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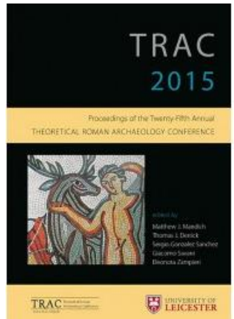


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Author: Chiara Botturi
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# ‘Landscapes of Life’ and ‘Landscapes of Death’: The Contribution of Funerary Evidence to the Understanding of the Perception and Organisation of Roman Rural Landscapes in Northern Italy

*Chiara Botturi*

## *Introduction*

The present paper focuses on the special and spatial relationship between the places of the dead and the places of the living in the Roman rural landscape, and aims to emphasise the crucial character of such a connection for a holistic understanding of the organisation of the Roman countryside. The relationship between the dead and the living was both conceptual and physical, in the sense that Roman beliefs in relation to their dead and the afterlife strongly influenced the arrangement of funerary and non-funerary spaces. It will be argued that the location of cemeteries and single tombs, in addition to being meaningful for the comprehension of funerary landscapes and thus funerary behaviour, can be extremely informative when assessing non-mortuary anthropic elements in the landscape. The paper begins with a brief literature review, in which the lack of attention given to the study of funerary areas in their landscape context is highlighted. The paper then considers the two main functions attributed to the tomb within Roman culture, as they played a crucial role in the location of funerary monuments. It concludes by discussing the implications of this landscape-oriented middle-range approach for the redefinition of the long-debated phenomenon of Romanisation. It will be argued that this perspective provides a fresh framework with which to address this matter, with particular respect to the encounter between pre-Roman perceptions and organisation of spaces with those from Roman traditions. Thus, questions about the extent of Rome’s impact on the ‘way of living’ and ‘way of dying’ in the territories of northern Italy may be answered, by virtue of the invaluable, and often unique, informative contribution funerary evidence can make.

## *Learning from the Dead: A Middle-Range Approach to Funerary Evidence*

> ‘It is a frequent irony that we can often learn more about a society through its dead than through its living’ (Hope 2009: 12).

In literature, the realm of the dead has been considered informative in reference to various aspects of past societies – especially social and ethnic identity, culture, and ideology (Morris

1992; Parker Pearson 2009). That precious information, often not otherwise retrievable, can be obtained from studying the dead and their domain can be considered an unquestionable truth. Whilst valid for cultural matters, such as the identity of the people to whom funerary areas belonged, it is equally applicable to a more material aspect of the Roman world, that of space. It will be argued that Roman funerary evidence, in addition to its heuristic role in terms of ancient beliefs and attitudes toward the world and afterlife ('socio-cultural marker'), can be considered a unique 'topographical marker', or 'spatial indicator', and thus an exceptional tool for the holistic reconstruction of the multifaceted Roman rural landscape – its funerary and non-funerary components.

While the ideological relationship between the living and the dead has been extensively investigated in studies relating to the Roman world (Hinard 1987; Koortbojian 1996; De Filippis Cappai 1997; Zaccaria 1997; Carroll 2011; Hope 2009; 2011), the explicit and concrete dynamics of spatial interweaving between funerary and non-funerary areas have often been neglected. The same gap can be observed in reference to the study of Roman cemeteries in their wider landscape context. Such an approach has been overlooked, in favour of more "small-scope" perspectives that have led to the production of a substantial literature about the layout of funerary areas, funerary architecture, and funerary objects and materials (Stone and Stirling 2007; Eckardt *et al.* 2009). To put it a different way, Roman archaeologists have, with some exceptions, seldom approached the matter of funerary landscapes, and this is especially true for their interconnection with life landscapes.

A more landscape-oriented approach to funerary areas, frequently involving spatial and statistical analyses and the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), has been recently employed primarily by prehistorians (Blake 2001; Llobera 2001; Löwenborg 2009; Wheatley *et al.* 2010; De Reu *et al.* 2011; Bongers *et al.* 2012; Déderix 2014). The crucial contribution of such studies, besides evidencing the benefits of new methodologies and techniques, lies in their reinforcement of the importance of a broader perspective, which takes into account the dialectic relationship between the environment and various anthropic features. Contrarily, within Roman archaeology, funerary areas still tend to be considered closed and self-contained entities – bounded repositories of social and ideological information often studied and investigated in isolation. A wider approach, which would yield narratives about experienced funerary landscapes, is still rarely found.

