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Debates over the reconstruction of Dresden’s Frauenkirche, the city’s landmark Church of Our Lady destroyed by aerial bombing in 1945, exemplify the conflicts inherent in the treatment of war-related cultural heritage. This chapter traces the shifting dynamics of a half-century-long debate over how the Frauenkirche site could and should be conserved, and the impact that struggles over war memory and commemoration have on cultural heritage. Initially, only some local citizens’ determination to rebuild the church prevented this particular ruinous site from being cleared away with all the other rubble from Dresden’s almost entirely destroyed historic Old Town (Altstadt). Over time, however, the Frauenkirche ruins emerged in their own right as an arresting antiwar symbol and one of the foremost sites of politicized war memory and commemoration in divided Germany. Of course, the two roles that the ruins had come to fulfil – either facilitating the church’s future reconstruction, or functioning as an increasingly prominent site of memory deserving of conservation in its unaltered state – were incompatible. Moreover, principles endorsed by the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites – popularly known as the Venice Charter of 1964 – could not resolve the issue one way or the other. By the 1980s, severe decomposition of the ruins demanded action. Then, with the advent of Germany’s reunification in 1989-90, the kind of heritage to be preserved at the site came under intensified scrutiny and debate. This created fresh opportunity for the church’s potential reconstruction, and a local citizens’ action group (Bürgerinitiative) successfully appealed for worldwide support to rebuild Dresden’s Frauenkirche. Debates over war-related cultural heritage are loaded with the politics of the past and present. In Dresden, we see that the political imperatives of the state, the agency of individual stakeholders and changing political contexts over time each influences debate over whether to preserve, reconstruct or redevelop war-damaged sites.

**Destruction of the Elbflorenz**

Allied aerial bombing heavily damaged over 130 German cities and towns of varying size and military-industrial strategic importance during the Second
World War. Estimates of the associated civil death and devastation are imprecise, but commonly accepted figures include some 600,000 German civilians killed, around 900,000 others wounded and a further 7.5 million 'de-housed' after 3.5 million dwellings were destroyed (Sebald 2003: 11; Hastings 1979: 352; Moeller 2006: 27; USAAF 1945–6: 5–6). In addition to such sobering statistics, myriad landmark buildings and artefacts of inestimable historical, architectural and cultural worth were lost, too. Germany abounds with constant reminders of the bombing-war, from memorials, museum exhibitions and local remembrance days to various other state-centred and socially engineered forms of public commemoration. Cityscapes across the nation, furthermore, still bear witness to the destructive effects of area-bombing. Whether it be the derelict vestiges of bombed-out buildings that remain standing or, conversely, modernized skylines emblematic of the massive postwar reconstruction that has taken place, many German town-centres serve as implicit tokens of the Western Allies' strategic bombing offensive against the Nazi homeland. Among this impressive catalogue of civil devastation, the 13 February 1945 firebombing of Dresden is widely recognized as both the zenith of the European bombing-war and a sui generis case of German wartime loss and suffering. Indeed, through the politics of war memory and commemoration Dresden promptly garnered a postwar reputation as the paradigmatic German Opferstadt, or victimized city sacrificed towards the war's end.¹

Several factors account for why the destruction of Dresden remains particularly controversial. One is the lateness of such a heavy attack on the hitherto virtually ignored city, which, when combined with the unmistakably civic nature of the designated target-area, raises serious questions about the operation's military-strategic justification. The unknown but certainly excessive civilian death toll continues to be a powerful motivator in private and public memory (Reinhard et al. 2005; Addison and Crang 2006; Joel 2009). The raid's devastating effectiveness – largely due to the successful creation of a much sought-after but rarely achieved inner-city firestorm – not only produced this human catastrophe, but also erased virtually all of the city's historico-culturally rich buildings. Perhaps more than any other factor, this explains why Dresden became a byword for German wartime loss and suffering that resonated on the international stage.

Dresden's rich cultural reputation can be traced back to the sixteenth century, when Saxony's ruling Wettin dynasty had settled on Dresden as its royal seat (Residenzstadt). In the early eighteenth century, under Elector Augustus II (the Strong) and his son and successor Augustus III, the picturesque capital sprawling along both sides of the River Elbe first gained real repute as a leading centre of architectural splendour and high culture. Inspired by the great northern Italian Renaissance cities, both electors invested substantial resources into transforming their Residenzstadt into an internationally revered Kulturstadt, or city of culture. Dresden amassed an
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envious collection of some of Europe’s finest examples of (neo)baroque architectural design and its opulent galleries housed masterworks by Raphael, Bernardo Bellotto Canaletto, Titian and Rembrandt among others. In 1802, the celebrated German author Johann Gottfried Herder was moved to write: ‘Bloom, German Florence, with your treasures of the art world!’ The popularized version became Elbflorenz (Florence of the Elbe).

