

Design of New Additions in Rothenburg after the Year 1945.

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The old town of Rothenburg o.d.T. in Bavaria (Germany-West) is among the best-known and most visited sightseeing places of the world. One wonders how many visitors are able to or even interested in distinguishing the really historic buildings from the modern ones. Perhaps this is not an important point in connexion with sightseeing but it is an interesting subject for the specialist

In 1975 the third General Assembly of ICOMOS was held in Rothenburg. The main theme was "The Old Town". Many participants in the Assembly admired the wonderful historic center of Rothenburg. But hardly anyone discussed the new buildings in the historic center because the destroyed buildings have been superbly reconstructed since 1945 and are now indistinguishable from their historic neighbours. Now, twelve years later, a new professional interest has arisen concerning not only the issue of rebuilding after war destruction but also the question how this was done.

During the last month of the Second World War Rothenburg was badly damaged (1). There was a bombardment on 31 March 1945. The following fire destroyed 40% of the town. A fortnight later Rothenburg was surrendered to the American Forces without any further destruction. The merciful surrendering was more or less the work of Mr John McCloy. At this time McCloy was Vice Secretary of War (later he became President of World Bank). Shortly before the attack against Rothenburg was to start, McCloy was driving along the front. He asked the commanding General Devers to spare the city from attack. At this point let me remind of General Eisenhower's order spoken to all corps commanders shortly before the landing in Italy. He said on 28 Dec 1943: "Today we are fighting in a country which has contributed a great deal to our cultural inheritance, a country rich in monuments which by their creation helped and now in their old age illustrate the growth of the civilization which is ours. We are bound to respect those monuments as far as war allows!" (2). Surely McCloy felt bound to respect Rothenburg's monuments and he was successful in avoiding an attack with certain destruction of the old town. This fact became known much later. In 1948 McCloy wrote a letter to the chairman of the Artist's Society and explained his part in rescuing the town.

In spite of the avoided attack a great part of the historic center of Rothenburg was destroyed. 306 houses had been completely destroyed and 52 partly, not to mention 6 official buildings, some 750 m of the medieval town wall with its towers, and five bridges.

The rebuilding started slowly and was dependent on the particular type of destruction. Only the district in the Northeast between Hirtengasse and Neugasse was completely destroyed. The oldest part of the town was touched by the destruction only near the Kapellenplatz and Georgengasse. The task of rebuilding was of two different sorts: a) the reconstruction of the official buildings and town wall, b) the rebuilding of private houses.

The rebuilding of the town was soon understood as a question of preservation of historic monuments. Rothenburg had been a main emphasis in the work of the Bavarian State Office for the Conservation of Monuments since 1908, when Georg Dehio, the great art historian, said: "The whole town is a work of art." Everybody who wants to build a house has to keep in mind that Rothenburg is a comprehensive work of art.

The chief of the Bavarian State Office for the Conservation of Monuments, Georg Lill, visited Rothenburg on 26 July 1945 and declared that, in addition to Munich and Würzburg, Rothenburg would be a focal point of the Office's work. In the town an office for rebuilding was established with the architect Fritz Florin/Munich. He was recommended by the State Office (3). The rebuilding began on a large scale after the year 1948, when the so-called Executive Committee for the Rebuilding was established.

The committee drew up a damage assessment (total amount 3.19 million D-Mark) and had the clever idea of the town wall action. Everybody who would give money for reconstruction of one meter of the town wall not only would get a document but also would have his name inscribed on a slab fixed into the town wall. This action was a great success. In 1950 131 m could be repaired, in 1951 160 m and so on. One should not forget to mention that in 1950 one meter was given by Mrs Ellen McCloy (5). The repair of the town wall was a reconstruction. The original appearance has not been changed. This is also the case with the towers and the town hall.

The rebuilding of the private houses was subject to other conditions. In 1950 a city ordinance concerning building styles took effect. We can recount some of the most important points: 1) It is an urgent task to rebuild the town without any mutilation and disfiguration by details. 2) The height of buildings will be fixed by the Office of Rebuilding. Each and every new building within the town walls must be designed in such a way that it will fit the traditional typical character of the buildings, and especially of the neighbouring old houses, and will not disturb any view of a street. 3) Within the town wall the compact urban structure is binding. 4) The unsuitable imitation of configuration of old buildings and the transmission of those forms to modern construction is on principle forbidden (e.g. pointed arched shop-windows). 5) Facades must be painted in light tones; if possible only lime-based paints are to be used. 6) The exposure of newly discovered half-timbered construction is only allowable in the case of special artistic value. It must be proven that the half-timbered construction was in earlier times unplastered. A visible half-timbered

design can be allowed in a new building only if there are special reasons in terms of urban design. 7) Every window and doorway must have stone framing. 8) The division of the windows must be well proportioned. 9) Additional buildings are not permitted along the town wall.