Some works, although not directly concerned with the landscape context of cemeteries, do show a wider and more spatially aware overview (Sena Chiesa 1997; Ciampoltrini 2009). A few address Roman cemeteries with the eyes of a landscape archaeologist, putting forward a desirable space-oriented perspective (Zanker and Von Hesberg 1987; Parker Pearson 1993; Tranoy 2000; Stone and Stirling 2007; Eckardt *et al.* 2009; Francisci 2010a; 2010b). In particular, these studies emphasise the relational aspects of necropoleis, especially the connection with roads at the outskirts of urban centres (Zanker and Von Hesberg: 1987), the relationship with inhabited areas and paths (Galliou 1993), and the impact on the countryside, where tombs worked as fulcra for the organisation of settlements (Lafon and Adam 1993). In addition, their connection with other elements that influenced the choice of locations – namely physical characteristics of the territory, related non-funerary structures such as extra-urban roads and non-funerary buildings (warehouses, workshops and dwellings), and former mortuary sites – has recently been studied (Tranoy 2000; Miná 2011). In a broader, more comprehensive perspective, cemeteries have been considered part of a wide system of relationships and activities from which, to be fully understood, they cannot be detached (Stone and Stirling 2007). Some recent contributions (Pocobelli 2007;

2010; Eckardt *et al.* 2009; Francisci 2010a; 2010b), focussed on the interconnection between Roman roads and tombs, adopt a topographical approach, and are supported by GIS and aerial photointerpretation. This paper emphasises the requirement for such a contextual perspective for funerary areas. It is the 'associations and relationships *beyond* the cemetery' (Parker Pearson 1993: 205, my italics) that Roman funerary archaeologists now have to focus upon, if the complex and complete dimensions of mortuary areas are to be fully grasped.

In this first section, the necessity of a broad perspective on Roman funerary areas and monuments has been emphasised by arguing that it has been rarely applied in previous research. Such an approach can lead to the comprehension of the spatial interrelations between cemeteries and other anthropic elements within the wider landscape, i.e. a rural space characterised by settlements, isolated abodes, roads, minor paths, and rural boundaries. The object of study must be the landscapes of death and their spatial and ideological relationships with the landscapes of life. To this end, studying the distribution of funerary evidence acquires a crucial importance. A holistic comprehension of the Roman rural landscape in all its anthropic elements can be achieved by virtue of the new character attributed to the Roman tomb, that of 'topographical marker'. In Roman times, the 'topography of death' is strictly dependent on the 'topography of life'. This ideological and physical relationship can lead to the discovery of unknown anthropic elements in the landscape and thus to a more complete reconstruction of the Roman countryside organisation.

In conclusion, we need to define the scale of the context for investigation. Tilley defined the study of the sites in their topographical context (landscape) as middle-range research, still as overlooked today as it was in the 1990s, when Tilley (1994: 3) noticed:

> 'The archaeologist appears as a mole whose head hardly rises above the site itself to consider wider sets of relationships between it and the environment in which it is situated or, alternatively, surveys everything on the distribution map as if from an aircraft'.

From the concept of middle-range research, a new perspective on Roman funerary landscapes can be brought to light. With this idea in mind, the fulcrum of research swings from 'micro-archaeologies' as well as wide-scope investigations, to the relationship between funerary sites and their landscape at a short-range. Solely by inserting mortuary areas in their 'contextual topographical surroundings', both natural and anthropic, can we write holistic, yet human related narratives. The object of study will then be the 'places of dead' and the 'places of living', in the sense given by Tilley (1994: 15): 'places as context for human experience, constructed in movement, memory, encounter and association'.

