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Modern Cemeteries of Europe and North America

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Between the 1740s and the 1850s, changes in burial customs within Europe and North America had far-reaching consequences for funerary architecture. Those changes first emerged in France, Sweden, Italy, Scotland, and in the American state of Louisiana, as new legislation prohibited burial in urban settlements and put an end to Christian traditions of church interment that persisted since the Middle Ages. Protestantism gave rise to a limited number of extramural cemeteries as early as the sixteenth century.¹ However, in most European countries, the dead continued to be buried within churches and overcrowded urban graveyards until the late eighteenth century, when reform prompted the construction of new cemeteries on the outskirts of cities. Those cemeteries constituted a new architectural type and were fundamentally different from earlier burial grounds in that they were suburban, secular, public, and multidenominational.

The modern cemetery emerged partly in response to hygienic concerns regarding the integration of the dead with the living and pressures exerted on burial grounds by expanding urban populations. The new cemeteries were also shaped by socio-political forces stemming from the Enlightenment and changing attitudes towards religion and death.² In that those forces were secular, egalitarian, and anticlerical, the establishment of modern cemeteries was opposed by some members of the aristocracy who stood to lose privileges associated with church burial and by a clergy threatened by the loss of burial fees. Conversely, in Protestant countries the suburbanization of burial practices was aided

by the Reformation and attempts to suppress the practice of chantries and the sale of indulgences. Moreover, influences stemming from English poetry and garden design sensitized the aristocracy to the proto-Romantic notion of burial within the landscape, paving the way for the eighteenth-century Elysium, a garden with tombs or cenotaphs that was the precursor of the modern landscaped cemetery.³ The modernization of burial practices was, therefore, a top-down revolution with proponents and detractors stemming from privileged sections of society. The pace of reform reflected, in part, the degree of resistance presented by local or conservative interests.

Given the influence of the Enlightenment, it is fitting that France was at the forefront in the evolution of burial practices and subsequent developments in funerary architecture. The Napoleonic Edict of St.-Cloud, which prohibited burial in French cities in 1804, provided the foundation for the development of the modern cemetery.⁴ That legislation was important in two respects. First, it banned mass burial in favor of individual graves, which constituted a victory for the advocates of individualism and the dignity of man. Secondly, it permitted the establishment of tombs and monuments in exchange for a fee, which signaled an era of fundamental social change as markers were allowed on the basis of wealth rather than on class, and privileges hitherto reserved for the aristocracy were extended to the rising middle classes.

The Edict of St.-Cloud was the culmination of a movement of reform that began in the 1740s. In France, it stimulated the production of a number of significant funerary designs, including the visionary paper-projects of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux and Etienne-Louis Boullée.⁵ Though widely influential, the realization of such projects was initially frustrated by political unrest, disunity, and other conditions that persisted in France until

the early nineteenth century. In contrast, contemporary efforts to reform burial practices in Italy, Sweden, Austria, and Spain proved more successful, leading to the establishment of suburban cemeteries in the last decades of the 1700s. The earliest of the new Italian cemeteries were generally stark and functional. For instance, in Naples (1762) and Pisa (1783), bare fields were given over to mass graves.⁶ Monuments were restricted in order to minimize social distinctions, and the public was banned to limit the risk of infection. However, more elaborate and monumental approaches to funerary architecture emerged in nineteenth-century Europe, as a new era of cemetery building expressed the rationalism of the Enlightenment and Romantic notions of death. The resulting cemeteries may be loosely divided into two broad groups, the picturesque and the monumental, which might be distinguished on the basis of how they sought to fulfill Romantic ideals and the aims of reformist legislation.⁷ The first group, which followed the model of the garden cemetery, was predominant in northern Europe and North America.⁸ Typically, a picturesque landscape was traversed by meandering paths lined with tombs. Plans, which conformed to the topography of the site, reflected Romantic associations of nature and death, and echoed the English Elysian fields of the eighteenth century.

