

## Topographies of Memory. The Certosa Cemetery of Bologna: a Case Study from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

I would like to thank the organisers of the conference for having invited me to this meeting in order to discuss the development of cemeteries and to analyse historical and social assumptions and their reflections on architecture and the arts. The point of departure of the research is the city as stratification of memories, an idea which has been expressed in different ways by such urban theorists as Marcel Poète, Pierre Lavedan, Robert Venturi and especially Aldo Rossi. The cemetery is perceived as a repository of social meaning, conceived as a house for the dead, indeed a city of the dead.

We cannot talk about the history of architecture and sculpture of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries without considering cemeteries, where some of the most famous architects, including Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Alvar Aalto, and Carlo Scarpa, have worked. Adolf Loos goes as far as to affirm: "there is only a little part of architecture that belongs to art: the grave and the monument".<sup>1</sup> Here it is possible to retrace evidence of all the artistic languages of the last two centuries, from Neoclassicism to

Realism, as well as Stile Liberty, Art Deco and Symbolism. Urban and architectural history have often crossed these territories, although those memories linked with virtue, public and private, national and domestic, collective and familiar, heroic and ordinary, have often been neglected, or dealt with superficially.

In recent years the communal cemetery of Bologna has become famous at a national and European level. This case study describes the great transformation provoked by the expulsion of cemeteries from towns and the history of the "subjects" involved between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in this construction of a "City of the Dead".

The Certosa Cemetery in Bologna was established in 1801, remodelling the Charterhouse (Carthusian monastery) (fig. 1), founded in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century and dismantled in 1797 by Napoleon. Extensive work soon began, reflecting the interest of noble and bourgeois families in the building of family tombs and turning the Charterhouse into a proper "open-air museum". During the 19<sup>th</sup> century in particular, the Certosa of Bologna be-

Fig. 1 J. Bleau, *Veduta del Monastero della Certosa*, from: *Theatrum civitatum et admirandorum Italiae*, 1663

