

Poetic Atlas of Cemeteries

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Pre-Diploma - Poetic Atlas of Cemeteries

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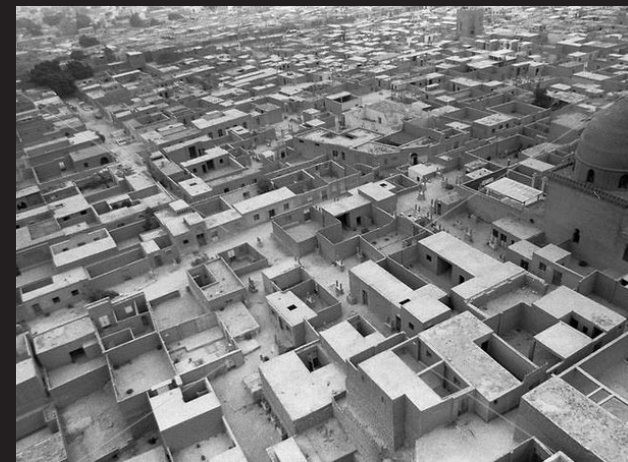
Abstract

This research is about landscape architecture cemeteries' precedents, and it is used as an atlas of poetic symbols for designing a cemetery.

A cemetery is a place for burial of the dead. The role of cemeteries differs from each culture, the focus will be on exploring cemeteries within the city and suburban areas and how cemeteries act within its context. An Atlas of different cemeteries characterizing the spatial qualities and its poetic meanings. The use of cemeteries as multi-functional vs mono functional. The Atlas highlights the understanding of different cultural heritage of cemeteries.

The intention of this research is not the findings themselves, but the process of translating the poetic qualities of cemeteries into the realm of materialization.

The objective is to develop a project of experimentation of a new understanding of cemeteries in desertic landscapes.



The Southern Cemetery; City of the dead
© Alexander Nesbitt

Design Questions

1. What could be learned from precedents about cemeteries and their spatial qualities? What are the uses of cemeteries in different cultures? Understanding the shift of the meaning of cemeteries and their uses?

2. Can landscape architects turn the understanding of cemeteries in Egypt? How the Egyptian cultural previews cemeteries in the poetic and spatial meanings?

Context

Around the 7th century, a graveyard or a churchyard was a place where the deceased were buried in mass graves around the church. The early 19th century saw completely new places of burials being established away from the city center. This modern notion of cemeteries can be defined as a “large landscaped burial ground, specially laid out for the deceased to be buried or interred, and is not attached to the churchyard a place of worship” (Curl, 1999). Cemeteries play a vital role in all cities not only as a space for the dead to be placed, but also a place for the living to visit and remember their loved ones. It is also to recognize that “While necropolises can be found in the ancient world, the cemetery, as we know it today is a modern invention, reflecting a modern sense of self” (Taylor & Lammerts, 2002).

Cemetery derives from the Latin *coemeterium*, which, in turn, can be traced to the Greek *koimeterion*. A *koimeterion* is a sleeping room or burial place. The stem of the verb *koiman* (‘to put to sleep’) is *kei*, which means ‘lie down’, ‘sleep’, ‘settle’, hence ‘home’, ‘friendly’, ‘dear’ (Taylor & Lammerts, 2002).

A French medievalist and historian Philippe Ariès (1982), described the cemetery as a ‘holy dormitory of the dead’. He further describes a cemetery to be something like a home for the deceased to which we all return’ (as cited in Taylor & Lammerts, 2002).

History

The history of cemeteries dates back to prehistoric times when they were referred to as grave fields, which lacked structures or grave markers. In the 7th century, European burials took place in graveyards located near or inside local churches. As the church was a key gathering place and social institution, death became a part of people's everyday lives. Authors Taylor and Lammerts (2002) illustrate the shift society has experienced in relation to the dead: "During the Middle Ages, the line separating life from death was not as sharp as it is today. The living and the dead mingled and regularly influenced each other" (p. 14). However this closeness of the living and the dead changed due to rapid population growth in the early 19th century, continued outbreaks of infectious disease and limited space for new interments, which shifted graveyards to the outskirts of towns (Taylor & Lammerts, 2002; "Cemetery," 2016).

In the Early Christian era, European burials only took place on consecrated ground, which was under the control of the Church ("Cemetery," 2016). The Early Christian community idealized death. They worshiped those who died for their faith. Commonly bodies were buried in a mass grave and left to deteriorate, however, practices varied. Burial practices differed, however, bodies were typically buried in a mass grave until they had deteriorated ("Cemetery," 2016).

A hierarchy determined where burials would take place: a person with highest spiritual ranking (martyrs/saints and clergy) were buried inside or close to the church whereas people with lower social ranks were buried in graveyards on the margins of the church as the land there was considered less sacred (Taylor & Lammerts, 2002; "Cemetery," 2016). As cities grew, they eventually encircled the mass graves, which were in poor condition, and the proximity of these graves posed serious threats to public health (Taylor & Lammerts, 2002).