In the heart of the Elbflorenz lay the Saxon capital’s most celebrated building and arguably German Protestantism’s most impressive architectonic achievement, George Bahr’s 1743 masterwork, the Frauenkirche. The church’s symbolic importance to Dresden is based on historical, architectural, cultural and spiritual grounds, and Dresdener have long bestowed an exalted status not only on the building but also on the site itself. The first church in the Elbe Valley surrounding present-day Dresden was built in the eleventh century as a missionary church to convert the local Sorbian population to Christianity (Friedrich 2005: 13; SFD 2005: 11; FDO 2009). Its full name was the Unserer-Lieben-Frauen-Kirche, conveniently abbreviated to Frauenkirche. The following century, the Romanesque church was relocated to the site that roughly 600 years later would be occupied by Bahr’s baroque replacement. Meanwhile, Dresden’s original Frauenkirche underwent periodic extensions reflecting both early and late gothic-inspired architectural trends. By the late seventeenth century, however, the church had become so badly dilapidated it was virtually beyond repair. Coincidentally, around this time Augustus the Strong made some controversial decisions. In 1697, to realize his ambition to become a king (and greatly expand his sphere in influence), Saxony’s ruler successfully sought election to the newly vacated throne of the adjacent Polish kingdom. To qualify, however, first he had been forced to convert to Catholicism. Being ruled by a Catholic dividing his time between Dresden and Warsaw challenged the faith and very sense of identity of the elector’s Saxon subjects. It had been under the House of Wettin that Martin Luther was protected in Wittenberg, leading to Saxony earning its cherished reputation as the ‘birthplace of the Reformation’. Augustus the Strong nonetheless promoted religious tolerance and reassured Saxons they would not be forced to follow his lead and convert to Catholicism. In 1714, however, he ordered the closure of Dresden’s decrepit Frauenkirche. Following its demolition, by 1722 planning was underway for a replacement to be constructed on the same site and Bahr, as the city’s official master builder, was commissioned to undertake the project.

Augustus the Strong, a renowned patron of the arts who played a pivotal role in Dresden garnering its reputation as the Elbflorenz, showed genuine interest and regularly received Bahr to discuss progress. He nonetheless declined repeated requests to help fund the ambitious project, steadfastly maintaining it should be a municipal venture. Between 1726, when the foundation stone was laid, and Augustus the Strong’s death in 1733, construction costs were completely funded by the city council, Saxony’s
Protestant Church consistory, and the city’s populace. Despite also converting to Catholicism in order to inherit the Polish throne, Saxony’s new Elector Augustus III proved far more receptive than his father to the idea of contributing to the new Frauenkirche in his beloved birthplace. He donated tens of thousands of talers, a most crucial gesture because it allowed Bähr to complete the cupola in sandstone rather than copper or wood, facilitating his vision of making the church appear as if it were carved out of ‘a single stone from top to bottom’. Norwithstanding Augustus III’s considerable contribution, upon its completion in 1743 Dresdeners looked upon the Frauenkirche as a municipal accomplishment and the object of unmatched civic pride. It served, then, as a powerful statement of both Saxon Protestant self-assertion and Dresden’s municipal wealth. The construction of such an impressive building, moreover, continued several centuries of history and tradition by having a Frauenkirche on this exact site (Fig. 10.1).

For centuries Dresden’s cultural significance was appreciated not only outside the city itself but indeed beyond Germany. And not even five years of Nazi barbarism and total war prevented some quarters of the enemy from publicly articulating hopes that this one particular German city would survive undamaged. With impeccably bad timing, the reputable Manchester Guardian declared on 12 February 1945: ‘We may hope the Saxon capital is spared the worst. Only Germans need care for Berlin, but Dresden, with the charm of its streets and the graciousness of its buildings, belongs to Europe’ (‘West and East’ 1945). Within 48 hours, and after the city had avoided any serious damage throughout the first 65 months of the war, 1,083 British and American aircraft dropped 1,952 tons of high explosives and 1,477 tons of incendiaries onto central Dresden, destroying 13 square miles of the pristine Altstadt and adjacent residential quarters in a single night (Bergander 1998; Neitzel 2006).

American novelist Kurt Vonnegut, who witnessed the raid while interned in a local slaughterhouse as a prisoner of war, later recalled Dresden in his 1969 acerbic timewarp classic Slaughterhouse-5 as having resembled a virtual moonscape (Vonnegut 2000).

The bombing and firestorm heavily damaged, if not wholly destroyed, practically all of Dresden’s splendid Renaissance-inspired and (neo)baroque gems. Initially, however, there was hope of a miraculous exception. Despite being located within the designated target-area, it seemed that somehow the Frauenkirche had survived. Yet, whereas the church’s exterior appeared remarkably unscathed, the intense heat had warped the internal wooden support beams holding up its massive sandstone dome, affectionately known to locals as the ‘Stony Bell’ (Steinerne Glocke). Owing to unbearable structural damage, mid-morning on Thursday 15 February 1945 (around 36 hours after the raid had commenced and some 22 hours after it had concluded), the Frauenkirche imploded into a mountain of rubble (Trümmerberg) covering an area 71 x 74 metres on the ground and reaching 17.6 metres into the air (SFD 2005: 128). Just as it had been Dresden’s last major public
building to succumb, so, too, would the Frauenkirche be more or less the last to reappear.

Dresden had lost its pre-war character, charm, identity and reputation as the Elbflorenz, and, according to W. G. Sebald (2005: 11), with an average of 42.8 cubic metres of rubble per person (based on the city's pre-war population
of roughly 600,000 inhabitants) Dresdeners faced one of the most monumental reconstruction tasks in postwar Europe. Its location in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) made Dresden’s rebuilding difficult for several reasons, not least the state’s lack of funds and chronic shortage of materials (Jokilehto 1998a). Also, the new government’s communist ideals were fundamentally opposed to the architectural grandeur synonymous with the former Saxon Residenzstadt, which in some cases such as the ornate Zwinger complex arguably even crossed the line into folly. As Robert Goeckel (1992) explains, moreover, Church and state shared an awkward relationship in the GDR, making the reconstruction of houses of worship especially problematic.