## *The Conceptual Premises for the Role of the Roman Tomb as a 'Topographical Marker'*

The ideological relationship between the dead and the living is the essential premise for this new perspective on funerary monuments that emphasises the 'topographical character' of tombs in the landscape. Roman conceptions and beliefs about the dead and the afterlife are the basis of spatial and topographical interrelations between the 'places of the dead' and the 'places of the living'. In this respect, Francisci (2010a; 2010b), the first scholar to put forward the heuristic character of funerary areas for the holistic reconstruction of Roman landscape, emphasises two meanings attached to the tomb within Roman funerary ideology. The first is the role as a physical device for memory preservation and the self-representation of individuals, *monumentum*; the second is the role of a sacred and non-movable border marker, or *terminus*. These two specific aspects determined the localisation of burials in the landscape, shaping the 'mortuary landscapes' of Roman times.

> 'Here lies Publius Atinius, belonging to the Fabia tribus, son of Lucius. If mud, if dust by chance slow your pace, traveller, or if arid thirst now shortens your way, read thoroughly, and when good Fortune will have conducted you home and you will have had a rest, tell often to your family: "In the regions of Italy, at Vobarno, I saw the sepulchre within which is buried *Atinius*' corpse…" ' (*CLE* 982; *CIL* V 4905).

In this inscription, two distinctive aspects of Roman funerary ideology that represented the most common *topoi* of mortuary epigraphy are expressed. The first aspect is the appeal to hand down the memory of the dead, even in an overseas country and among foreign people, and the second is the 'call' of the *viator*, with the request to stop and thoroughly read the text. The necessity of being remembered after life is the most distinctive feature of Roman conceptions regarding death, and constitutes the core of them (Koortbojian 1996; De Filippis Cappai 1997; Zaccaria 1997; Graham 2006; Criniti 2007; Graham 2009; Carroll 2011; Graham 2011; Hope 2011). The perpetuation of the memory of the dead was ensured by annual ceremonies and by the tomb itself, which was significantly named *cella memoriae* (De Filippis Cappai 1997: 110). 'Death was final, but a funerary monument, however basic, spoke through its words, pictures and location to posterity' (Hope 2011: 177). Hence, the tomb was a memorial to the dead and represented the most apt means by which to display their status, wealth, and personal virtues (Lavagne 1987) to the community, being 'the most public of private monuments' (Koortbojian 1996: 225). The tomb, a physical device for memorialisation and individual self-representation, instituted a communication with the living; a continuous dialogue that reassessed cultural ideals through memory, beyond present and past (Hinard 1987; Koortbojian 1996; De Filippis Cappai 1997; Zaccaria 1997; Wallace-Hadrill 2008; Hope 2009). This communication entailed the close spatial connection of the places destined for the dead and the places of daily life, with the consequence that the Roman tomb became a permanent component of the lived landscape. To fulfil its role of reminding and admonishing the observer – to be a *monumentum* – the tomb needed to stand in the most visible and accessible places in the landscape.

In contradiction with this habit stands the well-known and sharp distinction between spaces of life and of death, typical of Roman culture. It mainly occurred in force of religious beliefs, hygienic motifs, and practical needs (first of all, the danger of fires in the city). Tombs were generally located outside the *pomerium* and city walls, a regulation that was nonetheless often infringed upon, and thus, periodically restated (XII Tab. X.1; Cic. *Leg.* II.XXIII.58 onwards; Paulus *Sent*. I.21.2–3; Serv. *A*. XI.206). In this sense, the city of the living and the city of the dead were strongly divided (Dupont 1987: 170–171; Purcell 1987; Zaccaria 1997: 72; Vismara 1999). Nevertheless, the proximity of burials to settlements was necessary for the preservation of memory, the fulfilment of the due funerary rituals, and the related self-representation processes and negotiation of social roles.

