Funerary architecture as urban heritage: a study of european necrotourism and cultural barriers to cemetery requalification in Brazil

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Abstract

This research traces the cemetery's journey from a place of fear to a place of culture.

It asks why Brazil has not yet made that journey — and what it would take to begin.

This research addresses the historical and sociological transformation of the cemetery from a sanitation facility to a site of cultural heritage. It analyzes the consolidation of necrotourism and the garden cemetery model in Europe and contrasts these successful heritage initiatives with the Brazilian context, in which cemeteries are often associated with abandonment and institutional neglect. Drawing on primary survey data and a comparative study of European and Brazilian cases, the research aims to understand the cultural barriers that prevent Brazilian society from seeing its cemeteries as open-air museums and vital historical landmarks, and to propose the conditions under which that transformation becomes possible.

Keywords: Funerary Architecture, Urban Heritage, Necrotourism, Cemetery Requalification, Brazilian Heritage, Open-Air Museum, Cultural Tourism.

From sacred to scientific

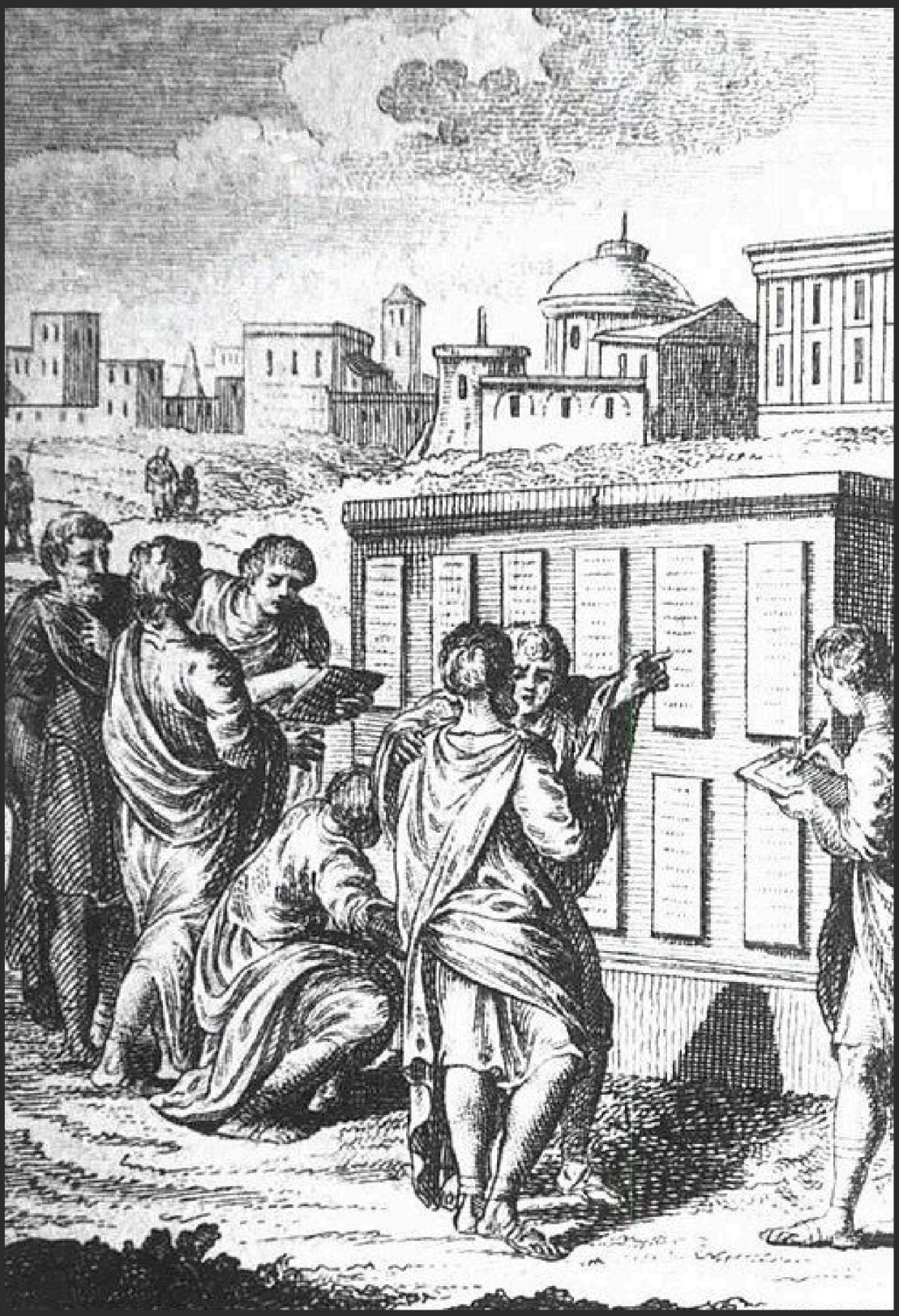
For centuries, burying the dead inside the city was normal.

Then hygiene became a political argument and the cemetery moved to the edge.

The origins and evolution of funerary spaces

The origins of death rituals transcend the boundaries of documented history, but one element remains constant across cultures and centuries: the body. It is inevitably the centerpiece of the funerary rite, yet the attitude toward it has repeatedly shifted in response to spiritual influences, social pressures, and, later, to the imperatives of hygiene and public order (Ariès, 1977). These shifts produced corresponding variations in the designated place of burial, the cemetery, and in the cultural meanings attached to it. Rites, beliefs, and spirituality share a spatial necessity; the necropolis, a term used here to avoid the contemporary connotations of "cemetery," is the diachronic object that has adapted to changing customs, needs, and regulations surrounding this most delicate of human experiences (Etlin, 1984).

To analyze this matter historically is to encounter a recurring antithesis: the city of the living against the city of the dead. Yet for most of documented history, this boundary did not exist in the sharp form that modern sensibility assumes. The dead were present in the city, beneath the floors of churches, in the churchyards attached to every parish, in the crypts of the powerful, in the common ground



Public exhibition of the Twelve Tables in Ancient Rome
Silvestre David Mirys, 1799.

that served the poor. The most radical shift, the product of a reform in urban management driven by Enlightenment rationalism and nineteenth-century hygienism, removed the dead from the city and created the modern cemetery as a bounded, architecturally conceived institution, located beyond the urban perimeter, subject to civic rather than ecclesiastical authority, and governed by principles of hygiene, spatial order, and aesthetic decorum (Etlin, 1984; Foucault, 1994). It is from this reform that all modern monumental cemeteries descend, including those of Brazil. Understanding the reform, and the cultural debates it provoked, is the necessary foundation for understanding both why those cemeteries took the form they did and why they constitute the heritage they do.

Death in the ancient city: sacred boundary and urban regulation

The relationship between urban space and funerary practice was legally codified in the ancient world with a clarity that the modern hygienist would have recognized. From 450 BC, Roman law prohibited burying or cremating the dead within city walls. The tenth of the Twelve Tables stated it plainly: *"Hominem mortuum in urbe ne sepelito neve urito"*



The ancient Via Appia: the status of the dead
displayed at the entrance to the Roman city.
Jules Bühlmann, 1878.

no person who has died shall be buried or cremated within the city (Toynbee, 1971; Hopkins, 1983). The practical motivation was sanitary; the symbolic motivation was the ancient conviction that proximity between the living and the dead was dangerous, spiritually, medically, and socially. Necropolises were therefore built along the roads leading out of Roman cities, the most famous being the Via Appia outside Rome, where the tombs of the wealthy lined the road for miles, a display of posthumous status visible to every traveler entering the capital (Toynbee, 1971).

This ancient order began to dissolve with the spread of Christianity. The transformation was slow and contested, but its trajectory was clear: with the rise of the cult of martyrs from the fourth century onward, the sanctified remains of holy individuals moved from peripheral burial grounds into the centers of cities, first into catacombs and then into churches built specifically to house them (Brown, 1981). Relics were recognized as possessing extraordinary powers of intercession; proximity to them in death was believed to aid the soul's passage into the afterlife, a practice known as ad sanctos burial. This belief produced a fundamental reversal, the burial of the dead not at the periphery of the city but at its sacred core (Brown, 1981; Geary, 1994).

The consequences for urban space were profound and, over centuries, catastrophic. The medieval churchyard became simultaneously a burial ground, a public space, a market, and, in many cities, a sanctuary for those fleeing the law. The Cemetery of the Holy Innocents in Paris, which operated for over five hundred years on a site adjacent to the central market of Les Halles, illustrates the extreme form of this situation: estimated to have received the remains of two million Parisians, surrounded by high walls that could not contain the stench of decomposition, and simultaneously functioning as a trading space, a social gathering point, and a legal refuge for the city's most vulnerable population (Harding, 2002; Ragon, 1983). For the clergy who managed it, the commercial and social activities in the cemetery were a perpetual source of scandal; for the Parisians who used it, it was simply an extension of the city's everyday life. This promiscuity between the living and the dead, between commerce and burial, between feast and mourning, represents a mode of urban organization that the nineteenth century would find not merely unhygienic but morally and symbolically intolerable.

The hygienist and Edict of Saint-Cloud

The turning point came with the progressive collapse of the hygienic conditions associated with urban burial in the eighteenth century. Towards the end of that century, public intolerance toward cemeteries steadily increased as they were blamed for the disastrous sanitary conditions of European cities (Foucault, 1994; Etlin, 1984). The appalling overcrowding of burial grounds, the spread of pestilential miasmas through the streets, and the proximity of churchyards to residential areas and food markets exacerbated what was already a critical situation. Although the relocation of cemeteries beyond city walls had already begun in the mid-eighteenth century in several European cities, the definitive legislative response came with Napoleon's Décret impérial sur les sépultures of 1804, signed at the Palais de Saint-Cloud and known as the Edict of Saint-Cloud (Kselman, 1993; Ariès, 1977).

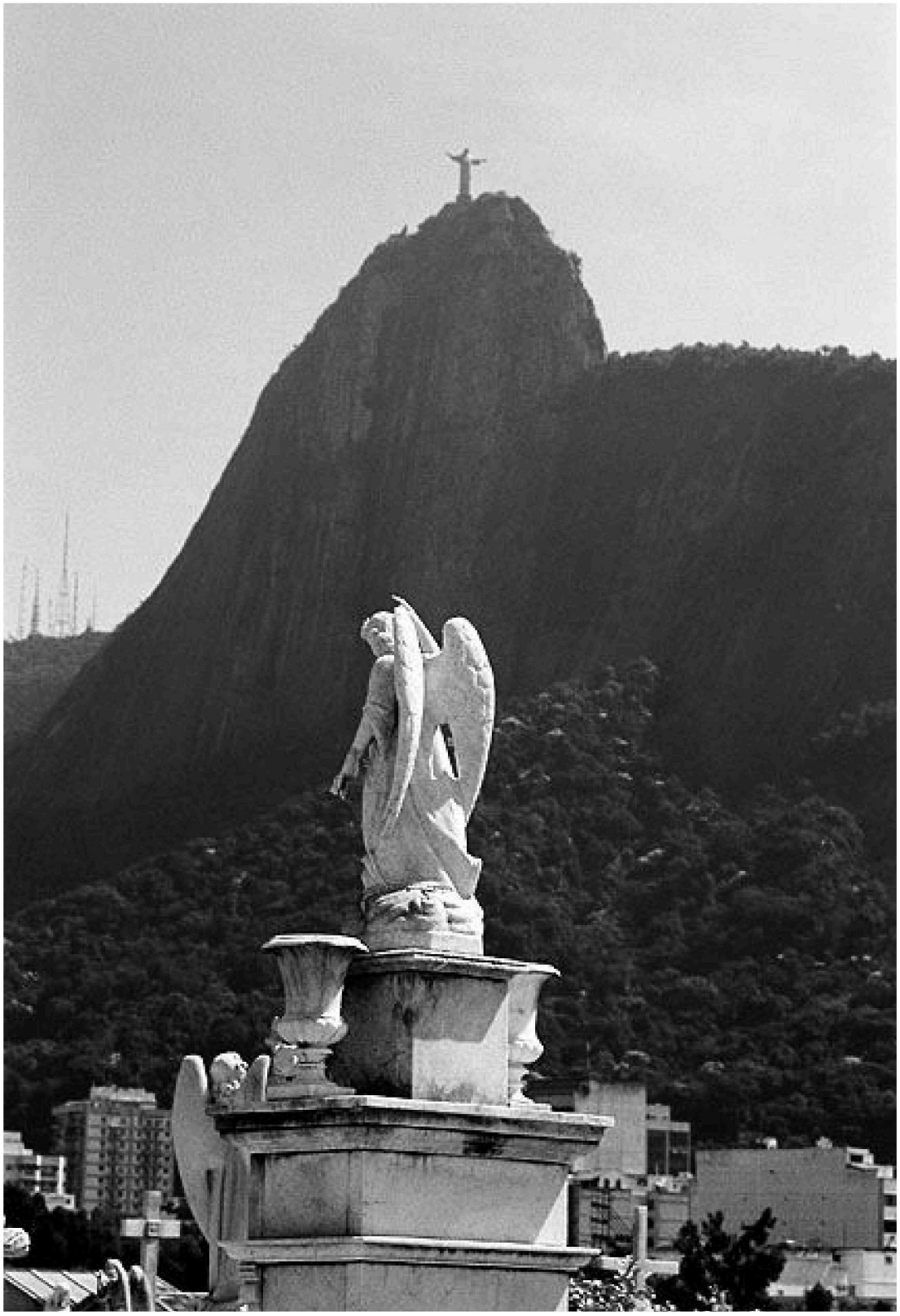
The Edict was a comprehensive reorganization of funerary practice in the territories under Napoleonic authority. Its first article explicitly prohibited burials within the walls of cities and towns. Its second article required the construction of new cemeteries at a distance of no less than 35 to 40 meters from urban walls. Subsequent articles provided

guidelines for identifying suitable sites and for the ongoing management of the new institutions. One of the most significant innovations was the prohibition of mass graves: "*Chaque inhumation aura lieu dans une fosse séparée*," as the fourth article stated, each burial shall take place in a separate grave. This requirement, driven by the hygienic conviction that the mixing of decomposing bodies accelerated the production of miasmatic vapors, had as its unintended cultural consequence the individualization of burial: the requirement that each body have its own place, marked and identifiable, created the conditions for the development of the individual grave as the locus of personal memory and familial commemoration that the nineteenth century would elaborate into the full-scale cult of individual death (Ariès, 1977; Kselman, 1993).

