantle the local political and social networks that were deeply ingrained in the city’s residential fabric. William’s primary aims were precisely the disruption of these networks and the alteration of the city’s identity, rather than the total obliteration of every physical urban structure.

In medieval cities like Bari, where neighbourhoods could coalesce around specific elite residences, these buildings served both as visible markers of the social status of their owners and as practical centres of power. Abundant evidence reveals that in Bari, these houses were pivotal locations for arranging meetings, making decisions, forming alliances, and striking deals<sup>32</sup>. They were the physical centre of a social network that extended beyond direct family members to encompass relatives and a broader array of associates<sup>33</sup>. As such, we often find competing groups vying for their control. During periods of internal factional struggle, for instance, the demolition of the house of a political enemy could mark the victory of the destroying party and there are numerous references to deliberate house destructions in Bari which are closely tied to periods of internal strife. Towers and tower-houses, in particular, formed a visible landscape of power meant to dominate the skyline of the city and, as such, their control had significant consequences in political terms. During Robert Guiscard’s campaign to conquer Bari, one of his notable demands was the surrender of the house of Argyros, a local leader, “since he knew that it was higher than the neighbouring houses” and he “hoped that by obtaining it and from its elevation he might control the whole city”<sup>34</sup>. They

were both a practical means of domination and a symbol of acquired authority. Consequently, erasing these conspicuous landmarks from the urban landscape would have signified the removal of the family's authority from the city in similarly symbolic and practical terms.

From a material perspective, as previously noted, Bari's urban fabric consisted of a tightly interconnected system of buildings that were often interdependent. Houses not only shared internal courtyards but also main walls, supporting arches, and passageways<sup>35</sup> (Fig. 5). In this context, the targeted destruction of even a few selected buildings had the potential to disrupt a much wider area than the single residence. Even assuming that only a percentage of the city's buildings suffered severe damage, the written sources testify to the impact on the inhabitants. In documents issued in the years after 1156, not only the city is frequently described as *diruta*, but various contracts and agreements often include expressions of hope that "through the leniency of our king, we might one day recover our city<sup>36</sup>." These sentiments underscore the enduring impact of the destruction on the city's identity, the longing for its restoration, and the feelings of denied belonging to its collective on the part of the exiled citizens, regardless of the precise quantitative extent of the residential demolitions.



Figure 5. Tower house in Strada Arco della Neve (Google Earth)

The rationale behind the choices made during the destruction becomes even more apparent when we consider another type of building that characterized the urban landscape of Bari. While the walls and residential buildings were the primary targets of William's army during the attack, there is a notable category of structures that were largely spared: ecclesiastical institutions. Except for the case of St. Bartholomew mentioned earlier, there is no clear evidence to suggest that churches and monasteries were systematically targeted in the assault.

An examination of religious buildings mentioned in documents from the 12th and 13th centuries revealed that out of 32 known churches from the earlier period, at least eighteen still existed in the later era<sup>37</sup>. The absence of mentions of the others in written sources does not necessarily indicate their ruin either, as they may have continued to exist. One papal document from 1177 does mention the dilapidated condition of the church of St. Nicholas *de lu portu*, describing it as “*diruta*”<sup>38</sup>. However, archaeological investigations conducted in several Bari churches, including St. Nicholas *de lu portu*, did not reveal any evidence of violence datable to the mid-twelfth century<sup>39</sup>. The fate of the cathedral of St. Sabinus has also been debated. An older tradition believed that the restoration the cathedral underwent in late twelfth-century may have been repairs due to following the Norman attack, though there is no direct evidence to support this interpretation<sup>40</sup>. Additionally, a document from 1160 records a series of intact houses adjacent to the cathedral, suggesting that this area may not have been significantly affected by the destruction<sup>41</sup>. It is more plausible that the refurbishment efforts were driven by competition with the Basilica of St. Nicholas, which enjoyed substantial wealth and patronage due to the relics of the revered St. Nicholas of Myra. The Basilica was indeed spared any damage during the attack, a fact that contemporary authors explicitly documented. As previously mentioned, this church was not only a significant pilgrimage centre but also a stronghold of Norman power in the city, which would have guaranteed its protection (Fig. 6). Similarly, other religious institutions closely associated with royal authority seem to have survived, such as the monastery of St. Scholastica. Four years after the destruction, the monastery was under the governance of *domina* Eustochia, who was the “sister of Lord Maio, the great admiral of admirals, and of Lord Stephen, likewise a royal admiral”, two of the most high-ranking figures at the Palermitan court<sup>42</sup>. It is likely that Eustochia rose to the role of abbess even earlier, as Falcandus informs us that Maio “appointed his family and relations to the highest offices of the realm” and “gave clerics appointments of great honor” as early as the summer of 1156<sup>43</sup>. This would suggest that St Scholastica had also managed to remain unscathed, confirming the image of relative continuity in the religious life of the city.