The ambivalent nature of the relationship between dead and living was reflected in the topographical location of the tombs, in such a position to be separated but near, as both 'rejected' and 'accepted'. The most suitable location that responded to these practical, cultural, and ideological needs were the roads that stretched out from inhabited areas, as attested by literary sources (Varro *Ling.* VI.6). Funerary monuments were thus located along the main roads departing from urban centres, and along minor paths outside rural settlements and villas. Such an arrangement allowed the preservation of the memory of the dead, with tombs constantly in front of the eyes of the passer-by, and easily accessible for the mourning family and the members of the community to periodically honour the dead. In addition, the tombs had the important role of indicating the public transit of the road (Campbell 2000: 22.8–9; Francisci 2010a: 317). There are, of course, exceptions to this custom, but location near roads is a very common and widespread trait in the areas that came under Roman influence (Koortbojian 1996; Graham 2005; Hope 2009: 155–156). Such a phenomenon has been extensively studied and defined by the German term *Gräberstraße*, namely 'street of tombs' (Zanker and Von Hesberg 1987). *Vitalis*, a *tabellarius* from Carthago, built his own tomb along the street, well aware of the visibility that its position could ensure*: '[E]go feci sepulchrum/adque meos uersus, dum transseo, perlego et ipse […]'* ('I built my tomb, and when I pass by, I thoroughly read my verses', *CLE* 484; *CIL* VIII 1027; *ILS* 1710). During his life, he probably chased away boredom with long travels by reading others' memorials along the roads of the Empire, and this may have influenced his choice of place for his eternal dwelling. This inscription clearly highlights the Roman 'dynamic approach' (*dum transseo, perlego*) to funerary monuments and inscriptions, and their location along popular, busy routes.

The phenomenon of the *Gräberstraße* is ascribed in particular to the late Republican-early Imperial period. Afterwards, the 'external' function of the tomb, oriented to the passer-by, gives way to the 'internal' function, when the funerary monument turns towards the family, reunited and reintegrated by the tomb itself after the crucial moment of loss (Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 47–52). However, the 'competitive' nature of funerary monuments, clustered along the roads in such a position to draw the attention of the travellers, goes beyond the early Imperial period, and characterises both Italy and the provinces (Equini Schneider 1972: 97–142; Maiuri 1978: 89–94; Zanker and Von Hesberg 1987; Baldassarre 2002; D'Andria 2003; Cormarck 2007). In *Transpadana* in particular, the custom tends to characterise the suburban space until the mid-second century AD (Sena Chiesa 1997: 286).

To summarise, the importance attributed to remembrance and self-representation, exemplified by the role, and the name itself, of the Roman *monumentum* (*Dig*. XI.VII.2.6; Varro *Ling*. VI.49) is at the core of the close spatial relationship between tombs and non-funerary, anthropic elements of Roman rural landscapes – in particular roads and minor paths. Roman cemeteries are often defined as 'cities of the living' rather than 'cities of the dead', for the crucial role they played in the creation and maintenance of the social structures of the living (Hopkins 1983; Koortbojian 1996; De Filippis Cappai 1997; Zaccaria 1997; Bodel 1999; Graham 2005; Cormarck 2007). Such a negotiation of social roles could take place by virtue of the physical connection of tombs with the physical structures of daily life.

The second role ascribed to the Roman tomb, and equally influential to its position in the landscape, is that of boundary marker (*terminus*). Ancient sources, especially the *Gromatici Veteres*, explicitly confirm this (Campbell 2000: 78.31, 188.28, 194.4–5, 200.9–10). Tombs, when in direct connection with boundaries and thus defined *sepulturae finales*, were considered in the same manner as proper boundary stones, or *lapides finales*, used to divide properties and identify boundaries. As such, they were also mentioned in lists of *termini* (Campbell 2000: 246.8) and in some cases came to substitute the *termini* themselves: '*pro terminibus monumenta sepulchrave veteranorum constituimus'* ('instead of boundary stones, I established the monuments and tombs of veteran soldiers', Campbell 2000: 252.31–32). This location 'on the edge' was due to the symbolic and ideological meaning attached to the tomb, as well as for practical reasons, as burials should not take away productive land from the living (Cic. *Leg*. II.XXVII.67). Thus, they were positioned in marginal and less productive areas (Francisci 2010a: 214). The case of *cepotaphia* – tomb gardens, built from the first century BC, with productive purposes (Purcell 1987) and a strong religious and commemorative character (Bundrett 2011) – can be considered an exception to this. However, it can be argued that not all tombs were built as *cepotaphia*, and the habit of allotting infertile spots of the land to funerary monuments – especially modest cemeteries – can be considered customary (Campbell 2000: 106.15–16).

