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Galizia: la persistenza del cimitero rurale

Galicia: the persistence of rural cemeteries

La campagna galiziana è una delle poche zone in cui nel XXI secolo non si tesse ad allontanare la morte dalla vita quotidiana. I cimiteri continuano ad esistere, intesi come luoghi di sepoltura che mantengono la tradizione medievale dello spazio funerario vincolato e in continuità con la chiesa. Le popolazioni rurali, oltre a rifiutarsi in tutti i modi possibili di allontanare i cimiteri dai loro nuclei abitativi, continuano ad avere uno stretto rapporto con i loro avi. Questo articolo affronta il tema dell'analisi architettonica di questi spazi, dal punto di vista topologico, per via dell'immagine suggestiva che la coppia chiesa-cimitero manifesta nel mondo rurale. Si analizza il suo rapporto con la chiesa e con la popolazione, sintetizzando lo studio in una classificazione tipologica che aiuta a filtrare i temi sviluppati.

The rural Galician world is one of the few places in the XXI century world, where death is normally distanced from day to day living, where the graveyards continue to persist. These funerary compounds maintain the mediaeval tradition of the funerary space associated and in continuity with churches. The rural population, resisting by all possible means to the removal of the cemeteries from urban areas, keeps on maintaining a strong relationship with their forefathers.

This article deals with the architectural analysis of these spaces, in a topological perspective, because of the evocative image that the church-graveyard unit manifest in the rural landscape. Its relation with the church and urban center are analyzed and summarized in a typological classification that filters the specific cases of study.

Parole chiave: cimiteri; Galizia; tradizione; parrocchia; analisi topologica; paesaggio rurale

Keywords: cemetery; Galicia; tradition; parish; topological analysis; rural landscape

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Fig. 1 - Old picture of San Martin de Juvia's cemetery, A Coruña

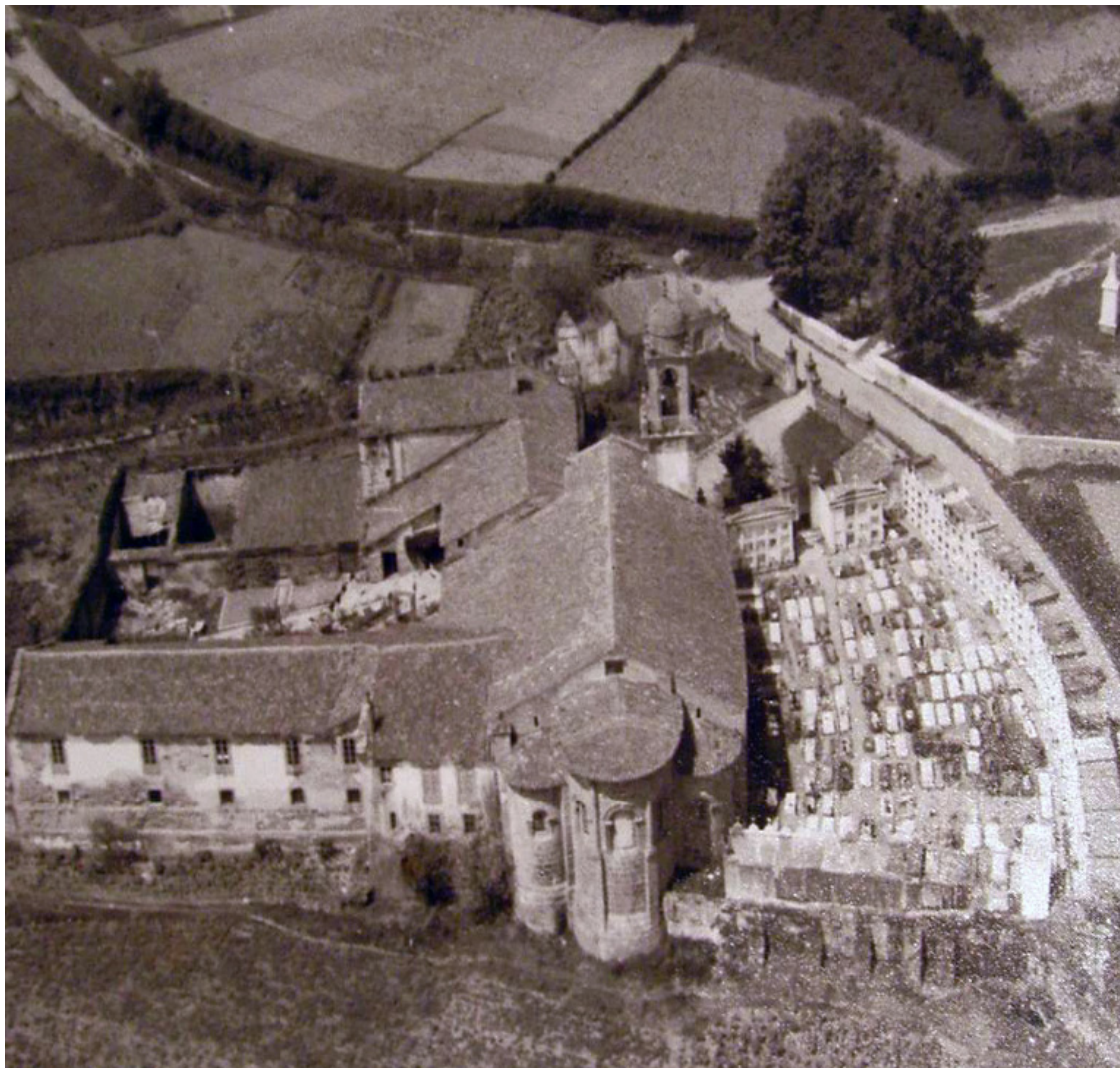
With these lines we try to explain and understand spaces of death, that is to say, cemeteries and specifically Galicia's rural graveyards from a topological point of view, their relation to the place and the territory, without losing the perspective of their ambiguous and enigmatic architecture with their imprecise limits between vernacular and cult, between individual and collective or between sacred and profane. We will attempt these analysis always from the different points of views provided by the numerous influences coming from diverse spheres of influence, styles and languages, which can be evaluated as result of successive cultural sedimentary layers that have been deposited with the passage of time.