The Edict was extended to the Kingdom of Italy by a Decree on Medical Police of September 5, 1806, and from there became the legal foundation for the great monumental cemeteries and scores of others across the Italian states. The same framework, transmitted through the cultural and intellectual links between Brazil's educated elite and the European, especially Italian and French, models they admired, shaped the design of Brazil's major nineteenth-



Arcaded gallery at the Staglieno Monumental Cemetery, a friar statue in the foreground.
Rob Tiv, 2025.



Angel sculpture at São João Batista Cemetery, Rio de Janeiro, with Christ the Redeemer in the background.
Marcio Ponte, 2018.

century cemeteries. The Consolação in São Paulo (1858), the São João Batista in Rio de Janeiro (1852), the Saudade in Campinas, and their counterparts across the country all derive, directly or indirectly, from the same hygienic, aesthetic, and civic premises as their European predecessors (Rodrigues, 1997; Etlin, 1984). Understanding this genealogy is important for two reasons: it establishes that Brazilian funerary heritage belongs to the same European tradition that has been most successfully converted into heritage tourism, and it identifies the shared architectural vocabulary that makes the comparison meaningful.

The social geometry of the monumental cemetery

The nineteenth-century monumental cemetery was never a neutral container for the dead. From its inception, it was an architecturally organized statement about the values, hierarchies, and aspirations of the society that built it. Two principal typologies emerged from the post-Napoleonic reform, each expressing a distinct cultural logic about the relationship between death, space, and society (Etlin, 1984; Choay, 1992; Worpole, 2003).

The enclosed cemetery, dominant in Italy, France, and Southern Europe, derived its spatial logic from the walled



Covered gallery at the Staglieno Monumental Cemetery, Genoa.
Mary Nowhere, 2025.

precinct of the medieval monastery and the enclosed garden. Its perimeter defined a world apart from the city, a space governed by different rules, different speeds, different sounds. Within the enclosure, social hierarchy was encoded in spatial position with extraordinary precision. The perimeter arcades, the most visible and architecturally elaborated locations, were conceded to the wealthiest families, the axial avenues connecting the main entrance to the principal chapel were lined with the mausoleums of the city's most prominent dynasties, the common burial fields, located at the center of the precinct or at its least visible extremities, received those who could not afford individual plots. The enclosed cemetery was, in this sense, the city in miniature: it reproduced in permanent stone the social geography of the living city, with prestigious addresses in death as in life (Verdery, 1999; Bourdieu, 1984; Ragon, 1983).

The park cemetery, dominant in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian contexts, expressed a different spatial logic: one rooted in Romantic sensibility and the picturesque tradition. Where the enclosed Mediterranean model subordinated landscape to architecture, the park cemetery subordinated architecture to landscape, making the garden

the dominant spatial experience (Worpole, 2003; Linden-Ward, 1989). The park cemetery modeled itself on this vision, treating the burial ground not as a place of architectural order but of natural beauty, a space in which the passage of time was made visible through the growth of trees, the weathering of stone, and the seasonal rhythms of vegetation rather than through the grandeur of mausolea.

Both models produced, over the course of the nineteenth century, collections of funerary art and architecture of extraordinary cultural significance. The choice of architectural style for the cemetery's gateways, chapels, and mausoleums, invariably neoclassical in the enclosed model, more eclectic and picturesque in the park model, was itself a statement about the relationship between death and civilization, between the individual and history, between private grief and public commemoration. These architectural choices are legible today to any visitor who takes the time to look at them, and they constitute the principal material argument for cemetery heritage tourism: the argument that these spaces contain, in concentrated form, the aesthetic history of a civilization at a defining moment in its development.

The cremation debate and the persistence of funerary architecture

The cultural and architectural investment in the monumental cemetery was not, in the nineteenth century, without its critics. The most sustained challenge came from the cremation movement, which emerged in the 1860s as a convergence of hygienist pragmatism and anticlerical politics. Cremation had ancient precedents, it had been a common funerary practice in classical antiquity, but had been progressively abandoned in the Western world with the spread of Christianity, which associated burial with the resurrection of the body and cremation with the pagan cultures it sought to supersede (Jupp, 2006; Davies, 1990).

The nineteenth-century revival of cremation was driven by two distinct motivations. The hygienic argument was that inhumation, particularly in the overcrowded cemeteries of growing industrial cities, produced toxic decomposition gases that contaminated air and groundwater; cremation would eliminate this source of contamination while simultaneously addressing the spatial problem of growing urban populations requiring growing areas of burial ground (Hamlin, 1998). The anticlerical argument was that cremation represented a rational, secular alternative to the

ecclesiastically managed ritual of burial, a way of managing death that did not require the involvement of the Church and that expressed the scientific and progressive values of the urban bourgeoisie (Jupp, 2006; Kselman, 1993).

The Catholic Church responded with a firm condemnation, issued by the Congregation of the Holy Office in 1866 and confirmed by Pope Leo XIII, which prohibited Catholic participation in cremation on the grounds that it expressed opposition to the doctrine of bodily resurrection (Jupp, 2006). This prohibition remained in force until 1963, when the Second Vatican Council revised it, permitting cremation for Catholics provided it was not chosen as a gesture of opposition to ecclesiastical authority.

The cremation debate is relevant to the heritage argument for a specific reason: it was precisely the persistence of burial culture, sustained in part by the Church's opposition to cremation, that produced the continued investment in funerary architecture and sculpture through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Had cremation become universal in the 1870s, the great sculptural programs of the Italian monumental cemeteries would not exist. The Staglieno collection, the Matarazzo mausoleum

at the Consolação, the funerary sculpture of the Monumentale in Turin, all of these are products of a culture that continued to invest in the built expression of individual and familial identity at the moment of death. This investment is precisely what makes these cemeteries the heritage sites they are today.

Between memory and taboo

The cemetery was once a space of collective ritual.

The twentieth century turned death into something private, institutional, and invisible.

The invention of individual memory: the nineteenth-century transformation

The monumental cemetery did not become a cultural heritage site simply because it was built with aesthetic ambition. It became one because the nineteenth century invented a new cultural relationship between the living and the dead, a relationship organized not around collective ritual but around individual memory, and the cemetery was the primary spatial expression of that relationship (Ariès, 1977; Kearl, 1989).

Until the late eighteenth century, the commemoration of the dead had shown almost no attachment to the specific place of burial. Common graves were reopened and reused; the bones of previous occupants were removed to charnel houses; the physical location of burial was considered theologically and emotionally unimportant, since the soul had already departed and would be reunited with its body only at the Last Judgment (Ariès, 1977). What mattered was not where the body rested but whether the appropriate prayers had been offered and the appropriate masses celebrated. The tomb, where it existed, was a marker of social status rather than an expression of personal memory.



Ornamented gazebo at the Monumental Cemetery of Turin.
Marco Nico, 2022.

This changed radically in the bourgeois era, in a transformation that Ariès (1977) describes as the transition from the "death of the other" to the "death of the self", from a culture in which death was primarily experienced as a collective event requiring collective ritual management to one in which it was experienced as the loss of a unique, irreplaceable individual whose particular life was worth commemorating in its specificity. The tomb became a monument to the person: an architectural and artistic expression of the desire to make remembrance tangible, to give memory a place, to ease the pain of separation by artificially recreating a sense of proximity to the living. The epitaph, which in earlier centuries had recorded the social status and pious sentiments appropriate to a Christian death, began to include biographical details, personal qualities, expressions of familial grief, and quotations from literary or philosophical sources chosen to characterize the specific individual who had died (Ariès, 1977; Nora, 1989; Walter, 1994).

This shift was entangled with the broader cultural project of bourgeois individualism: the conviction that each human life is unique, that its particular details and qualities matter, that it deserves to be remembered and mourned in its speci-

ficity rather than subsumed into collective categories of social role or religious significance. The commissioning of portrait sculptures, realistic, individualized likenesses of the deceased, became a widespread practice among those who could afford it. The marking of precise dates of birth and death, which earlier epitaphs had frequently omitted or approximated, became standard. All of these practices consolidated the idea that each life was irreplaceable and deserving of permanent commemoration (Verdery, 1999; Walter, 1994). They also produced, as a material by-product, the collections of funerary sculpture and monumental architecture that constitute the primary heritage asset of the great nineteenth-century cemeteries.

The cemetery as social mirror: hierarchy made permanent in stone

The cultural transformation of the cemetery in the nineteenth century was not only individual but social. The cemetery became, in this period, the most explicit and permanent record of social hierarchy available in any city, more permanent than wealth, more durable than political power, more honest than official monuments in its revelation of who, in any given society, commanded the resources necessary to make themselves remembered (Verdery, 1999; Bourdieu, 1984).

The spatial organization of the enclosed Italian monumental cemetery made this hierarchy immediately legible. The perimeter arcades, the most architecturally elaborate and publicly visible locations, were conceded to the wealthiest and most prominent families. A family's location within the cemetery was a statement of its position in the living city, and the architectural elaboration of its mausoleum was a direct index of its resources and cultural aspirations. The competition between families for the most impressive funerary monument was, in the great Italian cemeteries of the nineteenth century, a recognized form of social competition, one that produced extraordinary works of funerary sculpture and architecture but also one that made the cemetery a document of social stratification more detailed and less euphemized than any other public record.

For the cultural historian and for the heritage visitor, this social transparency is one of the cemetery's most valuable qualities. A walk through the Consolação in São Paulo, or through the São João Batista in Rio de Janeiro, is a walk through the social history of Brazilian urbanism. The mausoleums of the coffee and commercial elite tell the story of the economic transformation of the paulista interior in the late nineteenth century. The public figures, the politicians, the intellectuals, the artists, mark the cultural history of a nation in formation (Miranda & Soares, 2021; Verde et al., 2020).

But the cemetery also records, if one knows how to read it, what the official monuments do not say. The gradation from the monumental mausolea of the wealthy to the common graves of the poor; the contrast between the sculptural ambition of the immigrant elite and the anonymity of the workers who built their factories; the evidence, in the spatial organization itself, of the racial and class hierarchies that structured Brazilian society in the age of industrialization, all of this is present in the cemetery in a form that no official memorial could capture or would choose to represent. Reading the cemetery critically is reading Brazilian history against the grain of its official commemorations, and this critical dimension is, for the heritage educator, one of the most powerful pedagogical resources these spaces offer.

The twentieth-century estrangement: death as taboo

The cultural investment in the cemetery as a space of individual memory and social representation did not survive the twentieth century intact. Between the late nineteenth century and the postwar decades, the cultural relationship to death in Western societies underwent a profound and well-documented transformation, described by Philippe Ariès

(1977) as the transition from "tamed death", publicly accepted, ritually managed, and socially integrated, to "forbidden death": institutionalized, medicalized, privatized, and progressively removed from the fabric of everyday life.

The mechanisms of this transformation were multiple and reinforcing. The displacement of dying from the home to the hospital, which accelerated rapidly in the first half of the twentieth century, removed the moment of death from the domestic environment where it had been publicly witnessed for centuries and sequestered it in a clinical setting accessible only to immediate family (Elias, 1985; Illich, 1975). The growing professionalization of the funeral industry, which Mitford (1963) documented with devastating precision in the American context, transferred the management of the dead from the family and the community to a specialized commercial sector whose economic interest lay precisely in managing grief on behalf of its clients rather than integrating them into its rituals. The decline of widespread religious practice removed the shared symbolic frameworks through which earlier generations had made death collectively intelligible and socially bearable (Walter, 1994; Kearl, 1989).

The philosophical elaborations of this cultural shift are extensive. Norbert Elias (1985), in The Loneliness of the Dying, argued that the increasing isolation of the dying subject, removed from family, enclosed in institutional space, shielded from the awareness of others by the norms of social composure, reflects a broader societal failure to integrate the reality of mortality into the framework of everyday existence. Zygmunt Bauman (1992) extended this analysis by identifying death as the one experience that modern consumer culture cannot manage: it cannot be deferred indefinitely, cannot be commodified in any ultimately satisfying way, cannot be solved by the market logic that governs all other aspects of contemporary life. Death is, in Bauman's formulation, the ultimate scandal of modernity, and the cultural response to it is the systematic construction of a social reality from which death is absent.

The spatial consequences of this transformation are directly legible in the twentieth-century cemetery. The expansion of cremation; the rise of anonymous columbarium niches; the replacement of individual sculptural monuments with flat ground-level plaques; the contraction of the funerary landscape from an elaborated architectural environment to a functional storage facility for remains, all of these develop-

ments reflect a society that has externalized the management of death to specialized institutions while losing the symbolic languages and shared practices through which earlier generations had made death socially bearable and the cemetery culturally meaningful (Davies, 1990; Worpole, 2003). The cemetery, in this logic, becomes a place to be avoided except when grief makes attendance obligatory. This is the cultural default that Brazil has inherited and not yet fully reversed. And it is precisely what makes the argument for cemetery heritage tourism both urgent and, as the evidence in this thesis will show, more achievable than its proponents are often given credit for expecting.



Path at Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris, an example of the "garden cemetery" model. Gordon White, 2010.

The cultural reversal: how cemeteries became heritage sites

The transformation of European cemeteries from spaces of avoidance into celebrated cultural destinations did not happen spontaneously. It was the cumulative product of at least three distinct historical movements, operating over roughly two centuries, whose combined effect was to make it socially legitimate and culturally rewarding to visit a cemetery for reasons other than the grief of bereavement.