Nonetheless, over time many of Dresden’s most prominent buildings including the state theatre (Staatstheater), academy of fine arts (Kunstakademie), town hall (Rathaus), state opera house (Semperoper), the Protestant Church of the Holy Cross (Kreuzkirche) and the Catholic cathedral endearingly known as the Hofkirche either were restored, renovated, or reconstructed. The gradual reappearance of such buildings could be considered tangible manifestations of the GDR’s national anthem Auferstanden aus Ruinen (literally ‘risen out of the ruins’). Conversely, there were some striking examples of neglect and even inexplicable demolition. Dresden’s only surviving gothic church, the Sophienkirche, for instance, had been gutted by the firestorm but local historic monument conservationists secured its structurally sound exterior walls thereby making renovation/reconstruction possible. In 1962, however, GDR leader Walter Ulbricht ordered the church’s demolition, purportedly declaring that ‘a socialist city had no need for a gothic church’ (quoted in Köppe 2010). The Sophienkirche was just one such example of several bombed-out but salvageable churches demolished at the state’s behest in Dresden and across the GDR more generally. Whilst spared from demolition, Dresden’s badly damaged former royal palace (Residenzschloss) remained secured yet neglected until the mid-1980s. It was, along with the Frauenkirche ruins, one of Dresden’s two foremost sites whereby neither rebuilding nor redevelopment had occurred four decades after the war. Whereas the exterior of the former Residenzschloss was largely intact, the Frauenkirche site was nothing more than a pile of sandstone rubble framed by the two small sections of wall – part of a stair-tower, and a segment of the choir – still standing. Ostensibly there was little discernible difference between the Frauenkirche ruins and the millions of cubic metres of rubble surrounding them. Yet, it was no mere coincidence that this particular site was conserved in its ruinous condition while the rest of central Dresden was cleared for the GDR’s socialist-inspired redevelopment and ‘rebirth’ of the city.

Inadvertent conundrum

For over 200 years Bahr’s inimitable ‘Stony Bell’ had crowned Dresden’s internationally adored Elbe skyline. Locals therefore widely anticipated, indeed
expected, the Frauenkirche would feature among the city’s first major rebuilding
tasks. As early as August 1945, when the Cultural Department of the Saxon
State Administration (Landesverwaltung Sachsen – Kulturabteilung) convened its
first postwar Salvage and Reconstruction Meeting, the Frauenkirche was
prioritized among Dresden’s six most historico-culturally significant buildings
(SFD 2005: 95). Somewhat fortuitously, the church had been comprehensively
restored – cosmetic rejuvenation of the interior and structural reinforcement of
the exterior – during the Third Reich. Despite its subsequent destruction this
effort was not in vain because the project’s meticulous documentation survived
(Nadler 1992: 25–7). The Frauenkirche, then, was not only probably the single
most popular choice but also theoretically a most feasible candidate for rebuilding.
Local supporters conceived novel fundraising ideas to help finance reconstruction
including ‘donation angels’ (Spendenengef) for Christmas trees as early as 1945 and
a specially commissioned ‘reconstruction lottery’ (Wiederaufbaulotterie) three years
later (SFD 2005: 98–9). As custodian of the land and ruins, the Protestant
Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, EKD) initially announced its
support in principle for rebuilding the Frauenkirche. Declaring that it was in no
position to help fund such a project, however, the EKD handed over responsibility
for conserving the ruins to Dresden’s Institute for the Preservation of Historic
Monuments (Institut für Denkmalpflege).

Under the watchful eye of head curator Hans Nadler, in the immediate
postwar years the Institute conducted some preliminary rubble-clearing at the
Frauenkirche site (Nadler 1992: 25–34; 2001: 91–2). In a prescient move that
proved crucial a half-century later, all such work was carefully carried out in
preparation for reconstructing the church – as far as possible – according to the
principles of anastylosis, which essentially involves reassembling existing but
dismembered parts. (Here it is worth noting that Nadler’s insistence on adhering
to anastylosis predated the Venice Charter by almost two decades.) Salvaged
sandstone blocks were painstakingly catalogued and stored off-site, but with
neither Church nor state offering financial support it soon became apparent the
project would not get off the ground. By the early 1950s, Nadler and his
colleagues stopped planning for imminent rebuilding and instead turned their
attention to preserving the ruins indefinitely. Securing the Frauenkirche ruins
served a twofold purpose. First, their existence safeguarded the site against
possible redevelopment (an ongoing threat as evidenced by the sudden
demolition of the far-more-intact Sophienkirche) before the church’s
reconstruction could be achieved. Second, it was recognized from the outset that
if the Frauenkirche were to be rebuilt ‘authentically’ according to anastylosis
principles then incorporating the ruins would be absolutely vital. Accordingly,
as one of its leading curators Heinrich Magirius later reflected, throughout the
entire GDR era Dresden’s Institute for the Preservation of Historic Monuments
guarded the Frauenkirche ruins ‘like its most treasured possession’.

In the early Cold War period, 13 February was prominent in the GDR’s
public memory calendar. State-centred commemorative politics saw East
German communist officials appropriate the anniversary of Dresden's destruction as an occasion to openly portray the capitalist Western Powers – including the Federal Republic of Germany, accused of being the successor-state to the Third Reich – as aggressive warmongering imperialists (Margalit 2002; Neutzner 2005; Joel 2009). On the one hand, by holding the Nazis ultimately responsible for everything that had happened during Hitler's War, the loss and suffering associated with Dresden could be evoked as a warning of the inherent evils of fascism. On the other hand, annually commemorating the Dresden raid as a pernicious act of wanton destruction meant that those directly responsible could be depicted as 'Anglo-American terror-bombers', a term ironically enough borrowed from Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, who had accused the Western Powers of using 'terror-bombers' to erase German identity through the physical destruction of Germany's cultural heritage. The Frauenkirche ruins, increasingly prominent as all other rubble was cleared away, emerged as Dresden's undisputed foremost bombing-related site of memory. As a corollary, the ruins became imbued with powerful anti-fascist and antiwar symbolism. In German, an important distinction can be made between a Denkmal, meaning a memorial or monument, and a Mahnmal, which denotes a special kind of memorial/monument that serves as a reminder or warning to present and future generations. Although it was never the intention of those conservationists responsible for guarding over it, the ruinous Frauenkirche site categorically developed into an antiwar (and anti-fascist) Mahnmal.