With these and a lot of other instructions in mind the work of reconstructing private buildings began. We must add further points concerning the appearance of the town. There was no change in the streets, paths and squares in order to accelerate the traffic. Every alignment is the same as it was before. It was clear that the new buildings must have appropriate dimensions but that they have to show the decade in which they were built. They must satisfy modern requirements (in respect to economic value, ground-plan, hygiene, quality of dwelling) even if this is visible on the facades. The original system of the gable-end facing the street could not be given up. This point was very essential for the appearance of the town. One must admit that there were disadvantages for the owners because a roof pitched towards the street gives more space for rooms in the roof.

There is another example of a town's rebuilding in Western-Germany. The Renaissance town Freudenstadt in the Black Forest had been a masterwork of town planning. A large square was surrounded by buildings with their gable-end facing the street in a strong regular pattern. Following complete destruction during the war the square was rebuilt after 1949 with a change for the sake of economy. The original straight-lined alignment has been kept. But all buildings have their roofs pitched towards the street. Today we recognize this rebuilt Freudenstadt as a remarkable contribution to post-war architecture (6).

Were there any difficulties in Rothenburg in carrying out such a city ordinance concerning building styles? Perhaps it made it easier that the first order of this kind had been in effect since the year 1900. Of course there were difficulties! A lot of the owners of the new buildings were tradesmen who wanted to sell their articles and need large shop-windows. Again and again one reads in the requests about a tradesman feeling disadvantaged. But this argument was not effective because, as a result of the city ordinance concerning building styles, everybody could make his shop-window as large as was allowed (or smaller of course) and therefore no prejudice existed.

It must be emphasized that the intention of the citizens of Rothenburg has been to maintain the urban fabric and the street pattern but to reconstruct the new buildings as "modern architecture". The main idea in rebuilding the damaged Buildings was not to copy them (except in the case of the town hall and other important buildings) but to construct modern buildings. It was an interesting and difficult task for the architects. Almost every building is higher than it was before. In order to erect completely modern lodgings, it was necessary to make individual floors higher, thus raising the height of the gable-ends. Some buildings are really on story

higher than before 1945. There was a second intention to the rebuilding, too. Two years ago an old man from Rothenburg told me that in 1945 the task in Rothenburg was to rebuild the damaged quarter as quickly and secretly as possible before the world could perceive the damage. This was a remarkable point of view. There was the necessity of building modern housing and at the same time integrating it in the historic center. After the year 1945 and in the fifties the citizens of Rothenburg spoke of memory. Under this motto c. 320 buildings were reconstructed.

One wonders how many visitors would be able to differentiate between the old and the new buildings. Perhaps someone recognizes features of the so-called Post-Modern architecture and I think he is not wrong. Considering that a style is not an aggregate of features but an integral whole, Rothenburg's post-war buildings show not only details but also fundamental characteristics of Post-Modern architecture. I dare to speak of sources for Post-modern architecture in Rothenburg's post-war buildings. In opposition to modern architecture with its functionality, its flat roofs, its large windows without subdivisions and its diaphanous facades, the Post-Modern architecture of Rothenburg's buildings features small facades with few windows, steep roofs, small windows with glazier's lead, with sash and frames. A main point is the predilection for wood, stone and colour. Almost every facade is a symbol for dwelling. In spite of modern use every building takes its place in the historic character of the town. This recalls a remark by Karl Jaspers when he was asked his opinion about the reconstruction of the Frankfurt Goethehaus (destroyed in 1944, reconstructed with original details and the saved interior between 1945 and 1951). Jaspers said: "Even in the Deluge our ark of Noah can allow itself to carry such a precious thing as an image of the Goethehaus."