The first, and arguably the most influential, model for the landscaped cemetery was the municipal Père-Lachaise Cemetery (1804) in Paris (Fig. 1).⁹ Its design by Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart united formal and informal elements on a hilly site, with avenues, axes and ronds-points arranged within a picturesque landscape. Though inaugurated one month prior to the Edict of St.-Cloud, Père-Lachaise may be seen to embody the fundamental principles of that decree. Its success as a model lay partly in the

manner in which social status was represented in the range of tombs that lined its avenues. Those tombs, which were offered at different prices, created a platform for emergent social groups to assert their position.

England lagged behind France in terms of burial reform, although already during the eighteenth century some Dissenters' and "overspill" Anglican burial grounds were established, which were physically independent from churches.¹⁰ Between the 1820s and 1850s, and prior to the construction of cemeteries by the state, private companies fulfilled a growing demand for suburban burial grounds. These tended to be architecturally diverse. For example, Highgate and Brompton cemeteries were both constructed in London in 1839 – the former as a picturesque landscape, and the latter in a formal or classical style (W-Figs. 1-2).¹¹ Initially, the British favored the garden cemetery and the freedom it allowed with regard to the construction of private monuments. Arguably, the picturesque was a natural choice as an offshoot of the English landscape tradition. Although Père-Lachaise was an influential model, English cemeteries tended to adopt relatively looser planning strategies, whilst the Parisian prototype developed an urban arrangement of tomb-lined "streets" within an overall picturesque frame.¹² However, throughout the nineteenth century, there was a shift in Britain towards rectilinear and geometric layouts that used space more efficiently. Within an increasingly rigid architectural frame, the permissive attitude adopted towards family mausolea resulted in an eclectic and varied array of monuments. Divisions within wider society were expressed in the juxtaposition of the Neoclassical Kensal Green (London, 1832), and the Gothic and Egyptian Revivals employed at Highgate (W-Figs. 1 and 3).¹³ In general, the predominance of Neoclassicism in British funerary design persisted until the mid-1830s,

when Neo-Gothic came into favor – a shift reinforced, in part, by Augustus Pugin’s 1843 polemic against cemetery architecture rooted in classicism and the Egyptian revival.¹⁴

From the 1820s, funerary design in North America followed similar patterns to those established in Europe. As population growth rendered urban burial practices unsustainable, new suburban cemeteries were generally built along picturesque lines, although they tended to be more spacious and informal than their French counterparts. Indeed, the scale of the first American garden cemeteries, Mount Auburn (1831) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the Green-Wood Cemetery (1835) in Brooklyn, New York, represented an unprecedented expansion of the model of Père-Lachaise (W-Fig. 4).¹⁵ In that regard, they were closer in style to British cemeteries of the 1830s. Moreover, as in Britain, American burial grounds were largely the result of private initiatives, although religious objections to the commercialization of death gave rise to philanthropic associations that undertook the development of cemeteries on a non-profit basis.

Despite their similarities in the early 1830s and their common derivation from landscaped models, British cemeteries gradually adopted a greater formality whilst American burial grounds became more naturalistic. The latter assumed the appearance of the park and took on a “rural” quality that was seen to be antithetical to the gridded environment of the city and to the city dweller’s increasing isolation from nature and rural values.¹⁶ Developments in the United States serve to demonstrate that funerary architecture reflected conditions in national contexts and developing socio-economic systems. In Dublin, Père-Lachaise inspired the construction of two new cemeteries in 1832. Whereas the Protestant Mount Jerome was largely Neoclassical, the Catholic

cemetery at Glasnevin adopted a style suggestive of a native Irish Romanesque.¹⁷

Together they exemplify how different architectural styles carry distinctive political and cultural meanings. Similarly, within the broad group of nineteenth-century cemeteries that followed the picturesque model, there were essential differences in manner in which funerary architecture expressed individual social structures, and national and local cultures.