The first movement was the Romantic rehabilitation of the funerary landscape in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Romantic sensibility reframed the cemetery not as a space of fear, contamination, and institutional quarantine but as a site of sublime contemplation, a place where the presence of mortality intensified the experience of life, where the passage of time was made visible in stone and vegetation, and where the individual could encounter, in condensed form, the weight of human history. The garden cemetery, inaugurated paradigmatically by Père Lachaise in 1804, was designed from the outset as both a hygienic institution and a contemplative landscape: a space in which the bourgeois walker could experience the pleasures of melancholy, the

edification of historical association, and the aesthetic pleasure of a well-designed garden. Contemporary accounts of Père Lachaise in the 1820s and 1830s describe Parisians visiting not to mourn specific individuals but simply to walk, to look, and to experience the particular quality of feeling that proximity to the illustrious dead and the beauty of the landscape combined to produce (Etlin, 1984; Ragon, 1983). This is the cultural foundation from which European necrotourism ultimately derives.

The second movement was the formalization of heritage discourse in the twentieth century. The recognition of monumental cemeteries as sites of architectural and artistic significance, protected by heritage legislation, incorporated into tourist itineraries, inventoried by cultural institutions, made the subjects of scholarly catalogues and popular guidebooks, converted the Romantic sensibility into a sustained institutional practice accessible to a much wider public. Guided tours offered by municipal authorities, art historians, and enthusiast organizations made the aesthetic and biographical richness of the cemeteries legible to visitors who might not have had the cultural resources to discover it independently. Heritage protection ensured that the built fabric was maintained even when economic re-



Reclining funerary sculpture on a tomb, illustrating the artistic richness of European monumental cemeteries.
Mary Nowhere, 2025.

sources were limited. International recognition, in the form of UNESCO listings, European cultural route designations, and inclusion in major travel guides, positioned the great cemeteries within a global cultural itinerary, giving them a visibility they had not previously commanded (Choay, 1992; Rugg, 2000).

The third movement is driven by digital culture and the globalizing phenomenon of dark tourism. The viral circulation of cemetery photography on social media platforms; the inclusion of cemetery visits in mainstream travel guides and mobile applications; the growing cultural visibility of death-related aesthetics in fashion, music, and visual culture; and the theoretical articulation of "dark tourism" as a recognized genre of heritage experience (Stone, 2006; Stone & Sharpley, 2008) have introduced entirely new audiences to the cemetery as a site of cultural consumption. These audiences may be drawn less by the traditional heritage register — the guided tour, the architectural history, the biographical pilgrimage, than by visual atmosphere, subcultural associations, the discovery that cemeteries are aesthetically extraordinary spaces that repay the same attention given to any museum or historic district. The effect has been to normalize cemetery visita-

tion across a wider social range and to associate it with cultural sophistication rather than morbid eccentricity.

All three movements are directly relevant to the Brazilian agenda. The aesthetic readiness documented in the survey data in chapter 7 suggests that the Romantic sensibility, the capacity to find beauty, contemplation, and meaning in the funerary landscape, is already present in the Brazilian public. The theoretical framework of dark tourism provides intellectual legitimacy to programs that might otherwise be dismissed as eccentric or disrespectful. The digital tools that have democratized heritage tourism globally are available to any Brazilian institution willing to invest in them. The question is not whether the conditions for a Brazilian necrotourism exist, this thesis argues they do. The question is whether the institutional will to activate them will be found.

The silent archive

Brazilian cemeteries hold sculpture, biography, and two centuries of social history.

They have never been treated as the cultural sites they are.

Monuments in silence: the funerary architecture of brazilian cities

Brazilian cemeteries were founded under the same Napoleonic regulatory framework that shaped the Italian and French monumental cemeteries examined in the preceding chapters. The great nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cemeteries of Brazil's major cities, the Consolação in São Paulo (founded 1858), the São João Batista in Rio de Janeiro (1852), the Saudade in Campinas, the Bonfim in Belo Horizonte, the Soledade in Recife, among dozens of others, were conceived as architectural statements: monumental spaces designed to confer civic dignity on the management of death and to reflect the cultural ambitions of a society in the process of modernization (Rodrigues, 1997; Etlin, 1984). Their designers drew directly on the European models they admired: the enclosed cemetery with its perimeter arcades, its axial avenues, its neoclassical gateways, its open fields for common burial. The sculptural programs of their mausoleums were produced by artists trained in the great European academies, many of them Italian immigrants who brought with them the technical virtuosity and stylistic vocabulary of the verismo and academic realism traditions that had made the Staglieno collection internationally famous.

The result, across multiple Brazilian cities, is an accumulation of funerary sculpture and mausoleum architecture whose artistic significance has been recognized in the scholarly literature but has not permeated public cultural consciousness in the way that equivalent European collections have (Rodrigues, 1997). What these spaces lack is not the substance of heritage but the cultural framework and institutional infrastructure that would make that heritage legible as such to a wider public. The task, as this thesis argues throughout, is not to create a heritage that does not exist, it is to make visible one that already does, and to build the institutional apparatus that would allow that visibility to become sustained, programmatic, and financially self-supporting.

Consolação: a case study in unrealized heritage potential

The Cemitério da Consolação in São Paulo is the most extensively documented Brazilian cemetery and serves as the primary case study in this thesis. Founded in 1858 to replace burials in churches in accordance with the hygienist reform of the period, it rapidly became a site of social self-affirmation for the paulistano elite, a space where families



Symbolist chapel-tomb, sculptural ensemble by
Materno Garibaldi in Consolação Cemetery.
Denize Bacoccina, 2025.



Matarazzo Family Mausoleum, Consolação Cemetery, built in 1925 by sculptor Luigi Brizzolara.
Fabio Augusto Pedrosa, 2020.

competing for prestige in the fast-growing commercial capital of southern Brazil expressed their status and aspirations in the most durable medium available: marble and bronze.

The cemetery's architectural character reflects the eclecticism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with mausolea ranging from the severe neoclassicism of the earliest structures to the Italianate exuberance of the immigrant dynasties' commissions and the rationalist monumentality of the 1930s. Its sculptural collection is, by any measure of quality and historical significance, extraordinary. Approximately three hundred sculptures by nationally and internationally significant artists are distributed across the space, a density comparable to that of major European art museums but encountered in the very different experiential register of a funerary landscape, where the works are embedded in the biographical narratives of the individuals who commissioned them and the families who maintained them (Verde et al., 2020; Miranda & Soares, 2021).

The Matarazzo Family Mausoleum, built in 1925 by the Genoese sculptor Luigi Brizzolara and considered the lar-

gest tomb in South America, is the most architecturally spectacular single monument in the collection: fifteen meters high, occupying approximately 150 square meters, built in Genoese marble and bronze brought directly from Italy. Artists represented in the collection include Victor Brecheret, perhaps the most significant Brazilian sculptor of the modernist period, Galileo Emendabili, Nicola Rollo, and Ramos de Azevedo, among many others. The range of styles, periods, and commissions represented gives the collection a historical breadth that any art museum would envy.

The cemetery also holds, in its grounds, the biographical traces of figures whose names are already meaningful to every educated Brazilian. Tarsila do Amaral, whose 1928 painting Abaporu is perhaps the most important single work in the history of Brazilian modernism. Mário de Andrade, the intellectual architect of Brazilian modernism. Oswald de Andrade, author of the Manifesto Antropófago. Monteiro Lobato, the most beloved children's author in Brazilian literary history. The Marquise of Santos, whose political influence shaped the early Empire. These are not obscure historical figures requiring scholarly annotation to be meaningful, they are cultural icons whose presence in the

Consolação constitutes, for any Brazilian visitor, the same kind of biographical pilgrimage that Jim Morrison's grave provides for visitors to Père Lachaise or Karl Marx's grave for visitors to Highgate.

Unlike most Brazilian cemeteries, the Consolação has made genuine advances toward heritage tourism programming. Daytime guided tours and nighttime visits by candlelight have been offered; QR codes have been installed on selected tombs, allowing self-guided visits with detailed biographical and art-historical information; an application developed by PUC-SP provides additional interpretive content accessible via smartphone (Verde et al., 2020). These initiatives confirm both the feasibility and the public appetite for cemetery tourism in the Brazilian context. Their limitation is scale and consistency, they reach a minority of visitors and operate without the institutional depth and resource base that equivalent European programs have developed over decades.

The social mirror: reading brazilian history in the cemetery

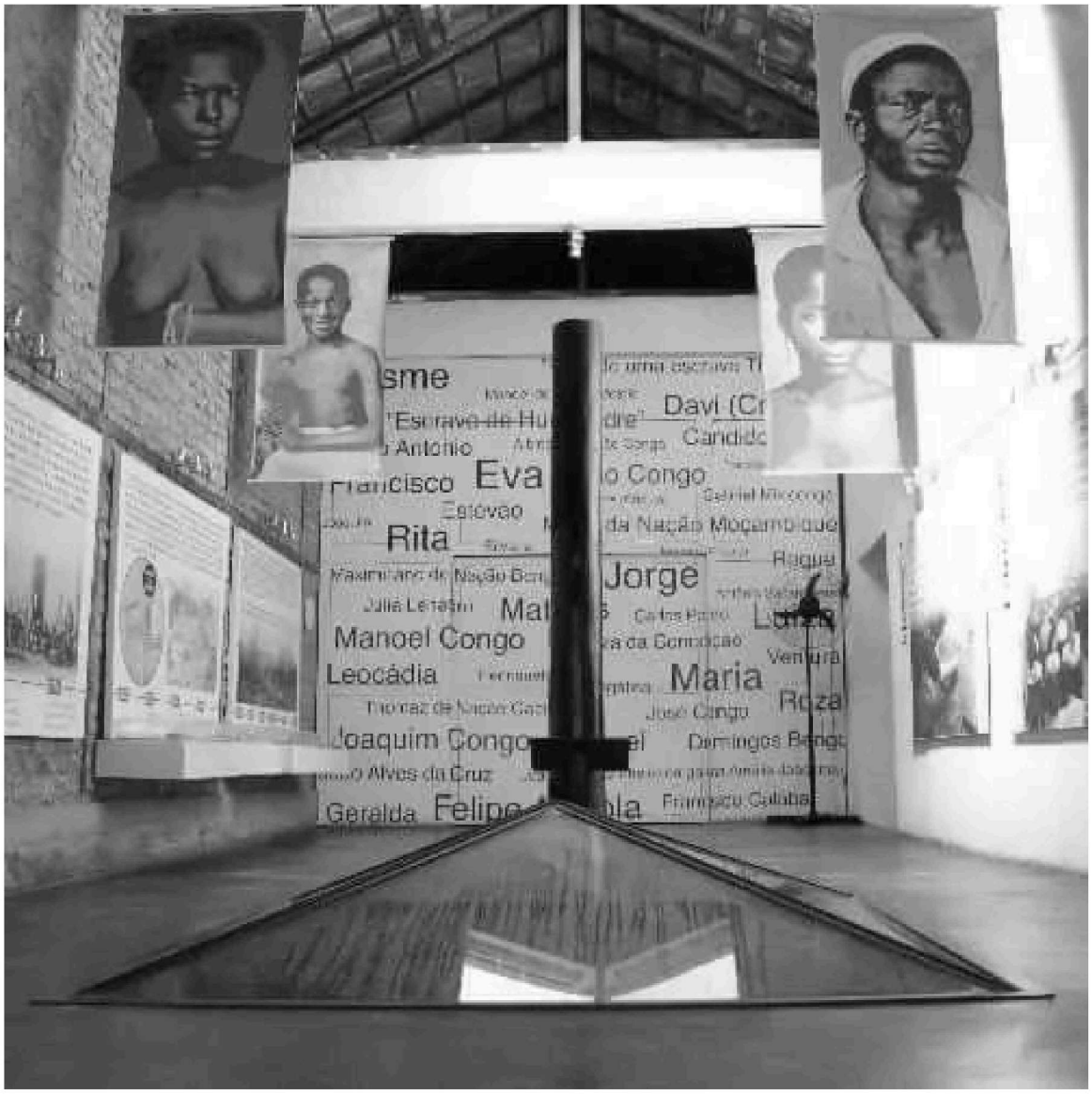
One of the most powerful arguments for heritage tourism in Brazilian cemeteries is not aesthetic but historical and civic, these spaces offer a reading of Brazilian social history that is simultaneously more honest, more concrete, and more emotionally present than any conventional museum exhibition. The spatial grammar of the monumental cemetery, who occupies the perimeter arcades, who is buried in the open fields, who commands a mausoleum of ten meters and who a simple inscribed stone, is the grammar of Brazilian inequality, rendered permanent in marble and legible to any visitor willing to read it (Rodrigues, 1997; Veras, 2021; Biasotto & Mansano, 2022).

The mausoleums of the coffee and commercial elite narrate the story of the economic forces that made São Paulo, the fortunes built on the cultivation, processing, and export of coffee; the reinvestment of those fortunes in industry, real estate, and banking; the cultural ambitions of a class that wanted to be recognized as the equal of the great bourgeoisies of Europe. The immigrant mausolea narrates the mass migration that transformed the demographic and

cultural character of São Paulo between 1880 and 1930, when the city's population multiplied tenfold in a single generation.

The gradation from the monumental mausolea of the wealthy to the anonymous common graves of the poor is not an incidental feature of the spatial organization, it is its central fact. The contrast between the cultural ambitions of the elite and the conditions of the workers who built their factories and cultivated their plantations is encoded in the very geometry of the space.

This dimension of the heritage argument is also one of its most democratically compelling. Cemetery tourism that honestly narrates the full social spectrum of histories present in the space, the elite mausolea and the common graves, the immigrant dynasties and the workers who served them, the canonical cultural figures and the anonymous majority buried alongside them, makes these spaces relevant not only to the educated cultural tourist but to any citizen with an interest in understanding how the city they live in came to be as it is.



