Introduction

"I can imagine a time," wrote the novelist Hans Wachenhusen in 1867, "perhaps a hundred or two hundred years from now, when a historian will sit down and write a simple sentence: 'Once upon a time, the city of Berlin was surrounded by walls.' Oh! If only that future historian could know the history of these city walls and, what is more, the tragic end they met!"[1]

Almost 150 years later, I sit in my study, writing the lines that you are now reading. And I cannot help beginning my story with the same sentence that Wachenhusen suggested, so long ago, that I would use. Once upon a time, the city of Berlin was surrounded by walls. So too were Vienna, Munich, Nuremberg, Augsburg, and more than 1,000 other German cities, let alone other European ones. This book is about those walls, and about the tragic end they often met. It is about the reasons for – and the experience, consequences, and significance of – their demolition, a process known as "defortification."

I assume that when traveling to a European city today, you, just like me, do not expect to see physical barriers separating that city from the countryside. Unless you intentionally seek out one of the few European cities that still retain their medieval fortifications, you do not expect to see walls, palisades, gates, or moats around the city, nor do you anticipate being stopped at the city gate, asked to show your passport to a local guard, and having a special fee demanded of you in order to pass through the gates. On approaching a European city today, you have no reason to worry about arriving too late, after the gates' lock-out hour in the evening, a mishap that in premodern times often forced even the city's own burghers to spend the night outside the walls, waiting for the gates to reopen in the morning.

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1 Hans Wachenhusen, *Berliner Photographien* (Berlin: Hausfreund Expedition, 1867), 2:232.

We "moderns" tend to take both the reality and the idea of the open city for granted.

The situation could not have been more different before the modern period. Up until the mid-eighteenth century, the fortifications of many European cities were enormous monuments. Standing twenty or even thirty feet high, these massive constructions dominated the surrounding country-side and could be seen from a great distance. They contained moats, bastions, towers, elaborate gates, and several layers of walls, sometimes stretching for many miles. As late as 1750, more than 2,000 city walls still stood in central and Western Europe, with a total length that likely rivaled that of the Great Wall of China. So important were walls for premodern European cities that they commonly formed part of the city's very definition. No settlement – no matter how big, populous, or rich – deserved the title "city" unless it was surrounded by strong fortifications.

This book represents the first comprehensive treatment of defortification in a single European country. As is often the case with projects such as this, my goals in writing this book have changed over time. I began researching it with rather limited aims in mind and with a small group of professional historians as my intended audience. Yet over time, it developed into a work that may, I hope, be of interest to anyone who is interested in the history of the Western city and the history of early modern and modern Europe in general.

My original aim was to furnish professional historians with enough evidence to demonstrate how insufficient are common explanations for the emergence of open cities in Europe. Historians have written a great deal, of course, about urban demography, social structure, and politics in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cities, but very little indeed on defortification and its significance. With only a few exceptions, historians of the general development of the modern city have written very little or nothing at all about defortification. This includes Max Weber, Lewis Mumford, and Mack Walker, among many others. The few historians who have written about defortification tended either to focus on very particular cases or to use one of three meta-narratives that, instead of explaining defortification, only managed to trivialize it.[2]

2 Some notable exceptions are: Peter Grobe, *Die Entfestigung Münchens* (München: Stadtarchiv, 1970); and Hans Lehmbruch, *Ein neues München: Stadtplanung und Stadtentwicklung um 1800* (Buchendorf: Buchendorfer Verlag, 1987). A very extensive documentation of Vienna's case is Renate Wagner-Rieger, *Die Wiener Ringstrasse, Bild einer Epoche: Die Erweiterung der inneren Stadt Wien unter Kaiser Franz Joseph*, 8 vols. (Wien: Böhlaus, 1969). For Vienna, see also Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 24–115. A few regional historians elsewhere have begun to pay attention to the defortification of particular cities. Two representative works for

I call the first of these three narratives the "expansion thesis." This is the idea that as more and more people migrated to European cities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, urban centers began to expand rapidly into their adjacent countryside and in the process "swallowed" their walls. Such descriptions appear in many different places: in general works on urban history such as Paul M. Hohenberg and Lynn Hollen Lees's *The Making of Urban Europe, 1000–1950*; in works on German urban history such as Peter Johanek's edited volume; and in lexical works such as the historical handbook edited by Karl Bosl and others. It is not surprising that the most succinct (and telling) example for this thesis comes from such a lexical entry. "The city expanded," one author characteristically wrote about Munich's case, "and the walls disappeared."[3]