The same may be said of the monumental cemeteries of the nineteenth century in southern Europe that fell loosely into the second group, and for which architecture rather than nature provided the basis for planning and design. Although French-occupied Italy was brought under Napoleonic burial laws between 1806 and 1809, Italian cemeteries of the nineteenth century differed from those of neighboring France in that they were formal and monumental.¹⁸ Their layout followed classical principals of design, with arcaded courts arranged symmetrically around axial avenues punctuated by major buildings, gateways, and chapels. The original core of the Staglieno Cemetery in Genoa (1844), with its porticoed cloisters centered on a Pantheon-like chapel, demonstrates the size and grandeur of the monumental Italian cemetery (Fig. 2). Neoclassicism was the dominant style in Italian funerary architecture in the early part of the century. Following the unification of Italy in 1861, the new nation-state also embraced medievalism as a style untainted by associations with previous regimes – an obvious example is the Monumental Cemetery in Milan (1863, W-Fig. 5). Meanwhile, nineteenth-century cemeteries in Spain and Portugal adopted a formal, “urban” layout articulated by classical planning devices – as exemplified by the San Isidro cemetery in Madrid (1811) and the Cemitério dos Prazeres in Lisbon (1833, W-Fig. 6).¹⁹ Again, these cemeteries demonstrate a tendency

for funerary architecture to reflect local conditions, and prevailing social and political values.

In contrast to the funerary architecture in North America and northern Europe that followed arcadian models, the cemeteries of southern Europe were largely monumental. However, there were exceptions on both sides. For example, in the distinctly urban cemeteries of Catholic Louisiana the dead were accommodated in *loculi*, or gridded recesses above ground.²⁰ These elevated structures, first employed at the St. Louis cemetery (1789) in New Orleans, offset the difficulties created by the damp climate and recurrent flooding. Equally, Scottish cemeteries were unique as virtual cities of the dead, as typified by the Glasgow Necropolis (1831, W-Fig. 7).²¹ Whereas Glasgow's cemetery may point to the nature of Presbyterianism, the formal layout of Austrian cemeteries suggests an affinity with the Catholic burial grounds of Southern Europe. Vienna's Central Cemetery (1873), for example, is monumental in the Italian vein, with a web of axial avenues culminating in a rond-point with a domed, centrally-planned chapel (W-Fig. 8).

However diverse, funerary architecture of the nineteenth century appears to hold to a general rule in that it is expressive of meanings rooted in local cultures and socio-political structures – hence, the divergence between the picturesque or rural cemeteries of the Protestant north and the urban and planned burial grounds of the Catholic south. The popularity of the garden cemetery in the north and the influence of the English landscape tradition were matched by the persistence of more appropriate native models in the south. The social and political values prevalent in Italy, for instance, were more easily expressed through the model of the thirteenth-century Campo Santo in Pisa – an influential

precedent for the cloistered monumental burial ground. Moreover, the garden cemetery, although adopted in France, may have been tainted in Italy and other Catholic countries by its associations with England, and therefore with Protestantism. It is also interesting that, whereas Protestantism in the north encouraged burial reform, the establishment of suburban cemeteries in Italy and other Mediterranean countries ran counter to the dominant Catholic religion and was largely the result of secular or anticlerical initiatives.²²

Burial grounds are also akin to their parent cities in that they can express socio-spatial structures that are defined in terms of specific property rights. Thus, social divisions that exist in the city, or differences in the power to acquire property, may be reflected in cemeteries. Similarly, the campo santo format with its arcaded courts was feasible in southern Europe because of the practice of temporary interment, whereby the corpse is exhumed on expiry of a relatively short lease, thus limiting the demand on available space. In contrast, Protestantism encouraged a sense of ownership and perpetuity, which rendered spacious rural cemeteries a necessity. Indeed, attempts to create tighter architectural formats for permanent burial proved financially unsustainable, as at the Brompton Cemetery in London (1840).²³

In summary, it might also be said that the choice between picturesque or classical planning may have been essentially social and political. During the nineteenth century, public cemeteries were invested with various moral and civic functions, and acted as idealized representations of the communities, cities, and social structures that they served. American garden cemeteries promoted rural over urban values, whereas landscaped burial grounds of Victorian Britain endorsed civic virtues through the

celebration of the valiant dead. In Italy, monumental funerary architecture acted as a vehicle for nationalism in that it expressed the power of the emergent city, and the patriotism and civic consciousness surrounding the creation of the nation-state. In essence, the choice between the landscaped and monumental models lay in the power of association.²⁴ Whereas monumentality allied to a native tradition was suggestive of the status of the nation, the garden cemetery offered associations with nature, privacy, and contemplation. Monumental cemeteries were more conducive to the expression of collective and overt political meanings. In contrast, landscaped burial grounds engaged concepts that related to the individual, family, and community. Monumental “urban” cemeteries focused on the glorification of the dead, whereas bucolic garden cemeteries offered consolation to the living. Whether monumental or picturesque, nineteenth-century funerary architecture reflected the nature and evolution of a society, its culture, and politics.