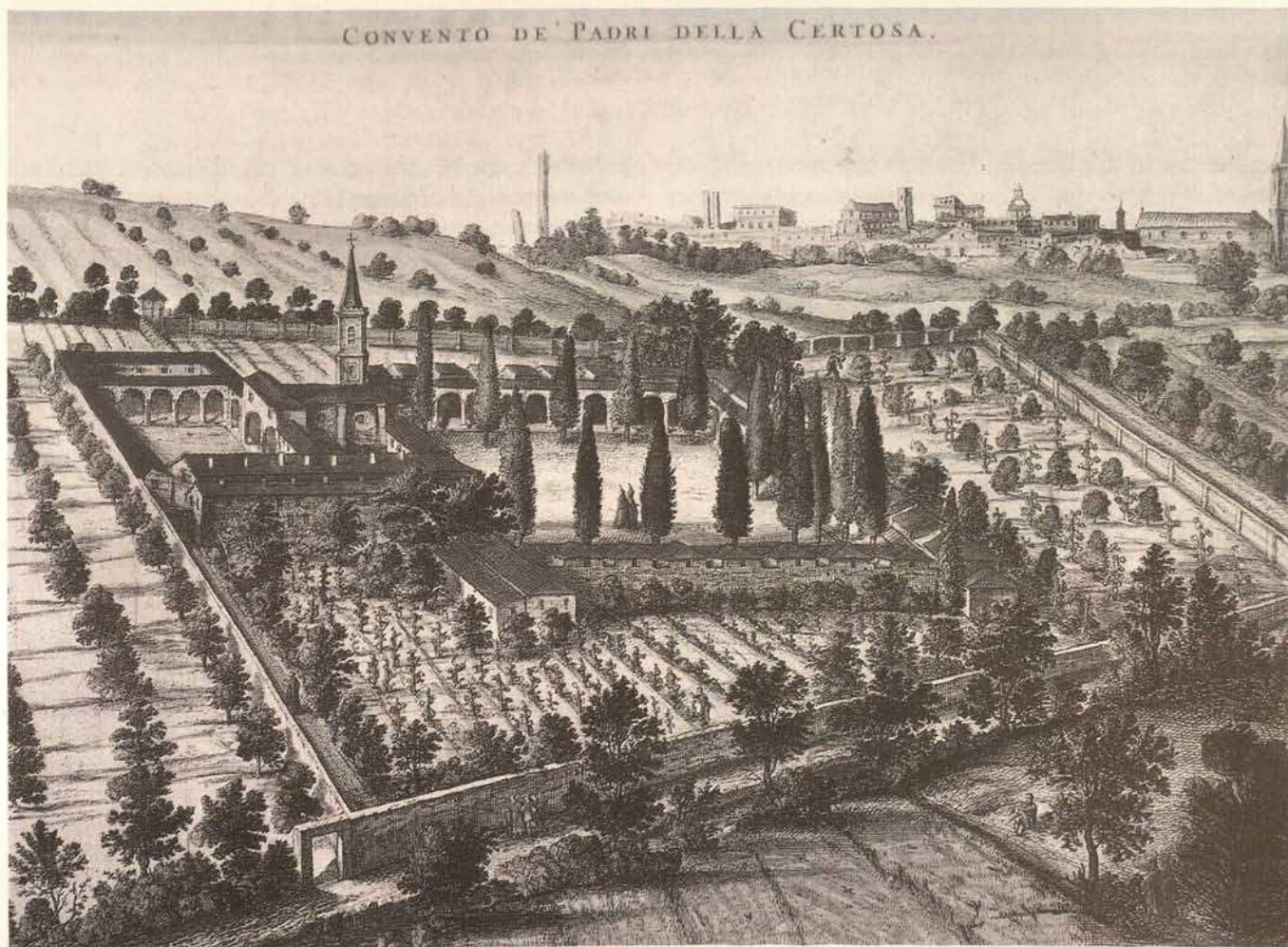




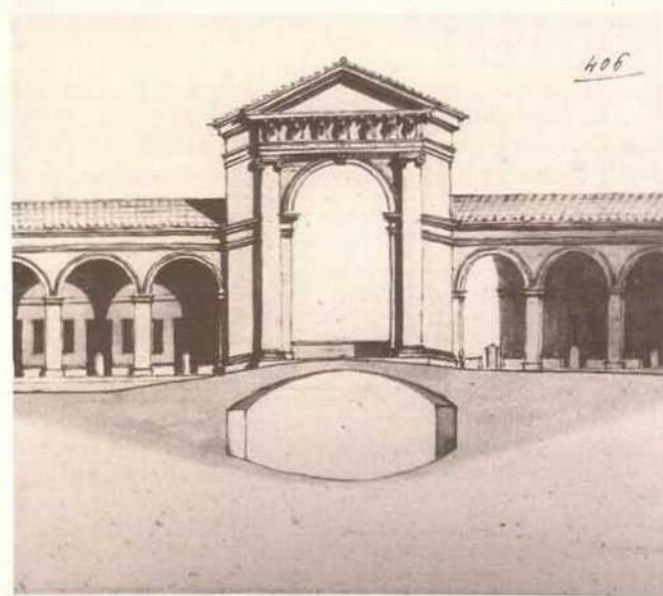


Fig. 2 Antonio Zannoni, works carried out near the old part of the convent to enlarge the burial area, 1869

came so famous that European travellers such as Byron, Dickens and Stendhal would include it in their Bolognese itinerary when they were visiting Italy on their Grand Tour.

The awareness of the values of a place full of works of art arose quite early, starting in the 1820s when the first guides expressly dedicated to a visit to the Certosa appeared, for exam-

Fig. 3 Ercole Gasparini, Studio per l'arco sul ponte del Canale di Reno



## ITINERARIO GRAFICO

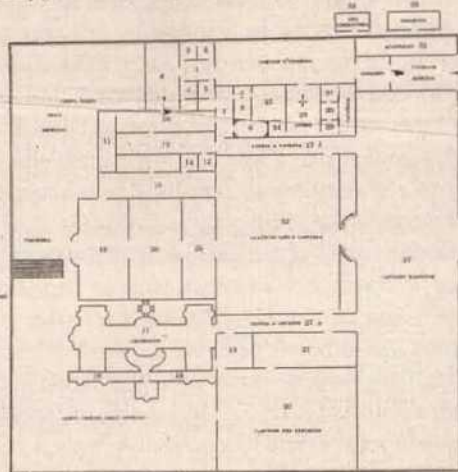
PER GIRARE CON FACILITÀ

# IL CIMITERO DELLA CERTOSA DI BOLOGNA

Mediante i numeri segnati in questo itinerario grafico facilmente si trovano le principali parti del Cimitero. Chi desiderasse poi avere un'ampia cognizione di esso Cimitero e dei suoi monumenti, nonché della storia dell'antica Certosa, acquisti l'interessantissimo GUIDA DEL CIMITERO DI BOLOGNA, detto LA CERTOSA, del prof. Angelo Gatti, con relativa planimetria, volume in. n.º di pag. 150, edito dalla premiata Tipografia Andreoli, in Bologna, via Farini 37, C. al prezzo di Cent. 60.