With this statement we come to the problem of the visibility of a monument and its quality of truthfulness. In the present day the image of a monument often has a higher value than the monument itself. The result is that the form can be reproduced if the maintenance of material is economically inconvenient. When we today more and more discuss the relation between modern architecture, Post-Modern architecture and conservation of monuments, it is the result of a worldwide increase in a consciousness of history. The case of Rothenburg can explain that history is a sensitive thing, susceptible to misinterpretations, and it can teach us to respect the monuments of history as well as possible. One should not exaggerate! Rothenburg's buildings are not more than dwelling houses. But it belongs to the traditional task of architecture to build dwellings and find forms for them which make social community visible, especially in a former free imperial town such as Rothenburg was.

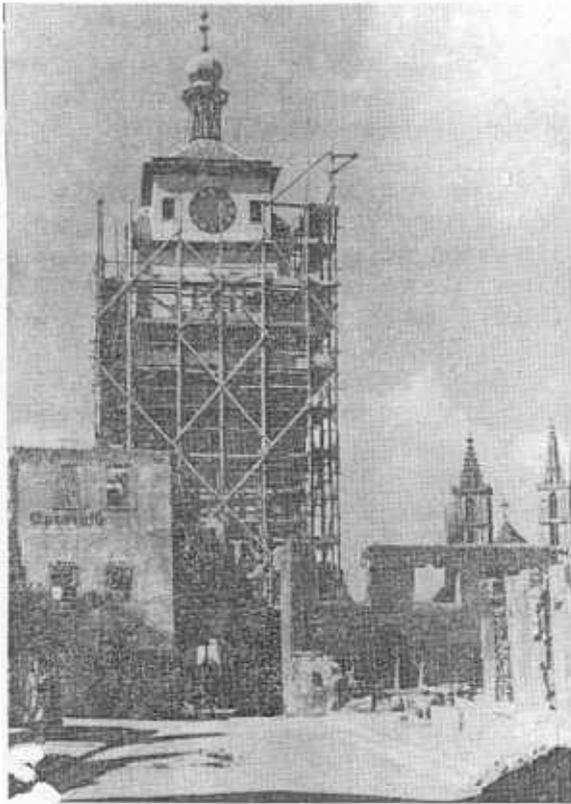
The main epoch of rebuilding Rothenburg was between 1947 and 1958. In this very decade Martin Heidegger described in his essay "Bauen, Wohnen, Denken" ("About Building, Dwelling, Thinking") that the building has its origin in dwelling. He thinks that the

human being is conscious of his finality and needs the careful opening into space which is given through the dwelling.

There was certainly a series of happy circumstances that made reconstruction and rebuilding in such a way possible in Rothenburg. In comparison with the really more important city of Florence, where the new buildings along the river Arno after the destruction during the Second World War were rebuilt much higher and without their former picturesque character (7), Rothenburg's buildings are today an indistinguishable part of the old town. I think it is not enough to speak about nostalgia. More important is the readiness to accept a restriction of liberty (economic liberty, limitation of yield and sometimes of personal comfort and so on). In Europe it can be observed that these values are worth thinking about. The word home became a slogan. Post-Modern architecture shows features of this consideration and there we can see some roots of Post-Modern architecture in the rebuilding of Rothenburg.

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Rothenburg 1945
Galgengasse -
Weißer Turm



Rothenburg 1950
Galgengasse -
Weißer Turm



Rothenburg 1945
black: destroyed



Rothenburg 1950
Galgengasse

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During the Second World War 40% of the old city of Rothenburg was destroyed, mainly the craftsmen's and lower middle class housing around the Galgentor. 306 houses were completely destroyed and 52 partly, not to mention 6 official buildings, some 750m of the medieval town wall with several towers, and 5 bridges.

Thanks to Mr McCloy, Vice Secretary of War and later President of the World Bank, an armed attack against Rothenburg could be avoided. The rebuilding started slowly. The intention of the citizens of Rothenburg has been to maintain the urban fabric and the street pattern but to reconstruct the new buildings as "modern architecture". The main idea in reconstruction of the damaged buildings was not to copy them (except in the case of the town hall and other important buildings) but to build modern housing. The rebuilding was understood as a question of preservation of historic monuments in the sense of Georg Dehio's remark "The whole town is a work of art" (1908).

The rebuilding began on a larger scale after the year 1948, when the so-called Executive Committee for the Rebuilding was established. It had the clever idea, too, that everybody who would give money for the reconstruction of one or more meter of the town wall not only would get a document but also would have his name inscribed on a slab fixed into the town wall.