It is necessary to highlight the architectural point of view, since there already is an extensive bibliography on the subject of death in the Galician rural environment, its rites and beliefs, but always from the perspective of other disciplines such as history, anthropology or sociology. In the first third of the XX century, in general, funerary architecture has not aroused much interest for architects. Nevertheless now, in the XXI century, this topic is once again a subject of interest due to the social and cultural changes that are taking place and which architecture must challenge offering solutions that are in line with new customs and uses.

CONTEXT

Galicia, due to its geographic location in the extreme northwest of the Iberian peninsula and its unique spatial factors, cultural and human, maintains a territory with well defined and singular characteristics which determine a scenario very different in many aspects from the rest of Spain, including the attitude of its people towards death. (Fig. 1)

With the objective of demonstrating the physical and social Galician environment it is necessary, in the first instance, to distinguish a very distinctive trait of the Galician population, that is its legendary rural character. Nevertheless this situation has changed in the last 20 years, following the propensity for urban development that is



common to developed countries¹. This has led to an elevated index of the depopulation in the rural parishes. In second instance, we must note Galicia's isolation from the rest of the peninsula and the deficient land communications due to existing geographic barriers that have become natural borders. And lastly, factors such as climate, emigration, and a scattered habitat of its hamlets have contributed to the determination of a particular idiosyncrasy: its sense of life and current state of affairs is characterized by a very traditional form of thinking which has great inertia and obstinacy to change, particularly in the rural areas, where cemeteries – object of this analysis – are located.

The previous statements are fundamental to place the state of affairs in the context taking into account the culture, the Spanish and the Western, that influenced and influence evermore, the current reality. This has been increasing in the last years, due to social and economic changes and communications that have eliminated Galician usual isolation. In this way rural Galician society is undergoing changes with respect to the previous ways of thinking and acting, which is resulting in a physical and cultural deterioration, with new ways of acting adulterated by the urban society which is a synonym for evolution and progress.

PERSPECTIVE WITH RESPECT TO DEATH. PARISHES OF THE LIVING AND OF THE DEAD

In the western Atlantic towns with Celtic origins



Fig. 2 - Santiago de Traba's cemetery, Laxe, A Coruña (author's picture).

there is an ingrained ancestor cult and a concern for the beyond. This land is characterized by a natural coexistence between the dead and the spaces of the living, since long time ago, and even though these are different worlds, they maintain strong ties of memory and tradition. This creates a community that resolves many affective problems, contrary to the urban environment, which leaves a person without the mechanisms necessary to face the emptiness that death brings (fig. 2).