By the 1960s, then, Dresden's cultural heritage conservationists had unwittingly created a kind of Hamlet-esque conundrum: to rebuild, or not to rebuild. It was a quandary not only facing the many supporters who had so vehemently advocated reconstructing the Frauenkirche since the war's end. It equally concerned anyone who now believed that such an arresting site merited preservation in its existing ruinous state. For the church to reappear the ruins would have to be monumentally disturbed, yet the fact that they had materialized into an important Mahnmal in their own right simply could not be overlooked. Paradoxically, preserving the ruins indefinitely would prevent the realization of ever seeing the 'Stony Bell' once again crown Dresden's Elbe skyline. There was no forgetting that this widely held dream was the only reason why this particular site had been protected instead of being cleared away with the rest of Dresden's rubble. And it was this development, in turn, which had inadvertently enabled the remnants of the Frauenkirche to manifest themselves as arguably the most (in)famous antiwar site of memory in divided Germany, thus creating a cultural heritage impasse.

Around this time, in May 1964, the Second International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments was held in Venice. The most immediate objective of the resultant Venice Charter was to arrest the widespread mistakes still being made in restoration and reconstruction practices across war-ravaged Europe. Through its advocacy of key concepts such as preserving monuments in
their historical setting, privileging 'authenticity' by distinguishing between genuinely restored objects and rebuilt replicas, and strictly limiting reconstructions according to anastylosis principles, the Venice Charter had ramifications for the debate over rebuilding the Frauenkirche. Whereas some of the Charter's concepts could be used in support of conserving the ruins, paradoxically other aspects contained in its 16 articles could be invoked as endorsements for rebuilding the church. Supporters of conserving the ruins as a Mahnmal, for instance, needed to look no further than the Charter's preamble. It states that, when it comes to historic monuments that are 'imbued with a message from the past', we all share a responsibility 'to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity' (Jokilehto 1998b, appendix). The Frauenkirche ruins certainly evoked an important warning from history about the horrors and futility of modern total war, and there was real danger of losing this message if the remnants were to be incorporated into (or consumed by) a reconstructed church. Any generation that did not pass on this message-laden site of war memory in the full richness of its authenticity, so the argument followed, must be viewed as having failed to meet its cultural heritage obligations. Given that only a small section of one stair-tower and a segment of the choir remained standing, furthermore, critics could argue that an over-reliance on introducing new materials meant that in this case reconstruction could not possibly qualify as anastylosis and so a rebuilt Frauenkirche would be nothing more than a replica. Conversely, Article 7 of the Charter could be read as vindication for demands to rebuild the church, on its original site, at the ruins' expense:

A monument is inseparable from the history to which it bears witness and from the setting in which it occurs. The moving of all or part of a monument cannot be allowed except where the safeguarding of that monument demands it or where it is justified by national or international interest of paramount importance. (Jokilehto 1998b, appendix)

At first glance this passage ostensibly supports preservation of the ruins as bearing witness to the history of National Socialism, the Second World War and the church's own destruction. Upon closer inspection, however, it actually contains some crucial points for advocating reconstruction. Whereas the ruins symbolized only one specific era and had functioned as a Mahnmal for barely a quarter-century, the site had a consistent history as a Frauenkirche (in various incarnations) for three-quarters of a millennium. Almost throughout Dresden's history in toto this site and a functioning church had been inseparable. In terms of universal significance, furthermore, supporters of the Frauenkirche could insist that the ruins' 'accidental' functionality as a Mahnmal was of secondary importance to their 'real' purpose of facilitating the rebuilding of a renowned and much loved historical landmark church. The Venice Charter thus could be interpreted either in support of preserving the Mahnmal as a site of war memory and commemoration, or as mounting an equally persuasive
case in support of reconstructing the church over the ruins. Dresden's Frauenkirche thereby offers a graphic illustration of how the Venice Charter can effectively cancel itself out, reinforcing the intrinsic difficulties of prescribing particular cultural heritage action through charters in an environment in which meaning and significance are open to interpretation and consequently a matter of considerable debate.

**Time for action, of one kind or another**

For advocates of rebuilding the Frauenkirche the situation was looking rather dire by the 1980s. The previous decade (coinciding with détente and improved relations with Bonn), East Berlin had intensified its interest in preserving and promoting German national cultural heritage (Koshar 2000: 269–83; Fulbrook 1991: 299–306). In July 1975, the GDR Parliament (Volkskammer) had enacted influential new cultural heritage conservation laws and tens of thousands of objects slated for attention were registered on special lists at the local, district and state level (Hinze 1985). This exhaustive programme finally delivered funding to reconstruct Dresden's world-renowned Semperoper, and when opening the rebuilt opera house on 13 February 1985 — the milestone fortieth anniversary of the firestorm — GDR leader Erich Honecker (1985) announced that the Residenzschloss would be Dresden's next major reconstruction project. The Frauenkirche, however, did not feature on the state's itinerary. The EKD's synod likewise still could not be persuaded to help fund the church's reconstruction. Many Dresdeners nonetheless maintained hope that one day a project somehow might come to fruition, and local conservationists continued to safeguard the site accordingly. The ruins, meanwhile, continued to grow in stature as an antiwar Mahnmal. From 1982 onwards, annually on 13 February, the Frauenkirche site was the focal point of mass gatherings designed partially as silent candlelit remembrance of the bombing victims and, in what was extremely rare for the GDR at the time, public demonstrations of passive resistance against the state. As each year passed, rebuilding the Frauenkirche seemed increasingly unlikely.