Twentieth Century: The Age of Renewal

Until World War I, the traditional architectural languages served to carry meanings associated with the dead. Following the war, a need emerged for new styles that would act as appropriate vehicles for commemoration. In some quarters, historicism was seen to be inadequate in the face of unprecedented bloodshed, or was rejected due to its association with the failures of a pre-war generation.²⁵ Yet new styles and formats were slow to develop, in part because of an intrinsic conservatism that sought a sense of permanence and universality in commemorative architecture. However, there were exceptions, as twentieth-century architects experimented with funerary design that

embodied a reassessment of the commemorative needs of the living.

The cemeteries of the First World War represented the first step in the development of a new funerary language, which commonly resulted in a return to archetypal forms associated with timelessness and durability. Those forms were often clad in a stripped classicism that sought to avoid sentimentality and triumphalism. In fact, classicism played a large part in the design of war cemeteries as it was perceived to be a secular idiom, linked to a humanist tradition, and yet capable of yielding a sense of order. The British Imperial War Graves Commission established thousands of military cemeteries worldwide, most with a grid of tombstones positioned within a landscaped setting marked by an altar and a cross.²⁶ Edwin Lutyens's memorial at the Étapes cemetery (1923) in France is notable in that it illustrates a symbolic use of classicism, with twin cenotaphs surmounted by sarcophagi and stone flags. Some criticized even that restricted reliance on historicism, while others condemned the lack of overt Christian symbolism.²⁷ American and British military cemeteries are remarkable in their regularity and homogeneity, which followed from the decision to ignore rank and commemorate the dead with matching tombstones set into geometric grids.²⁸ Repetition conveys the scale of the lives lost but with muted emotion. In some respects, there are parallels with the cemeteries of eighteenth-century Europe that were established on an egalitarian basis with communal graves in an unadorned field.²⁹ The military cemeteries of the twentieth century ran counter to trends that followed the Napoleonic Edict of St.-Cloud (1804), which allowed for the expression of developing class structures and the rise of bourgeois societies through an eclectic arrangement of family and individual monuments. Whereas, in the war cemeteries, the picturesque setting and the naming of the fallen endorsed a

respect for individual freedom, private memorials were subordinated to a collective architectural framework, as individual losses were engulfed by the common tragedy of war.

Italian and German war cemeteries followed markedly different formats to the landscaped burial sites of Britain or the United States. The differences might be measured in the degree of state intervention, the choice of an architectural or landscaped model, and tendencies towards militarism and nationalism. Under Italian Fascism and German Nazism, fallen soldiers of the Great War were exhumed and reburied as part of efforts to exploit remembrance as propaganda. The ossuary, or bone-depository, was adopted perhaps for its centralized structure that allowed for the expression of social hierarchy and national unity. Uniformity and classicism, with some Futurist undertones, were employed in the design of a number of monumental ossuaries, which were built under Italian Fascism in the 1930s.³⁰ As exemplified at Monte Grappa (1935) and Redipuglia (1938), stepped monuments of stone ascend hillsides to great theatrical effect, creating sites of up-hill pilgrimage dedicated to the Fascist cult of the dead (Fig. 3, W-Fig. 9). The medieval fortress was also exploited for its martial associations, as exemplified by the Italian ossuary of Oslavia (Ghino Venturi, 1938), and the German *Totenburgen* (“castles of the dead”) of the 1930s (W-Fig. 10).³¹ In comparison, American and European cemeteries of World War II were more subdued. The austerity of their design was partly expressive of a desire to move on, and the consensus that monuments should be utilitarian and not overly taxing on public funds.³² The ossuary of the Fosse Ardeatine (1945) near Rome represents an exception – a large, haunting arrangement of concrete blocks intended to commemorate the victims of a Nazi-Fascist massacre (W-Fig. 11). It

subverted the stripped elemental language of Fascist war memorials by appropriating it for the condemnation of dictatorship.³³