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EDIZIONE 1907 A ROMA DI LEGNA

Fig. 4 Gatti, Itinerario grafico per girare con facilità il Cimitero della Certosa, 1890

ple the *Giornale a comodo di quelli che frequentano il Cimitero di Bologna e la sua Chiesa* (1821), the *Certosa di Bologna ora Cimitero monumentale* (1828) and *Itinerario grafico per girare con facilità il Cimitero della Certosa*, published in 1890 (fig. 4).

It would take too much time now to go through all the construction phases that the Certosa underwent; therefore I intend to focus only on the most crucial events. The cemetery lies approximately one kilometre west of the city, at the foot of the hill on which rises the Sanctuary of the Beata Vergine of S. Luca. It was not constructed as a unified and organic project, but rather adapted the structures of the Carthusian monastery. It was later enlarged with arcades that enclosed the areas of the surrounding gardens.

Around 1774 conditions in the small cemeteries attached to the urban churches were nearing collapse because of precarious hygienic conditions. Initially four areas outside the main city gates were sought, but there were difficulties convincing the owners to give them to the community in order to build cemeteries. In 1777 public property was found, "una piazzetta presso la tribuna al principio del portico di S. Luca" (a little square near the platform at the beginning of the arcade of San Luca). The intention was to take care of the excess needs of the urban cemeteries there, but at the same time to maintain their function.

After a period during which the problem seemed to be reappraised, a sanitary emergency arose from the need to bury the corpses far from the olfactory reach of residential areas; at that time the area outside Saragozza gate was chosen, not far from the





Fig. 5 Cappella dei Suffragi, from: *Vedute pittoresche della città di Bologna tratte dai quadri ad olio dipinti dal vero da A. Basoli, disegnate e incise all'acquatinta dai fratelli L. e F. Basoli, 1833*

Carthusian site of the future cemetery. But the space soon turned out to be inadequate, leading to the definitive solution which was later adopted and which had become possible as a result of the Napoleonic suppression of the religious orders. It is certainly the great plan by Ercole Gasparini (1771–1829) that characterises the initial construction phase of the Certosa.<sup>2</sup> Apart from the original structures of the convent, the purpose of the plan is to connect the big spaces necessary for burial of the poorest (underground) with an arched architectonic structure for placement of the sarcophagi of the representative municipal personalities. Here the arcade, typical of the Bolognese “genius loci”, recalls urban peculiarities in an area that was then still open country.

To facilitate access to the cemetery from the urban gates, Gasparini projected a long covered structure, similar to the structures along the perimeter of the cemetery.<sup>3</sup> A new arm made of 160 arches detaches from the arcade that leads to San Luca from Via Saragozza, the strategic point of connection between the level tract and the one that goes up the hill, and connects to the perimeter of the cemetery (fig. 3). The arches, constructed with some variations from the original project, were finished in 1831, two years after the death of the architect.

Another important intervention is that of Angelo Venturoli (1749–1821), protagonist of the architectonic culture of Bologna between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For the Certosa, on which he worked in 1816, he suggested the re-adaptation of the former refectory and of the cellar below, which later became the Sala della Pietà. A light and elegant elliptical staircase enno-

bles what were originally service spaces. Stairs from the upper hall continue perpendicularly until they reach the lower level (fig. 6). Both this work and the Sala delle Tombe that Venturoli created from the transformation of the Sala della Ricreazione were carried out later by the municipal engineer Luigi Marchesini (1796–1882). In addition to numerous other interventions to the Certosa, the latter is author of a plan dated 1822 in which he projected further necessary enlargements of the cemetery.

We must also recall another important public official, Giuseppe Tubertini (1759–1831), designer of the big exedra that connects the main cloister with the cloister known as della Cappella (of the chapel), and of the adaptation of the Sala degli Uomini Illustri or Pantheon (1828).