Ancient Egyptian Manuscript; Book of the Dead
© Egyptian Museum in Cairo

From the early 19th century, there was a decline in mass graveyards with the rise in the individualization of death. This era saw a changing status of the self when activist Martin Luther King (n.d) declared that, "Salvation did not depend on public participation in the church universal but was the result of the individual's private and personal relationship to God, he prepared a way for what still remains a predominant understanding of selfhood" (p. 15). The shifting notion of self, entailed new religious practices, altered the understanding of death and revolutionized the architecture of cemeteries and the design of graves (Taylor & Lammerts, 2002).

Taylor and Lammerts (2002) further states that one of the most important manifestations of these changes was Napoleon Bonaparte's Decree of 23 Prairial, Year XII, issued in Paris in 1804. This proclamation prohibited burial inside churches, and most importantly, declared that bodies could not be "s per imposed but must always be juxtaposed". This represented a complete break with the past as Ariès rightly points out (p. 16). The Decree of Prairial also led to the use of tombstones and monuments to memorialize the dead and mark graves (Taylor & Lammerts, 2002; Kselman, 1993).

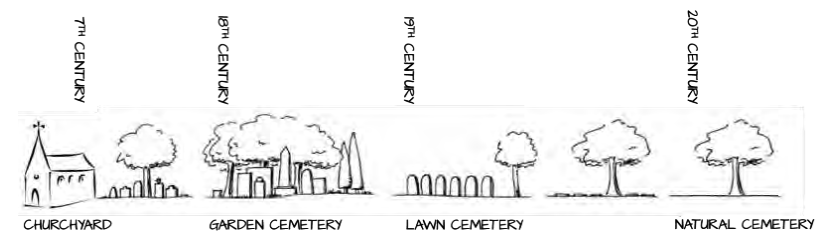
During the 19th century the rapid expansion of cemeteries and individual burial practices eventually led to space problems. As a result cemeteries were moved to the outskirts of cities. The gridded metropolis found its way around the concentric structure of the Church and the architecture of cemeteries changed. However democratization of burial did not abolish social hierarchy, and a good example of this was Père-Lachaise cemetery, which was created for the wealthy and socially prominent people in Paris. These cemeteries set a trend of using individual graves and markers which were then seen in other places around the world (Taylor & Lammerts, 2002).

At the same time, American cemeteries were different and have made a significant contribution to the history of cemeteries through the Rural Cemetery Movement, which was influenced by the English garden tradition. The Decree of Prairial prescribed requirements that would transform cemeteries into gardens: "Trees and shrubs will be planted, with appropriate precautions so as not to interfere with the circulation of air" (Taylor & Lammerts, 2002, p. 18). In America, the agrarian tradition has influenced the design of cemeteries in a way, which still shapes the landscape of death (Taylor & Lammerts, 2002). "The cultivation of nature in new cemeteries provided a setting in which to remember the dead and instruct the living" (Taylor & Lammerts, 2002, p. 18).

The natural setting of rural cemeteries served purposes other than moralizing. Romanticism flourished at the same time when rise of the Rural Cemetery Movement took place in the 19th century and for the Romantics, "Nature was not only tinged with nostalgia but also harboured the possibility of experiencing the Sublime" (Taylor & Lammerts, 2002).

Evolution of Cemeteries

The evolution of cemeteries over the years from churchyards to rural cemeteries to modern memorial parks has been quite notable. This evolution has led to the development of a number of different styles of cemeteries around the world. Many times various styles are seen in one cemetery, which reflects the diverse cultural practices around death. The broader categories of cemetery types are the Church cemetery, Rural cemetery, Lawn cemetery and Natural cemetery.



*Evolution of cemetery types
Hagen, n.d*

The Church Cemetery

7th Century

Worpole (2003) states that a churchyard ideally commanded the iconography of death rather than the urban cemetery. The church cemetery and churchyard dates back to the 7th century, where every church had tombs inside or below them in which people with certain ranks were buried. The land adjoining or surrounding the church was the churchyard where poor people and children were buried in mass graves. Yew trees were commonly planted in churchyards or used as a symbolic marker to mark the burial sites (Worpole, 2003). Beginning in the 19th, churchyards were no longer used as there was a spread of infectious diseases due to increasing populations and pressure for space for new interments (“Cemetery,” 2016).



*The Church of England Church and Cemetery, Kanyu River Camp
Chalker, Jack Bridger*

The Rural/Garden Cemetery

18th Century

Bender (1974) writes “The rural cemetery movement was a widespread cultural phenomenon in mid-nineteenth century America” (p. 196). A rural cemetery was a large landscaped park like burial ground also known as a garden cemetery (“Rural cemetery,” 2016). This planned public space retained the arrangement of existing natural features with mutually added roads and paths following natural contours along with native and exotic tree plantings (“Rural cemetery,” 2016). Rural cemeteries were designed for recreation purposes and to establish a connection with nature in the emerging urban society. (Bender, 1974)



Mount Auburn Cemetery
W.H. Bartlett Engraving © Aaron Sachs

The Lawn Cemetery

19th Century

The lawn-park cemetery design was introduced by a renowned landscape architect Adolph Strauch, who designed the lawn cemetery layout for Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati, Ohio, USA in 1855. This marked the departure of the romantic rural cemetery design and elimination of monumental markers from cemetery landscape. This type of cemetery is an extensive lawn with a series of burials, which are marked with a commemorative plaque. This cemetery style was adopted by the public for its appealing aesthetics and by cemetery authorities anticipating easier ground maintenance ("Cemetery," 2016).