War graves represent a particular situation in the generation of funerary architecture. In fact, from the 1920s, many other architectural movements, such as Expressionism and Art Deco, percolated into European burial grounds through the design of individual tombs and monuments. Garden cemeteries were fertile ground in that they afforded a planning framework that could accommodate different architectural styles. Modernism brought a tendency towards the articulation of simple, abstract forms and, whereas other styles might afford character to individual tombs, it also had the potential to provide a basis for cemetery design. However, its influence on planning was limited, and the history of the twentieth-century cemetery is more easily set down in terms of individual projects and architects, rather than common stylistic movements or national trends.

Though innovative, the Woodland Cemetery near Stockholm sets its roots in the enduring tradition of the garden cemetery. The architecture of Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz is intrinsically connected to the tradition of the Nordic landscape (Fig. 4).³⁴ The initial competition entry of 1914-5 was orientated towards a symbolic narrative suggestive of the transition from life to death, and from grief to resignation, as enacted through the manipulation of the landscape, light, and natural elements such as earth and water. Within this picturesque frame, which was tightened by later revisions, Asplund's Woodland Chapel (1918) merges vernacular Swedish elements with the concept of the primitive hut as the mythical origin of architecture. The progression from a dark, heavy portico to a top-lit, domed interior is imbued with symbolic meaning. In contrast,

Lewerentz's Chapel of Resurrection (1921) embodies a minimal, reticent interpretation of Nordic Classicism.³⁵ It offers a sense of progression from an axial route aligned with the entrance, through a shady narthex, into a bright chapel with a separate exit. That sense of pilgrimage is also evident in Asplund's crematorium (1935-40). Thus, the Woodland Cemetery derived its symbolic power from associations with nature and the landscape and from a willingness to engage with significant themes relating to passage, death, and loss.

Lewerentz's Eastern Cemetery at Malmö (Sweden) also evokes the sense of a ritual progression through the landscape.³⁶ Due to its lengthy construction (1916-70s), the cemetery reflects a transition within funerary design from Neoclassicism, with echoes of the vernacular, to modernism. The chapel of St. Birgitta (1922), a Nordic tumulus faced with a Doric portico and sunk into the hillside, contrasts with the later chapels of St. Knut and St. Gertrude (1944), where a severe linear geometry is enlivened by textured materials. Modernism is also represented by a flower stand (1978), built as a concrete hut faced with a grid that is reminiscent of Mondrian.

While Swedish funerary designers gained impetus from the Nordic landscape and vernacular archetypes, Jože Plečnik sought to create a microcosmic representation of Slovenian architecture within the Žale Cemetery in Ljubljana (1938-40).³⁷ In contrast to Swedish examples, Plečnik's design is decidedly axial and urban. A curved Doric propylaeum leads to a chapel in the manner of a Baroque stage set. The main avenue, articulated by freestanding columns, is intersected by a serpentine route stretching between fourteen chapels. These are diminutive archetypes, expressing various styles in distilled form, and were intended to sow the seeds for the development of a national

architecture within the recently liberated Slovenia – another example of the nation-building role of funerary architecture. The chapels, which provide intimate and small-scale environments for mourners, also are meaningful with respect to the collective memory, due to their associations with familiar architectural styles.

Similarly, Aldo Rossi's extension of the San Cataldo Cemetery in Modena (1971-6) is intended to resonate within the Italian collective memory through its exaggerated use of recognizable types (Fig. 5).³⁸ Rossi's design is distinctly urban and recalls the monumental cemeteries of nineteenth-century Italy through its rectangular plan, porticoed enclosure, bisecting avenues, and major centerpiece. The cemetery is conceived as a necropolis, or as a city of the dead that is analogous to the urban environment. Forms derived from the Italian city, and particularly from domestic architecture, are stripped bare and reduced to pure geometrical elements that reinforce embedded cultural and socio-political meanings.