The work of Marchesini brings us to what we can define as the second generation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century work in the Certosa, characterized by the figures of Coriolano Monti (1815–1880)<sup>4</sup> and Antonio Zannoni (1833–1910).<sup>5</sup> Monti was chief engineer and architect of the municipal technical office during the crucial years after national unity (1860–1865), and protagonist of the short season of adjustment works by the city in the infrastructural chessboard of the new reign. In the Certosa he contributed to the enlargement and the completion of the architectonic structures of the southern cloister, raised adjacent to the pre-existing ancient one. In particular with the Galleria a Tre Navate (1863–1865) he follows the trend of his predecessors in his adhesion, typical of Bolognese architecture, to a neo-Cinquecentist “koinè”, here close to its exhaustion.



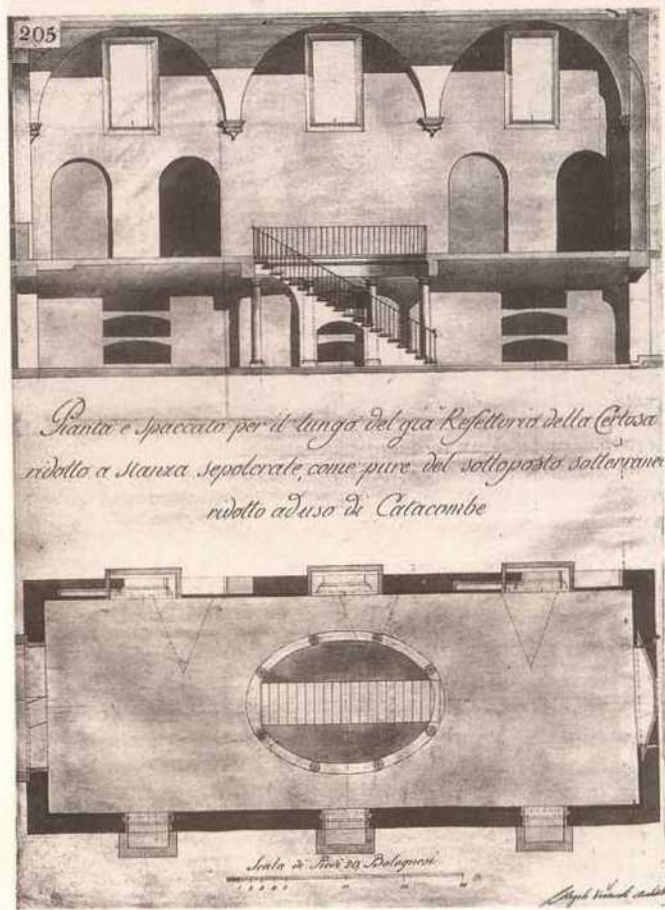
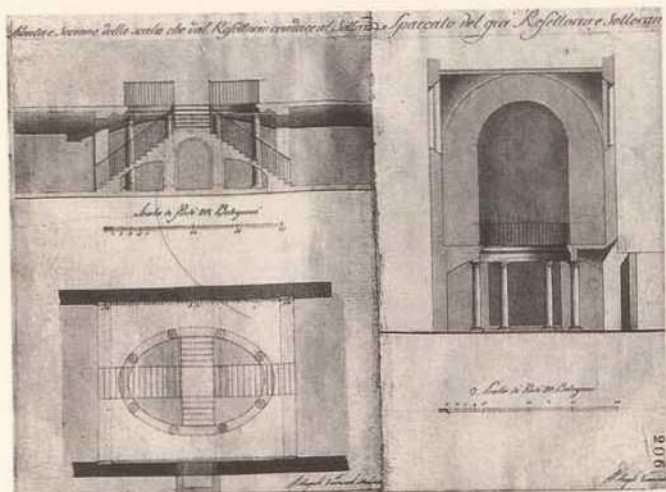


Fig. 6 Angelo Venturoli, Pianta e spaccato per il luogo del già Refettorio della Certosa ridotto a stanza sepolcrale come pure del sottoposto ridotto ad uso di Catacombe

Antonio Zannoni, engineer from the municipal technical office and professor of the engineering school of Bologna, had the task of reconnecting the past and the present at the Carthusian site.<sup>6</sup> During the work carried out near the old part of the convent in 1869 to enlarge the burial area, Zannoni discovered an Etruscan necropolis with 420 tombs, now displayed in the Municipal Archaeological Museum (fig. 2). During his appointment as municipal engineer he took another important step forward in the work to transform the cemetery. To connect Cloister III to the new parts built more to the south by Marchesini and Monti, Zannoni was obliged to demolish part of the Cappella dei Suffragi by Ercole Gasparini (fig. 5); the neoclassical front was retained, and a room was inserted in the area later called Galleria degli Angeli (Gallery of the Angels).