Rural Galicia, has arrived to modern times much later than other areas. As result it maintains certain rituals and costumes that have been lost long time ago in cities because of the weight of progress and social pragmatism. Nevertheless,

rural society is affected and integrates some foreign behaviors belonging to urban society. This situation is noteworthy in funerary rituals and in spaces in which these take place: cemeteries, as stages to witness and make sacred the relation with the forefathers, intermediaries between the parish of the living and one of the dead². For this reason it is necessary to send in this moment a message of alarm in order to take care and to protect the extensive and exclusive funerary patrimony that these rural communities possess, since if no action will be taken, it will deteriorate and adulterated the landscape, thus losing its cultural and communitarian value.

In order to study the Galician graveyards is

necessary to recognize the importance and transcendence that rural parishes have had, and still have, and to recognize them as *basic structural cells* in the territory, not only in the ecclesiastic sense but also in the social context. The legal character which has given to parishes with article 40.3 of the Statute for Galician Autonomy, is a demonstration of a social and anthropological reality which concern many locales and hamlets. Churches create a territorial entity, religious and social, that serve to unify members of the society, due also to custom of baptizing and burying in the same place. Birth and death, the two extremes of life's cycle, share the same space.

Places of the dead live in very close proximity

Fig. 3 - San Estevan de Avelleira's cemetery, Muros, A Coruña (author's picture).



to the places of the quick³. *In the same way that happens to the living, the dead have their own customs and compartments; but often we barely distinguish the border between the two.* Aldo Rossi⁴, in his Scientific Autobiography, states that this is frequently noted in rural Galicia, where death is a part of day-to-day living and it continues being a very significant social fact.

THE HYGIENIST POSTULATES

As is well known, the idea of an unhealthy death developed slowly in Europe during the XVIII century, giving rise to the segregation between the cities of the living and the dead which up to this moment had remained in the interior of the churches and population centers. One could

say that cemeteries did not exist in the way that we know them today. They did not have their own identity unless they were part of a church. It was not until the XIX century, that cemeteries manifest themselves as part of the urban fabric in the peripheries of the cities, with an institutional character and official secularization (Fig.3).

This new model and the change in the way of thinking was not readily accepted by rural society. The hygienist postulates had few repercussions, keeping the cemetery adjoining the parish temple. On the contrary, in the Galician cities, due to the disastrous health conditions and their growing worry over public health, new cemeteries were constructed outside the

city walls, thereby obeying the 1787 Carlos III Royal Decree pertaining to Cemeteries. This was considerably later than the rest of Spain. As we have said, Galicia did not pay much attention to the new law, firstly because of the clergy who wanted to maintain the privilege of favoring "dignified burials" to those classes that could afford it⁵ as well as their perception of losing power and control over death which had traditionally been in their hands. Secondly, due to economics, since it was stipulated from the beginning that the new cemeteries would be financed by the churches coffers, which caused further delays and problems between civil and church authorities. Many more Royal Orders were necessary, always met with im-



pediments, before being carried out⁶. In reality the creation of cemeteries outside the city walls came to be gradually. In this heterogeneous process, the new and the old came together slowly, given that society's position with respect to death doesn't allow for radical changes, because of the ingrained tendency to keep the inherited ancestral ways⁷. The great majority of rural cemeteries continue, even today, with the historical tradition of the funerary space associated with the temple; they represent an overbearing and harmonious milestone in the landscape. The ensemble of church and its cemetery, often in the population center, but always part of the social and territorial fabric of the municipality form the

images that are our popular culture. Referring to this phenomenon in Great Britain R. Clarke⁸ states: *they're at the icons of our nostalgia, symbols of an epoch in which the environment and society were considered stable, solid and sure*. In the same way, this author differentiates between small rural cemeteries and the new urban cemeteries which he considers dead spaces... *Like death itself, they are inevitable and necessary...; something to ignore except when needed, close at hand but hopefully out of sight and out of mind*. These are the new cemeteries in the periphery, those which are away from the cities, that do not participate in urban life, and to which we have to go when there is no other choice.