Memorial installation at the Cemitério dos Pretos Novos, with portraits and names of enslaved Africans. Andrea Lessa, 2022.

Afro-Brazilian funerary heritage: resistance made architecture

The official monumental cemeteries of nineteenth-century Brazil excluded much of the population. Enslaved Africans and free Black communities were systematically barred from the Catholic funerary infrastructure, which required Christian baptism and fees inaccessible to the poorest (Reis, 1991). The spaces designated for their dead were not monuments, they were sites of disposal, reflecting the same logic of dehumanization that governed every other dimension of enslaved life.

The Cemetery of the New Blacks, Cemitério dos Pretos Novos, in the Gamboa neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro is the most unsettling evidence of this reality. Operating between 1774 and 1830, the site served as a repository for the bodies of enslaved Africans who did not survive the Atlantic crossing or died shortly after disembarking, before they could even be sold at the nearby Valongo Market. There were no individual graves, no markers, no monuments. The bodies were deposited in collective pits and covered over, as if the dead had never existed (Montoza, 2018; Lima, 2018).

The site was subsequently buried by urban development and remained invisible for over a century and a half, until its accidental rediscovery in 1996 during the renovation of a private residence. What came to the surface was not only bone, it was an erased history, a deliberate forgetting that the city had literally built over. The Cemitério dos Pretos Novos is, in this sense, the most radical expression of what it means for a funerary space to be denied: not simply neglected, but buried, covered, and replaced by the infrastructure of the living city as if the dead beneath it had no claim on memory.

Since its rediscovery, the site has become one of the most politically and emotionally charged heritage spaces in Brazil. For Afro-Brazilian communities, it is not an archaeological site in the neutral sense, it is a territory of ancestral presence, a wound in the urban fabric, and a point of spiritual obligation. Its symbolic inauguration in 2012 included a ritual of cleansing and purification led by Candomblé priestesses, an act that made visible what institutional heritage discourse often obscures: that for these communities, the management of the dead is inseparable from the spiritual and political life of the living.



Excavations after the rediscovery of the
Cemitério dos Pretos Novos
Instituto dos Pretos Novos, 1996.



Archaeological and community work at the
Cemitério dos Pretos Novos.
Andrea Lessa, 2022.

The heritage tourism argument for the Cemitério dos Pretos Novos is not about spectacle. It is about making a history visible that the city spent two centuries concealing. A visitor who stands on that site confronts, in the most direct and physical way possible, the scale of what was lost, not only in lives, but in names, in stories, in the right to be mourned. No museum exhibition can replicate that confrontation. And no Brazilian necrotourism agenda that claims to narrate the full history of the country's funerary culture can afford to leave it out.

Indigenous funerary heritage: territory, memory, and the argument for visibility

For Brazil's Indigenous peoples, the relationship between death and the land is inseparable in a way that makes their funerary heritage unlike any other in the country. The dead are not placed in bounded cemeteries set apart from everyday life; they are returned to the territory itself, buried within the village, in specific clearings, beside rivers, in places charged with ancestral meaning. The land, in this understanding, is not a container for the dead but a living archive of presence: animated by those who came before, maintained through ritual, and meaningful only as long as the community retains physical access to it (Krenak, 2019; Viveiros de Castro, 2015; Carneiro da Cunha, 1978). This is a conception of funerary heritage that has no precise equivalent in European or urban Brazilian tradition, and that is, for that reason, one of the most distinctive and original dimensions of the Brazilian heritage landscape.

The heritage tourism argument for Indigenous funerary culture in Brazil is not about opening specific burial sites to visitors, it is about the broader cultural visibility that a mature cemetery tourism agenda can provide. A Brazilian necrotourism that takes seriously the plurality of its funera-

ry traditions must communicate, in its interpretive programs, that the relationship between the dead and the land has never been the same for all Brazilians. For a Guaraní community in Mato Grosso do Sul, or for an Amazonian people whose ancestors rest in the terra preta sites along the river, the management of death is also the management of territorial sovereignty and cultural continuity. This is not a footnote to the heritage narrative, it is one of its most humanly significant chapters, and one that no European cemetery tourism program can offer, because no European model has this dimension of living territorial inheritance encoded in its funerary culture.

Several Brazilian Indigenous communities have already developed exactly this kind of program, on their own terms and under their own governance. The role of a broader Brazilian funerary heritage agenda is to acknowledge and amplify these initiatives, not to subsume them into a standardized institutional framework. In doing so, it transforms what might otherwise be narrated as a gap in the Brazilian heritage offer, the absence of the bounded, catalogued, accessioned cemetery, into one of its most compelling arguments: that here, in this country, the dead are not only in the cemeteries. They are in the land itself.

The problem of institutional neglect - and why tourism helps

The case for Brazilian cemetery heritage tourism is strengthened, paradoxically, by the evidence of what happens in the absence of it. Brazilian public cemeteries, particularly those serving lower-income communities, but also many of the historic monuments discussed above, face chronic underfunding, deteriorating physical infrastructure, and institutional neglect that threaten the loss of irreplaceable heritage (Veras, 2021; Biasotto & Mansano, 2022).

Physical infrastructure deteriorates when it is institutionally invisible. Heritage that no one visits, no one photographs, no one discusses, and no one advocates for is heritage that municipal budgets feel no civic pressure to maintain. The direct causal chain is evident; cultural invisibility produces institutional neglect; institutional neglect produces physical deterioration; physical deterioration produces the definitive loss of irreplaceable cultural assets.

The inverse chain is equally evident in the European examples. Staglieno receives funding for conservation because it receives visitors who generate institutional atten-



General view of the former Nossa Senhora do Carmo Cemetery, showing abandonment and deterioration. Glaucia Garcia, 2011.

tion and, through organized advocacy groups and tourist revenue, financial resources. Highgate Cemetery, perhaps the most instructive example, was rescued from abandonment entirely by organized civic volunteers who made it a heritage destination and thereby generated the resources and political will necessary for its physical preservation (Brooks, 1989; Worpole, 2003).

The argument that cultural visitation threatens the sanctity or integrity of funerary spaces is therefore not only empirically unsupported by the survey data in chapter 7, it is historically inverted. In almost every case where a monumental cemetery has been successfully preserved over the long term, it is because cultural visitation generated the interest, the resources, and the civic advocacy that physical conservation requires. In almost every case where a comparable cemetery has been lost or severely degraded, it is because the absence of cultural programming left it institutionally invisible and therefore institutionally undefended.



Grave overtaken by weeds at the former Nossa Senhora do Carmo Cemetery.
Glaucia Garcia, 2011.

Motivations, profiles, practices

Cemetery visitors are not only mourners.

They come for art, for history, for famous names.

The theoretical framework: dark tourism

The scholarly study of cemetery visitation as a cultural practice has been significantly advanced by the development of "dark tourism" as a recognized field of heritage studies. The term, introduced by Foley and Lennon in the mid-1990s and elaborated systematically by Philip Stone (2006) and his collaborators, denotes tourism associated with places and experiences connected to death, tragedy, suffering, and the macabre. Within this broad category, cemetery tourism, or necrotourism, a term with cleaner etymological roots in Seaton's (1996) earlier concept of thanatourism, represents one of the oldest and most widespread forms, predating the Romantic rehabilitation of the funerary landscape by centuries.

Stone (2006) proposes a "dark tourism spectrum" ranging from the very darkest, sites of mass atrocity, genocide, and recent tragedy, to the relatively lightest, sites where death is historical, aestheticized, or narrativized in ways that allow the visitor to engage with mortality at a safe aesthetic distance. Cemetery tourism falls toward the lighter end of this spectrum, particularly in the case of the great nineteenth-century monumental cemeteries, where the individual deaths commemorated are generally historical,

the emotional register is contemplative rather than traumatic, and the primary experience is one of architectural and biographical richness rather than direct encounter with suffering (Stone, 2006; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). This positioning is significant for the Brazilian agenda: it means that the cultural normalization required for cemetery tourism is not the radical kind needed for, say, tourist programming at a site of recent political violence, but the relatively modest kind that involves simply treating the cemetery as what it demonstrably is, an architecturally significant, historically rich, publicly important space worthy of the same kind of cultural attention that is routinely given to historic churches, art galleries, and public monuments.

Seaton (1996) distinguished between two primary orientations within thanatourism: the contemplative, in which the encounter with mortality produces aesthetic pleasure and philosophical reflection, and the commemorative, in which the visitor seeks a personal or cultural connection to specific individuals commemorated at the site. Both orientations are well documented in the literature on cemetery tourism, and both are directly relevant to the Brazilian case. The contemplative orientati-

on corresponds to the visitor drawn by the architectural and sculptural quality of the space, the category that accounts, in the survey data presented in chapter 7, for 20% of stated motivations. Together, these non-affective motivations substantially outnumber pure grief-driven visitation even in a context with no institutional cultural programming, and they suggest a public that is already, without encouragement, approaching Brazilian cemeteries in the register that heritage programming would seek to cultivate.

The many reasons to visit: a portrait of the cemetery visitor

The motivations that draw people to funerary spaces are multiple, overlapping, and often contradictory. No single motivation captures the full range of the cemetery visitor population, and any heritage program premised on a narrow understanding of why people visit will necessarily leave the majority of its potential public underserved. The literature on cemetery visitation (Rugg, 2000; Worpole, 2003; Seaton, 1996; Francis, Kellaher & Neophytou, 2005) identifies at least six distinct motivational clusters, each with its own implications for heritage programming.



Visitors honor loved ones with
flowers on All Souls' Day.
Michel Willian, 2021.

The first and most universal is the commemorative and affective motivation: the visit to the grave of a specific deceased family member, friend, or loved one. This form of visitation predates the concept of tourism by centuries; it corresponds to the ritual obligation of maintaining a living relationship with the dead through periodic presence at the site of burial. In the context of All Saints' Day and Finados, this motivation assumes a collective dimension, the annual mass pilgrimage to the cemetery is a cultural event that simultaneously expresses individual grief and collective social solidarity, transforming the space of death into a temporary festival of communal memory (Ariès, 1977; Rodrigues, 1997). In Brazil, this motivation accounts for approximately 83% of cemetery visits by timing, nearly everyone visits on Finados or on personal commemorative dates, and for roughly 40% of stated motivations by content.

The second motivation is historical and genealogical research. The cemetery as archive, a repository of names, dates, family relationships, professional identities, and social affiliations inscribed on tombstones and mausoleums, has generated a growing community of researchers, both amateur and academic, who approach the funerary space as

a primary source for social and demographic history (Rugg, 2000; Seaton, 1996). The expansion of genealogical research as a popular practice, accelerated by digital platforms that allow users to trace family histories across generations, has produced entirely new flows of cemetery visitors who seek not the grave of a known relative but the documentary traces of distant ancestors or historical community members. This motivation is particularly strong in communities whose members have deep historical connections to specific urban cemeteries, immigrant communities, for example, whose founding families are buried in the same spaces that their descendants continue to inhabit.

The third motivation is aesthetic and artistic appreciation. The great monumental cemeteries of the nineteenth century were conceived from their inception as spaces of architectural and sculptural ambition, open-air galleries in which the funerary arts of a society were displayed at their most elaborate. Visitors drawn by this motivation approach the cemetery primarily as a museum, attentive to the iconographic programs of the monuments, the biographical narratives of the epitaphs, and the spatial choreography of the funerary landscape. This is the motivation most readily



Jim Morrison's grave at Père Lachaise Cemetery, covered in flowers and tributes. Author/date not given.

cultivated by guided tour programs, audio guides, and interpretive signage, because it has the most immediate institutional counterpart in the heritage and museum sectors.

The fourth motivation is celebrity pilgrimage: the visit to the grave of a famous person whose life and work has personally mattered to the visitor. This motivation is one of the most culturally visible and commercially significant forms of cemetery visitation, and it depends entirely on the existence of interpretive infrastructure, signage, maps, guides — that makes famous interments discoverable. In its absence, even a cemetery that holds dozens of nationally significant figures will not activate this motivation in its visitors, because most visitors will not know who is buried there or where to find them. The presence of Tarsila do Amaral, Mário de Andrade, and Monteiro Lobato in the Consolação constitutes a cultural asset of the first order for celebrity pilgrimage tourism, but only if that asset is communicated to potential visitors through institutional channels.

The fifth motivation is educational. Cemetery visits have been incorporated into formal heritage interpretation pro-

grams across Europe and, increasingly, in Latin America, as pedagogical experiences in which the funerary space is approached as a primary document of social history, architectural evolution, and cultural identity (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). School groups, university courses in architecture, history, and urban studies, and organized cultural tours increasingly use cemeteries as outdoor classrooms. The pedagogical power of the cemetery as a teaching environment derives from its capacity to make historical abstraction concrete and spatial: the social hierarchies of the nineteenth century are not described in the cemetery but physically present in it, legible in three dimensions, touchable, walkable, and infinitely more viscerally convincing than any textbook illustration.

The sixth motivation is the search for contemplation, wellbeing, and psychological refuge. A growing body of research has documented the role of cemeteries as spaces of quiet, greenery, and aesthetic meaningfulness in dense urban environments (Worpole, 2003; Francis, Kellaher & Neophytou, 2005). Visitors motivated in this way approach the cemetery primarily as a park. This motivation is particularly relevant in the Brazilian urban context, where the great historic cemeteries occupy significant areas of green space in zones where such space is extremely scarce.



Guided tour at Père Lachaise Cemetery.
City Wonders Ltd, 2024.

How visitors experience the cemetery

The sociologist John Urry (1990) introduced the concept of the "tourist gaze" to describe the culturally conditioned modes of attention that visitors bring to heritage environments, the set of expectations, dispositions, and interpretive frameworks that determine what they see, how they evaluate it, and what meanings they attach to it. The tourist gaze is not a natural or universal capacity; it is a learned cultural practice, shaped by prior exposure to representations of heritage, by educational background, by the specific framing provided by tour guides and interpretive materials, and by the social context of the visit. Heritage programs, in this understanding, are not simply providing information, they are cultivating specific modes of attention and providing the cultural vocabulary through which visitors can articulate what they are experiencing.