The texts of the land surveyors (Campbell 2000: 106.14, 220.14–16) attest that burials were normally located at the borders of properties and in connection with *fines* (general boundaries), or along the *limites* of the *ager centuriatus*. The *fines* marked by tombs could be public, political, or administrative, but also of private nature. Indeed, the graves could indicate, with their position, the limit between land tenures or between public properties and the private lands – the only places where burials could stand. As far as the *limites* of *centuriatio* were concerned, funerary monuments could mark the lines of *kardines* and *decumani*, but also of the inner divisions (*limites intercisivi*) that divided the *centuria* in different properties (Campbell 2000: 220.14–22; Bodel 2010: 259; Francisci 2010a: 214–221). Isolated funerary monuments along rural streets and *limites* at the borders of land tenures are known within the *regio Transpadana*, where the phenomenon is deemed rather widespread (Sena Chiesa 1997).

Furthermore, the Roman tomb could mark a border that was also a path, a public road, or a private way (Francisci 2010a: 224). Thus, the Latin term *limes*, 'a man-made boundary or balk, uncultivated and wide enough to form a road or pathway' (Campbell 2000: 501) is clear in this respect. Therefore, the main *limites* and the secondary lines of the centuriation grid were in many cases also routes (Castagnoli 1958: 25–26). Major roads could take the place of main *limites*, influencing the layout of the *limitatio* – as in the case of *via Aemilia* and *via Postumia*, *decumani* of the centuriations – or, less frequently, being determined by it (Regoli 1983: 106–108). Furthermore, the necessary topographical relationship between rural settlements, in particular *villae*, and the roads emphasised by ancient sources (Varro *Rust*. I.XVI.6; Columella *Rust*. I.III.3–4) was achieved by virtue of the centuriation and its *limites*, with their dual nature as borders and paths (Tosi 1984: 87). The twofold character of the *kardines* and *decumani*, as *limites* of the *agri adsignati et divisi* but also as roads and trails, worked toward a profound unification of rural landscapes, opening the way to new patterns of mobility (Bosio 1984).

It is, nonetheless, worth underlining that the location of burials along roads and boundaries represents a general tendency, and does not constitute a rule (Francisci 2010a: 223–226). As mentioned above, tomb location could be influenced more commonly by the characteristics of the soil, rather than considerations of an ideological nature (Campbell 2000: 106.15–16). Furthermore, tombs and funerary areas could be placed away from boundaries and in close connection with dwellings, for the purpose of signalling the property of the landowner (Campbell 2000: 220.11–13). Nevertheless, the connection of the villa with the *limitatio* was very strong. The abodes of the landowners, instead of being isolated, could be located exactly on the *limites* (Chouquer *et al.* 1983; Tosi 1984), as explicitly mentioned by the *Gromatici Veteres* ('*villis, qua limites transeunt*', 'in the farm buildings […], where the *limites* pass through' – Campbell 2000: 88.8, 124.32–36, 126.1–3). In these cases, funerary monuments found in relation to dwellings would also be in close connection with the *limites*. Consequently, the spatial interconnections between tombs and villas, and between villas and *limites*, could also be very informative in terms of the topographical connection(s) between tombs and *centuriatio*.

The borderline position of burials, arguably stemmed from symbolic conceptions. The Roman tomb represented the eternal dwelling of the departed and the place it occupied was considered a *locus religiosus*, however, in juridical texts the extension of such a sacred character was much debated (Hope 2009: 175; Bodel 2010: 258–259). The respect owed to the dead is well expressed by a short Latin inscription from Rome: '*ne tangito, o mortalis, reuerere Manes Deos*' ('Do not touch, mortals, respect the spirits of the departed', *CLE* 16; *CIL* VI 5075; *ILS* 8173). Therefore, the sacredness of funerary monuments was very apt to guarantee the inviolability of both tombs and boundaries, as evidenced by the *Gromatici Veteres* (Campbell 2000: 220.4–5; Francisci 2010a: 222). The tomb itself, in this role as *terminus*, constituted the physical equivalent of written documentation ('*vice instrumentorum tabellarumve*', 'take the place of written documentation and records', Campbell 2000: 220.12–13). It indicated the property of buildings and fields and was determinant in land disputes (Bodel 2010; *CIL*, X 3334; *ILS* 8391; *Dig*. X.I.11).

