



Planning for the Mark Brandenburg and for Prague during the Third Reich

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During the 12 years of the Third Reich, the Nazis engaged in several important urban planning projects. Shortly before the beginning of World War II, they initiated an ambitious effort aimed at redesigning dozens of larger German cities as sites “representing” Nazi ideological aims and practices. Many plans were prepared, though the war put implementation of these plans on hold. Second, they developed wartime plans to transform conquered territories in Eastern Europe into suitable towns for use by a relocated German population. And third, once the bombing began, they produced plans for the reconstruction of the damaged cities. Several scholars have studied these plans, but little attention has been given to the work of a small group of planners, headed by Reinhold Niemeyer, which focused first on smaller towns in Brandenburg other than Berlin (which was reserved for Albert Speer) and then on Prague. The towns in Brandenburg included Oranienburg, the location of the important concentration camp of Sachsenhausen. In 1939, Prague became the capital of the so-called Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, a semi-autonomous territory within greater Germany.

This paper will analyze key elements of the plans of the Niemeyer group. The primary sources are texts that I found in 2008 in the papers of Eugen Blanck which were deposited in the Cologne city archive (and, unfortunately, were not fully cataloged prior to the catastrophic collapse of the archive building in March 2009). Niemeyer and Blanck, his chief subordinate, had both been associated before 1933 with “modernist” ideas on planning and architecture. Between 1931 and 1937, Niemeyer served as the successor to Ernst May, the famous progressive planner of Frankfurt am Main, and in 1934 he also became the president of the German Academy for Urban, Reich, and Regional Planning, a post he held until 1946. In 1937 Niemeyer moved to Berlin to take the position as planner for Brandenburg. Blanck worked for 3 years in May’s office in the late 1920s, and after a few years in private practice as an architect, he joined Niemeyer in 1938 in working for the Third Reich. Their plans for Brandenburg and Prague, it will be argued, reflected the tensions between their modernism and the grandiose, authoritarian visions of Nazism. They sought to combine modern ideas about urban form and function with Nazi models, and they thereby contributed to the creation of planning models that constituted the main leitmotifs for postwar German reconstruction planning up until the mid-1960s.

KEY WORDS: German planning models, National Socialism, Prague.