The cemetery gaze, as it has been formed through two centuries of Romantic aesthetics, guidebook culture, and heritage programming, involves several characteristic modes of attention. There is the biographical mode, in which the visitor reads each tomb as a condensed narrative of a human life, piecing together from name, dates, inscription, and sculptural iconography the outline of an in-

dividual existence. There is the art-historical mode, in which the formal qualities of the funerary sculpture and architecture are evaluated against the standards and conventions of the period and style in which they were produced. There is the historical mode, in which the spatial organization of the cemetery, and the relative elaboration of its monuments, is read as evidence of the social structure of the period. And there is the contemplative mode, in which the visitor simply inhabits the space, registers its particular quality of stillness, notices the vegetation, attends to the quality of light, and allows the proximity of the dead to produce whatever complex of feelings and reflections it produces.

All of these modes are simultaneously available to any visitor who enters a well-interpreted monumental cemetery. Heritage programs that provide good biographical and art-historical information activate the biographical and art-historical modes; spatial orientation tools (maps, signage) activate the historical mode by making the social geography of the space navigable; the physical qualities of the space itself, its shade, its silence, its scale, activate the contemplative mode without requiring any institutional mediation at all. The design challenge for heritage program-

ming is not to produce any of these modes from scratch but to provide the scaffolding that allows visitors to move between them fluidly, according to their own interests and time.

The performative dimension of cemetery visitation is also important and often overlooked. Visitors to cemeteries do not merely observe, they actively perform: they photograph monuments, leave flowers or mementos at famous graves, trace inscriptions with their fingers, sit in contemplation on benches, sketch or paint, walk in silence or in conversation, make biographical research notes. These practices are not incidental to the tourist experience but constitutive of it; they are how visitors produce the cemetery as a meaningful cultural space and position themselves within it as subjects of historical consciousness, aesthetic sensibility, and living memory (Urry, 1990; Stone, 2006). Heritage programs that make room for this variety of practices, rather than scripting the visit too narrowly as a linear guided tour, will find a more diverse and more engaged public.

Learning from Europe

European cemeteries attract millions of visitors a year.

That did not happen by chance: it happened by decision.

Père Lachaise (Paris): the making of the celebrity cemetery

Père Lachaise Cemetery, inaugurated in 1804 on the eastern hills of Paris, occupies a foundational position in both the history of modern funerary architecture and the history of cemetery tourism. Designed by Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart at the request of the Prefect of the Seine, Nicolas Frochot, the cemetery was conceived from its inception as both a hygienic infrastructure and a cultural monument, a space in which Paris would give permanent and aesthetically worthy form to the management of its dead (Etlin, 1984; Ragon, 1983).

The early commercial history of the cemetery illustrates a crucial lesson for any contemporary heritage program: cultural prestige must be actively constructed, not simply declared. In its first years, Père Lachaise attracted few interments; Parisians were reluctant to bury their dead at such a distance from the city center, and the new institution lacked the established associations and historical resonance that made the traditional churchyards emotionally compelling. The turning point came in 1817, when the city authorities made a deliberate institutional decision: they arranged the transfer to the new cemetery of the presumed

remains of Molière, La Fontaine, Héloïse, and Abélard, literary and philosophical figures whose names were instantly recognized by the educated Parisian public (Ragon, 1983). The strategy was effective almost immediately. Interments increased dramatically; Père Lachaise was established as the most prestigious burial ground in France; and the pattern of celebrity association that the 1817 transfers had inaugurated continued to accumulate over the following decades, as the graves of Rossini, Chopin, Balzac, Delacroix, and Oscar Wilde were added to the cultural topography of the site.

Today, Père Lachaise extends over 44 hectares in the 20th arrondissement and contains approximately 70,000 burial plots. It receives an estimated 3.5 million visitors annually, placing it among the most visited cultural destinations in France, a figure that should be read not as a testimony to French morbidity but as evidence of what happens when institutional investment in a funerary space is sustained over two centuries. The cemetery is managed by the City of Paris, which maintains the physical infrastructure, employs conservation specialists and gardeners, and regulates the activities of commercial tour operators. Guided tours, offered in multiple languages by both municipal and private



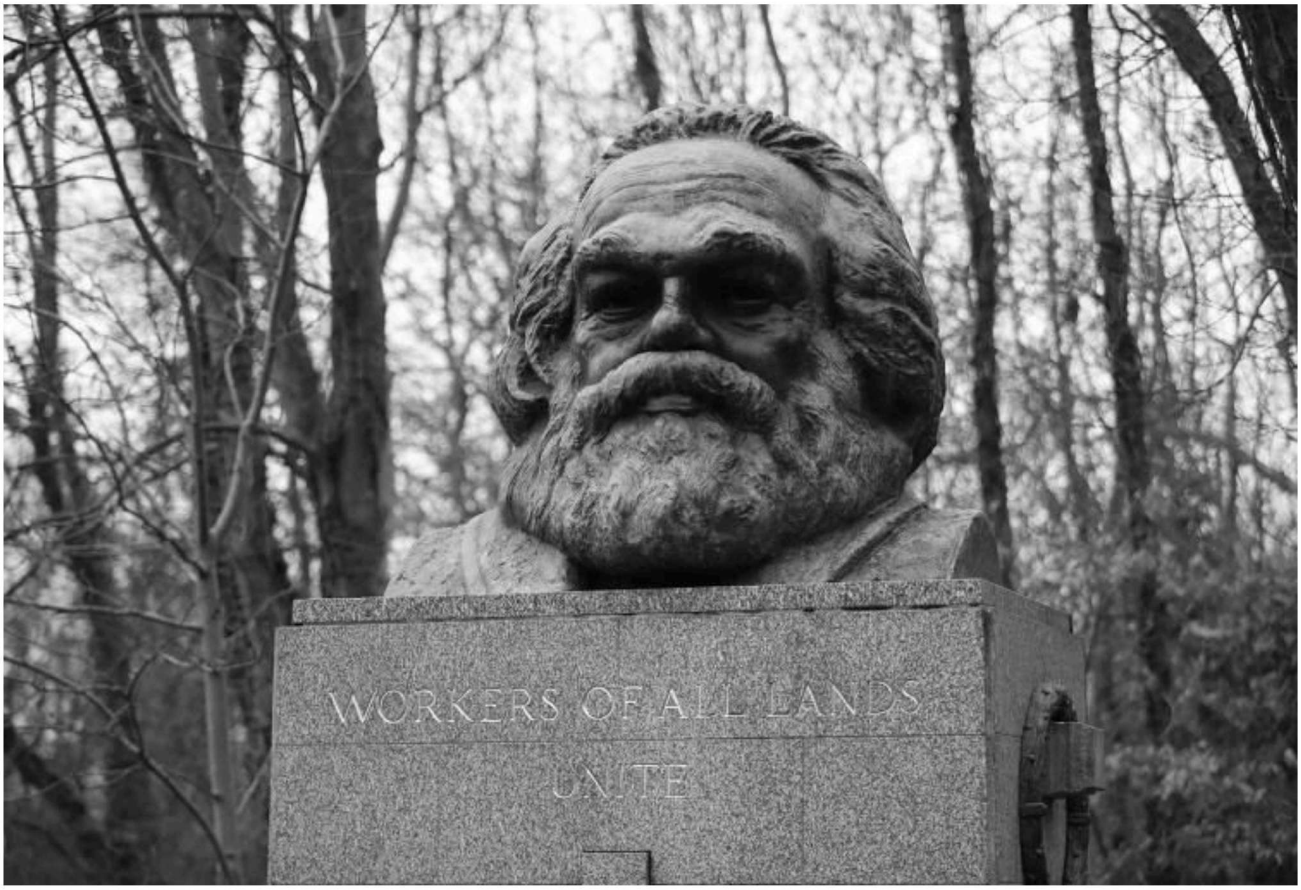
Frédéric Chopin's grave at Père Lachaise,
covered in flowers left by admirers.
Andrew Horne, 2006.

providers, follow thematic itineraries organized around the graves of celebrities, the history of funerary sculpture, or the political history of the site, including the Mur des Fédérés, where 147 Communards were executed and buried in 1871 (Rugg, 2000). Cultural events, concerts, theatrical performances, photography exhibitions — are held within the cemetery, always managed in careful tension with the institution's primary funerary function and with the sensitivities of the families who continue to use the space for mourning.

The management of this dual function, funerary and cultural, mourning and tourism, private grief and public experience, is Père Lachaise's most instructive institutional achievement. It demonstrates, at very large scale and over a long period, that these uses are not only compatible but mutually reinforcing: the cultural programs sustain the institution's financial capacity, the ongoing funerary use preserves the cemetery's living character and prevents it from becoming a mere museum, and the combination of the two creates the particular quality of atmosphere, simultaneously intimate and monumental, personal and historical, quiet and publicly inhabited, that makes the cemetery an experience unlike any other cultural destination.



Tomb of Fernand Arbelot at Père
Lachaise Cemetery, Paris.
Jonk Photograph, 2016.



Karl Marx memorial at Highgate Cemetery, London
Ann Wuyts, 2024.

Highgate (London): civic will as heritage strategy

Highgate Cemetery in North London, opened in 1839 as one of the "Magnificent Seven" garden cemeteries established around the Victorian metropolis, offers a model that is in many ways more directly instructive for the Brazilian context than the grand municipal administration of Père Lachaise. Where Père Lachaise succeeded through the sustained investment of a wealthy and powerful municipal government, Highgate succeeded through the organized civic will of private citizens operating with minimal resources and against considerable institutional indifference.

Designed by Stephen Geary for the London Cemetery Company as a commercial enterprise aimed at the bourgeois market for dignified burial, Highgate was from its inception a space of carefully calculated aesthetic effect. Its western section, laid out in the 1830s and 1840s, contains a remarkable sequence of architectural set-pieces: the Egyptian Avenue, a tunnel of matched neoclassical sarcophagi leading to an underground chamber; the Circle of Lebanon, a ring of catacombs surrounding a great cedar

of Lebanon that predates the cemetery itself; and the Terrace Catacombs, a long series of vaulted brick chambers arranged as a hillside gallery for the tombs of the wealthy. Together, these structures constitute one of the finest examples of Victorian funerary architecture in existence. The eastern section, opened in 1854, is architecturally more modest but historically significant: it contains the grave of Karl Marx, which has become one of the most visited individual graves in Europe, attracting pilgrims, scholars, students, and tourists from around the world.

The cemetery's transformation into a heritage site was not, however, the product of institutional planning. When commercial management ended in the 1970s and the cemetery was abandoned without resources for maintenance, vegetation quickly overtook the western section. Trees grew through the roofs of the catacombs; ivy engulfed the monuments; the paths became impassable. This apparent disaster turned, paradoxically, into an asset: the gothic density of the overgrown western cemetery, with its atmosphere of romantic decay and hidden grandeur, proved extraordinarily attractive to photographers, filmmakers, and literary tourists. Victor Hugo had described it as the most magnificent monument in London;

now, in its neglect, it became something even more visually compelling.

The Friends of Highgate Cemetery, established in 1975, rescued the site not through appeal to public institutions but through organized voluntary labor, clearing paths, stabilizing structures, raising funds from visitors, combined with a guided tour program that gave the public access to the western section under controlled conditions (Brooks, 1989; Worpole, 2003). This community-led model, in which heritage tourism is managed not by a municipal authority or a commercial operator but by an association of engaged citizens who care about the place, has become widely influential as a template for cemetery heritage management in contexts where institutional resources are limited but civic interest is strong. Its relevance to Brazil is direct: it suggests that a Brazilian cemetery heritage program does not need to wait for federal heritage policy or municipal budget allocations to begin. It can begin with organized civil society, with universities, neighborhood associations, community groups, and interested individuals who decide that their cemetery is worth visiting and worth protecting, and who build the interpretive infrastructure that converts that conviction into a sustained public practice.

Staglieno (Genoa): funarary sculpure as open-air museum

The Cimitero Monumentale di Staglieno, inaugurated in 1851 in the hills above Genoa, is the most architecturally ambitious and internationally celebrated Italian monumental cemetery, and the one whose management model most directly anticipated the "open-air museum" paradigm that has become the dominant framing for cemetery heritage tourism (Ragon, 1983; Bentivogli, 2001). Designed by Carlo Barabino and his successor Giovanni Battista Resasco, the cemetery extends over more than one square kilometre of terraced hillside, a landscape of extraordinary spatial complexity organized around a monumental central pantheon, a network of colonnaded galleries, and open fields descending toward the valley below.

The sculptural collection that has accumulated in Staglieno over more than 150 years is, by any measure of quality and historical significance, exceptional. Thousands of funerary monuments spanning from neoclassicism through verismo, symbolism, Art Nouveau, and into the twentieth century are distributed across the terraces, a chronologically and stylistically comprehensive survey of Italian funerary sculpture that includes works by artists of major national



The Statue of Faith by Santo Varni at the
Monumental Cemetery of Staglieno, Genoa, Italy.
Sabrina C, 2015.

reputation alongside the products of Genoa's long-established tradition of marble craftsmanship. The cemetery's most celebrated individual monument, the life-size marble statue of Caterina Campodonico (La venditrice di noccioline, the peanut vendor), commissioned by the subject herself in 1882 as a portrait of her daily working life, has become an iconic image of funerary realism ,reproduced in countless art historical publications and instantly recognizable to anyone with an interest in nineteenth-century sculpture (Bentivogli, 2001).