'Women & children First'; Fairview Lawn Cemetery
© Nova Scotia Archives Places

The Natural Cemetery

20th Century

A natural cemetery, is a place where natural burial or Eco burial takes place. The practice of natural burials was used for thousands of years, but was discontinued as modern practices, such as vaults, mausoleums, embalming, etc. were introduced, which in fact slowed down the decomposition process ("Natural burial," 2016). Later in the 19th century, prominent physician and etcher, Sir Francis Seymour Haden (1875) recommended "earth to earth burial" to bring a better change in the system of burials and a substitute for cremation and other practices of the time.

The idea of a natural cemetery is to use a natural shrub land or woodland setting for natural burials but the idea can be applied to any cemetery to be turned into a natural cemetery. On account of the fast decomposition of bodies as a result of natural burials, the burial land can be reused, which would increase the efficiency of land use. A natural cemetery houses the deceased along with native flora and fauna is intended to become a living memorial park for the family to visit and memorialize.



*Woodland Crematorium, Stockholm, Sweden, Exterior elevation
Erik Gunnar Asplund © MoMA*

01

Poetic Atlas of Words

A word is a single distinct meaningful element of speech. A word is translated into a single element or space that is grasped from different cemeteries. They are a spatial quality that symbolizes life and death.

01.1

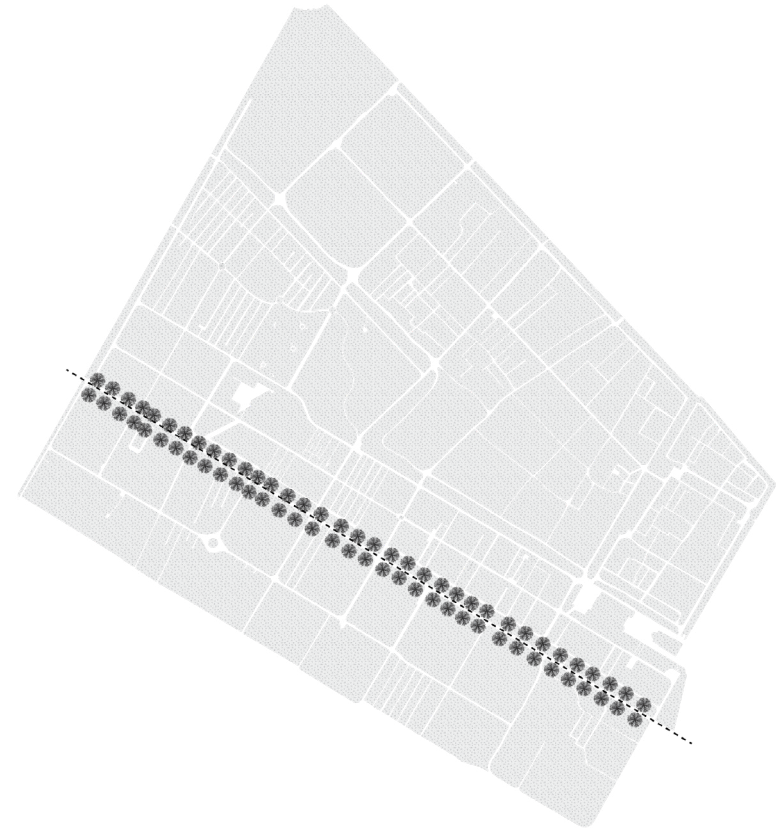
Assistens Kirkegård

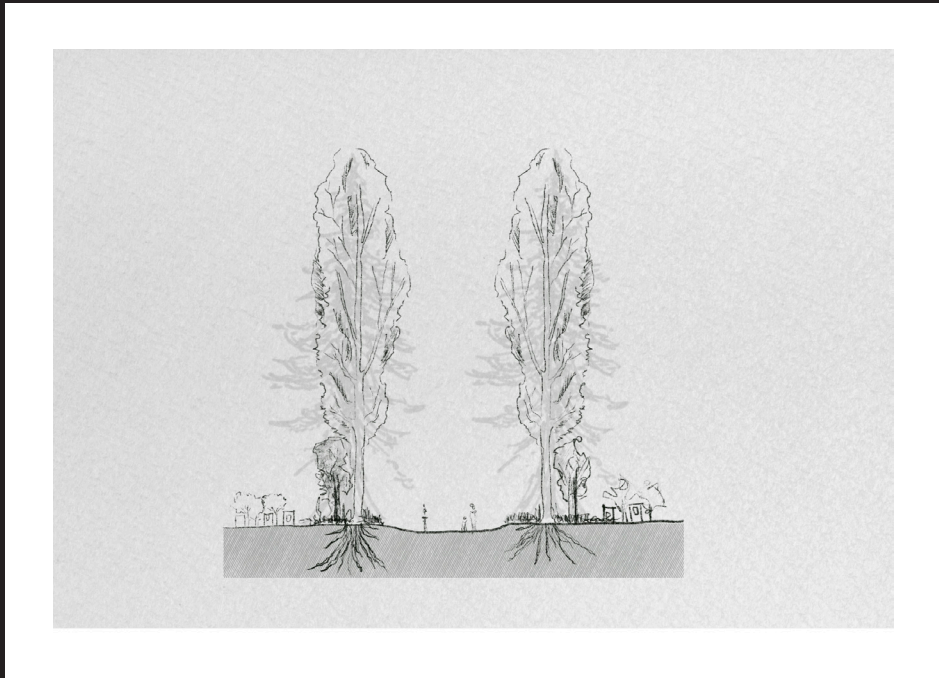
Copenhagen, Denmark

Assistens Kirkegård dates from 1760. Large parts of the cemetery function today as a cemetery park, but approx. 1/4 of the area is still a burial ground. It is in the middle of Nørrebro district, one of the most populated districts in Copenhagen with very few green spaces.