Figure 6. Aerial view of Bari vecchia, with the Norman-Swabian castle in the bottom-left corner, the cathedral at the centre, and St Nicholas in the top-right corner (Google Earth)

In addition, this also reveals that the destruction was not indiscriminate, but rather followed a precise rationale and was the result of deliberate consideration on the part of the destroyers. We know that the St Nicholas area, which had been rebuilt after substantially reworking the site of the former Byzantine praetorium, was not just a church, but a whole complex that still was fortified in the 1150s<sup>44</sup>. This allowed it to function as a relatively independent neighbourhood, a sort of city within the city, which also housed markets and even a *xenodochium* for travellers<sup>45</sup>. In the *Breve Chronicon de Rebus Siculis*, it is explicitly mentioned that “the neighbourhood of Saint Nicholas was spared out of devotion so that the pilgrims who came to worship that saint could find the necessary supplies<sup>46</sup>.” The decision to spare this area thus served two distinct purposes: the first was to support a prestigious religious centre that had been closely linked to the southern Italian Norman power since its establishment. The second was to maintain an area within the city that still retained a degree of liveability, including access to food and essential supplies for travellers, as indicated by the *Chronicon*. The key detail is that this was not intended for the citizens themselves, but rather for pilgrims coming to venerate St. Nicholas’s relics and other external visitors. The choice to spare St. Nicholas, along with other religious institutions in the city, thus further illustrates a rationale of destruction aimed at targeting the urbanity of the place, the physical landscape that fostered the daily lives of its citizens, rather than engaging in indiscriminate demolition of the entire urban area. William’s strategy effectively involved the targeting of the destruction so that the city would become unliveable and inaccessible to its own citizens, while carving out spaces which could continue to operate as enclaves with their own characteristic urban character, different and capable of surviving independently from that of the main city.

## CITIZENS WITHOUT A CITY - A CITY WITHOUT CITIZENS

There are different ways of evaluating the success of William’s endeavour. On one hand it seems clear that unlike other medieval cities that suffered destruction<sup>47</sup>, Bari was never fully abandoned. Even outside of the confines of the St Nicholas neighbourhood, we know that there was a degree of activity in the city already in the years immediately following 1156, as testified by the documents which record the presence and the work of the royal curia in Bari<sup>48</sup>. However, for the majority of the population, the situation must have been quite different. As the *Chronicon* recounts, “the inhabitants of Bari [...] did not return to their properties if not after the death of king William I, [when] queen Margaret his wife had them recalled; and for 11 years they dwelled as exiles, living under their vines and their fig trees. [...] Instead, the leading men among the citizens of Bari travelled with their families to the [...] emperor of the Constantinopolitans, who gave them the city of Spita/Spica to settle in<sup>49</sup>.” The long exile appears confirmed once again by the documentary sources, as still in 1167 they record the transactions of former inhabitants who continued to reside in neighbouring areas and on occasion even include their hopes that one day the city would be returned to its citizens, as seen above<sup>50</sup>. The memory and longing for Bari’s restoration clearly persisted among its displaced residents.

The impact of the destruction on the people was profound and enduring even after the royal pardon allowed for their return. Approximately half a century after the events, local judges compiled the *Consuetudini Baresi*, a heterogeneous written collection of customary laws that likely combined older oral customs with written laws<sup>51</sup>. Throughout this compilation, the

demolition of the city is a recurring theme, with numerous references to the loss of acts and *chartae* in connection with the city's destruction. Consequently, many entries in the *Consuetudini* are dedicated to providing instructions on how to resolve disputes related to dowries, property ownership, lost documents, debts, and various other disagreements when the original proofs were lost in the "*destructionem patriae*<sup>52</sup>." The compilation of the *Consuetudini*, perhaps even more than the accounts of chroniclers, serves as a vivid testament to the anxieties and disruptions caused by the widespread losses that followed 1156 and by the breaking down of the networks that regulated everyday life as a consequence of it.