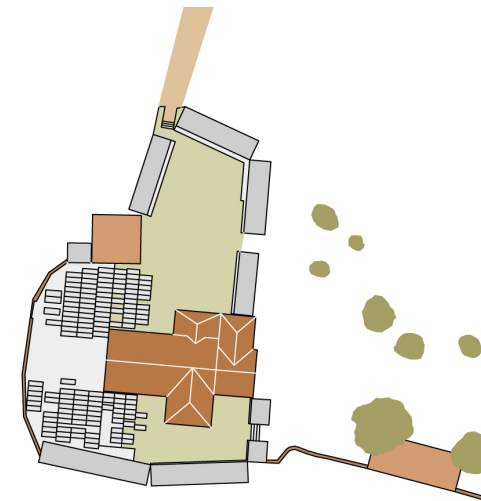
Fig. 4 - Santa María de Cambados's cemetery, A Coruña (author's picture).

Fig.5 - San Vicente's cemetery, Graña, A Coruña (author's picture).

In the next page:

Fig. 6 - Aerial image of Santiago de Traba's cemetery, Laxe, A Coruña. Example of an atrium cemetery isolated from the population.

Fig. 6A - Schematic ground plan of Santiago de Traba's cemetery, Laxe, A Coruña (author's design).



The ingrained Galician tradition of honoring the dead demands having them close by, only in this way can we understand the negative social impact of moving cemeteries outside of the urban nucleus. The problems of space and overcrowding are resolved by gradual expansion, variegation and the addition of new levels to the burial structures. This results in the loss of open space which is substituted by new burial structures. Any solution is a good solution so long as the cemetery is not taken out of the urban nucleus, given that the cemetery still is a public space, caring for its crypts with a daily respect unknown in urban cemeteries (Fig. 4,5).

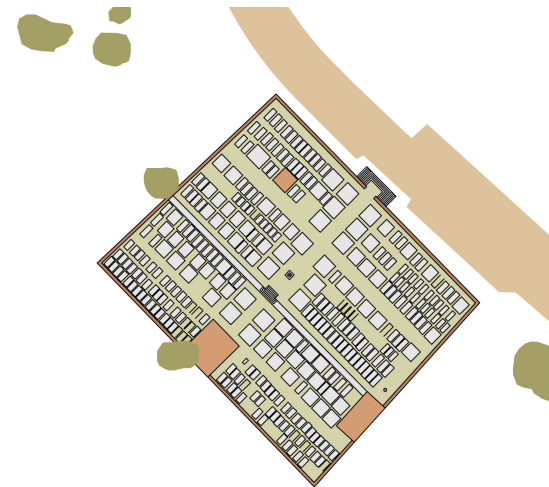
THE CHURCH CEMETERY ENSEMBLE: A TOPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

This study is based on G. H. Baker's architectural analysis based on three basic principles: location, functionality and culture. This paper basically looks at only the first of three, location, given that functionality would require a more in-depth look and cultural context and its influences have been addressed in the previous pages.

Every analysis requires that the whole be broken into its parts, which is fundamental in understanding that which is being analyzed. To bring about the topological analysis of rural (holy ground) cemeteries we have studied, photographed and drawn their location in the ter-

rain, its connection and location with respect to the population it serves, its topographical characteristics and visual and landscape impacts. Also, given that most are managed by the parish⁹, we have studied its location with respect to the governing church.

We fall back on the classical concept of locus, since the cemetery is an integral part of a place and the territory which it characterizes by its presence in architecture. As Norberg-Schulz¹⁰ states: *a place is not an ensemble of resources or a neutral container, it is a concrete environment which has order and character*. As such, it does not make sense to talk about life on one side and a place on the other. Cemeteries are an intrinsic part of the rural landscape, being



stages for the presentation of ritual goodbyes and memories, but always maintaining a position of respect by the society that accepts them as significant and meaningful spaces (Fig.6, 6A). With reference to the above, we shall first look at location where the respect to the urban nucleus, keeping in mind two variables: the antiquity of the cemetery and the size of the urban nucleus. We shall divide this into three categories: ISOLATED CEMETERY (30%) far from the population it serves, which generally allows it to be viewed in perspective from a distance. They have the greatest impact on the landscape. This occurs in two extreme cases, small parishes with little demographic growth keeping the isolation that was there originally, and in

those urban nucleus of rapid growth that have of necessity constructed new cemeteries, in particular after the 1980s because of the saturation of the old cemetery. INTEGRATED CEMETERY (35%): located in the interior of the urban nucleus, where consolidated area, integrated as one more piece in the city. Its location is related by the two variables previously mentioned. With respect to the size of the nucleus, there is equilibrium between the two category extremes, the integrated and the isolated. In this way, as the population increases there is a larger number of integrated cemeteries in the center of the city, due to the fact that in those centers that experienced the greatest growth in the cemeteries were en-