Had he not declined the commission, the project at Modena might have been undertaken by Carlo Scarpa, who was then engaged with the expansion of the nineteenth-century cemetery of San Vito d'Altivole near Treviso for the Brion-Vega family (W-Fig. 12).³⁹ Scarpa's design (1970-2) contrasts vividly with Rossi's Modena cemetery in that it embodies a picturesque landscape in a Nordic vein, with a symbolic route articulated through a series of architectural experiences. As a garden cemetery with Japanese influences, the Brion-Vega extension represents a significant departure from the native Italian tradition of urban burial grounds.

The cemeteries at Ljubljana and Modena demonstrate that some of the most interesting and innovative approaches to funerary design came not from modernism but

from the distillation of historical forms that have meaning within a collective memory. Paradoxically, despite its significance in twentieth-century architecture and planning, modernism cannot be said to have had a comparable impact on funerary architecture. Arguably, that was because of an attempt within modernism to overcome historicism in the name of function and a new social structure, which had the effect of partially eliminating or re-writing the collective memory that acts as the basis for meaning in funerary architecture. This tendency was matched by a counter-approach in twentieth-century architecture that drew on past styles and national traditions as the meaningful foundation for new designs. In this vein, designers such as Aldo Rossi and Jože Plečnik testify to the opportunities offered by the employment of the essential nature of historical forms and architectural types.

It might also be argued that, with some exceptions, the architecture of twentieth-century cemeteries has been stifled by a general incapacity to confront death, or by a propensity to meet death with timidity and an innate architectural conservatism. That funerary architecture was not generally an arena for innovation during the twentieth century might be attributed to a cultural tendency to deny death and to push thoughts of mortality to the margins.⁴⁰ That denial is represented by the remembrance park, which conceals the features of a working cemetery within scenic parkland. The Forest Lawn Memorial Park (1917) in Glendale, California, the first of its kind, was essentially a pleasure garden decorated by replicas of famous art works.⁴¹ Satirized as an unscrupulously commercial enterprise, Forest Lawn evolved from “lawn plans” that limited the marking of plots and the height of monuments in favor of scenic and homogenous expanses of planting. An American model that spread to Europe, the “lawn

plan” was first introduced by Adolph Strauch in his 1855 plan for Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati.⁴² In a sense, that plan was anti-individualistic in that the demarcation of private plots was subordinated to the creation of an open, cohesive environment. Broadly, the uneasiness about death, or the commercialization of eternity, together with the inappropriateness of modernism, may have contributed to the failure of a new or distinctive funerary style to emerge during the twentieth century. However, all funerary architecture is invested with meaning and the power to express social attitudes towards death. What distinguishes, for example, the Nordic interpretation of the garden cemetery, or Rossi’s use of meaningful archetypes, is the capacity to embrace the idea of death through distinctive forms of funerary design.

Crematoria

No history of modern funerary architecture would be complete without a discussion of the impact of cremation. Although commonly used in antiquity, cremation was abandoned in favor of interment following the rise of Christianity. From the fourth to the nineteenth century, European graveyards were exclusively dedicated to burial. Thus, the development of crematoria from the 1870s marked a significant departure from tradition. Cremation was perceived as more hygienic and offered a space-saving alternative to burial at a time when even the new cemeteries of the early nineteenth century were becoming overcrowded. Italy was at the vanguard with regards to the techniques of cremation, and the first public crematorium in Europe was opened in Milan in 1876. Given that the Vatican sought to prohibit cremation until 1963, it is interesting that its adoption within Italy outstripped that of other countries where Protestantism might have been less of an obstacle to its introduction. In fact, religious opposition boosted the

popularity of cremation within anticlerical and liberal circles of Catholic Europe.