This evidence makes it clear that William was extremely successful in committing a form of temporary urbicide against the Apulian centre. Bari experienced a deliberate act of political violence that was not intended to obliterate the entire urban fabric but rather to dismantle and harm specific structures or groups of buildings closely associated with the identity, politics, and daily life of its citizens. The city walls and the residential buildings were the main targets, while the major religious institutions of the city, especially those which had a connection with the Norman authority, were allowed to remain mostly intact. Notably, St. Nicholas Basilica was left standing and was allowed to function as an isolated urban island, distinct from its surrounding environment. Using the framework of urbicide allows us to study the events of 1156 beyond answering the simple question of whether the city was truly empty or thoroughly destroyed. Firstly, it enables us to engage with the information provided by textual sources in a different manner: instead of solely searching for the "truth" concerning the physical extent of the destruction, it allows for an examination of the choices made regarding which structures were to be demolished or spared. This analysis can be carried out with a focus on the impact on the lives of the citizens, their sense of identity, and their daily routines within the city. In this context, it becomes necessary to detach the concept of urbicide from specific considerations of scale or of the practical feasibility of destruction. Secondly, the framework of urbicide need not be reserved for the study of contemporary destructive events. Rather, it can also offer a valuable tool for contemplating what constituted "a city" and "urbanity" in the perspective of a medieval urban resident, allowing us to explore the motivations of the destroyer as well as the reactions of observers and contemporaries.

