

Rudolf Klein, Metropolitan Jewish Cemeteries of the 19th and 20th Centuries in Central and Eastern Europe. A Comparative Study (Michael Imhof Verlag, 2018)

Abstract:

Despite being intrinsic components of urban landscape, sacred areas have enjoyed little scholarly attention in terms of their relation to urban evolution. They represent a patrimonial heritage of a value similar to that represented by religious buildings and, at the same time, are a testimony to the coexistence of different confessional-religious communities within the same territory. Therefore, a work addressing the topic of metropolitan Jewish cemeteries in Central and Eastern Europe in the late modern and contemporary period cannot be overlooked in the context of this volume. Its author, Rudolf Klein, a professor of modern architectural history at Szent István University in Budapest, is a renowned specialist in the history of synagogue architecture, as illustrated by his recent work on synagogues in Hungary. [1] The book presented in this review is the result of an earlier attempt to update the provisional list of the Federal Republic of Germany for the UNESCO World Heritage List. Along with other objectives, this attempt also considered the proposal to declare the Berlin Weißensee Jewish cemetery an illustrative example of funerary heritage and initiate of an international collaboration between Germany and its eastern neighbours for a future joint nomination of modern Jewish metropolitan cemeteries in this European space. [2]

The book proposes two major differences in approach compared to most of the works on the topic. Firstly, it approaches cemeteries in their entirety, not just the tombstones, starting from urban and landscape aspects, including the social sphere and the various types of segregation that reflect the structure and hierarchy of Jewish communities in the diaspora. In the case of individual graves, the analysis covers the shape of the tombstones, their typology, the characteristics of the inscriptions and the symbols, as well as the grouping of the graves according to family ties or the representation of different generations on a single family tombstone. Secondly, the book seeks to point out the significance of metropolitan Jewish cemeteries during the Emancipation period, as an illustration of the coexistence and cultural interaction between European culture and the Jewish heritage. The practical problems regarding the restoration and preservation of cemeteries are also included. [3]

The first part of Rudolf Klein's book, devoted to aspects of Jewish funerary art from the period in question, opens with a history of Jewish cemeteries up to the Emancipation, analysing the characteristics of the most important preserved medieval cemeteries – namely, those of Worms, Frankfurt am Main, Prague and Hamburg-Altona, the latter a mixed cemetery used by both Ashkenazi Jews and descendants of the Sephardim expelled from the Iberian Peninsula. The following

chapters are dedicated to non-Jewish influences on the organisation of metropolitan cemeteries and Jewish funerary art and the impact of Jewish religious reform initiated during the Jewish Enlightenment (*haskalah*). In the first case, the author discusses issues such as the repositioning of cemeteries on the outskirts of cities, the use of geometric and rectangular plans, the typology of funerary monuments, which adopt models inspired by Antiquity, artistic styles characteristic of these monuments (*neoclassicism*, *historicism*, *neo-Romanesque*, *neo-Gothic*, *eclectic*, *Art Nouveau*), the symbols represented on the monuments, and the content and spelling of the inscriptions.

These synthetic reviews are followed by detailed analyses of the consequences of the establishment of metropolitan cemeteries as a result of urban evolution, which involved relocating graves from previous cemeteries, abandoning traditional aspects such as the centrality of *ohel* monuments dedicated to Hasidic rabbis or the orientation of tombstones. However, examples of cemeteries that have continued to function in the same place are also provided, the transition from traditional to modern being noticeable in the change in the appearance of their newer parts. The analysis of segregation according to gender and religious orientation, characteristic of traditional cemeteries, as well as according to social status, which imposes itself in modern cemeteries, illustrates their general evolution, although there are also exceptions here. For example, in the case of the oldest cemeteries in Transylvania, a territory about which the author unjustifiably states that most of the Jews here were Reformed (*neologues*), [4] such segregation was not practiced.

The urban morphology method is applied to analyse the organization of cemeteries, with reference to alleys, nodes (intersections), boundaries (outer, or inner delimitations), districts (sections) and landmarks (mortuaries and *ohel* monuments), whereas the architectural perspective serves to investigate gates, the walls of premises and the various buildings (ceremonial halls, mortuaries, and so on).

The chapter dedicated to the shapes and materials of tombstones offers a detailed discussion of the typology of monuments, mainly starting with the 12 types proposed by Tobias Rütenik following research in the Berlin Weißensee, [5] which also includes the period taken under consideration by Rudolf Klein. Appreciated as the most comprehensive attempt at typology, focused on strictly geometric proportions and based on the investigation of some Ashkenazi Jewish cemeteries, this typology is not considered appropriate in all cases, especially for cemeteries in areas further away from German and Austrian centres, especially since this typology pays less attention to stylistic elements. Moreover, Klein points out the difficulty of establishing an all-encompassing typology, given the diversity of shapes specific to monuments in metropolitan cemeteries, such an attempt being possible only in the case of those cemeteries characterized by a significant coherence of the funerary monuments. Consequently, he proposes a simplified formal categorization based on the shape of the monuments: zero-dimensional, one-dimensional, bi-dimensional, tri-dimensional and four-dimensional. [6]