The second narrative tries to establish a connection between the demolition of city walls and industrialization. Here, the idea is that with the changing nature of society following industrialization and the increased need for easy transportation between city and countryside, the walls simply had to go. Although less common than the expansion thesis, one can still encounter such arguments in professional literature: in Wolfgang R. Krabbe's description of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century German city, for instance, or in the concluding remarks in Michael Wolfe's new book on French walled towns.[4]

Finally, the third narrative is of a military nature. It is the claim that sometime in the early modern period, when the firepower of the artillery reached a certain level, the military defenses of towns and cities lost their usefulness and were consequently razed. This argument is typically applied either to the cases of specific cities or, in the work of Martin Van Creveld, to the Napoleonic Wars in general.[5]

Of these three narratives, by far the most problematic is that of industrialization. As this book shows, industrialization occurred after most of the

the cases of Basel and Saarlouis are: Georg Kreis, "Der Abbruch der Basler Stadtmauern," in *Stadt- und Landmauern*, ed. Brigitte Sigel (Zürich: Institut für Denkmalpflege an der ETH Zürich, 1993), 135–43; and Anne Hahn, *Die Entfestigung der Stadt Saarlouis* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig, 2000).

3 Paul M. Hohenberg and Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe, 1000–1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 301–03; Thomas Tippach, "Die Rayongesetzgebung in der öffentlichen Kritik," in *Die Stadt und ihr Rand*, ed. Peter Johanek (Köln: Böhlau, 2008), 213–34, esp. 213; and "München," in *Handbuch der historischen Stätten Deutschlands*, ed. K. Bosl (Stuttgart: A. Kröner, 1981), 7:81.

4 Wolfgang R. Krabbe, *Die deutsche Stadt im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 78–79; Michael Wolfe, *Walled Towns and the Shaping of France: From the Medieval to the Early Modern Period* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 170.

5 See, for instance, Ortwin Pelc, *Im Schutz von Mauern und Toren* (Heide: Boyens, 2003), 70ff.; and most importantly Martin Van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 40–42.

cities in Western and central Europe had been defortified and therefore could not have been its cause. The same is true for expansion – contrary to the common assumption, there is only a weak correlation between expansion and the demolition of city walls in the eighteenth century, and the nineteenth century witnessed an inverted correlation: the biggest, most rapidly expanding cities, at least in central Europe, demolished their walls later than other cities, not sooner.

The military argument is by no means as problematic as expansion or industrialization, but it too needs to be considered with caution, because the argument, as it is usually formulated, lacks sufficient nuance. To speak about the demolition of city walls in terms of their decreasing usefulness without asking usefulness for whom and for what purpose is to lose sight of one of the most important arguments in favor of defortification in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Paradoxically, this argument held that the continuing usefulness of urban fortifications should be the main reason to dismantle them.

The most serious criticism of the three traditional narratives to explain defortification, however, should concentrate on the common thread connecting them: the assumption that the demolition of city walls was a self-evident, natural development, whether demographic (expansion), socioeconomic (industrialization), or technological (military firepower). All too often, historians tend to use the term "disappearance" in describing what happened to European city walls.[6] Even Ilja Mieck, who concedes that it is the lack of fortifications that most distinguishes the modern city from its predecessors, uses the word disappearance to describe what happened to the old walls.[7] This term, probably unintentionally, might lead one to conclude that at one point in time the walls were simply gone, without anyone really doing anything to make this happen; without the authorities making a decision to tear down the walls; without anyone writing about defortification, reacting to it, arguing about it, fighting over it; without, in short, any substantial political dimension. As will become evident on almost every page of this book, nothing could be further from the truth.