After four decades, weathering had taken its toll. Experts testing the Frauenkirche site before construction commenced on a nearby luxury hotel the Dresdner Hof (nowadays the Dresden Hilton) discovered advanced decomposition in some of the more concealed parts of the ruinous sandstone mountain. The hazardous site was cordoned off immediately in the interests of public safety. It clearly was no longer an option simply to leave — or 'passively' conserve — the ruins in their deteriorating condition; major activity of some kind or other was required. This could have entailed, on the one hand, securing the ruins' continued existence in their unaltered state, or, on the other hand, incorporating them as much as possible into an 'authentically' reconstructed Frauenkirche. Either way, however, funding posed seemingly
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insurmountable hurdles in the late 1980s. Without Church or state intervention the costs of rebuilding remained unattainable. Even reinforcing the ruins would have required considerable funds, and in the impecunious GDR allocating large sums of money to the upkeep of what essentially was a pile of rubble just was not feasible. Almost certainly, without meaningful change to the status quo, the Frauenkirche would not have been rebuilt and the ruins would not have received the attention necessary to prevent further deterioration and eventual collapse. Then suddenly in the autumn of 1989, the Wende—the profound socio-political 'turn' of events that caused the GDR's collapse and culminated in Germany's reunification—unexpectedly created fresh opportunity.

The Ruf aus Dresden and World Heritage listing

In late November 1989, a fortnight after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a select group of influential Dresden residents gathered at the home of local art-dealer Heinz Miech. Agreeing the time was politically ripe to launch a new campaign to rebuild the Frauenkirche, they established a Bürgerinitiative and elected Ludwig Güttler, arguably Germany's leading trumpet virtuoso, as spokesperson. The group immediately established contact with EKD authorities, endeavouring to 'get the Church to come on board'. They hoped that, in light of the state's collapse, the synod might change its longstanding attitude and make a sizeable monetary contribution to the campaign. And, even if financial assistance was not forthcoming, obtaining the EKD's permission to continue campaigning alone would at least circumvent any future legal battles over ownership and usage of the land and ruins. The synod announced it would not stand in the way if the Bürgerinitiative attracted the necessary funds from elsewhere, but declined to become involved. Underpinning the EKD's polite but apathetic response were not only financial concerns, though these were critical. The synod also pointed out that the Frauenkirche no longer had a community and central Dresden simply did not need another Protestant church. Postwar city-planners had largely abandoned the traditional concept of centrally located housing in favour of Stalinist gigantism and exaggerated spaciousness. The altered urban landscape meant that the Kreuzkirche (with over 3,500 seats) and the nearby Annenkirche—two churches reconstructed within the first postwar decade—easily could accommodate Dresden's reduced number of inner-city Protestant churchgoers. On practical grounds, then, the EKD considered rebuilding the Frauenkirche to be indulgent.

Similarly, initial contact with Dresden City Council met with polite but firm rejection. While maintaining dialogue with both the synod and council in late 1989, the Bürgerinitiative realized that wider support would be crucial and thus decided to make an ambitious global appeal for help. Güttler suggested that, in order to harness the heightened emotions that would envelop the forty-fifth
anniversary of the city's destruction, February 1990 was the opportune moment to publicly launch the Ruf aus Dresden – a call from Dresden for worldwide financial assistance to rebuild the Frauenkirche. Accordingly, the official Ruf released to the media contained a strong international dimension. In part it appealed for a campaign to reconstruct the Frauenkirche as a 'Christian Centre of World Peace in the new Europe' (Jäger 1992: 98–100). This concept could help to thwart criticism that central Dresden did not need another 'conventional' Protestant church, which would leave a rebuilt Frauenkirche without a community. It was, moreover, an assurance that even if the admonishing site of memory gave way to an august house of worship, the lessons from Dresden's wartime fate would not be forgotten. The Ruf aus Dresden also appealed for international support under the rubric of reconciliation. Indeed, a month prior to publicly launching their campaign the Bürgerinitiative sent private letters to Queen Elizabeth II and United States President George Bush Sr as the respective heads of state of the two nations directly responsible for Dresden's destruction, and reconciliation was the key theme underpinning the letters' request for moral and financial support. The Ruf aus Dresden also addressed that most crucial issue of authenticity. The Bürgerinitiative – boasting as a member the spritely octogenarian Hans Nadler some four decades after he had played such a pivotal role in safeguarding the ruins – was supremely confident that the church's reconstruction could be accomplished in accordance with the principles of anastylosis. There were the two segments of wall still standing, salvaged sandstone blocks to reuse, untold other objects concealed underneath the mountain of rubble to be recovered during the site's excavation, and meticulous documentation to facilitate a faithful and 'authentic' reconstruction. The Ruf aus Dresden even went so far as to declare that, upon its completion as an internationally backed project, the Frauenkirche 'should be included on UNESCO's World Heritage List' (quoted in Jäger 1992). This claim made in reference to one specific building (that did not even exist at the time!) was particularly bullish given that a 1989 GDR proposal that Saxony's entire capital be inscribed in the World Heritage List under the title 'The Baroque Ensemble of Dresden' had been rejected. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) recognized Dresden's 'great cultural value' but the proposal to inscribe the ensemble was rejected on the basis of the World Heritage Committee's earlier ruling over another war-ravaged city painstakingly restored: Warsaw (UNESCO 2003: 87). For several years in the late 1970s, the Committee debated whether reconstructed sites such as the Polish capital qualified as authentic. When, in 1980, it inscribed the Historic Centre of Warsaw as 'an outstanding example of a near-total reconstruction of a span of history covering the 13th to the 20th century', the Committee announced that it would remain an exceptional case and no other reconstructed sites would be considered on the grounds of authenticity and integrity (quoted in UNESCO 2010b; see also Cameron 2008).
The Warsaw ruling, then, ostensibly precluded either Dresden or a reconstructed Frauenkirche from World Heritage recognition. In 2004, however, an expanded proposal encompassing not only the city but also the surrounding Elbe Valley was inscribed on the World Heritage List as a 'continuing cultural landscape'. An ICOMOS expert mission that visited the proposed site in September 2003 did not ignore the problematic cultural heritage issues stemming from Dresden's wartime destruction. Furthermore, it acknowledged the capacity of a reconstructed Frauenkirche – nearing completion by this stage – to contribute to the overall authenticity and integrity of the site:

The historic city centre was bombed at the end of the Second World War, but the remaining buildings continue to have an important role in the panorama ... The most damaged building of the monumental group was the Frauenkirche. Around 40% of the original stones have been recovered, and the work is based on exceptionally complete records ... While recognizing the unfortunate losses in the historic city centre during the Second World War, the Dresden Elbe Valley, defined as a continuing cultural landscape, has retained the overall historical authenticity and integrity in its distinctive character and components. (UNESCO 2010a)

Joy was short-lived, however, when five years after its inscription the Dresden Elbe Valley became only the second site ever to be deleted from the World Heritage List. The controversy centred on state and city officials' decision to build the Waldschlösschenbrücke, a four-lane bridge over the River Elbe designed to alleviate Dresden's traffic congestion but arguably at the cost of upsetting the valley's aesthetic equilibrium. UNESCO immediately announced its concerns that the bridge would 'irreversibly damage the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity' of the World Heritage Site. When the project went ahead anyhow, UNESCO responded by listing the Dresden Elbe Valley as an Endangered World Heritage Site and three years later, in June 2009, ultimately decided to remove the site from the World Heritage List (UNESCO 2010a). Whereas the reconstruction of war-damaged buildings had not disqualified Dresden on the grounds of authenticity, moves to add another modern man-made construction to the valley's 'continuing cultural landscape' ultimately proved one step too far (Fig. 10.2).

**Criticisms of, and support for, the Frauenkirche rebuilding project**

Calls for a post-reunification reconstruction of Dresden's Frauenkirche met with criticism on scientific, aesthetic, moral and pragmatic grounds.
Notwithstanding the idea of it serving as a ‘Christian Centre of World Peace’ in the new post-Cold War Europe, opponents could adopt the EKD synod’s view that central Dresden simply did not require another Protestant church. From a Christian perspective, furthermore, given all the poverty, hunger, illness and associated misery in the world such an extravagant project could be dismissed as pure hedonism. And renewed calls to rebuild the church once again raised questions over whether the ruins should be conserved as a site of war memory and commemoration rather than being replaced by what arguably would be little more than a mere replica. A number of questionable examples of supposedly ‘authentic’ reconstructions of historico-cultural landmarks destroyed by wartime bombing already existed in Germany, and the influential German Foundation for Monument Protection (Deutsche Stiftung Denkmalschutz, DSD), a private Bonn-based initiative established in 1985, declared itself fundamentally opposed to all such endeavours. In 1991, the DSD became particularly alarmed by growing calls to rebuild Dresden’s Frauenkirche and Berlin’s Stadtschloss, the war-damaged but reparable Hohenzollern city palace located on Unter den Linden that had been controversially demolished in 1950 because East German officials disapprovingly viewed it as a symbol of
class oppression and Prussian militarism. In response, the DSD released a statement explaining its disapproval of these projects:

The erection of reproductions of lost monuments can only be of importance for the work in the present day. Such copies cannot be monuments recalling great achievements of the past in their full sense and keeping alive the memory of historic processes with their heights and depths. Conservationists are responsible only for historical evidence which cannot be reproduced and must warn when there is a threat to the possibility for remembrance in the public arena. (Quoted in Friedrich 2005: 77)

Furthermore, as Martin Gegner's earlier chapter in this volume explores in detail, an alternative approach to war-related cultural heritage could be found in (West) Berlin where the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche, the heavily bomb-damaged nineteenth-century church, was conserved in its ruinous state and complemented by the construction of an adjacent modern replacement. Rather than simply replicating past architectonic achievements, then, a new work was created that in due course developed its own cultural heritage value as a unique example of 1950s architectural design. And the remnants of the original church were preserved as probably (West) Berlin's foremost antiwar Mahnmal. Theoretically there was no reason why this approach could not have produced similarly impressive results at the Frauenkirche site. In Dresden, however, it represented an unacceptable compromise because advocates of rebuilding always had set their hearts and minds on seeing an 'authentic' reconstruction of the city's beloved landmark. For this to eventuate, of course, the ruins had to be incorporated (or sacrificed) and the Frauenkirche had to rematerialize on the exact site it had previously occupied for centuries. Neither a nearby replica nor an adjacent replacement would be satisfactory. As a commentator exclaimed in the influential Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung a week after the public launch of the Ruf aus Dresden: 'So long as this dome of the Church of Our Lady no longer crowns the city, not only will Dresden have a gaping wound, but also every Dresdener, regardless of where they live now, will have a bleeding heart' (Zimmermann 1990).