Fig. 7 G. Vaccaro, Goldoni Chapel, Campo degli ospedali

The more significant structural works from the following century involve above all the extreme eastern area of the Certosa, with a new entrance from c. 1924 and the structures of Cloister IX, together with the relative long galleries constructed in 1927. But of much bigger impact is surely the larger Cloister VI, dedicated to the victims of the First World War. Started by Filippo Buriani (1847–1898)<sup>7</sup> and later finished by Arturo Carpi, in the centre it features the pavilion by Giulio Ulisse Arata (1881–1962)<sup>8</sup> dedicated to the victims of Fascism (fig. 8).

Saturation of the area, a less monumental and more ordinary approach, characterised the last planning phase of the cemetery. Examples include the works of Enrico De Angeli (1900–1979),<sup>9</sup> who designed the Finzi “aedicule” in the Jewish cemetery of the Certosa in 1938 with an essential rationalism,<sup>10</sup> or, almost ten years later, the Caruso Tomb, a little, coherent and elegant piece of architecture. In the Cloister degli Ospedali there is a project by the architect Giuseppe Vaccaro (1896–1970),<sup>11</sup> graduate engineer in Bologna and often active in the city. In the Goldoni Chapel the essential volumetric system relates to the plastic complex sculpture of Amerigo Tot (fig. 7).

A project of immediate visual impact is located close to the Vaccaro Chapel: the ossuary monument for the dead Partisans, executed by Piero Bottoni (1903–1973)<sup>12</sup> between 1954 and 1959. The sculptures by Bottoni himself (the complex within the spring), by Stella Korczynska (the feminine figures at the basement of the “fireplace”) and by Genni Mucchi (the plastic decoration on the edge) establish a strong dialogue with the context, as much as the architectonic space of the monument seems impenetrable and closed in upon itself (fig. 9).

In the last century, every decorative excess is stripped from the funerary architecture. The emptiness increases in value and