The receptivity of funerary art to the adoption of classical artistic styles and, to an equal extent, modern artistic styles characteristic of the period heralded by the Emancipation, in direct relation to the social position and cultural orientation of the beneficiaries, is proved by the examples presented in the chapter dedicated to stylistic considerations, brought over from some of the metropolitan cemeteries of Central Europe. Another trend was the rebirth of traditional forms of funerary art from the period prior to the Emancipation. Both trends are generally reflected by the shapes or details of the funerary monuments in the functional cemeteries during these periods, even if they are of slightly more modest dimensions. The symbols represented on Jewish funerary monuments illustrate a transition roughly similar to the one perceivable in cemeteries of Christian confessions, from religious

representations characteristic of traditional monuments, to those specific to secularizing modernity after the Emancipation, which become in the case of the Jews particularly related to the social status or the profession of the deceased. With regard to names, the adoption of German surnames, imposed by a decree of Habsburg Emperor Joseph II, was followed by the adaptation of the names to national languages (such as Polish, Czech, Hungarian and Croatian) and by the use of inscriptions rendered in the same languages located on the main side of the funerary monuments. The exceptions were the monuments of Hasidic rabbis, for which this side was still reserved for the Hebrew inscription, a characteristic of the older Orthodox cemeteries.

The first part of the book concludes with a brief discussion on the various causes of the destruction of Jewish cemeteries, from intentional destruction under the influence of totalitarian ideologies, to degradation caused by overly lush vegetation, which can give quite a distinct character to these cemeteries. Abandoned rural cemeteries, in particular, require specific *in situ* solutions for their protection, for example, by erecting enclosing fences, or by transferring tombstones to lapidariums set up in the cemeteries of larger urban centres – a more controversial method in terms of preserving monuments and sites, as well as in terms of halachic regulations. However, Klein does not pay particular attention to the issue of preserving and restoring funerary monuments.

The second part of the book is devoted to the description and analysis of 21 cemeteries in Central and Eastern Europe, in terms of their history, art, architecture and landscape features, but also in terms of recent findings on the current state of the cemeteries. The most important cemeteries – that is, those which are considered illustrative in terms of general evolutionary trends – are those in Berlin (Weißensee) (to which the author pays the most attention), Budapest (on Salgótarjáni and Kozma streets), Prague (Žižkov) and Vienna (the old and new Jewish cemetery in the Zentralfriedhof). With the exception of the new cemetery in Vienna, all were inaugurated in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and they are integrated within the trends of the Emancipation era and reflect the intellectual and artistic dynamism of the European metropolises on which Jewish communities have left an undeniable imprint. These influences persist in the cases of the Jewish cemetery in Bratislava, which is differentiated by the orthodoxy of the community, and the Jewish sector of the Central Cemetery in Zagreb. However, the cemeteries in the Balkans (that is, the Ashkenazi and Sephardic cemeteries in Belgrade; the Sephardic cemetery in Sarajevo – one of the oldest analysed, with origins dating back to the first half of the seventeenth century; and the Jewish sector of the Central Cemetery in Sofia) reflect to a greater degree the interactions between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews, but also the influences drawn from Orthodox Christianity, as well as the ethnic and linguistic diversity characteristic of this space, with visible consequences in the languages of the inscriptions. These characteristics are also found in the Jewish cemeteries in Bucharest (the two Ashkenazi ones – Filantropia and the one on Șoseaua Giurgiului – and the Sephardic one). In the case of Filantropia cemetery, Central European Ashkenazi traditions are noticeable. The Polish cemeteries (Krakow, Łódź, Warsaw and Wrocław) illustrate the transformations of funerary art characteristic of the Ashkenazi, from the traditionalism specific to Orthodox and Hasidic Jews to the new forms that spread in the context of the reforming orientations and the Emancipation. From the former Soviet area, the author analyses the cemetery in St Petersburg, characterized by a great stylistic diversity which, exceptionally, did not suffer during the Second World War. The second example, that of the desolate cemetery in Vilnius, is considered illustrative in terms of the questionable memorialization of an irreparably damaged burial site, but also of the consequences of the dictatorial regimes of the twentieth century.

The book contains a summary with an obvious interpretive role, in terms of cultural-historical importance of Jewish cemeteries, their artistic significance, and

their importance for Jewish history, but also their significance in terms of regional history and cultural influences and interactions. The author also summarises issues around the preservation and maintenance of the cemeteries, their touristic significance and their educational potential. The annexes contain a synthetic analysis of the characteristics of the analysed cemeteries based on 30 indicators (including the surface; number of graves; existence of plans and registers; ritual affiliation; artistic characteristics; protection; destruction suffered; current condition; degree of authenticity; attitude of owners, political figures and citizens towards them; and intention to nominate them within a provisional list of monuments), 16 maps of the urban context of the cemeteries, and 20 maps of the cemeteries themselves, as well as a glossary and a fairly consistent bibliographic list.

In conclusion, through his book on metropolitan Jewish cemeteries, Rudolf Klein offers an informed analysis of the interactions between Christian and Jewish funerary art, in the context of the attempts to integrate Jews from Central and Eastern Europe into the host countries, which facilitated their remarkable cultural and artistic affirmation, but most also be considered in the context of their tragic destiny during the Holocaust. The author also outlines an image of the varying attitudes towards this type of heritage in the 13 countries in which the analysed cemeteries are found. At the same time, the work has the value of a guide for more detailed research dedicated to the topic, which can confirm or add nuance to its conclusions.

Keywords: *Jewish cemeteries, Central and Eastern Europe, Rudolf Klein*