Despite heated debate, the Ruf aus Dresden soon proved successful in creating an irresistible groundswell of (inter)national support to rebuild the Frauenkirche. Considerable donations came from all corners of the globe, in particular the United States and Britain where some inspired individuals respectively established the charity organizations Friends of Dresden and the Dresden Trust. Having opposed the idea during the GDR era, in February 1992 the Dresden City Council announced it would cover 10 per cent of the total rebuilding costs (Friedrich 2005: 87). The 'reunification chancellor' Helmut Kohl was personally responsible for a very substantial early donation
that helped to kick-start the fledgling project. In December 1989, Kohl had travelled to Dresden to hold closed talks with his new GDR counterpart Hans Modrow about strengthening German–German relations following the Wende. Upon arrival, however, Kohl was overwhelmed by an unexpected groundswell of popular support and as a show of gratitude made an impromptu public address. Employing the Frauenkirche ruins as an arresting backdrop, an inspired Kohl for the first time publicly articulated his vision of ‘the unity of the nation’. He later reflected on this particular occasion as his ‘key experience’ of the entire reunification process (Kohl 2005: 1020). In April 1990, a sum of approximately €750,000 was raised after Kohl requested that all guests attending an event at Bonn’s Beethovenhalle celebrating his sixtieth birthday donate to the Frauenkirche rebuilding project in lieu of personal gifts to him (SFD 2005: 117).

Other major donations followed. During her state visit to Germany in 2004 Queen Elizabeth II, whose first cousin Prince Edward the Duke of Kent was intimately involved in the rebuilding project as royal patron of the Dresden Trust, hosted a gala event at the Berlin Philharmonic to raise funds for the final stages of the church’s reconstruction. The lavish evening was not the Queen’s only engagement with the Frauenkirche and Dresden commemorative politics. During her brief but controversial visit to Dresden in 1992, when Elizabeth II attended a special reconciliation service conducted in the Kreuzkirche but refused to apologize for the city’s wartime destruction, her motorcade had (purposely) passed the Frauenkirche ruins. Thereafter the Queen maintained a personal interest in the rebuilding project as evidenced by the ‘four-figure contribution’ she made to the Dresden Trust from her own privy purse (Heimrich 1995). The most significant ongoing financial commitment was provided by Dresdner Bank. Despite having kept its city of origin in its name, for decades the bank had been based in Berlin and Frankfurt-am-Main and during the Cold War it operated as a Western financial institution. The Frauenkirche rebuilding project thus represented the ideal chance for the bank to re-establish itself in Dresden and across the former GDR territory. Furthermore, underpinning such a popular war-related cultural heritage venture certainly would have been a welcome public relations boon at a time when Dresdner Bank’s reputation was coming under increased scrutiny for having been the ‘bank of choice’ for the SS and other Nazi organizations during the Third Reich’s occupation of much of Europe (Young 2006).

Fundraising, of course, was not restricted to such prominent public figures and institutions. Notwithstanding the sizeable contributions made at both local and international levels, between February 1990 when the Ruf was launched publicly and the rebuilt church’s (re)consecration in October 2005, the overwhelming majority of funding was collected across reunified Germany in a truly national effort. Many Dresdener and local businesses donated to the appeal, while across Germany for the whole 15 years the
fundraising campaign persisted through a variety of methods. Public concerts and other festive gatherings were staged. The federal government commissioned commemorative stamps and coins. The EKD raised ongoing donations, as did numerous churches (of all denominations) across Germany. Such an emphatic response as occurred at all levels suggests that the (inter)national community shared the local positivistic view that the reappearance of Dresden's spectacular Frauenkirche held far stronger historico-cultural appeal than the continuing conservation of a haunting antiwar Mahnmal. Furthermore, the rebuilding project's registered logo encapsulates the ambiguity inherent in this chapter's title. On the one hand, it depicts the long-held intention not merely to replace the ruins with the church, but rather to incorporate them as a feature with the 'authentically' rebuilt church rising above. On the other hand, however, this image is emblematic of how the fight to reconstruct the Frauenkirche ultimately won out over the battle to preserve the ruinous site of memory. On both accounts it was, indeed, literally a case of reconstruction over ruins.

Controversies during reconstruction

Even once underway the Frauenkirche rebuilding project was not without controversy. Questions were raised on matters as diverse as reconstruction techniques employed, the handling of building materials and even the commissioning of an anachronistic musical instrument. Adopting modern engineering and building techniques could be justified according to the Venice Charter. Articles 2 and 10, for instance, approve of having recourse to modern techniques wherever traditional practices may prove inadequate. Nonetheless, employing at least some period technology when rebuilding the Frauenkirche could have helped to reinforce the project's claims of being a faithful reconstruction of Bähr's eighteenth-century masterwork. When coupled with the necessary introduction of so many new building materials, however, in the eyes of purists the project's heavy reliance on computerized engineering and modern construction methods could be seen as undermining its 'authenticity'.