Freemasons and progressive elements within an urban bourgeoisie adopted cremation as a symbol of modernity and hostility to the Church, thereby investing the architecture of crematoria with socio-political associations.⁴³

The revival of cremation was linked to advancements in the modern incinerator, and the form of crematoria was partly dependent on the need to house new and developing technology. The absence of historical precedents afforded an opportunity for the creation of a new architectural type. Difficulties, however, emerged from the necessity to reconcile the emotional needs of the mourner with the functions associated with cremation.⁴⁴ Whereas the operation of the oven and other complex machinery demanded specific planning solutions, the public required an environment that was dignified and reassuringly familiar. Moreover, the absence of an established ritual meant that there were no guidelines for the arrangement of the plan, raising questions regarding the placement of the furnace and its concealment from mourners. In attempting to resolve conflicting functional and human needs, two distinct approaches emerged. Some projects exploited a sense of continuity with traditional burial practices by adapting historical forms and recognizable styles. Arguably, this historicist approach aimed to render cremation more acceptable to a conservative and religious opposition. In contrast, other projects broke with the past and openly presented cremation as an efficient and progressive alternative to interment and, in some instances, as a defiant rejection of tradition and religious orthodoxy.

From the 1870s to the First World War, the historicist approach prevailed as cremation struggled to gain acceptance within Italy, Britain, Germany, France, and

Switzerland. In Italy, the earliest crematoria sought a sense of legitimacy through a variety of historical styles, ranging from neo-Egyptian to medievalist. In particular, classicism was favored for its secular nature and associations with the ancient precedent for cremation – as demonstrated by the Doric facade of the crematorium in Milan (Carlo Maciachini, 1876, Fig. 6). Whereas Italian crematoria of the nineteenth century emerged despite opposition from religious and civic authorities, in Britain, cremation was generally accepted by the establishment and embedded within national architectural traditions.⁴⁵ British architects generally exploited the sacred connotations of medievalism and ecclesiastical architecture in order to minimize any suggestion of godlessness and radical politics. Whereas the earliest British crematoria adopted a Gothic idiom, Golders Green (1902) in London stood out as a sophisticated essay in the Italian Romanesque (W-Fig. 13).⁴⁶ In that its cloisters provide shelter for funerals, and a campanile conceals the chimney, it exemplifies a capacity to adapt historical forms, as well as the elements of embellishment and disguise that are common to historicist crematoria. Similarly, the crematorium of Père-Lachaise Cemetery in Paris merged Romanesque and Byzantine elements (Jean Camille Formigé, 1889, W-Fig. 14). Within its square plan, there are three interlinking halls, each with an incinerator placed within an apse, efficiently articulating circulation within the space. A cloister, acting as a columbarium, encloses the Byzantinesque crematorium – its impressive scale once asserted the significance of cremation as a new funerary practice.

Function triumphed over historicism in a relatively small number of nineteenth-century crematoria. For example, an eclectic crematorium was erected at Lodi (Italy) in 1877 by one of the inventors of the modern incinerator (W-Fig. 15). It was not until the

1900s that function rather than historicism was allowed to emerge as a dominant factor in crematorium design. That this did not always result in a rejection of historicism is demonstrated, for example, by crematoria constructed in Sweden between the 1880s and 1920s that employed a combination of Roman classicism and the vernacular.⁴⁷ One striking example is that of Helsingborg crematorium (Ragnar Östberg, 1926), which juxtaposes a domed rotunda with a Swedish church tower. Cremation triumphed in Sweden as the dominant funerary practice, and Swedish crematoria, although diverse in style, are remarkably innovative in their planning and aesthetics. Whereas the advancement of cremation in the twentieth century was largely confined to the Protestant north, and particularly to Scandinavia and Central Europe, the number of cremations in Catholic countries leveled off towards the First World War in line with a declining impetus from anticlericalism and radicalism.⁴⁸

Whether defined with respect to Protestantism and Catholicism, functionalism and historicism, there were markedly different approaches to the architecture of crematoria. For example, Catholic Austria's first public crematorium was built in Vienna on the site of a sixteenth-century castle (Clemens Holzmeister, 1921-2, W-Fig. 16).⁴⁹ Incorporating large portions of the original fabric, the project combined castellated forms, thick crenellated walls, stout ogee arches, and pointed lancet windows. The result is a foreboding, Expressionistic facade that evokes the gravity of death. Similarly, the crematorium (Arnošt Wiesner, 1925) at Brno, now in the Czech Republic, is reminiscent of a fortified structure with a low entrance on a heavy plinth surmounted by spiked piers that symbolize Christ's Crown of Thorns.⁵⁰ In Germany, the architect Fritz Schumacher made an important contribution to theory and practice in his pioneering crematorium at