NOTES

- [1] Falcandus, Hugo. 1998. *The History of the Tyrants of Sicily*. Edited and translated by Graham A. Loud and Thomas Wiedemann. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 73-74.
- [2] For an overview of the political situation: Lavermicocca, Nino. 2017. *Bari Bizantina: Origine, Declino, Eredità Di Una Capitale Mediterranea*. Bari: Edizioni di Pagina.
- [3] For the question of Falcandus' identity and his reliability: Loud, Graham A. 2015. "Le Problème du Pseudo-Hugo: qui a Écrit l'Histoire de Hugues Falcand?" *Tabularia 'Etudes'* 15: 39-55.
- [4] Santangeli Valenzani, Riccardo. 2013. "Dall'Evento al Dato Archeologico: Il Sacco Del 410 Attraverso la Documentazione Archeologica." In *The Sack of Rome in 410 AD: The Event, Its Context and Its Impact*, edited by Johannes Lipps, Carlos Machado, and Philipp von Rummel, 35-39. Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag. A counterexample from a non-urban setting is the excavation at Montaccianico: Monti, Alessandro, and Elisa Pruno, eds. 2016. *Tra Montaccianico e Firenze: gli Ubaldini e la Città*. Oxford: Archaeopress. [5]
- Carrión Mena, Fernando, and Paulina Cepeda Pico. 2023. "Urbicide: An Unprecedented Methodological Entry in Urban Studies?" in *Urbicide: the Death of the City*, edited by Fernando Carrión Mena and Paulina Cepeda Pico, 3-22. Cham: Springer, 8. [6] Coward, Martin. 2009. *Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction*. London, New York: Routledge, 15, 128.
- [7] *Ibid.*, for relevant bibliography. See also Delgadillo, Victor. 2023. "Epilogue. Remake Us from Ruins, Collective Memories and Dreams" in *Urbicide: the Death of the City*, edited by Fernando Carrión Mena and Paulina Cepeda Pico, 3-22. Cham: Springer, 917-937, section 44.2. [8] Fachard, Sylvain, and Edward M. Harris. 2021. "Introduction: Destruction, Survival and Recovery in the Ancient Greek World." In *The Destruction of Cities in the Ancient Greek World: Integrating the Archaeological and Literary Evidence*, edited by Sylvain Fachard and Edward M. Harris, 1-33. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 18. [9] See for instance Coward, Martin. 2009. Op. cit., 127-128. [10] Nuzzo, Donatella. 2020. "Bari Dal Praetorium Bizantino Alla Cittadella Nicolaiana: Le Trasformazioni Di Un'area Urbana Alla Luce Delle Fonti Scritte e Della Documentazione Archeologica." In *Oltre l'Alto Medioevo: Etnie, Vicende, Culture Nella Puglia Normanno-Sveva*, 203-225. Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 206. [11] For these transformations: Musca, Giosuè. 1981. "Sviluppo Urbano e Vicende Politiche in Puglia. Il Caso Di Bari Medievale." In *La Puglia Tra Medioevo Ed Età Moderna: Città e Campagna*, edited by Domenico Blasi, 14-49. Milan: Electa, 34-37. [12] *Ivi*, 38. [13] For an overview: Iorio, Raffaele. 1995. "L'urbanistica Medievale Di Bari Tra X e XIII Secolo." *Archivio Storico Pugliese* 48: 17-100; Palombella, Raffaella. 2014. "Modelli Abitativi e Trasformazioni Del Tessuto Urbano a Bari Tra XI e XIV Secolo: Una Ricerca Multidisciplinare." In *Casa e Torri Medievali: Indagini Sui Centri Dell'Italia Meridionale e Insulare (Sec. XI-XV), Atti Del V Convegno*, edited by Elisabetta De Minicis, IV:143-165. Rome: Edizioni Kappa. [14] Giuliani, Roberta. 2011. "L'edilizia Di XI Secolo Nella Puglia Centro-Settentrionale: Problemi e Prospettive Di Ricerca Alla Luce Di Alcuni Casi Di Studio." In *La Capitanata e l'Italia Meridionale Nel Secolo XI Da Bisanzio Ai Normanni*, edited by Pasquale Favia and Giovanni De Venuto, 189-232. Bari: Edipuglia, 205. [15] Raffaella, Palombella. 2014. Op. cit., 154-155. [16] Falco of Benevento. 2012. "The Chronicle of Falco of Benevento." In *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily: Selected Sources Translated and Annotated by Graham A. Loud*, edited and translated by Graham A. Loud, 130-249. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 46. [17] Cited in Lavermicocca, Nino. 2017. Op. cit., 243. [18] Perfido, Paolo. 2008. "Una Parte Di Città. Assetti Urbani e Architettura Nella Bari Medievale: Il Vicino Di S. Maria de Kiri Johannac." In *Bari, Sotto La Città: Luoghi Della Memoria*, edited by Maria Rosaria Depalo and Francesca Radina, 45-52. Bari: Mario Adda, 45. [19] Mucciarelli, Roberta. 2009. "Demolizioni Punitive: Guasti in Città." In *La Costruzione della Città Comunale Italiana, Secoli XII-Inizio XIV*, 293-330. Pistoia: Viella, 293ff. [20] Fredegar. 