Staglieno's international cultural reputation was established early. Oscar Wilde visited in 1877 and described the cemetery as beyond all comparison the most beautiful thing in Genoa. Mark Twain visited. Friedrich Nietzsche made a special journey from Sorrento. These visits, and the accounts they generated, established Staglieno as a destination on the cultural tourist's itinerary of Italy, a positioning it has maintained and elaborated through its annual Staglieno Days initiative, which offers twelve thematic guided itineraries through the sculptural landscape, and through ongoing conservation programs for the most significant monuments. The lesson for Brazil is specific: Staglieno demonstrates that a cemetery whose primary cul-

tural asset is not the fame of its occupants but the quality of its funerary art can nonetheless sustain a substantial and loyal international visitor public. The argument for visiting is architectural and sculptural rather than biographical, which means it does not depend on the presence of universally known celebrities but on the existence of interpretive infrastructure that makes aesthetic quality legible and accessible.



Arcaded gallery at the Monumental Cemetery of Turin.
Majed Veysel, 2025.

The Cimiterio Monumentale di Torino: direct evidence

The Monumentale di Torino was inaugurated in 1828 and expanded progressively through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, following the enclosed Italian typology. Its perimeter galleries contain an extensive collection of funerary sculpture by Piedmontese and Italian artists spanning from neoclassicism to the early twentieth century. The cemetery is managed by the City of Turin and is open to the public throughout the year, with unrestricted access during regular hours and organized guided tours available through the municipal tourist authority and partner agencies. Its TripAdvisor profile accumulates independent visitor reviews in multiple languages, confirming the reach of its spontaneous cultural reputation.

The survey conducted for this research, distributed through the cemetery's administration and through partner tourism agencies, reached visitors with diverse relationships to the space, mourners and family members, cultural tourists, professionals and researchers, and casual visitors, and captured a set of findings whose implications extend well beyond the Torino case to inform the broader Brazilian heritage tourism argument developed in the following chapter.

Institutional networks: sustaining heritage over time

The institutional ecosystem that sustains European cemetery heritage over time is not simply the sum of individual site management programs. It is a coordinated network of supranational organizations, national civic bodies, digital platforms, and programmatic frameworks that together create the social legitimacy and institutional momentum without which individual site programs would struggle to survive changes in political will, economic cycles, or management personnel.

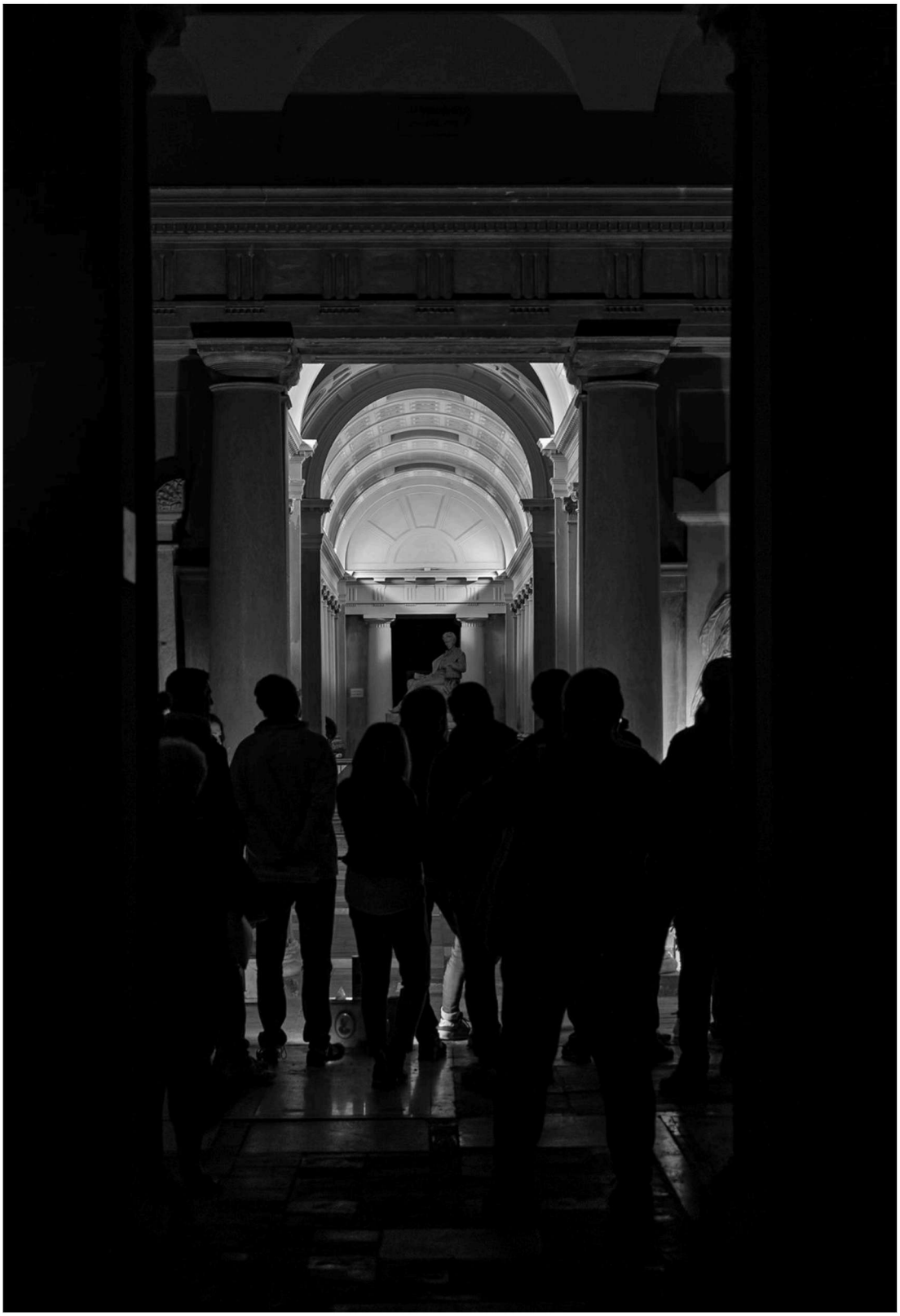
The Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe (ASCE), founded in 2001, manages the European Cemeteries Route as a certified Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, a designation that places funerary heritage within the same institutional framework as the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage route, the Via Francigena, and other major European heritage itineraries. ASCE currently counts 55 member institutions in 22 countries and organizes the annual Week of Discovering European Cemeteries (WDEC), which invites member institutions across the continent to develop public programming around a shared heritage theme. The FAI (Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano) extends this institutional

landscape into the domain of mass civic participation through its biennial I Luoghi del Cuore census, which invites Italian citizens to nominate and vote for places they consider worthy of preservation and valorization. Multiple monumental cemeteries, including the Cimitero Monumentale di Torino and Staglieno, have appeared prominently in successive editions, demonstrating that funerary heritage is capable of mobilizing the same civic attachment as any other category of cultural monument (FAI, 2026).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), which maintains 1.7 million Commonwealth war graves at 23,000 locations globally, including numerous sites in Italy and on the former Western Front, has developed one of the most sophisticated digital heritage programs in the funerary tourism sector. Its Forevermore application offers tools for discovering personal stories, curated thematic tours, itineraries at landmark sites, and individual grave profiles, combining genealogical research functionality with cultural tourism itinerary planning in a single digital platform (CWGC, 2026). Its annual War Graves Week events combine guided tours with augmented reality experiences designed to engage new publics, particularly younger visi-

tors for whom the biographical connection to Commonwealth military losses may be less direct but the historical and aesthetic interest remains powerful.

The Certosa di Bologna, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, offers the most comprehensive model of year-round cultural programming in a monumental cemetery. Its open-air calendar of events runs from May to November and encompasses guided tours organized by art historians and archaeologists, theatrical performances staged within the funerary architecture, children's educational workshops, nocturnal visits, and specialized events on the history of funerary sculpture and symbolism. In Barcelona, the municipal cemetery management body has developed "Life Lessons: Cemeteries as Educational Heritage," a structured educational program explicitly designed to normalize death as a pedagogical subject and to position the cemetery as a living classroom for history, art, ecology, and civic formation (ASCE, 2026). The program connects cemetery visits to established curriculum objectives in history, civic education, and natural sciences, and is delivered by educators with the dual capacity for cultural enthusiasm and emotional sensitivity that the subject requires.



Visitors at a nighttime event at the Certosa di Bologna.
Michele Brusa, 2025.

What visitors say

The belief that these grounds are spaces of culture is already there.

Like the stones themselves, the visitors were waiting, they just needed the invitation.

Methodology

The empirical contribution of this research rests on two bodies of primary data collected specifically for this thesis and complementary to the theoretical and comparative arguments developed in the preceding chapters. The first body of data consists of responses to a structured survey distributed through the administration of the Cimitero Monumentale di Torino and, through partner tourism agencies, with casual and cultural visitors to the site. The survey was designed to capture behavioral patterns (when and how often respondents visit cemeteries), motivational data (what draws them into cemetery spaces), self-identification data (how respondents characterize their own primary role as cemetery visitors), attitudinal data (whether they consider the cemetery a cultural and historical space in addition to a funerary one), and professional data (for cemetery management professionals, whether they perceive cultural visitation as disruptive to the primary funerary function). The second body of data consists of qualitative testimonials published independently by international visitors on the turists platform.

Monumentale di Torino belongs to the same Italian enclosed cemetery typology, with its perimeter arcades, its

axial avenues, its neoclassical gateways, and its extensive collection of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century funerary sculpture, that directly inspired the design of the great Brazilian monumental cemeteries. The motivations, perceptions, and attitudes documented at Torino are therefore plausibly transferable, as hypotheses, to the Brazilian case. Torino cemetery already has an established cultural tourism program, it appears in travel guides and receives organized cultural visits alongside its regular funerary use, which means that the survey captures a visitor population that includes both mourners visiting for commemorative purposes and cultural tourists visiting for aesthetic or biographical reasons.

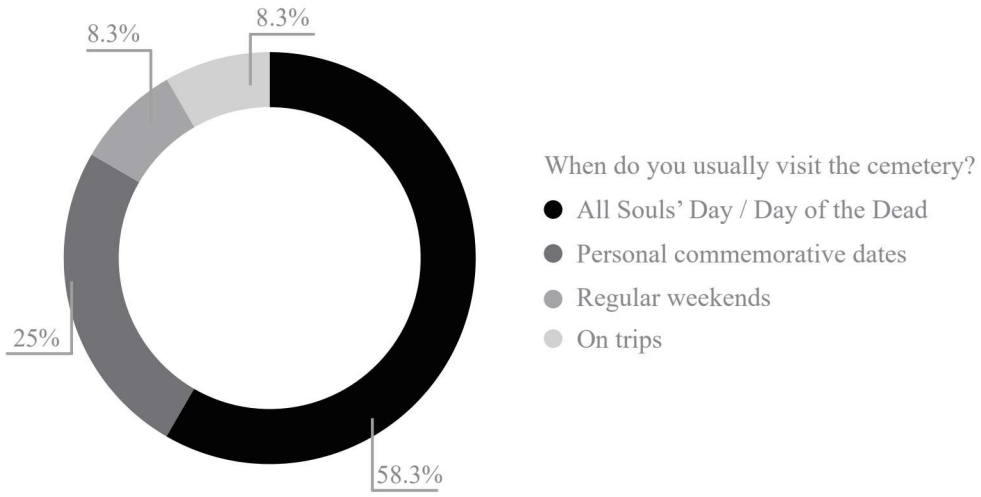
When do people visit? the ritual calendar and its limitations

The timing data establish a behavioral baseline that is, in isolation, potentially discouraging but, actually one of the most actionable findings of the entire research. Asked when they usually visit cemeteries, 58.3% of respondents identified All Souls' Day / Day of the Dead as their primary occasion, 25% cited personal commemorative dates such as death anniversaries or birthdays, 8.3% reported visiting on regular weekends, and 8.3% indicated that they visit while travelling. No respondent identified regular weekday visitation as a pattern.

This distribution confirms the structural dominance of the ritual calendar over any form of autonomous cultural engagement with cemetery spaces. If nearly six in ten visits occur on a single day of the year, the cemetery functions, for the overwhelming majority of this public, as an event rather than as a place, something one attends in fulfillment of a ritual obligation rather than something one inhabits, returns to, or relates to as part of an ongoing cultural practice. This is consistent with what Rodrigues (1997) describes as the historical concentration of Brazilian cemetery culture around the Finados holiday, and it corro-

borates the broader sociological literature on the institutionalization of grief within a narrow ritual window (Ariès, 1977; Walter, 1994).

But the concentration also needs to be read for its strategic implications. A concentration of 58.3% of visits on a single day means that, on that day, the cemetery receives a large and predictable audience whose presence is guaranteed by cultural obligation rather than institutional persuasion. This is, from the heritage programming perspective, an extraordinary asset. European cultural institutions invest significant resources in building audiences for cultural events; the Brazilian cemetery on Finados has that audience already assembled.



What draws visitors in: the motivational distribution

If the timing data describe when people visit, the motivational data describe why, and here the picture becomes considerably more complex and more promising than a simple narrative of grief-driven attendance would suggest. Asked what most catches their attention or motivates their entry into a cemetery, respondents distributed their answers across four categories: sentimental value and memory (40%), famous public figures buried there (30%), funerary art (20%), and silence, greenery, and peace (10%).