Concepts of boundaries were of great importance in Roman culture. This may be ascribed to an intrinsic Roman attitude to organise and classify the known world in defined categories (e.g. free and slave, *urbs* and *rus*) – a world that, notwithstanding the existence of transitional areas, was divided by sharp borderlines. The centrality of the boundary concept is well expressed by Ovid: '*Termine sancte [...] tu populos urbesque et regna ingentia finis: omnis erit sine te litigiosus ager*' ('divine Terminus: you delimit peoples, cities and great kingdoms: without you every field will be disputed' – Ovid, *Fasti* II.658–660). *Terminus* was the god of borders, whose festivity *Terminalia* celebrated communal boundaries with sacrifices on the *termini sacrificales* (Ovid, *Fasti* II.639–660, Campbell 2000: 106.32–36, 108.1). Boundaries were therefore considered sacred and the border markers themselves regarded as deities. Moving a boundary stone was a sacrilege and was punished by the law (Filippi 1983; Campbell 2000: 471).

The interrelation between tombs and centuriation is confirmed in the archaeological record (Furlanetto 1984; Lampugnani 1984; Longo 1985; Chouquer 1987; Sena Chiesa 1997; Ciampoltrini 2009; Francisci 2010a; 2010b). Ciampoltrini (2009), furthermore, presents evidence that confirms the location of cemeteries on the boundaries of rural divisions. Funerary areas could also be located at the intersection of *viae publicae* and main *limites* (*kardo* and *decumanus maximus*), a position that was pursued to enhance the prominence of the cemeteries. Sena Chiesa (1997: 308–309) emphasises the relation between the *possidentes'* tombs and the lines of the *limitatio*. Moreover, the author connects, as far as the *regio Transpadana* is concerned, the *limitatio sepulturae* with the centuriation, arguing that the distribution of funerary areas along the main suburban roads appears intimately related to the rural organisation – as is also attested by epigraphic evidence (Longo 1985: 44).

To conclude, the role of tomb as *terminus*, 'or boundary marker', is the primary cause for the spatial relationships between *limitatio* and cemeteries, a physical connection that was even closer than the one between the rural divisions and the *villae* (Francisci 2010a: 210). Such a phenomenon justifies the employment of Roman tombs as 'topographical markers', making them crucial tools for the reconstruction of rural non-funerary features of the landscape, such as roads, boundaries, and *limites* of centuriation.

## *Finding the Dead, Finding the Living. A New Way to Tackle Romanisation?*

Studies which are concerned with the relationship between tombs and other anthropic elements in the landscape have often tended to infer, from a given spatial position or a specific organisation of mortuary evidence, funerary ideology and changes in mentality/social identity (Morris 1992; Parker Pearson 1993; Stone and Stirling 2007; Eckardt *et al.* 2009; Déderix 2014). The topographical position of funerary monuments has been frequently deemed significant in terms of communal choices and intentional decisions related to economic, social, and ritual needs (Blake

2001; Llobera 2001; Löwenborg 2009; Wheatley *et al.* 2010; De Reu *et al*. 2011; Bongers *et al.* 2012). That social needs 'mould' the reaction of the living to the dead, and thus influence their relationships, has been posited previously by Lévi-Strauss (1961). Morris (1992) and Parker Pearson (1993) derive from this concept the consequentiality that links together social needs, the reaction to the dead, and the organisation and localisation of the dead in the landscape of the living. Such studies, which emphasise the spatial and conceptual interrelations between funerary and non-funerary evidence, between the dead and the living, show the appropriate perspective for the deep comprehension of "funerary landscapes". While it holds true that patterns in the location of funerary and non-funerary structures 'defy functionalist interpretations and point to an ideological motive' (Blake 2001: 159), it can be now stated that a 'reversed perspective' is possible, which allows us to infer spatial links on the basis of the ideological and conceptual connections. In other words, the above-mentioned roles attributed to the tombs in the Roman system of beliefs (ideology), allows us to hypothesise their position in the landscape (topography).

