

THE JEWISH CEMETERY OF VIA ORFEO IN BOLOGNA

The symbolical space and the buried body from a cultural anthropological perspective

The research of cultural anthropology took place through a combined project of study and research lead by the Superintendence of Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape for the metropolitan city of Bologna and the provinces of Modena, Reggio Emilia and Ferrara. It was in collaboration with the Jewish Community of Bologna and with the University of Bologna.

The anthropological cultural study investigates the cemetery through its significance as a settlement. It is characterized by its cultural heritage and historical values and in its ability to evoke memory.

The formation of the cemetery, *orto degli hebrei*, in Via Orfeo in Bologna, and its relative desecration are historical events. The cultural elements are thus extremely important as they leave a profound mark on the Jewish population and on the city of Bologna.

A summary of a notarial act, preserved in the Archive of the State in Bologna, says that the property, once in *contracta sancti Petri Martiris*, was taken over by *Elia l'hebreo* to establish it as the cemetery of Jewish people.

Cultural anthropology studies the cultural processes, and it examines the elements around a practice and its conservation. In studying the context of the cemetery, it is possible to know a lot of information linked with cultural identity as a factor.

The study permits in depth-analysis of the Jewish rite of burials and its dynamics, thanks to the combined approach of analysing the archaeology and the physical anthropology.

Particular attention is paid to the investigated area regarding its quality as a burial field. The link between individuals and/or groups is defined by the buried body and the practice of burial produces an action similar to that of scripture, since it has a space that gives it a precise physiognomy and thus constructs a cultural link with it.

The term culture comes from the Latin *colere* (cultivate), it indicates a cyclical idea, in essence a transformation; *colere* is the practice of living on the land, cultivating the land and of burying bodies. It is an action for humans who intervene in a territory.

The Cemetery of via Orfeo brings a symbolic meaning too. In 1569 the cohabitation between Jewish people and Christians ended because of a sequence of measures against Jewish people: after *Hebraeorum Gens* Pope Pius V granted the property of the burial field to the nuns of San Pietro Martire he then commanded the desecration of the cemetery. Form an anthropological point of view that event is an attempt to deprive the Jewish Community of their history. This action rooted out the remains of the Jewish group to which the cemetery belonged as well as the demolition of their cultural landmarks. Their gravestones, for example, were destroyed or reused. Just four of them are conserved in the Medieval Museum of the City of Bologna.

The cemetery of via Orfeo is a unique case in Europe. Thanks to its informative elements, it represents an extraordinary field of collaboration among scientific disciplines and public institutions. The mission of the anthropological research is the restitution of human remains to guarantee them a burial according to Jewish rites and the restitution of a historical and cultural scenario fit for the contemporary setting. It will study and make actions to enhance and make known the facts linked to the cemetery of via Orfeo, of the period in which it was used, because it is a part of the memory and of the cultural Jewish heritage of the city of Bologna.

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