Dresden (1909), which is endowed with a crude yet powerful monumentality.⁵¹ The curved forms of a colonnaded apse appear to be breaking out of a concrete frame; and the stripped classicism of the main building and adjoining porticoed court are reminiscent of a ruined villa of ancient Rome, or perhaps the Mausoleum of Theodoric (520 AD) near Ravenna. In contrast, Schumacher's crematorium at Hamburg (1932, W-Fig. 17) tends toward an eclecticism that is based on abstraction. Whereas a truncated pyramid suggests a primitive archetype, arcaded wings point to classicism, and vertical windows to Perpendicular Gothic. Moreover, a large parabolic hall with stained-glass windows might be described as an Expressionistic play on the idea of the celestial vault.

As with cemeteries in general, the development of modernism in the 1920s resulted in the use of pure and simple forms in the architecture of crematoria. An extreme form of modernism was employed in the crematorium (Alois Mezera, 1929) at Prague, which promoted the superiority of cremation as a secular and progressive rite through the use of a skeletal, quasi-industrial architecture.⁵² This is emblematic of how, in Czech lands that were formerly under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, cremation was adopted in the interwar period to signal freedom from imperial and Catholic power.⁵³ In the Woodland cemetery near Stockholm, Asplund's crematorium (1935-40) is reached by a symbolic up-hill route marked by a large Cross suggestive of Christ's ascent to Calvary (Fig. 4).⁵⁴ A sloping landscape is reflected in the varying heights of its three chapels. The overall structure is modernist in that its regularity and equilibrium are neither symmetrical nor axial. Whereas a portico with compluvium suggests a vestigial classicism, the crematorium's rectilinear forms of stone-clad concrete also display modernist influence. In that respect, Asplund's crematorium is comparable to that of

Sigurd Lewerentz at Malmö (1931).⁵⁵ Both designs make no attempt to conceal their purpose. However, their approach to function is enhanced by a modernist aesthetic with classical undertones that looks to the emotional needs of the mourner.

The shift within crematorium design from historicism to modernism, or from the adaptation of old forms to the creation of new ones, allowed for different approaches to the placement and exposure of the incinerator. In historicist crematoria, the components of the furnace were generally concealed by elements of funerary or ecclesiastical architecture. In Milan (1876), the chimney was disguised as a Romanesque belfry (since destroyed, W-Fig. 18). In Cremona (1883), it was hidden inside a classical column (W-Fig. 19). In Paris (1889) and Zurich (1889), the oven was camouflaged as a sarcophagus. Equally, designers adopted an ecclesiastical model by treating the furnace as an altar positioned on an axis leading from an entrance – a convention that was maintained in the twentieth-century crematoria at Dresden, Hamburg, and Prague. These conceits, intended to increase public acceptance of a new funerary practice, might reveal a reluctance to confront the reality of cremation. Among the exceptions are the crematoria at Prague (1929), which leaves the chimney in view, and at Stockholm, where the public exits through a glass door that is on an axis with the building's entrance, thereby symbolizing the progression from grief to acceptance or resignation. Despite such innovations, many of the difficulties surrounding the reconciliation of functional realities and emotional needs have yet to be resolved. Crematoria presented particular issues in that they accommodated a new funerary practice that was generally at odds with tradition. As with all funerary architecture, they carried meanings that were generated within a culture and society, and through their architecture and planning they expressed those meanings in a

purified form.

Suggestions for further reading

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¹ Examples include the Calvinist burial ground outside Geneva (1536), the cemeteries at Marburg (1568-74) and Kassel (1526-33) in Germany, Sebastiansfriedhof in Salzburg (1595-1600), and Greyfriars Kirkyard in Edinburgh (1562). See Howard Colvin, *Architecture and the After-Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 367; James Stevens Curl, *Death and Architecture: An Introduction to Funerary and Commemorative Buildings in the Western European Tradition, with Some Consideration of Their Settings* (Thrupp, Stroud: Sutton, 2002), 150-3.

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