The main access of Assistens Kirkegård cuts the cemetery from east to west. It acts as a main spine for pedestrians and cyclists. It is a connection and a shortcut for pedestrians. Also, the cemetery acts as the main urban park where the community do a lot of the activities.

The main spine is surrounded by Populous trees on both sides that emphasizes the directionality of the spine. Also, it act as an alley.





The main spine in the cemetery is an alley of Populous trees on both sides. That gives a feeling of directionality and also as a wall for the mourners.



A photo showing how the community using the main spine for different activities

*Assistens Cemetery
Szymon K © Google maps*

*Assistens Cemetery
© Google maps*



Along the main spine, there are some hidden nooks for people to sit in.

01.2

Vår Frelzers Gravlund

Oslo, Norway

Vår Frelzers gravlund dates from 1808. The cemetery is in St. Hunshaguen neighborhood. The cemetery is placed on top of a steep slope while being surrounded by dense urban areas.

The topography defines the cemetery into terraces with views on each terrace.

Because of the condensed urban area around the cemetery, it acts as a urban green park, with a lot of users doing different activities.





*Our Savior's Cemetery
© Google maps*

*The topography defines
the levels of the burial
grounds. The vegetation
follows the topography
so it creates terraces for
views*



*Standing on one of the
highest terraces, one can
view the whole cemetery
from above.*



Our Savior's Cemetery Orestis © Google maps

*Level split when the architecture meets the
path. A decision of free flowing paths*

01.3

City of the Dead

Cairo, Egypt

The city of the dead is a series of vast Islamic-era necropolises and cemeteries in Cairo, Egypt. They extend to the north and to the south of the Cairo Citadel, below the Mokattam Hills and outside the historic city walls, covering an area roughly 4 miles long. They are included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of "Historic Cairo".

Pressure of Cairo's intensive urbanization and its ensuing housing shortage led to a large increase in the number of people living in the necropolis zones. Some people resorted to squatting within the mausoleums and tomb enclosures and turning them into improvised housing.

The idea behind the city of the dead is where the community lives above their decedents. As a way of remembrance of their heritage and the great fathers.





An image from 1830s showing the cemetery

De begraafplaats voor de oude stadsmuren van Cairo
Sébah, Pascal © Rijks Muescum

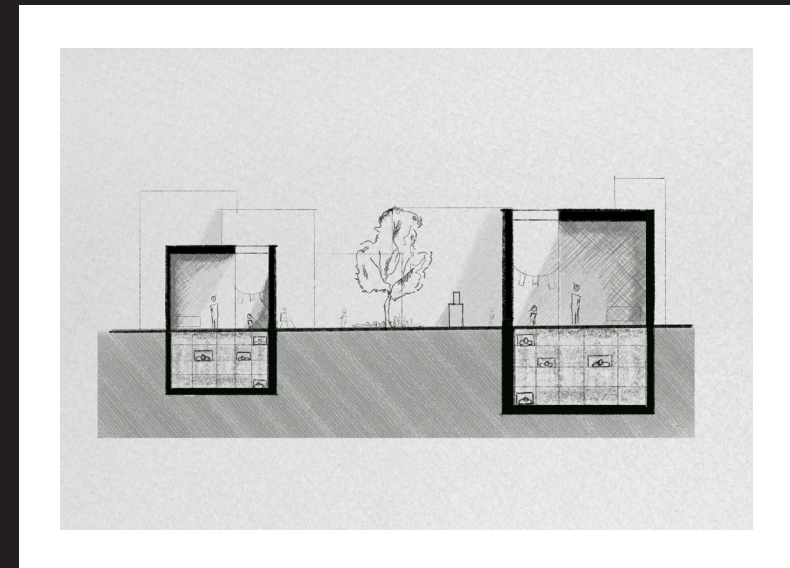


An image showing the quality inside

A child runs past a tombstone.
© Asmaa Waguib



A barber shaves a man © Asmaa Waguib
How the community using the space



A section showing the different timeline of how people are living in the city of the dead.

01.4

Witikon Cemetery

Zurich, Switzerland

VOGT

The Islamic burial culture stipulates that the dead persons be laid on their right side with their faces looking towards Mecca. The overall complex should be simply designed, without embellishment or lush vegetation. These regulations determine the orientation of the graves and explain why they follow neither the topography of the site nor the orientation of the rest of the cemetery.

Two of the four planned burial grounds are framed by a wall and form independent yet similar areas. They are each divided into a grave and an assembly area. The latter is equipped with a fountain and a cluster of ironwood trees, *Parrotia persica*. These deciduous trees are indigenous to northern Persia and create an association with Islamic regions.