Fig. 7 - Aerial image of Santa María de Cee's cemetery, A Coruña. Example of an exempt cemetery situated on the core's edge.

Fig. 7A - Schematic ground plan of Santa María de Cee's cemetery, A Coruña (author's design).

In hte next page:

Fig. 8 - Aerial image of Santa María de Salto's cemetery, A Coruña. Example of an atrium cemetery isolated from the core.

Fig. 8A - Schematic ground plan of Santa María de Salto's cemetery, A Coruña (author's design).



circled and incorporated inside of the urban perimeter, thereby losing their being outside of the city walls and being absorbed into the urban environment. As regards age, it is frequently the opposite, the older cemeteries and in particular the atrium cemeteries remain in those parishes of little growth but with a very privileged situation inside the walls and the boundaries of the nucleus. They are characterized by having smaller area than the isolated cemeteries without disturbing the urban fabric; it is only when they attempt to expand that conflicts occur.

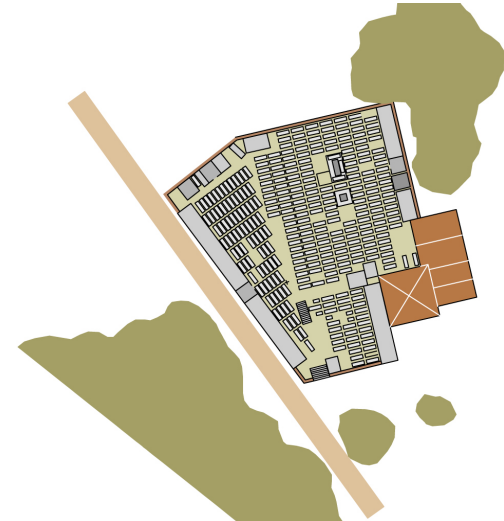
EDGE CEMETERY (35%); located in a transitional zone in the outer perimeter or periphery of the population nucleus. This is in line with

what was addressed in previous paragraphs where edification is reaching and begun to encircle the fringes of the cemetery, as well as the popular will created by the proximity of the cemetery to the population (Fig.7, 7A).

In this sample the graveyards analyzed (200), the location of the cemeteries with respect to the urban nucleus do not appear to have any territorial logic that would suggest the existence of a model for locating these by geographical area. Comparing the total percentages, one can see the lower incidence of cemeteries that are far from the population centers, about 30%, even though the data for integrated in fringe cemeteries is very similar, one reaches the conclusion perceived since the

beginning of this investigation, that the proximity of the spaces of the dead and the living is something that is sought after. Some 70% of the cemeteries are located inside the city or its borders, this last piece of data being somewhat ambiguous in some cases, given that it would have been necessary to introduce population growth data which would have allowed the assessment of the relative situation of the cemetery from its inception to current day. There are instances of ancient isolated cemeteries that due to population growth have become fringe or integrated cemeteries.

With respect to antiquity one detects a generalized tendency clause by assisting law, all new cemeteries are isolated. While in the older ce-