The most important points of the city ordinance concerning building styles are the following: It is an urgent task to rebuild the town without any mutilation and disfiguration by details. Each and every new building within the town walls must be designed in such a way that it will fit the tradition typical character of the building, especially the neighbouring old houses, and will not disturb any view of a street. The unsuitable imitation of old composition of a building and the transmission of those forms to modern construction is on principle forbidden. Already by the year 1950 77 dwelling and commercial houses, 16 administration buildings, and 131 m of the town wall had been rebuilt. There was no change in the streets, paths and squares in order to accelerate the traffic. Every alignment is the same as it was before. The original system of the gable-end facing the street has been retained. In order to erect completely modern lodgings the individual stories and thus the houses as a whole are considerably higher than before 1945. (There is a comparison to post-war buildings in Freudenstadt and Florence).

Some features of Rothenburg's rebuilding after 1945 remind us of so-called Post Modern architecture: the steep roofs, the small facades, the windows with subdivisions and the predilection for wood, stone, and colour. On the other hand there was a certain readiness to accept a restriction of liberty (economic, personal comfort etc). That is more than nostalgia - that is the value of history.

Plan des Additions Nouvelles à Rothenburg après 1945

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Pendant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, 40 % de la vieille ville de Rothenburg a été détruit, principalement les habitations des artisans et de la petite bourgeoisie, situées autour de la Galgentor. 306 maisons ont été complètement détruites, 52 partiellement détruites sans compter 6 bâtiments administratifs, 750 m du mur d'enceinte médiéval avec ses tours et enfin 5 ponts. Grâce à Monsieur McCloy, Vice-Secrétaire de la Guerre et par la suite Président de la Banque Mondiale, une attaque armée contre Rothenburg a pu être évitée. La reconstruction a débuté lentement. L'intention des habitants de Rothenburg a été de conserver le tissu urbain et le dessin des rues, mais de reconstruire les nouveaux bâtiments suivant les principes de l'architecture moderne. L'idée qui a présidé à la reconstruction des bâtiments endommagés fut non pas de les copier (sauf dans le cas de l'Hôtel de Ville et de quelques autres bâtiments importants) mais de construire des habitations modernes. On a conçu la reconstruction comme la préservation de monuments historiques suivant l'idée de Georg Dehio "La ville entière est une oeuvre d'art" (1908). La reconstruction à grande échelle débuta après 1948 lorsque le comité exécutif pour la reconstruction fut établi. Le comité eut la bonne idée d'attribuer à toute personne finançant la reconstruction d'un mètre ou plus du mur un certificat mais aussi d'inscrire son nom sur une plaque fixée au mur. Les points les plus importants de l'arrêté municipal concernant le style de construction à respecter sont les suivants: Il est essentiel de reconstruire la ville en évitant tout détail qui puisse l'altérer ou la défigurer. Tout bâtiment nouveau, à l'intérieur des murs de la ville doit avoir un style qui corresponde au caractère traditionnel, et plus particulièrement au style des vieilles maisons voisines, et ne doit pas déranger l'harmonie de la ville. La mauvaise imitation de l'ancienne structure d'un bâtiment et la transposition de ces formes sur des bâtiments modernes est interdit par principe. En 1950, 77 bâtiments à usage résidentiel et commercial, 16 bâtiments administratifs et 131 m du mur de la ville avaient déjà été reconstruits. Il n'y a eu aucune modification dans la disposition des rues, des trottoirs ou des places pour faciliter la circulation. Le tracé est rigoureusement le même qu'autrefois. Le procédé originel des pignons donnant sur les rues a été conservé. Pour pouvoir construire des logements parfaitement modernes, les étages et les maisons sont considérablement plus élevés qu'avant 1945. (On peut faire la comparaison avec les bâtiments construits après la guerre à Freudenstadt et Florence.) Quelques aspects de la reconstruction de Rothenburg nous rappellent l'architecture "post-moderne": les toits pentus, les petites façades, les fenêtres à croisillons, enfin la prédilection pour le bois, la pierre et la couleur. D'un autre côté, on a accepté quelques restrictions (économiques, comforts personnels, etc...). C'est là plus que de la nostalgie - c'est accorder sa propre valeur à l'histoire.