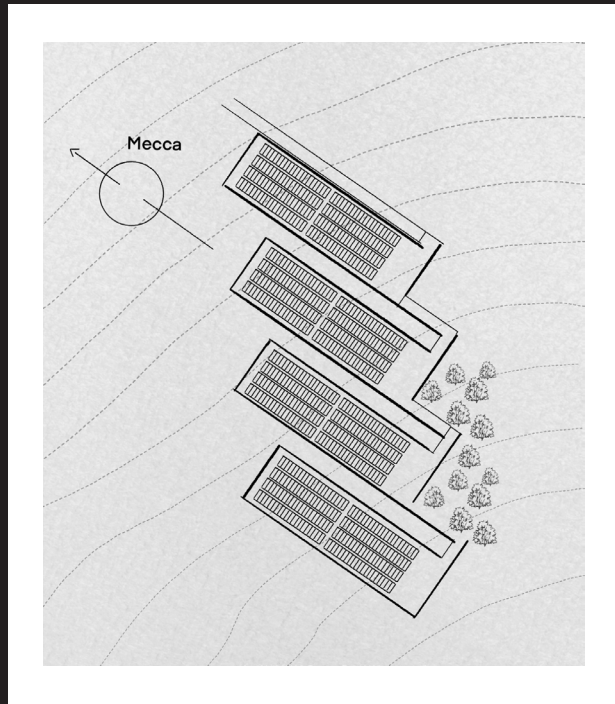


© VOGT

The Muslim burial ground does not follow neither the topography nor the orientation for the rest of the cemetery



© VOGT



The graveyards must be facing Mecca, so it must change the orientation of the graveyards, so it would create a contrast between the rest of the cemetery.

The graveyards should be free of lush vegetation because of the concept of the buried have a straight connection from earth to sky without any interruptions.



© VOGT

02

Poetic Atlas of Syntax

A Syntax is the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in a language. This is translated into arranging different words/spaces into an informed movement through spatial qualities of cemeteries creating a whole understanding of the context.

02.1

Skogskyrkogården

Stockholm, Sweden

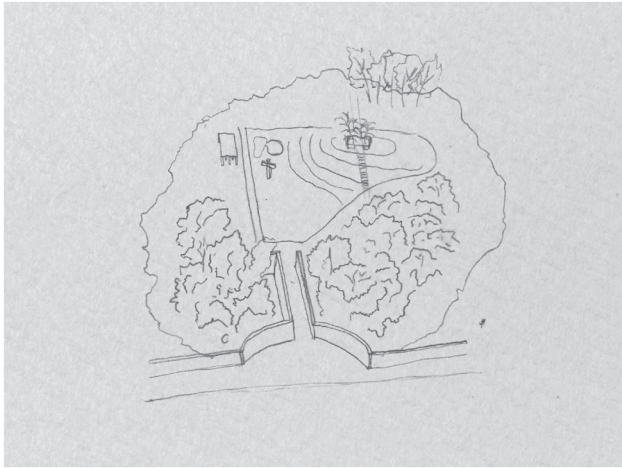
Asplund and Lewerentz

This Stockholm cemetery was created between 1917 and 1920 by two young architects, Asplund and Lewerentz, on the site of former gravel pits overgrown with pine trees. The design blends vegetation and architectural elements, taking advantage of irregularities in the site to create a landscape that is finely adapted to its function.

By using landscape as essential point of departure for their architectural solutions, Asplund and Lewerentz sought to imbue the site with a sacred quality. They turned to forms embodying more primitive Nordic affinities with nature in order to situate their design with regional cultural traditions.

Transcending the limitations of the conventional Christian iconography, they relied primarily on enhancing attributes of the landscape _ ridge and valley, earth and sky, forest and clearings, meadow and marsh _ to evoke associations of death and rebirth in the landscape of spiritual dimension.



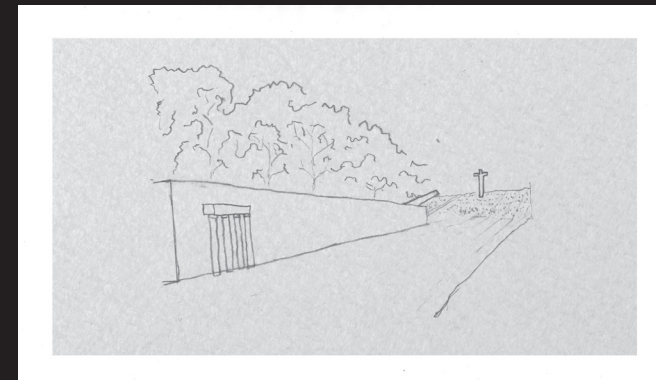
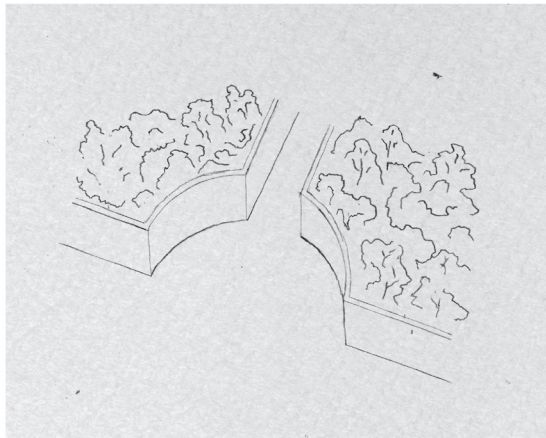