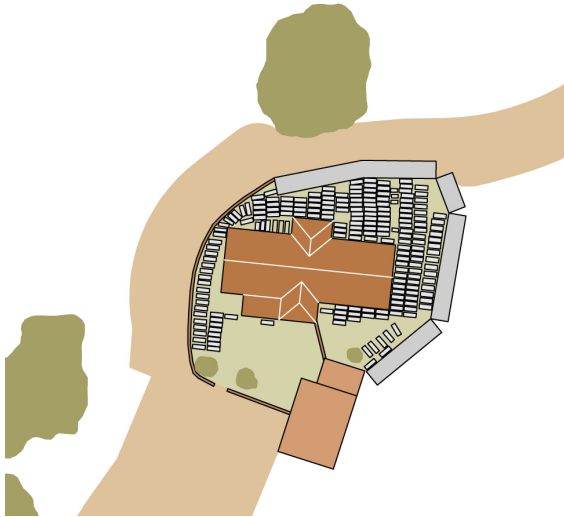


meteries, those of the XIX or XX century, they fall indifferently into any of the three categories. The second approach of this topological analysis is carried out with respect to the amount of visual or relevant impact that the placement of the cemetery with respect to the population nucleus and the area in which it is located. This refers to the level of overbearing visual impact or notorious and significant location. We attempt to prove if the cemetery could be considered a landmark in the landscape. Evaluation of the environment as determined jointly by the cemetery and its location. We establish three categories: significant position (78%), neutral (20%), or none (2%) (Fig.8, 8A). In analyzing the data one gleams that the ma-

ajority of the graveyards, 78% present a significantly relevant situation, not because of the perception for representative locations with respect to the place or topography, and but because of the very concept and design of the cemetery, with a series of architectural variables that contribute to immediately perceiving and identifying this as a funerary space projecting it above the bottom to which it is inscribed. In fact, a neutral position or one without a visual relation, is noted in those cases where vegetation or nearby buildings hide the cemetery, or in those cases where the design does not contribute in the identification of the architectural space and its function. We can extract the conclusion that even though we may not seek a perceptually

Fig. 9 - Aerial image of San Pedro de Muros's cemetery, A Coruña. Example of an exempt cemetery and integrated into the population.
Fig.9A - Schematic ground plan of San Pedro de Muro's cemetery, A Coruña (author's design).

In hte next page:
Fig. 10 - Aerial image of San Cristoval de Carnés's cemetery, A Coruña. Example of an atrium cemetery integrated into the population.
Fig. 10A - Schematic ground plan of San Cristoval de Carnés's cemetery, A Coruña (author's design).



representative position, this comes about because of the intrinsic characteristics of the very funerary space. Nature and funerary patrimony, along with the memory of the dead who live there, determine the characteristic landscape of the Galician community.

The third approximation to the topological analysis is carried out with respect to the church, primitive because of the characteristics already expressed, that 80% of the cemeteries studied belong to the parish and are managed by the clergy. We can distinguish three clear and differentiated categories and a fourth mixed category:

ATRIUM CEMETERY (19%): conceived as a continuity of the temple, it develops with respect

to it, totally or partially surrounding its perimeter, engaging and saturating the sacred space with varied burial to typologies, and in most cases without any particular order. An enclosed space, with imprecise limits, given that the church's atrium serves not only the funerary purpose, but also a social function. *We find them totally integrated into the interior of the nucleus, naturally cohabiting with its inhabitants¹¹*, occupying a reduced space that neither alters nor distorts the fabric of the urban nucleus. There the oldest heirs of the medieval burial tradition *ad sanctos* and the later *apud ecclesiam*¹² (Fig 9, 9A).

Although we also find with relative frequency atrium graveyards, segregated from the town,

that probably came about as a result of Royal Decree of 1787 which recommended that existing isolated churches serve as the chapel to the cemetery. In general because of their location, they have a greater visual impact than the atrium cemeteries that are integrated in the nucleus, emphasized amongst other things by its isolation and its greater visual perception. They are immediately identifiable as cemeteries, lonely, closed, with a path leading to and often ending in them.

ATTACHED CEMETERY (16%): we include in this category those cemeteries that without losing the church's tutelage did not develop in its atrium, but instead are to the side of it treating it as a space of social interaction or anteroom to



the cemetery. Its boundaries are defined by perimeter walls, or the burial crypts themselves act as a separating element but always with a clear threshold for access to the funerary space (Fig 10, 10A).

ATRIUM/ATTACHED CEMETERY (30%): a mixture of the two previous categories that is typified by having an old graveyard and a later expansion clearly identifiable by its perimeter morphology as well as the burial typologies.

EXEMPT CEMETERY (35%): in this category we have all the cemeteries that are separate and independent of the church. Many of these are managed by the municipality and whose location, other than legal requirements, does not take much consideration for the suitability of

place but rather only the availability or use the acquisition of the land by the township. They are usually of recent construction and much larger in area. Unfortunately in most cases they lack architectural interest although they still have anthropological and social interest.