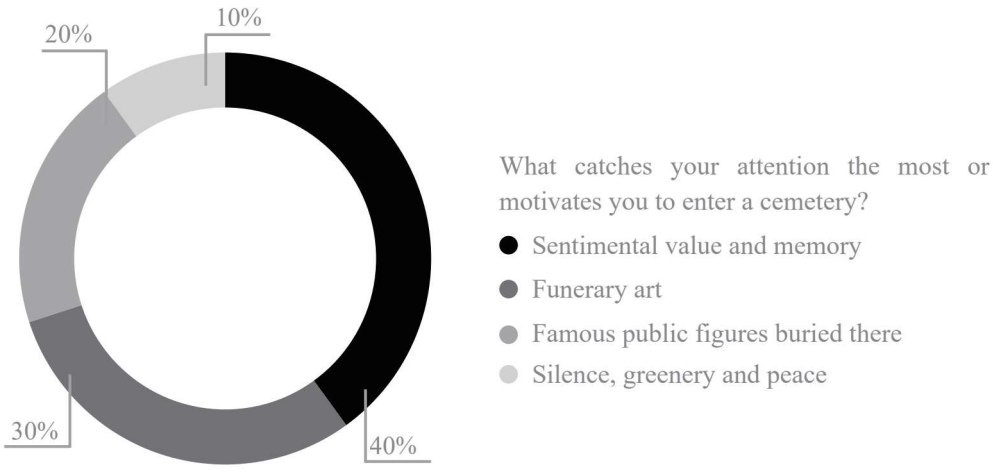
The affective motivation, sentimental value and memory, while still the largest single category, accounts for less than half of all responses. The remaining 60% is divided among motivations that are explicitly cultural, biographical-historical, and environmental in character. This distribution is directly relevant to the heritage program designer, because it suggests that the majority of actual cemetery visitors are already experiencing the space in registers that exceed pure grief, and that heritage programs designed to cultivate the cultural and aesthetic dimensions of the visit are not imposing an alien mode of engagement on a reluc-

tant public but amplifying and giving shape to modes of attention already present in the majority of those who enter.

The 30% weight given to famous public figures deserves particular attention, as it documents the celebrity-pilgrimage motivation at a substantial and surprising level. This motivation is, by definition, dependent on prior knowledge of who is buried in a specific cemetery, knowledge that, in most Brazilian cemeteries, is not systematically communicated to visitors. If 30% of respondents at a cemetery where interpretive infrastructure exists report this motivation, the implication for Brazilian cemeteries, where comparable figures are buried but rarely communicated, is that this motivation is substantially underactivated relative to its potential. The simple institutional act of publishing and displaying the names of culturally significant individuals buried in a given cemetery would likely produce a measurable increase in the proportion of visitors motivated by this mechanism.

The 20% attribution to funerary art confirms that the architectural and sculptural dimension of the cemetery is, for a significant proportion of visitors, not an incidental backdrop to the experience but an active object of attention

in its own right. Combined with the 10% environmental motivation, aesthetic and spatial qualities account for 30% of stated motivations, a proportion that challenges the assumption that cemetery visitors are primarily there to mourn and are indifferent to the built environment they inhabit.

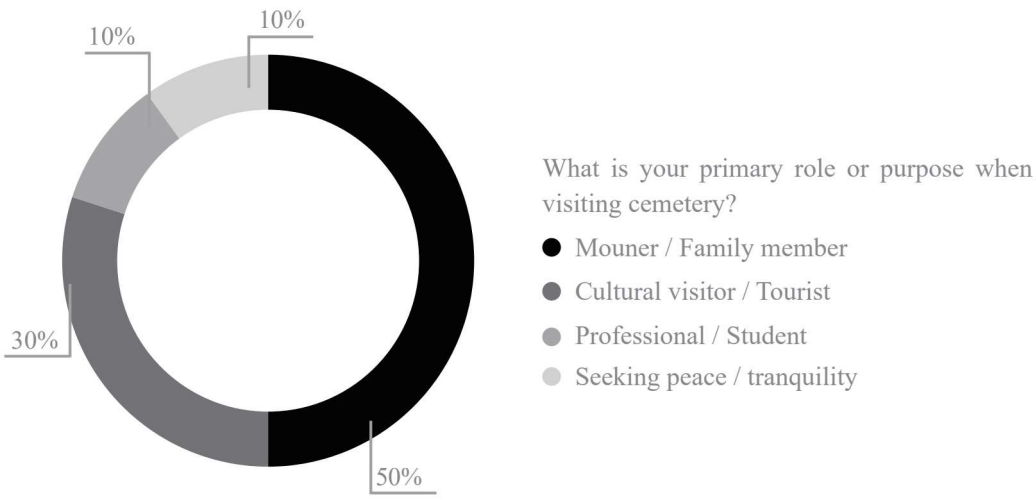


Who are the visitors?
self-identification and overlap

The survey's data on self-identified primary role when visiting a cemetery provides a further dimension to this picture. Half of respondents (50%) identified as mourners or family members; 30% identified as cultural visitors or tourists; 10% as professionals or students engaged in research; and 10% as visitors seeking peace or tranquillity.

The 50/50 split between primarily funerary and primarily cultural self-identification should not be read as evidence of two entirely separate visitor populations operating in parallel without overlap. The more plausible reading, consistent with the motivational data above, is that a significant proportion of self-identified mourners are simultaneously experiencing the cemetery in registers that exceed grief. The categories of "mourner" and "cultural visitor" are overlapping modes of attention that the same individual may inhabit within a single visit: one can enter to pay respects to a specific grave and leave having also noticed, consciously or not, the sculptural quality of a neighboring mausoleum, the biographical interest of an adjacent tomb, or the particular quality of light filtering through the mature trees.

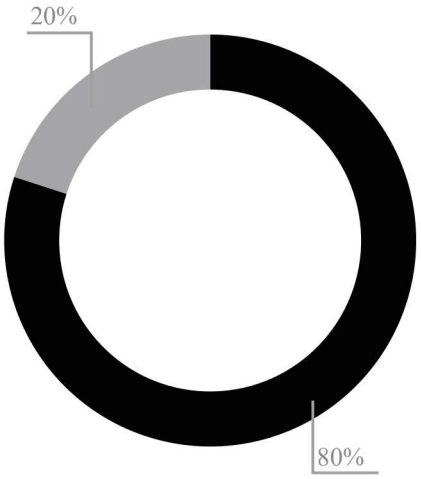
This overlap is confirmed by the discrepancy between role identification and motivational data: 50% identify primarily as mourners, but only 40% cite sentimental value and memory as their primary motivation. The difference, roughly 10% of respondents, is the portion of self-identified mourners who report primarily cultural motivations even as they identify their role as affective. This group is the natural primary audience for any cemetery heritage program: visitors who are already there for funerary purposes but who are simultaneously experiencing the space in cultural registers, and who would likely welcome interpretive content that makes those registers more accessible and more rewarding.



The central finding: recognition at 80%

The most analytically decisive result in the entire dataset is the response to a direct and unambiguous question: do you consider the cemetery to be a cultural space and historical archive, in addition to a place for burials? Eighty percent of respondents answered yes, absolutely. Only 20% maintained that the cemetery is strictly a place for grief and burial.

This result must be read against the timing data presented above, and the contrast between the two is the central interpretive crux of this research. The same population that visits cemeteries almost exclusively on a single ritual occasion, a behavioral pattern that, taken in isolation, would suggest a narrow, purely commemorative relationship to the space, nonetheless recognizes, at a rate of four to one, that the cemetery is simultaneously a cultural and historical archive. This is not a contradiction to be explained away; it is the precise structure of the gap that this thesis diagnoses and addresses. Cultural recognition precedes and exceeds cultural behavior by a substantial margin. The public does not need to be persuaded that cemeteries matter culturally, the data suggest they already believe this with high confidence.



Do you consider the cemetery to be a cultural space and historical archive, in addition to place for burials?

- Yes, absolutely
- No, I consider it strictly a place for grief and burial

This distinction has direct and clarifying implications for the design of heritage programs. Any institutional intervention premised on the assumption that the Brazilian public must first be convinced of the cultural value of cemeteries is starting from a false diagnosis and will invest resources in a problem that does not exist. The task is not persuasion but activation the institutional signal that visiting a cemetery for cultural reasons is a legitimate and socially valued activity, that would allow a recognition already held in principle to be exercised in practice.

The European institutional ecosystem described in chapter 6 is best understood, in this light, not as engines of attitude change but as infrastructures of activation: mechanisms that convert latent recognition into sustained and repeated cultural behavior. The ASCE network, the WDEC events, the Bologna calendar, the Barcelona curriculum, the CWGC Forevermore app, none of these programs attempted to convince a reluctant public that cemeteries are worth visiting. They provided occasions, interpretations, and institutional frameworks for a conviction that was already widely held. The Brazilian institutional task is identical in kind, if different in scale and context.



Nighttime cultural event beside a candlelit
funerary monument at the Certosa di Bologna.
Luca Strambi, 2021.

Visitor testimony: spontaneous recognition

The qualitative testimonials collected from international visitors to the Cimitero Monumentale di Torino through an international tourism platform deepen this picture considerably, and they do so from a vantage point the structured survey cannot reach: that of visitors who arrived with no institutional prompting whatsoever, wrote about their experience entirely on their own initiative, and had no connection to this research. Their value lies precisely in this spontaneity. Where the survey measures latent recognition through direct questioning, the testimonials show what that recognition looks like when it is permitted to speak freely, in the visitor's own words and framing.

"In the nineteenth century, it was expected that visitors to the city would visit the local cemetery. Garden cemeteries like Mount Auburn in Cambridge. This cemetery meets that standard admirably. The art of the tombs and family chapels is extraordinary. There is excellent signage in English and Italian. A very peaceful place that is a pleasant rest from visiting all the busy Italian attractions."
(Monsieur Pamplemousse, December 2025)

"As a fan of architecture and birdwatching, it was a little obvious to visit the Cimitero Monumentale di Torino. Architecturally the place is stunning. When the main cemeteries of Europe are classified, generally the main consideration is which famous dead people are there, but if you prefer stone to bone, then it is hard to beat this place."
(Chris Farthin, January 2018)

Both testimonials were written years apart, by visitors of different nationalities and backgrounds, with no knowledge of each other or of this research. Both reach the same conclusions as the survey and the scholarly literature: that monumental cemeteries offer a quality of experience that visitors cannot easily locate elsewhere, and that this quality is recognized rapidly and without institutional prompting by anyone who has the occasion to encounter it. The question for Brazil is not whether its public would respond similarly, the architecture and the biographical density are directly comparable. The question is whether the institutional occasion will be created for them to discover it.

Toward a Brazilian necrotourism

The monuments are there. The stories are there.
The people are ready.

The only thing missing is the beginning.

What Brazil already has: the case before any programming begins

The case for cemetery heritage tourism in Brazil does not need to be made from scratch. It is already made, implicitly, by the spaces themselves, by the scale and quality of their architecture, by the biographical density of their interments, by the layered social histories encoded in their spatial organization. The institutional task is not to argue the case, it has already been argued by the buildings, but to build the infrastructure that translates recognition into practice.

What Brazil possesses, in heritage terms, is this: a set of monumental cemeteries, concentrated primarily in its major cities but distributed across the country, that contain architectural and sculptural collections of genuine significance, biographical associations with figures central to the national cultural imagination, and spatial histories that tell the story of Brazilian social development more honestly and concretely than almost any other type of public space. These cemeteries belong, genealogically and typologically, to the same European tradition of monumental funerary architecture that has produced the most visited heritage tourism destinations in the cemetery world, Père Lachaise, Staglieno, the Certosa di Bologna.



Flower-covered grave in a cemetery in Taubaté,
Brazil, on All Souls' Day.
Claudio Vieira, 2021.

They were designed and built to the same standards, by many of the same artistic traditions, with the same cultural ambitions. The difference is not in the material heritage but in the institutional apparatus built around it, and institutional apparatus, unlike architectural heritage, can be built at any time, with decisions rather than stone.

The finados opportunity: activating an existing audience

The concentration of Brazilian cemetery visitation on Finados, 58.3% of visits in the survey sample, and anecdotally much higher in a specifically Brazilian cultural context, is typically discussed as evidence of the limitations of Brazilian cemetery culture: the reduction of cemetery engagement to a single obligatory occasion. This reading is correct as far as it goes. But it misses the strategic opportunity embedded in the same data.

On Finados, Brazilian cemeteries receive their largest single audience of the year, an audience that arrives of its own accord, motivated by cultural obligation that requires no institutional marketing to produce, and that is distributed across every economic, educational, and demographic category that comprises the national population. This is not a niche cultural audience that heritage programmers need to

ttract with specialist communications; it is the general public, in all its diversity, already physically present in exactly the right places. The European cultural institutions that have successfully built cemetery heritage programs had to work for years to build comparable audiences. Brazil has them already, once a year, without asking.

The strategic proposal is therefore not to abandon the Finados framework but to enrich it. On that single day, or across the Finados weekend, offer, alongside the commemorative visit, cultural content that provides an additional register of engagement for those who want it. Thematic guided walks, organized in advance and free to join mid-route, covering the biographical, architectural, or social-historical dimensions of the space. Printed maps showing the locations of notable interments with brief biographical annotations. QR codes on the most significant monuments, linking to audio guides, biographical essays, or art-historical commentaries accessible on any smartphone. Temporary photographic or documentary exhibitions installed in the cemetery's covered galleries or chapels, telling the story of the space and the people within it. Brief performances, a reading of texts by authors buried in the space, a musical piece associated with a notable musician, staged in appropriate locations.

None of these interventions requires permanent infrastructure or large capital investment. They require curatorial intelligence, organizational will, and the decision that the cemetery's heritage deserves to be communicated. Done well, they begin the work of reframing the Finados visit, for those who encounter them, as a cultural experience alongside a commemorative one. They build, over successive years, a familiarity with the cemetery as a cultural space that makes return visits for non-commemorative purposes increasingly plausible. And they generate, through the organic social circulation of positive experiences, the word-of-mouth endorsement that no institutional marketing campaign can replicate.

Digital heritage tools and the mobile turn

The heritage tourism landscape has been fundamentally transformed by the digitization of interpretive content and the near-universal penetration of mobile devices capable of accessing it. The CWGC's Forevermore application represents the sophisticated end of this development: a purpose-built tool that combines genealogical research functionality, thematic tour itineraries, biographical grave profiles, and curated narrative content into a single platform accessible to anyone with a smartphone. The Barcelona cemetery management body has developed comparable digital infrastructure. The Consolação in São Paulo has already implemented QR codes and a PUC-SP application.