An overview of the main words in the woodland cemetery



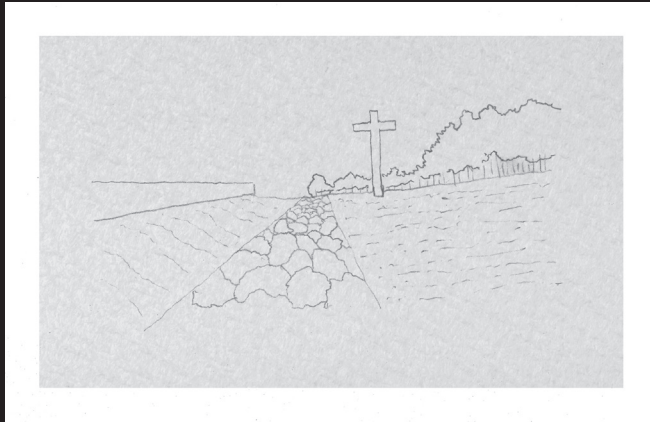
© Johan Dehlin

The bold, semicircular form of the cemetery forecourt draws the visitor toward a clearing punctuated by large granite cross.



A fountain to one side _ a fieldstone wall bathed in a steady trickle of water and screened by a Doric colonnade _ suggests eternity as well as tears of mourning. This wall of tears marks the gateway to the sacred enclosure.

The gradual ascent of the entry drive reinforces a sense of departure from the realm of living.



The entry sequence ritualized the threshold between profane and sacred territories, this celebration of boundary is transmuted within the cemetery to the relationship of earth to sky.



© Caroline Constant



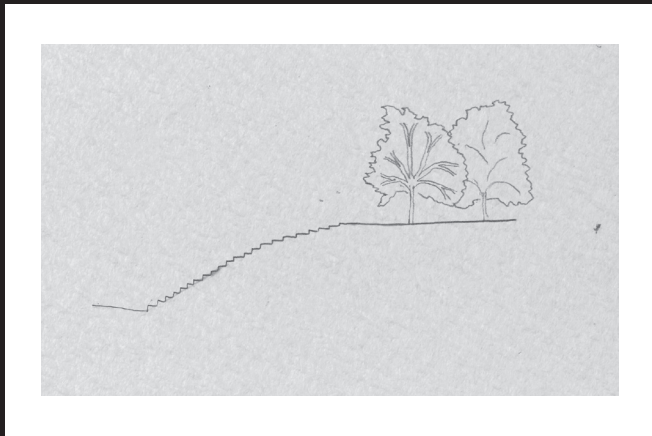
The open lawn viewed upon entry is free of burial markers, imparting serenity to the landscape. This uninterrupted expanse provides a view of the cemetery's broader organization and choice of route.

© Åke E:son Lindman



To the west, a long segmented flight of stairs ascends a steep earthen mound to a low precinct, where a grove of weeping elms is dramatically profiled against the sky.

While the hill's massive form suggests the difficulties of the mourner's task, the ascent comprises successive flights of steps, decreasing in height to ease the approach to the summit.



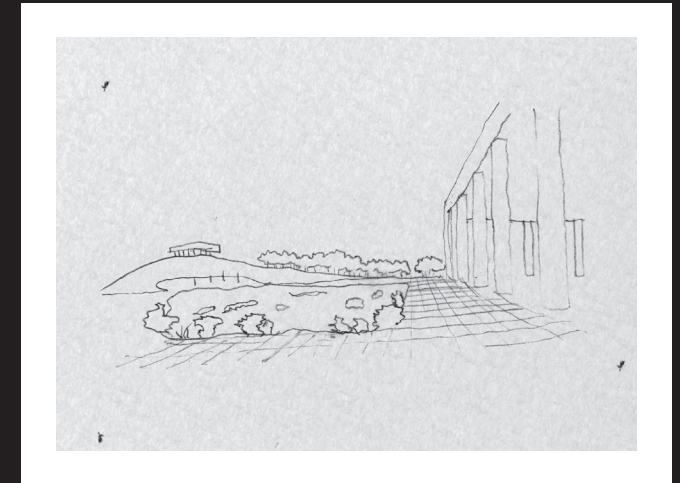
© Mikael Almeiqs



© Unknown



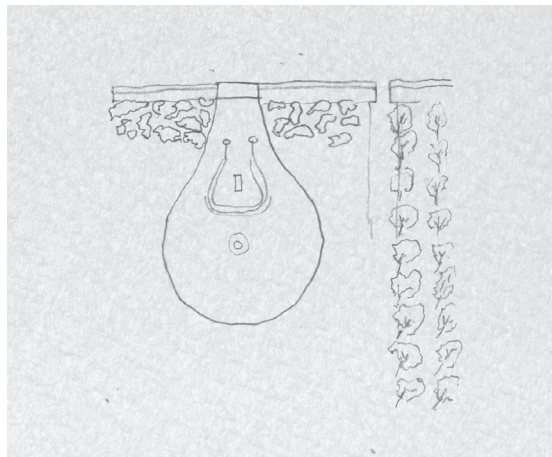
© Holger Ellgaard



A lily pond , positioned in defiance of nature at the crest of the hill, is deliberately isolated from natural source of water. Singled out to reinforce its symbolic reference to the eternal cycles of the life and death.