A notable controversy, the so-called Dresden organ dispute, erupted midway through the rebuilding project after a French company was commissioned to design and build a new instrument for the Frauenkirche. The German-born, New York-based researcher Günter Blobel had been the driving force behind the American charity Friends of Dresden. Blobel (2005: 39–41) recalled how, as a boy fleeing from the advancing Red Army in early February 1945, he had trekked through Dresden with his mother and siblings. Coming from a small Silesian village, Blobel remembers being awestruck by the silhouette of the Saxon capital's Elbe skyline and was especially impressed by the dome of the Frauenkirche. He wished to stay in Dresden but they had to keep trekking westward, so his mother promised they would return as soon as possible. Just days later, however, the Blobels heard news of Dresden's destruction and a
distrasted Günter realized he would never get the chance to revisit the Elbflorenz. This experience left such an indelible impression on Blobel that a half-century later he not only established the charitable organization but, moreover, upon winning the 1999 Nobel Prize for medicine donated his entire award of some €800,000 to the project. Blobel, however, made this magnanimous gesture while under the misapprehension that the church's original Silbermann organ would be replicated. Instead, the decision was made to install a larger 4,873 pipe organ with a stoplist range reaching well beyond that of its predecessor in order to cater for post-baroque compositions. Arguing that the modern Strasbourg-made organ would be an anachronism and an insult to Saxony's celebrated eighteenth-century organ builder, an outraged Blobel henceforth distanced himself from the remainder of the Frauenkirche rebuilding project (Paul 2004: 57–8).

Finally, perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the entire reconstruction process concerns the use of original stones from the destroyed church. Not all salvaged stones could be reused, because compression testing revealed that some were badly decayed and engineering computations warned that too many old stones in any given area could cause structural weakness. For two reasons, however, incorporating as many original stones as possible was crucial: first, to adhere to anastylosis reconstruction principles; and, second, to achieve the desired effect of making the ruins a prominent feature of the rebuilt church. Therefore, Bernd Kluge (2002) explains, engineers used the IBM software suite CATIA (Computer Aided Three-dimensional Interactive Application) to arbitrarily determine the placement of original stones. Their darkened appearance due to over 200 years of natural patination means that these original blocks can easily be identified among the new lighter sandstone blocks (Fig. 10.3). (Coincidentally, this effect adds a nice touch by mirroring Dresden's official city colours of black and gold.) Moreover, the contrast between the golden colour of the new stones and the original blocks' blackish patina is in keeping with the Venice Charter's proposal that the introduction of new materials must always be clearly visible in reconstructions. But the arbitrary nature of the original stones' placement around the church raises serious questions about the artificial creation of what Mark Jarzombek terms 'embedded memory' (2004: 55–6). And what, if anything, should be done in future when decades or centuries of natural patination take their course and the difference between the original eighteenth-century stones and the majority of 'new' blocks is no longer discernible?

**Conclusion**

Dresden's Frauenkirche is an illuminating case study of how the production of war heritage constitutes an evolutionary and quite often organic process. For almost a half-century after its wartime destruction, debate over whether to rebuild this historico-culturally rich landmark building was shaped and
Figure 10.3 Arbitrarily determined 'embedded memory'? The black patina formed on original stones reused in the rebuilding of the Frauenkirche constrasts starkly with the light golden colour of the new sandstone blocks.
reshaped by the politics of the past and present. Over time the situation had become further complicated by the fact that the ruinous site – only preserved during the city’s postwar rubble clearance in order to facilitate the church’s ‘authentic’ reconstruction – materialized into an important antiwar site of memory and commemoration. This development posed a cultural heritage conundrum: rebuilding the church meant disturbing the ruins and thus robbing future generations of an important relic of the Second World War; conversely, preserving the ruins indefinitely would prevent Dresdeners from ever healing the gaping wound in their city’s heart. Looking to the Venice Charter could not provide a definitive solution, for its articles could be interpreted as supporting either side of the debate. The case of the Frauenkirche thereby illustrates the difficulty of prescribing particular actions through charters when contemplating whether to reconstruct, conserve, or possibly even redevelop culturally significant sites decimated by war. For decades a chronic shortage of funds exacerbated by a lack of support from church and state authorities had put paid to the idea of reconstruction, anyhow. Then, in the wake of the GDR’s sudden collapse, a new call from Dresden for global help to rebuild the Frauenkirche as a ‘Christian Centre of World Peace in the new Europe’ met with spectacular success. Donations flooded in at local, national and international levels over the next 15 years as the rebuilding project progressed, albeit not without controversy. In accordance with the principles of anastylosis, the two remaining segments of wall were incorporated and many original blocks were (arbitrarily) placed all over the church. That stark contrast between the older, darker stones and the light golden colour of the new sandstone blocks is very impressive and informed visitors receive a jarring visual reminder of the city’s destructive past. It remains to be seen, however, whether this impact is lost as natural patination eventually envelops the church’s exterior and if memories of the war likewise fade with the passage of time.

Notes

1 In German, as Jost Dülfter (1999: 300) explains, conceptually the noun Opfer contains both a passive (victim) and a voluntary (sacrifice) connotation.

2 'Blühe, deutsches Florenz, mit Deinen Schätzen der Kunstwelt!' (quoted in KAS 2006). This and all subsequent translations of the original German are my own unless otherwise stated.

3 'von Grund aus bis oben hinauf gleichsam nur ein einziger Stein' (quoted in Magirius 1992: 13–14; Gretzschel 2006: 30).

4 'gehütet wie seinen Augapfel' (Magirius 1990: 3).

5 'die Kirche mit ins Boot zu bitten' (quoted in SPD 2005: 114).

6 A verbatim transcript of the letter sent to Queen Elizabeth II is in possession of the author.

7 The DSD eventually had a change of heart and became supportive of the Frauenkirche rebuilding project. For an interview in which its chairman Gottfried Kiesow justifies the change in attitude, see Mayer (2010).
References


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