The implications for the Brazilian heritage agenda are significant. The principal barrier to developing interpretive content for Brazilian cemeteries has historically been the cost of producing and physically deploying traditional interpretive media, printed guides, bronzed signage plaques, permanent display structures, in environments where climate, humidity, and security considerations make physical installations expensive to maintain.

Digital content eliminates most of these barriers: once produced, it can be accessed by any visitor with a mobile device, updated at minimal cost, translated into multiple languages, and distributed through existing platforms without requiring physical installation in the cemetery itself.

The essential investment is not in hardware or infrastructure but in content, in the research, writing, photography, and editorial work that converts historical knowledge into engaging, accessible, visitor-ready interpretation. This is work that universities can do: a semester-long project in a heritage studies, architecture, or history program could produce biographical profiles of the most significant interments in a major Brazilian cemetery, geo-referenced to their locations and formatted for a smartphone application, at a fraction of the cost of any physical installation. The partnership between cemetery administrations and higher education institutions, already demonstrated by the PUC-SP application at the Consolação, is a scalable model for extending digital heritage interpretation to the many Brazilian cemeteries that currently have none.

Educational programs: building the next generation of visitors

The evidence on visitor age distribution in European cemetery tourism consistently shows that the development of a habituated cemetery-visiting public depends critically on early exposure, on experiences in childhood or early adolescence that normalize the cemetery as a space of cultural interest rather than exclusively of grief and avoidance. The "Life Lessons" program in Barcelona, the educational programs of the Certosa di Bologna, and comparable initiatives across Europe have all recognized this logic and invested accordingly in school visit programs, teacher training, and curriculum connections that bring young people into cemetery spaces in organized, pedagogically structured ways before the taboo of avoidance becomes habitual.

For Brazil, the educational argument for cemetery heritage tourism is particularly compelling. The Brazilian national curriculum includes mandatory content on social history, urban history, art history, and cultural heritage, all of which can be effectively addressed through well-designed cemetery visits. A guided visit to the Consolação that focuses on the social history of São Paulo from the nine-



Materials from the "Verdi passeggiate" educational program for school visits to the Certosa di Bologna, 2025.

teenth century through the early twentieth would cover the coffee economy, mass immigration, industrialization, and urbanization in a single spatially present experience. A guided visit focused on the Matarazzo mausoleum and the surrounding collection of immigrant dynasty monuments would address the cultural history of Italian immigration in Brazil, the largest single migration of any nationality to the country, in a way that no classroom teaching can replicate. A guided visit to the Cemetery of the New Blacks would address slavery, abolition, and Afro-Brazilian resistance through the physical evidence of a community's organized response to oppression.

These visits require coordination between cemetery administrations and the educational system, the development of curriculum-aligned interpretive content, and the training of guides, who can deliver that content in ways appropriate to different age groups. The investment is primarily one of time and intellectual labor; the physical environments already exist. It required the institutional decision to take the cemetery seriously as an educational environment and to develop the programming that made that decision operational.



Elementary school students on a guided cemetery visit, part of the "Cultural Days for Elementary School Students" program.
ASCE, 2026.

The economic argument: tourism, conservation, and local development

Heritage tourism, in well-managed contexts, generates revenue streams that support conservation, employment, and local economic development in the communities that surround heritage sites. The economic argument for cemetery tourism should not be overstated, Brazilian monumental cemeteries are unlikely, in the short or medium term, to achieve the visitor volumes of Père Lachaise, but it should not be underestimated either.

The most direct economic benefit of cemetery heritage programming is the generation of revenue that can be reinvested in conservation. Guided tours, when organized and priced appropriately, produce income that can support the employment of conservation specialists, the maintenance of sculptural monuments, the repair of deteriorating architectural structures, and the development of additional interpretive content. The Highgate model demonstrates that even a relatively modest visitor program, organized without public subsidy, can generate sufficient revenue to maintain a major heritage site. The Certosa di Bologna demonstrates that a more ambitious program of events can generate significant income while simultaneous-



Audience at an evening theater performance at the
Certosa di Bologna.
Musei del Risorgimento. 2025.

ly building the institutional reputation that attracts additional support from cultural foundations, heritage bodies, and public authorities.

The secondary economic benefits are broader. Heritage destinations generate economic activity in their surrounding neighborhoods, in hospitality, in food service, in retail, in the transport sector, that extends well beyond the gates of the heritage site itself. This is a recognized pattern in urban heritage tourism: the visitor who comes to see the cemetery also drinks coffee in the neighborhood café, takes public transport, buys a book or a souvenir, and perhaps returns for a longer stay if the neighborhood's overall cultural offer is strong. Making Brazilian cemeteries into cultural destinations is, in this sense, an argument not only for the preservation of heritage but for the revitalization of the urban neighborhoods that surround them, many of which are historic districts that share the same pattern of institutional underinvestment that afflicts the cemeteries themselves.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the heritage conservation argument, the economic visibility that tourism generates produces political visibility. A cemetery that is a

recognized tourist destination, that appears in travel guides, generates positive reviews on tourism platforms, attracts international visitors, and is discussed in cultural media, commands a different kind of institutional attention than one that is invisible to all but the families who use it. The municipal administrator who might not respond to arguments about the intrinsic cultural value of a funerary heritage site will respond to evidence that the site is generating economic activity and attracting media attention. Tourism, in this sense, is not merely an end in itself but a mechanism for generating the political will and institutional resources that heritage conservation requires.

Conclusion

The cemeteries are already there, dense with history and waiting.

The question was never whether Brazil has the heritage, it was whether it would choose to see it.

The stone is already speaking

The cemetery is not a space apart from the city. At its most developed, it is one of the few places where the accumulated experience of urban life, its hierarchies, its aesthetics, its biographies, its conflicts and ambitions, is rendered spatially and permanently legible. This research has argued that Brazilian cemeteries are precisely such places; that they are, taken together, among the country's richest and most undervalued cultural assets; and that promoting their regular visitation is not a challenge to the dignity of these spaces but its most effective guarantee.

The historical argument established that the monumental cemetery is not merely a hygienic infrastructure created by nineteenth-century urban reform but the spatial embodiment of a civilization's relationship to individual memory, social hierarchy, and aesthetic aspiration. The great European monumental cemeteries, Père Lachaise, Staglieno, Highgate, the Certosa di Bologna, became the heritage destinations they are today not because of anything uniquely European in the public's relationship to death, but because institutional decisions were made, sustained over decades, and gradually consolidated into a social norm in which visiting a cemetery for cultural reasons is as legiti-

mate and rewarding as visiting a museum, a historic church, or a public garden. The architectural heritage that makes these decisions payable existed from the beginning; what was built over time was the institutional and cultural scaffolding that made its value publicly legible.

The Brazilian heritage argument established that Brazil possesses funerary heritage of directly comparable quality. The Consolação in São Paulo, with its three hundred sculptures, its biographical associations with the central figures of Brazilian modernism, and its mausolea ranging from the severe neoclassicism of the 1860s to the Italianate grandeur of the Matarazzo commission, is a collection that would be celebrated without reservation if it were located in Europe. The Cemetery of the Brotherhoods in Jaguarão is an architectural archive of resistance and community solidarity whose human significance exceeds that of most official public monuments. Dozens of other Brazilian cemeteries hold comparable riches, documented in the scholarly literature but absent from the cultural itineraries of the cities that contain them.

The motivational argument established that the Brazilian public already possesses the cultural readiness that heritage

programming requires. The survey data are unambiguous: 80% of respondents already consider the cemetery a cultural space and historical archive. Sixty percent report motivations that are explicitly cultural, biographical, or environmental rather than purely affective. Thirty percent of respondents already identify as cultural visitors or tourists rather than mourners. And the professionals who manage these spaces daily report, with near unanimity, that cultural and funerary uses coexist without conflict. The gap between recognition and practice is not a gap of public attitude but of institutional infrastructure.

The comparative argument established that the institutional infrastructure required is achievable. The European precedents demonstrate not that cemetery heritage tourism requires centuries of cultural preparation but that it requires specific institutional decisions, sustained over a sufficient period, that give the public the occasions, interpretive tools, and social permission to act on a recognition they already hold. The Highgate precedent demonstrates that those decisions can be made by organized civil society rather than by the state; the QR-code programs already operational at the Consolação demonstrate that they can begin, in the Brazilian context, right now.

The policy argument established that the Brazilian agenda can be pursued in a graduated sequence beginning with immediate, low-cost actions, digital documentation, QR-code interpretation, Finados programming, and building toward the longer-term goals of heritage protection, formal educational integration, and national network-building. At each stage, the argument is the same: recognition precedes and exceeds practice, and the institutional task is activation rather than persuasion.

What has this thesis added that was not already known? It has added empirical evidence: the survey data from Torino, showing that the gap between cultural recognition and cultural behavior is real, large, and structurally conditioned rather than attitudinal, and that professionals see no operational conflict between the uses that conventional wisdom declares incompatible. It has added a clearer articulation of the activation principle, the recognition that the Brazilian task is not to change public attitudes toward cemeteries but to build the infrastructure that allows existing attitudes to generate behavior. And it has added a consistent argument for the specific and unusual richness of the Brazilian heritage case: not a single-tradition monumental heritage of the European type, but a layered,

plural, multicultural heritage in which the funerary architecture of the elite, the community solidarity of the brotherhoods, and the biographical density of the national cultural imagination all coexist in the same space, telling, together, a story that no other kind of public space can tell as honestly or as completely.

Brazil does not lack the raw material for this sequence. It lacks only the institutional decision to begin it, deliberately and patiently, building on a public readiness that the evidence documents as already substantial. The stone is already standing, dense with sculpture, biography, and two centuries of accumulated civic ambition. Visitors already discover it, as the testimonials confirm, when the occasion arises. What is waiting is not the discovery but its institutionalization, the decision that lets the space speak to more than the few who happen to find their way inside.

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

Thesis survey: perceptions and dynamics of cemetery visitation

This questionnaire was used to collect data for this research. It was administered online using Google Forms.

Section 1: general respondent profile

1. Age
□ Under 18
□ 18 to 25
□ 26 to 40
□ 41 to 60
□ Over 60

2. What is your primary relationship with the cemetery environment?
□ I am a visitor (I go to visit loved ones, for tourism, academic research, or walks)
□I am a cemetery employee (I work in administration, maintenance, burials, security, etc.)

3. What is the name of the cemetery you are referring to in this survey?

Section 2: exclusive for employees
Note: This section is exclusive to staff members, offering the insider perspective.

4. How long have you been working in a cemetery environment?
□ Less than 2 years
□ 2 to 5 years
□ 5 to 10 years
□ More than 10 years

5. What is your main job function at the cemetery?
□ Administrative / Reception / Customer Service
□ Operational (Burials, exhumations, maintenance, landscaping)
□ Security
□ Tourist Guide
□ Other

6. In your daily work routine, how often do you notice people visiting the cemetery for reasons NOT related to funerals (e.g., tourism, photography, walking, curiosity)?
□ Daily
□ Mostly on weekends
□ Only on specific dates/holidays (e.g., All Souls' Day)
□ Rarely or never

7. In your opinion, what is the main reason why casual visitors (non-mourners) visit the cemetery?
□ Cultural/Historical interest: Admiration for funerary art, architecture, or local history
□ Leisure/Tranquility: Walking, photography, or seeking a quiet place to relax
□ Curiosity/Morbidity: Interest in the supernatural, dark tourism, or general curiosity
□ Religious/Spiritual reasons: Seeking blessings, paying promises, or visiting famous religious graves...
□ Other

8. From your professional perspective, does the presence of casual visitors interfere with essential operations (burials, maintenance, or grieving families)?
□ Yes, it causes disruptions and occasional conflicts
□ It disrupts slightly, requiring extra attention and effort from the staff
□ It doesn't disrupt at all; the space accommodates both groups respectfully

9. Does the cemetery where you work have specific rules or guidelines for casual visitors (e.g., photography bans, restricted hours, dress codes)?
□ Yes, there are clear, formal rules
□ There are no formal rules; it relies purely on common sense

Section 3: exclusive for visitors
Note: This section is exclusive to people who visit the cemetery for personal, cultural, or academic reasons.

10. How often do you usually visit cemeteries?
□ Frequently (at least once a month)
□Occasionally (a few times a year)
□ Rarely (only on specific holidays or for funerals)

11. When do you usually visit the cemetery? (Select all that apply)

□ All Souls' Day / Day of the Dead (November 2nd)

□ Personal commemorative dates (death anniversaries, Mother's/Father's Day, etc.)

□ Regular weekends

□ Regular weekdays

□ Other

12. What is your primary role or purpose when visiting a cemetery?

□ Mourner/Family member: To visit the graves of loved ones, pay respects, or pray

□ Cultural Visitor/Tourist: To admire the architecture, sculptures, funerary art, or the history of the site

□ Professional/Student: Researching for academic purposes (history, architecture, sociology, etc.)

□ Seeking peace/tranquility: Using the space as a quiet place for walking, reading, or reflection

□ Other

13. What catches your attention the most or motivates you to enter a cemetery?
□ The sentimental value and memory of those who have passed away
□ The beauty of the sculptures, tombs, and architecture (funerary art)
□ The history of the city or famous public figures buried there
□ The silence, greenery, and peace that the environment conveys
□ Other

14. Do you consider the cemetery to be a cultural space and historical archive, in addition to a place for burials?
□ Yes, absolutely
□ No, I consider it strictly a place for grief and burial

15. In your opinion, does the presence of casual visitors/tourists disrupt essential cemetery operations (such as burials, funeral processions, and families' grief)?
□ Yes, it causes significant disruption
□ It disrupts slightly, depending on the visitor's behavior
□ It does not disrupt at all; there is room for both to coexist respectfully

16. Have you ever witnessed a situation where casual visitation caused discomfort to people who were grieving?

□ Yes

□ No