In the course of the research and the writing of this book, it became increasingly clear to me that my main preoccupation was in fact much broader than just a refutation or a fine-tuning of three old narratives about

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6 Two examples for the use of the term "disappearance" in conjunction with the demolition of city walls are Bosl, "Munich," 7:81; and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: Beck, 2009), 432–33.
7 Ilja Mieck, "Von der Reformzeit zur Revolution (1806–1847)," in *Geschichte Berlins von der Frühgeschichte bis zur Industrialisierung*, ed. Wolfgang Ribbe (München: Beck, 1987), 1:407.

defortification and its causes. I felt that I had something to say not only
to urban historians, but also to anyone who is interested in early modern
and modern European history. Immanuel Kant, who as a young man held
lectures in Königsberg about the science of fortification, once commented
that "human reason so delights in constructions that it has several times built
up a tower and then razed it [just] to examine the nature of the foundation."[8]
Part of what Kant meant, I think, is that we often understand something –
be it an idea, a piece of machinery, or even (as archeologists know) a whole
culture – only after dissecting, dismantling, or even destroying it completely.
By examining its broken pieces, we get to see, perhaps for the first time, an
object's hidden parts and understand its operating principles.

When burghers demolished their city's walls with pickaxes, hammers,
and shovels, or when they blew them up with gunpowder kegs, they stood
in front of a hole in the ground. Looking with them into the void and at
the surrounding fragments of the old walls, I felt a chance to follow Kant's
suggestion: to understand, exactly at the moment of their destruction, the
kind of communities the fortifications helped sustain, the basis of these
communities' ways of life, the "true foundations," as one Frankfurter put
it in 1801, of their communal spirit.[9] This is why this book is not only
about defortification. It is also about the old world to which the walls once
belonged and the modern world that replaced it.

It is the general significance of defortification as a metaphor for, or a
parable about, the replacement of a whole older world by a new one that
explains why, as it unfolded, defortification was everybody's business. It
was the business of monarchs, state officials, generals, architects, travelers,
the local peasants from the city's surrounding countryside, and, of course,
the burghers themselves. The following pages will excavate these actors'
long-forgotten voices. Through them, we will look at defortification not
only from the historian's bird's-eye view (although we will do that, too),
but also from the perspective of the people who supported, opposed, or
merely witnessed defortification. Without these voices, the story will always
be partial, always incomplete.

Defortification was, of course, not unique to German cities; all but a very
few European cities experienced it at one point or another. Why devote a
book to the German case, then, and not to Europe as a whole or to any

8 Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis:
   Hackett, 2001), 2.
9 "Der alte Frankfurter Brückenthurn wurde abgerissen im August 1801, der jüngere, der Sach-
   senhäusser war geboren 1345 und starb 1765," His. M. Frankfurt am Main, Grafische Sammlung,
   C 3129g.

other European country? Beyond the fact that a comparison with France
will play an important role in this book, I have two broad answers here: one
intended for a general public, the other for specialists in the field.

"If a scholar from another planet were to come to earth in order to
investigate different forms of government," wrote the journalist Rudolf
Zacharias Becker in 1796, he would find Germany "to be the best school
for his purposes. Here one can investigate from up close the advantages
and disadvantages of any conceivable form of government."[10] Indeed, no
other European country (except, perhaps, Italy) displayed such a diversity
of institutions, traditions, and urban centers as early modern Germany.
Lacking a centralized bureaucracy or a nation-state framework, Germany's
many states and cities moved along several distinct trajectories from the
mid-seventeenth century onward. The result was an unparalleled diversity
of defortification projects in the German lands that represents a broad illus-
tration of the general forces behind the modernization of European cities
in general. Unlike in France or England, for instance, in Germany one
cannot reduce defortification to a single factor. My decision to concen-
trate on German cities is therefore motivated not only by my professional
background as a historian of early modern and modern Germany, but by an
analytic claim as well: early modern Germany was a microcosm of Europe as
a whole.

Christopher Friedrichs recently criticized another book about German
cities, Mack Walker's *German Home Towns*, by arguing that the communities
Walker described in it were not all that unique compared to Europe's other
urban centers.[11] I personally find this to be an advantage rather than a flaw.
Because seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Germany was Europe writ
small, the story of its transformation from a country full of walled cities to
one containing almost exclusively open cities is Europe's story, too.