© Susanne Hallmann



The pool serves as backdrop to the open air ceremonial plaza

02.2

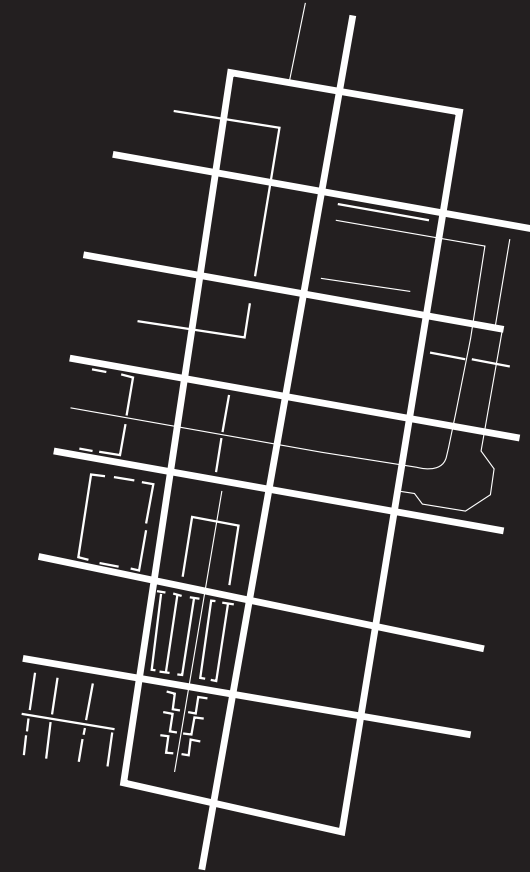
Nordre gravlund

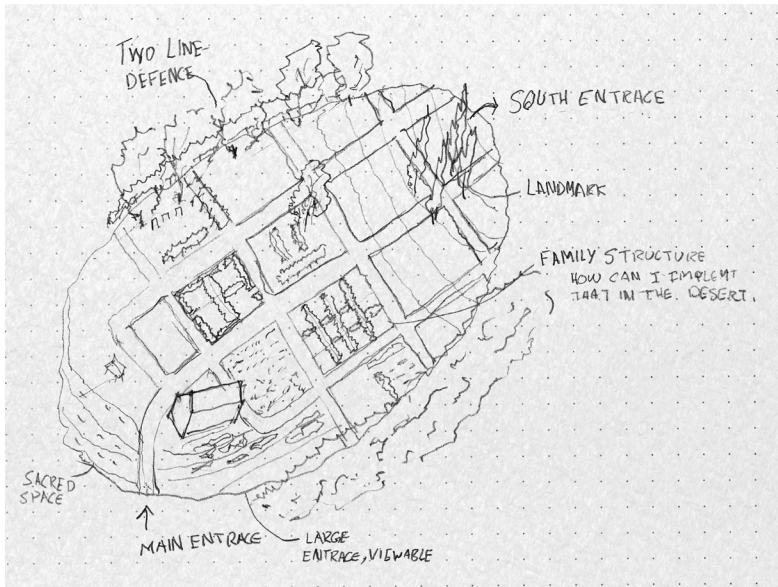
Oslo, Norway

Odd Hilt

At Nordre gravlund stands the war memorial for the communist party NKP, made by Odd Hilt, unveiled in 1984. In addition, there are several war graves here. In 2005, a stand was set up with stone slabs showing the names of deaconesses who were buried so early that the graves have been erased.

It is a typical grided cemetery, the site as whole is divided into smaller grid, which represents families, its enclosure within each smaller grid.





An overview of the cemetery



An entrance to one of the family enclosures, it is surrounded by bushes that defines the inner grid.



The edge of the cemetery has two lines of defense, the first is high bushes towards the street and the second is deciduous trees that change depending on the season.

A straight line of pedestrian path that cuts the grid system in the middle with an ending of evergreen trees as a view point towards heaven.



Inside the inner grid corner view. One can feel the enclosure by the first line of bushes and the second view of trees.

01.3

Igualada Cemetery

Igualada, Spain

Enric Miralles

Igualada Cemetery was designed to replace the former cemetery and was envisioned as a new type of cemetery by its architects. The cemetery is located between an elongated lowland of the river Riera de Odena and an industrialized section of the town Igualada, near Barcelona. It is a cemetery that challenges the long established idea of a cemetery. The whole architectural concept was to “explore the poetic ideas of a cemetery for the visitors to understand and accept the cycle of life, which would enable a link between past, present and future” (Kroll, 2011).

When visitors reach the cemetery they meet a gate, which is a set of Corten steel poles that mark the entry to the cemetery (Kroll, 2011). From the main entrance a path like a wide plaza leads to the prime burial area. The inward and outward sloping concrete walls line the pathway. These concrete walls with articulated niches called loculi house the bodies (Kroll, 2011; Reed, 2005). The processional pathway forms the circulation pattern through the cemetery that focuses more on the experience rather than the arrangement of the burial plots (Kroll, 2011).