Therefore, Roman necropoleis are to be considered an extraordinary tool for the comprehension and reconstruction of the 'topography of death' and, concurrently, the 'topography of life'. Cemeteries are directly indicative of the way ancient people conceived of and organised the places of the dead. Moreover, the Roman attitude towards death, the relationship between living and dead, and the meaning ascribed to burials in such a relationship, were the basis for the creation of a very particular (and typically Roman) landscape, where funerary elements were strongly interwoven with the spaces and structures of daily life. This very phenomenon allows us to reconstruct indirectly the 'places of life' through the identification of the 'places of death'. A space-oriented approach to funerary monuments, which conceives of tombs as 'topographical markers', is proposed and extensively adopted by Francisci (2010a; 2010b). He managed to achieve a plausible and articulated reconstruction of minor roads and centuriation, in its main and minor boundaries, in a region in the north of Italy (Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol). The method seems to be hinted at by Miná (2011) in the study of the Hellenistic necropoleis of Alexandria. Tranoy (2000), albeit implicitly, also appears to make use of tombs as 'heuristic tools' in his map of funerary and non-funerary sites in the suburbs of Lyons.

The connection between tombs and routes allows the employment of funerary monuments as a means to reconstruct the system of roads and paths both in the suburbs and in the countryside (Francisci 2010a: 310–311). Cemeteries could be placed along roads, consular or minor, in the vicinities of rural settlements, *vici* and *pagi*, and could also be located in connection with smaller inhabited areas, for instance *villae*, *mansiones*, *fora* (market centres), and *conciliabula* (small settlements probably with administrative purpose). Such a phenomenon is exemplified by the rural landscape of *Transpadana*, a territory populated by numerous funerary areas with dimensions ranging from large cemeteries to the single funerary monuments of the landowners (Sena Chiesa 1997).

The study of the distribution of tombs represents a new, very informative methodology that can allow us to confirm known parts of centuriations, to discover new sections, and to assess their chronology and duration over time (Francisci 2010a). This is especially true in reference to the northern regions of Italy, a territory that, more than others, saw the impact of this major physical and ideological reshaping of agricultural space through Roman centuriation (Castagnoli 1958: 10). The role of tomb as *terminus* comes to complement the reconstruction of the *limitatio* achieved by other means – for example, the identification of regular alignments and of the orthogonality of intersections, the adherence to the Roman measurement system, the presence of archaeological structures, and the toponymy (Castagnoli 1958; Francisci 2010a).

The location of tombs not in explicit, or direct, connection with boundaries or paths could certainly occur. Nonetheless, such a position, if not informative about the existence and characteristics of roads and rural borders, can help us to understand land organisation and rural settlement distribution (the above mentioned *villae*, *mansiones*, *vici, pagi, fora, conciliabula*). Sena Chiesa (1997: 279–280) asserts that the widespread cemeteries of *Transpadana* mirror the scattered distribution of the small rural centres that characterised the territory. Also Francisci (2010a: 153–158) holds that funerary areas and single tombs document the characteristics and evolution of the population, although inviting a certain degree of caution in the matter due to the not necessarily direct relationship of the two types of evidence. In addition, Tranoy's contribution (2000) stands as an illustrative case of the important role of funerary areas, in particular those in the suburban realm, for the definition of the limits and perimeters of non-walled urban centres.