We respect to the location of the church it is worth mentioning the importance of having a nearby, which is the situation in 65% of the cases (taking into account all three related categories).

CONCLUSIONS

After completion of the topological analysis, to which we have to sum other types of analysis: functional, morphological, cultural and historical, which have not been included because of

lack of space, it is possible to establish the predominant type of cemetery in rural Galicia: a sacred space, enclosed with its physical limits only interrupted by a gate which acts as the threshold between life and death, always around the church and always close to population center. These characteristics make them exceptional, in these moments that the cemetery is an isolated and solitary space that alienates itself not only physically but also culturally from society. Nevertheless the deep relationship between galicians and their land, the deep feeling of attachment to the place, manifests itself in the need to be buried in that land and to form a part of it (Fig.11, 12, 13, 15).

Italo Calvino in one of the stories in his book

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Fig. 11 - San Esteban de Cesullas's cemetery, A Coruña (author's picture).

Fig. 12 - San Amedio de Sarces's cemetery, A Coruña (author's picture).

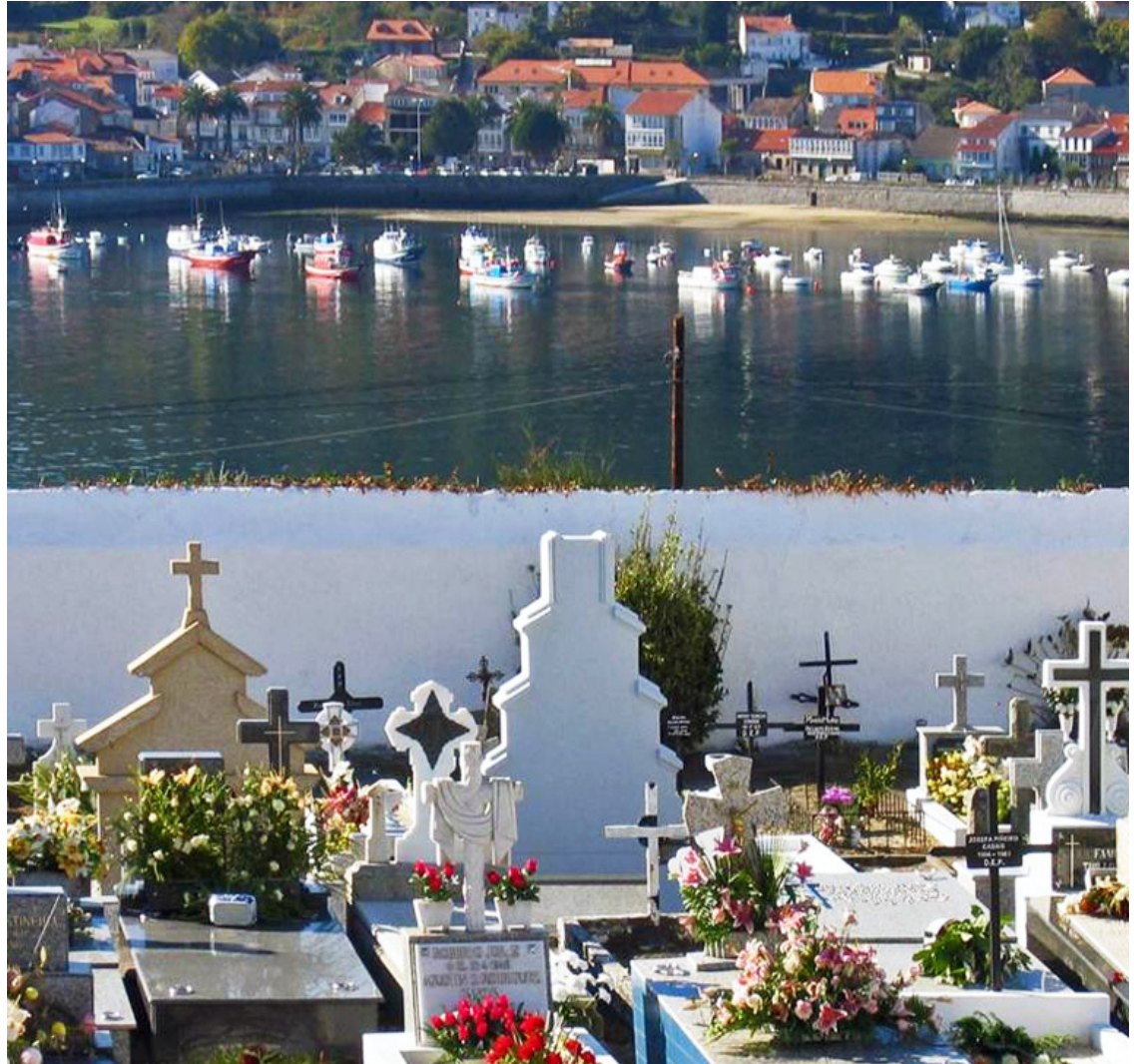
Fig. 13 - Goiriz's neogotic cemetery, Lugo (author's picture).