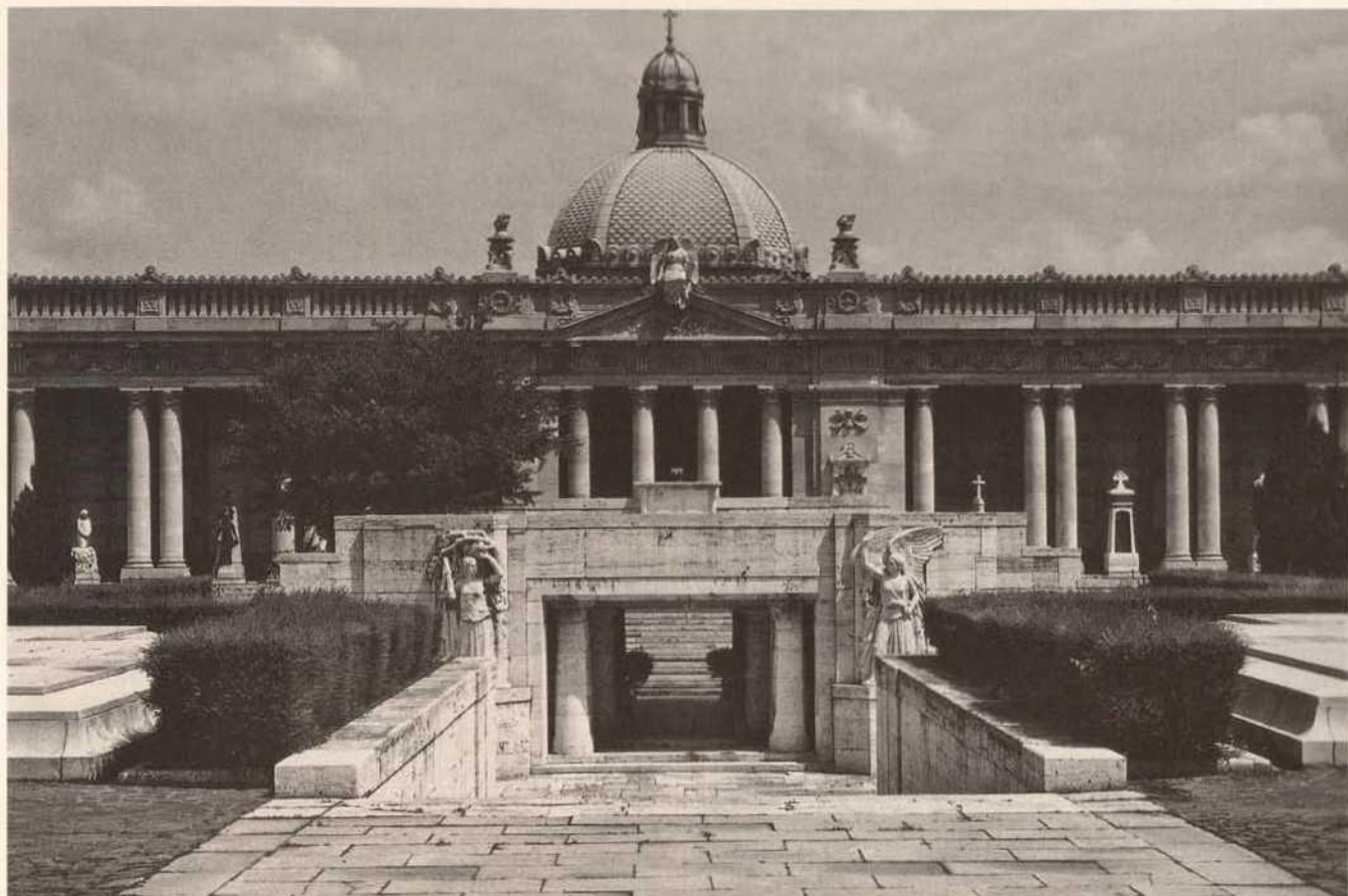


Fig. 8 F. Buriani, Cloister VI dedicated to the victims of the First World War and G. U. Arata, Cenotaph dedicated to the victims of Fascism

Fig. 9 P. Bottoni, Ossuary-monument for the dead partisans, Campo degli ospedali, 1954-59



becomes a symbol: plastic material to shape like the other elements. The volumes are pure, severe, essential, while the light becomes the constituent part through which the architect underlines levels and volumes. But in spite of these attempts, with the passing of time the historical link between art and death cannot be renewed any more, leading to the isolation of the cemeteries. With the advent of mass society artists and architects were no longer interested in funerary production, thus opening the way for functionality to prevail. In the industrial and post-industrial society of our times, it is possible to recognize a different socio-anthropologic approach to the theme of death. The cemeteries have become a non-place; the anonymous dormitory-suburbs of the modern city find a reflection in the crowded burial niches of the flat and standardised architecture.

A patrimony wrongfully forgotten and undervalued that finally starts to assume a museum physiognomy; a patrimony not only to protect, but also to exploit as cultural goods accessible to all. It is precisely in the cemeteries that we can feel the history of life, perceiving its entirety and completeness, in a really tight bond between sculpture, architecture, nature, public and private memories.

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<sup>5</sup> "Antonio Zannoni", in: *ibid.*, p. 413.

<sup>6</sup> C. MORIGI GOVI, "Antonio Zannoni e le scoperte archeologiche della Certosa", in: PESCI, *La Certosa di Bologna*, 1998, pp. 77–82; E. GOVI, "Il sepolcro etrusco della Certosa", in: *ibid.*, pp. 83–89.

<sup>7</sup> "Filippo Buriani", in: GRESLERI and MASSARETTI, *Norma e Arbitrio*, 2001, p. 386.

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<sup>10</sup> I. M. MARACH, "Il cimitero ebraico", in: PESCI, *La Certosa di Bologna*, 1998, pp. 336–347.

<sup>11</sup> "Giuseppe Vaccaro", in: GRESLERI and MASSARETTI, *Norma e Arbitrio*, 2001, p. 409f.

<sup>12</sup> CONSONNI, MENEGHETTI and TONON, *Piero Bottoni*, 1990, p. 378f.

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