1888. "Fredegarium Scholasticum Chronicarum Libri IV." MGH, SS, Rer. Merov. II, edited by Bruno Krusch. Hannover, 57. [21] Pertz, G.H., ed. 1866. *Annales Ceccanenses*. MGH SS 19. Hannover, entry y,1156. [22] Nitti di Vito, Francesco, ed. 1902. *Le Pergamene Di S. Nicola Di Bari: Periodo Normanno (1075-1194)*. Codice Diplomatico Barese V. Bari: Società di storia patria per la Puglia [henceforth: *CDB* V], 114 (1157);116 (1158); 125, (1165). [23] *CDB*, V, frag. 16 (1160 ?); frag. 19-20 (1156-1165). Also: Iorio, Raffaele. 1995. Op. cit., 24. [24] Delle Donne, Fulvio, ed. 2017. *Breve Chronicon de Rebus Siculis*, vol XII. RIS 3. Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo. [25] Falcandus, Hugo. 1998. Op. cit., 73-74. [26] Riccardi, Ada. 2008. "I Progetti Di Riqualificazione Urbana: Le Indagini Archeologiche Nella Città Vecchia Di Bari." In *Bari, Sotto La Città: Luoghi Della Memoria*, edited by Maria Rosaria Depalo and Francesca Radina, 93-98. Bari: Mario Adda editore, 97. [27] E.g. *CDB*, V, frag. 16 (1160?), 119 (1161). [28] *CDB*, V, 114 (1157), 196. [29] Colafemmina, Cesare. 1975. "L'itinerario Pugliese Di Beniamino Da Tudela." *Archivio Storico Pugliese* XXVIII: 81-100, 99. [30] Nitto de Rossi, G.B., and Francesco Nitti di Vito, eds. 1897. *Le Pergamene Del Duomo Di Bari (952-1264)*. Codice Diplomatico Barese I [henceforth: *CDB* I]. Bari: Vecchi, 50, (11[6]7). [31] Tropeano, Placido Mario, ed. 1977. *Codice Diplomatico Verginiano*. Montevergine: Edizioni Padri Benedettini, XI, 1062; *CDB*, VI, 11. [32] For a couple of examples of house use: *CDB*, IV, No. 43, (1068), p. 85; Pellegrino, C., ed. 1724. *Anonymi Barensis Chronicon (855-1149)*. RIS 5. Milan: Società Palatina, 156, MCXVIII. Ind. XI. [33] Falkenhausen, Vera von. 1984. "A Provincial Aristocracy: The Byzantine Provinces in Southern Italy (9th-11th Century)." In *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries*, edited by Michael Angold, 211-235. Oxford: B.A.R., 224; Skinner, Patricia. 1998. "Room for Tension: Urban Life in Apulia in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries." *Papers of the British School at Rome* 66: 159-176. [34] William of Apulia. *The Deeds of Robert Guiscard*. Translated by Graham A. Loud. Leeds Medieval History Texts in Translation Website. [https://ims.leeds.ac.uk/archives/translations/Book II, 27-28](https://ims.leeds.ac.uk/archives/translations/Book%20II,%2027-28). [35] Iorio, Raffaele. 1995. Op. cit. 5. [36] *CDB*, V, Frag. 19-20 (1156-1165); 114 (1157), p. 196. [37] Iorio, Raffaele. 1995. Op. cit. 83ff. [38] *CDB*, I, 53 (1177). [39] Lavermicocca, Nino. 2017. Op. cit. 242-243. [40] *Ivi*, 249. [41] *CDB*, V, frag. 16 (1160?). [42] Cited in: Gabrieli, Andrea. 1899. *Un Grande Statista Barese Del Secolo XII, Vittima Dell'odio Feudale*. Trani: Vecchi, 27-33; cfr: Panarelli, Francesco. 2011. "Le Origine Del Monastero Femminile Delle SS. Lucia e Agata a Matera e La Famiglia Di Maione Di Bari." In *ArNoS*, 3:19-32, 29-30. [43] Panarelli, Francesco. 2011. Op. cit., 30; Falcandus, Hugo. 1998. Op. cit., 77. [44] See the contemporary account of John Kinnamos, calling it a 'fortress': John Kinnamos. 1976. *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*. Translated by Charles M. Brand. New York: Columbia University Press, 110. [45] Nuzzo, Donatella. 2020. Op. cit., 216. [46] Delle Donne, Fulvio. 2017. Op. cit., XII, 57-61. [47] See for instance Tusculum: Beolchini, Valeria. 2006. *Tusculum II. Tuscolo, Una Roccaforte Dinastica a Controllo Della Valle Latina: Fonti Storiche e Dati Archeologici*. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider. [48] Lavermicocca, Nino. 2017. Op. cit., 246. [49] Delle Donne, Fulvio. 2017. Op. cit., XII, 57-61. [50] *CDB*, I, 50, (11[6]7). [51] Massa, Teodoro. 1903. *Le Consuetudini Della Città Di Bari: Studi e Ricerche*. Bari: Vecchi, Copeta, Clara. 2011. "Bari: Una Ciudad Multiétnica En La Edad Media". *Plurimondi* 9: 139-164, 111. [52] Andrea da Bari and Sparano da Bari. 1860. *Il Teste Delle Consuetudini Baresi*. Edited and translated by Giulio Petroni. Naples: Stamperia del Fibreno, 42; 54-56; 106; 140-141; 148, et al.

**CONTACTS**

Politecnico di Milano, Polo Territoriale di Mantova  
Piazza D'Arco 3, 46100 Mantova  
[adhjournal.mantova.polimi.it](http://adhjournal.mantova.polimi.it)  
[adh-journal@polimi.it](mailto:adh-journal@polimi.it)