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Fig. 14 - Santa María de Cee's cemetery, A Coruña (author's picture).

Las Ciudades Invisibles states the following: *each city has by its side like Laudomia, another city whose inhabitants go by the same names: it is the Laudomia of the dead in the cemetery....*¹³

This is a fictional story which nevertheless is clearly reflected in the Galician graveyards, which would not allow us to talk of the city of the dead, because of modesty and its small space, but we can say that each parish of the living has by its side the parish of the dead and that they need each other in order to make sense. Continuing with Calvino's story, *to feel safe with the living Laudomia must seek an explanation of itself in the dead Laudomia.*



NOTES

[1] Precado, Andrés. Míguez, Alberto. Fernández, María. Isabel (2008). Galicia: El tránsito hacia una sociedad urbana en el contexto de la Unión Europea, in *Revista galega de Economía*, vol 17, nº extra., pp 1-20.

[2] According to LisonTolosana, a cemetery is a space where communication is established with dead people. Not only it is an area of strong symbolic associations it also creates conscience of belonging to the same perennial mystical community. The Church was, and is, the center around which the events of some significance in the life of the community are revolved. Lisón, Carmelo (1990). *Antropología cultural de Galicia*. Akal, Madrid.

[3] Pérez, Antonia (2006). El cementerio rural gallego en la actualidad. *Panorámica de una situación*. SEMATA. Muerte y ritual funerario en la historia de Galicia, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, nº 17, pp 541-563.

[4] ROSSI, Aldo (1984). *Autobiografía científica*. Gustavo Gili. Barcelona, p 24.

[5] Durán, Francisco.

Fernández, Carlos. Sánchez, Jesús. (2006) *Asilos de la muerte. Higiene, sanidad y arquitectura en los cementerios gallegos del siglo XIX*. SEMATA. Muerte y ritual funerario en la historia de Galicia. Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, nº 17, p. 440.

[6] Churches and Councils are engaged in sharp polemics, until civil power intervened giving ample space to religious authority, all this was legislated by the Royal Order of July, 1888. González, D. (1990). *La evolución del lugar de sepultura en Galicia entre 1550-1850: los casos de Tuy y Santiago*. Obradoiro de Historia Moderna. Universidad de Santiago, pp. 163-180.

[7] On the other hand, given that all the funeral rituals were conceived as investments to get a better life in the afterlife, not surprising that by prohibiting burials in the temples or nearby, the clergy refuse to do so, to feel that they were marginalized to periferic areas, by the remoteness that it supposed of the sacred and the economic loss.

[8] Clarke, Richard. (1993) ¿Espacios muertos o refu-

gios vivos?, in *Actas del I Encuentro Internacional sobre los Cementerios Contemporáneos*. Junta de Andalucía. Consejería de Obras Públicas y Transportes, Sevilla, p. 355.

[9] 80% are parochial management, while the remaining 20% are divided equally in local and municipal management, these last correspond to the major population centers.

[10] Norberg Schulz, Christian (2005), *Los principios de la arquitectura moderna*. Sobre la nueva tradición del siglo XX, Reverté, Barcelona, p. 13.

[11] Pérez, Antonia (2006). El cementerio rural gallego en la actualidad. *Panorámica de una situación*. SEMATA. Muerte y ritual funerario en la historia de Galicia, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, nº 17, pp 541-563.

[12] Ariès, Philippe (1982), *La muerte en Occidente*. Ensayos sobre la historia de la muerte en occidente desde la Edad Media a nuestros días, Argos Vergara, Barcelona.

[13] Calvino Italo (2008), *Las ciudades invisibles*, Siruela, Madrid, pp 149-151.

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