Multiple Topographies in the Campo Santo of Pisa (Pisa, 1 - 2 Sep 16)

Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore, Palazzo della Carovana, piazza dei Cavalieri 7, Sala Azzurra, Sep 1–02, 2016

Rahel Meier

JOURNEYS OF THE SOUL.
MULTIPLE TOPOGRAPHIES IN THE CAMPOSANTO OF PISA

International Conference
Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore
September 1-2 2016
Palazzo della Carovana, piazza dei Cavalieri 7, Sala Azzurra

Organizers: Michele Bacci (Université de Fribourg), David Ganz (Universität Zürich), Rahel Meier (Kunsthistorisches Institut Florenz)

The construction of the Camposanto in Pisa, begun in the late 1270s, resulted in an innovative type of monumental cemetery. Generously dimensioned and surrounded by a prestigious shell of white marble, the new cemetery of the cathedral complemented both the dome and baptistery as a third monument of equal ranking. Placed directly beside one of the city gates, the cemetery complex constituted an astonishing Portal of the powerful seaport. Great artistic expenditure was continued on the inside: the high walls of the four wings were decorated with frescoes of heretofore unknown dimensions, thus creating one of the most impressive painted spaces of the Late Middle Ages. The Camposanto provided the municipal audiences with a place of burial which eclipsed that of the popular mendicant church cemeteries.

The aim of the conference is to illuminate the Camposanto venture as an innovative interaction between the two artistic mediums of architecture and mural painting and the funerary utilization of the space. The guiding concept of “Journey” allows us to consider perceptions of burial as an entry into an otherworldly Journey, as well as journeys to holy and otherworldly places, which are invoked in the iconographic program of the frescoes. Following this concept, the conference will focus on a long Pisan tradition of spatial interweaving of locations within the Mediterranean Region – in particular the holy sites of Palestine - which were diversely linked to Pisa through overseas trade, by military participation in the crusades and through its position as starting point and place of passage for pilgrimages.

Recent research projects have emphatically illuminated a widely circulating practice of “site-relics” and “site-transfer” in the medieval West. Pilgrim’s ampoules with lamp oil and stones from the holy sites were media for the creation of composite places which superimposed the local

topography and the Terra Sancta sites of memory. Transfer processes and the adoption of foreign locations were already abundant in the older constructions of the cathedral area in Pisa: the Dome itself was built on the occasion of the victory over the Saracens ruling in Sicily and to commemorate the seminal myth of the second Rome. The baptistery begun in the 11th Century cited the forms of the Anastasis in Jerusalem.

The project of the Camposanto can be understood as a further development of this topographic memory. In this context, the narratives about the sacred earth, which was allegedly spread throughout Camposanto, played a central role. The notion that sacred earth could be spread in a cemetery can be understood as an innovative advancement of older models of site transfer. Source evidence suggest that these legends were greatly enriched over the centuries, although they already circulated in nuce at the time the cemetery was founded. These stories also motivated the innovative designation of a cemetery as „campus sanctus“. It is a key purpose of the conference to consider the interplay between the sacred substance of earth, the fictive spaces within the murals and the burial practices within the cemetery.

Thursday, September 1

09:00 Greetings
09.10 Introduction by Michele Bacci (Fribourg) and
David Ganz (Zurich)

PANEL I – THE CAMPOSANTO: ARCHITECTURAL AND PICTORIAL TOPOGRAPHIES

CHAIR: DAVID GANZ

09:30 Neta Bodner (Jerusalem): A Reading of the Camposanto’s Role among the Monuments of the ‘Piazza’

10:30 Margherita Orsero (Lausanne): La parete dipinta sulla piazza: sequenze, strati pittorici, incongruenze

11:30 Coffee break

12:00 Lorenzo Carletti (Pisa) and Francesca Polacci (Siena): Senza cornice: lo spazio dell'arte negli affreschi del Camposanto tra ricezione e storia materiale

13:00 Lunch break

14:30 Visit to the Camposanto (Carlo Giantomassi/Donatella Zari)

PANEL II – SACRED EARTH. THE TERRA SANCTA-LEGEND

CHAIR: MICHELE BACCI

16:00 Rahel Meier (Florence): Between Flesh and Blood. The Early Construction History of the Camposanto in Pisa and its Relation to the so-called Terra Santa Legend

17:00 Coffee break

17:30 David Ganz (Zurich): Sacred Earth, Panoramatic Spaces. The Early Fresco Decoration of the Campo Santo

19:00 Conference Dinner

Friday, September 2

PANEL III – THE JOURNEY AFTER DEATH

CHAIR: RAHEL MEIER

10:00 Friederike Wille (Berlin): "Mirandoti intorno": Visual evidences in Campus sanctus

11:00 Coffee break

11:30 Alessandra Malquori (Florence): L'immagine della morte e l'edificazione attraverso l'immagine nelle Storie degli anacoreti del Camposanto di Pisa

12:30 Lunch break

14:00 Visit to the Laboratorio di Campaldo (Carlo Giantomassi/Donatella Zari)

16:00 Roundtable discussion with Michele Bacci (Fribourg), Ottavio Banti (Pisa), Antonio Caleca (Pisa), Chiara Frugoni (Pisa), David Ganz (Zurich), and Mauro Ronzani (Pisa)

17:00 Coffee break

17:30 Conclusion by Michele Bacci

18.00 End of Conference

Reference:
CONF: Multiple Topographies in the Campo Santo of Pisa (Pisa, 1 - 2 Sep 16). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 15, 2016 (accessed Nov 4, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/13497>.