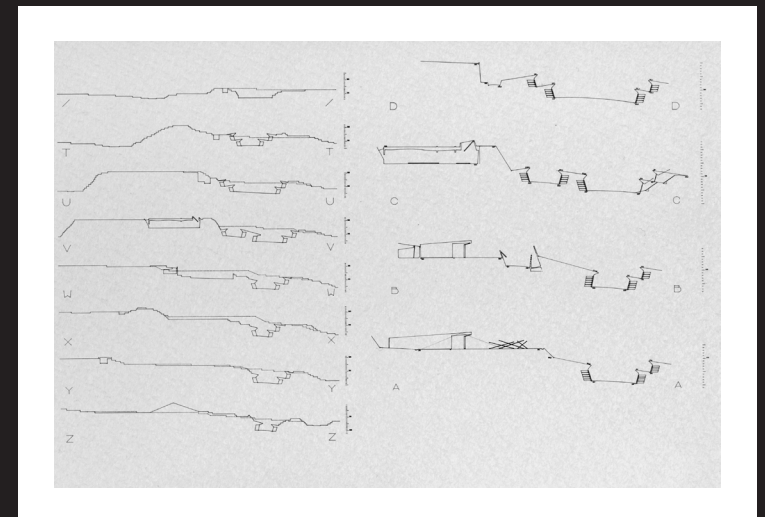
As one enters the site, one confronts a set of conical steel poles that double as gates to the cemetery – the poles are likened to the crosses at Calvary.

© Dharmesh



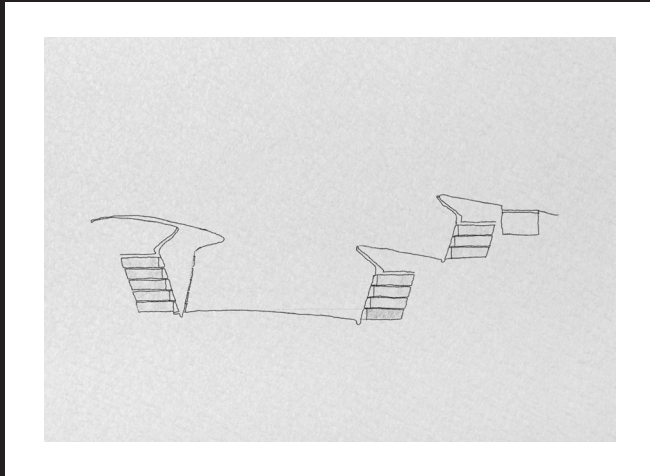
From the main entrance, there is a processional winding pathway that descends into the main burial area; the pathway is lined with concrete "loculi" - mausoleum burial plots – that wrap around the depressed space as a transition from tier to tier.

© Dharmesh



Enric Miralles

The main burial area is part of a lowered excavated part of the cemetery that is surrounded by gabion walls and the mausoleum-like burial plots, which obstructs the visitor's vision from the surrounding context secluding them in an area where the sky is the only visible entity outside of the central burial area.



By the end of the path, one will be met with a circular enclosure defined by the landscape.



© Dharmesh

The windy path is conceptualized as the river of life that moves from a wide open expanse in the Catalonian hills to a secluded memorial space excavated below the horizon.



Enric Miralles

Plan showing the intention of the architects dealing with topography and embedding the cemetery into the landscape

03

The Site

Religion

Islam

Islam has been the state religion in Egypt since the amendment of the second article of the Egyptian constitution in the year 1980, before which Egypt was recognized as a secular country. The vast majority of Egyptian Muslims are Sunni. Egypt hosts the most important Sunni institution in the world, Al-Azhar University. It is the oldest Islamic institution of higher studies (founded around 970 CE), and is considered by many to be the oldest extant university in the world.

Christianity

The Coptic Christian population in Egypt is the largest Christian community in the Middle East and North Africa standing at between 5% – 15% of Egypt's population according to different statistics. About 95% of Egypt's Christians are members of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria.[21]an Oriental Orthodox Church, Traditionally believed to be established in the 1st century C.E. by Saint Mark. The Church is headed by the Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, attests to Egypt's strong Christian heritage. It has a followers of approximately 10 million Christians worldwide.

Burial Rituals

Islam

Muslims believe that death is a part of God's plan and perceive it as a temporary separation, as everyone will reconcile in the afterlife. The body of the deceased is prepared gently and modestly, either at the hospital or at a funeral home. The body is washed, perfumed and dressed in a plain white shroud.

Muslims are always buried, as cremation is not permitted in Islam. Muslims regard participating in a funeral as an honour and privilege. A funeral prayer or salatul janaza is said before the burial, and mourners pray to God for a blissful life for the deceased in the next world.

The Islamic burial culture stipulates that the dead persons be laid on their right side with their faces looking towards Mecca. The overall complex should be simply designed, without embellishment or lush vegetation. Because the soul will move from earth to sky without any distractions.

Coptic Orthodox

When someone dies, a member of the family washes the body of the deceased. Only rarely does the family ask a professional to do the job for them, a man for a man and a woman for a woman. Then the body is dressed in a shroud and the family goes to church to pray for the dead. The priest pays his condolences to the family and thanks everyone who takes part in the funeral service. There is no rule specifying the day on which the deceased has to be buried. Each family buries their dead just as they wish. Three days after the burial the priests visit the family in their home to pray and water is poured on the floor throughout the flat. Tradition has it that relatives visit the family to mourn for forty days.