A narrower answer to the question "Why Germany?" relates to more
specific aspects of Walker's book. In *German Home Towns*, Walker set out
to explore the history of those countless middle- and small-size commu-
nities that were so characteristic of premodern Germany. For many good
and important reasons, his book is still considered the classic in the field,

10 Quoted in Holger Böning, "Gotha als Hauptort volksaufklärischer Literatur und Publizistik," in
   Ernst II. von Sachsen-Gotha-Altenburg, eds. Werner Greiling, Andreas Klinger, and Christoph Köhler
   (Köln: Böhlau, 2005), 326.
11 Mack Walker, *German Home Towns: Community, State, and General Estate, 1648–1871*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca:
   Cornell University Press, 1998). Christopher Friedrichs, "How German Was the German Home
   Town?" (Paper presented to the annual meeting of the German Studies Association, Louisville,
   Kentucky, 2011).

at least in the English-speaking world. It demolished superficial histori-
ographic boundaries between the early modern and the modern, and it
told the history of the German lands from the bottom up and not, as had
been so common beforehand, from the top down.[12] At the same time,
certain assertions in Walker's work have always seemed problematic to me.
By concentrating on "home towns" – urban communities with less than
10,000 inhabitants – Walker drew a line dividing them from larger cities.
Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Germans did not make these distinc-
tions: they described what in English one would call "boroughs," "towns,"
and "cities" with a single term – *eine Stadt*. When they did make distinctions
between different cities, early modern Germans did so according to political
rather than social criteria: Imperial cities, residence cities, provincial cities,
and so on. They probably did so for a reason. Thrusting a social definition
of the city on early modern Germans rather than using their own native
concepts could be misleading.

Walker furthermore paid no attention at all to the physical footprint of
German towns, to their internal layout, the location of their communal
institutions, or the towns' different parts. He even termed the typical early
modern tendency to define all cities by the existence of fortifications as
intellectually lazy.[13] Whether in the clear line he drew between home towns
and large cities or in his disregard for towns' and cities' external appearances,
Walker's methodology served a purpose: to show, despite their slow decline,
the continuity and extraordinary stability of urban communities in Germany
from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 to German unification in 1871 and
even beyond.[14] It is a central argument of this book that overemphasizing
stability can be misleading and that the material environment of cities and
towns is not a superficial aspect of their history but part of their very
fabric.

It is clear to me – and should be clear to the reader from the outset –
that there is more than one way of telling the dramatic, and often traumatic,
story of the defortification of German cities. In the book's seven chapters,
ordered chronologically, I concentrate mainly on politics and what has been
called "political culture" – the set of discourses and symbolic practices that
shape political claims.[15] Other historians could have chosen a different way

12 For an evaluation of Walker's achievement, see Christopher Friedrichs, "But Are We Any Closer
to Home? Early Modern German Urban History Since 'German Home Towns,'" *Central European
History* 30, no. 2 (1997): 163–185; and James J. Sheehan, "Foreword to the Cornell Paperback
Edition," *German Home Towns*, by Walker, xiii–xvii.
13 Walker, *German Home Towns*, 30.   14 Ibid., 5.
15 Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth
Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4.

of describing and analyzing my sources. A social historian would probably
have devoted more space to the question of migration in and out of cities,
to the social groups that inhabited the city's margins, and to questions of
health and sanitation; an economic historian could have analyzed in depth
the fluctuation of real estate prices within and outside the walls and their
effects on defortification decisions; and an art historian would have surely
devoted much, much more time to discussing the re-planning of defortified
cities than I have done here. The story of the demolition of city walls and of
the collapse of the world to which they had once belonged is a complicated
one; other historians might certainly use different analytical methods to shed
more light on it. Be that as it may, my intention while writing the following
pages has never been to present a "total history" of the transformation of
German cities from fortified to defortified ones, nor has it been to claim
that my interpretation is the only valid one. My aim, above all else, was
to draw the attention of historians and laypersons alike to one of the most
important, but also most neglected, chapters in the history of the European
city; an important chapter, indeed, in the history of the transition between
premodern and modern Europe.

Last but by no means least: this book describes a historic demolition of
fortifications, but it also seeks to demolish certain walls itself. Historians of
the transition between premodern and modern Europe are often trapped
in boundaries of their own making: the distinction between large cities and
home towns, between industrialized and nonindustrialized towns, between
German and other European cities, and – most generally – between the
premodern and the modern. I am not certain that these distinctions are
always useful and I am absolutely sure that, in the story of the emergence of
the open city, they need to be treated with great caution. Wachenhusen was
right: in many cases, the demolition of city walls was a tragic event. Tearing
down historiographic boundaries, on the other hand, should cause no anx-
iety. We should follow Kant's lead here: razing historiographic boundaries
could help us realize the nature of their true foundations. Whether we then
choose to rebuild them or not is a different question.

PART I

Beginnings, 1689–1789