However, after '[M]apping the profane and the sacred' (Parker Pearson 1993: 227), and once reintegrated in the holistic unity they formed in antiquity, the historical development of the landscape itself must become the object of investigation. The detailed framework created by virtue of this new heuristic approach can be informative to understanding the phenomena of continuity or change in the perception and organisation of the countryside. Northern Italy, especially the *Gallia Transpadana*, represents a suitable study area, due to the pervasiveness of Roman structures and the strong presence of the pre-Roman *substratum*. With respect to this area, whose process of 'self-Romanisation' (Landucci Gattinoni 1989; Gabba 1994; Torelli 1998) has been lately heavily questioned (Stek 2009), many problems can be raised. How pervasive was Roman conquest and influence? Is it possible to understand the degree of alignment with Roman traditions and material culture by studying funerary remains, their distribution and connection with non-funerary evidence? How did local communities engage with the Roman 'way of living' and 'way of dying'? The middle-range landscape investigation, the 'spatial heuristic role' of Roman burials, and the conceptualisation of the 'landscapes of life' and the 'landscapes of death' as part of a network, may possibly lead to the reconsideration of the impact of Romanisation on pre-existing structures and traditions. This new approach would produce a more complete picture of the landscape, where different components are envisaged as part of a wider system of relations, to contribute new insights into the ways and times of the 'cultural encounter' between the pre-Roman communities of *Transpadana* and Rome.

The Roman 'landscapes of death' and 'landscapes of life' in northern Italy must be interpreted as part of a dynamic, functional, and symbolic network, composed by various elements (centuriation, streets, tombs) that cannot be considered as mere objects placed on a neutral background. They must be seen as 'cultural entities' that informed a new rural landscape, or a rural landscape experienced in a new way. These anthropic elements of the landscape can be regarded as the physical structures that reflected the 'discrepant experiences' of the Empire (Mattingly 2010), and that reified the 'stratified identities' (Wallace-Hadrill 2008) that emerged as a consequence of Romanisation envisaged as 'cultural encounter'. It is a process characterised by phenomena of mutual identity construction and interactive mechanisms of negotiation (Keay and Terrenato 2001; Kingsbury 2011: 3). The study of funerary evidence is thus deemed crucial to assess the impact of the Roman conquest on pre-existing traditions. Thus, cultural and political changes, as well as cultural influences, can be observed in the evolution of the relationship between tombs and the landscape (Stone and Stirling 2007: 3–31).

To conclude, if native communities 'used Roman structures to make sense of their world, and in so doing replicated these structures over the physical space of the Empire' (Revell 2009: 37), we should envisage Roman landscapes as experienced places that can be investigated in terms of cultural identity, as complex as it may be. We could conceive of such landscapes as places where individuals like *Ennius* could express their multiple, coexisting identities, their blended and intertwined *tria corda* (Gellius, *NA* XVII.XVII.1).

## Conclusion

Cemeteries were key features of the Roman rural landscape and well-frequented places in ancient daily life. The spatial connection between 'places of life' and 'places of death' was a direct consequence of an ideological relationship, based on Roman conceptions regarding the dead, the afterlife, and the role of burial. The two aspects ascribed to the tomb as a '*monumentum aere perennius'* (Hor. *Carm.* III.XXX.1), and as a 'guardian' of properties and boundaries, profoundly influenced the choices of location for funerary areas, shaping the Roman suburban and rural landscape. The role of burial as *monumentum* is the origin of the 'streets of tombs', whereas the function of the tomb as *terminus* can be seen as the primary cause for the location of funerary areas along *fines* and *limites* of the centuriation. Notwithstanding the existence of exceptions to these locations, it can be stated that the tomb acquired a new role in terms of the comprehension of the past. In addition to being a 'cultural and ideological marker', the tomb can now be considered a 'topographical indicator' of non-funerary elements, and, as such, a heuristic tool for the holistic reconstruction of the Roman organisation of the rural landscape. The potential of such an approach appears even more evident considering that, in the archaeological record, funerary structures are some of the most durable and widespread types of evidence, providing unique elements to reconstruct the diachronic development of a territory.

The study of the distribution of funerary evidence, when integrated with traditional topographical methodologies, can markedly contribute to the holistic reconstruction of Roman rural landscapes. Only by adopting a middle-range approach to cemeteries and tombs that goes beyond their boundaries, placing them within a comprehensive yet human-related context, will we come closer to grasping the real dynamics of the relationship between the living and the dead. Furthermore, from a broader historical perspective, it will be possible to understand how local people conceived of and organised both their 'places of life' and their 'places of death' during the centuries in which the encounter of the northern communities with Rome took place.

Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton

## Abbreviations

*CLE* *Carmina Latina Epigrafica*
*CIL* *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
*ILS* *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*

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