

Beyond Burial: Ritual Practice, Social Space, and Visibility in the Necropoli di Porta Nocera

Porta Nocera (Nocera Gate)

- > Constructed in the Samnite era, C4th CE
- > Southern exit and entrance to Pompeii > lead to neighbouring Nuceria
- > Critical point of transit between urban and rural areas
- > One of the seven main gates that broke up the city's defensive walls

Necropolis

- > Southeast of Pompeii, adjacent to the city walls
- > At the south end of the Via di Nocera
- > Primarily used by lower and middle-class citizens
- > Largest necropolis of Pompeii

Roman legal and religious prescriptions prevented burial within the city's pomerium...



Fig 1. photograph of the Porta Nocera - Madain Project

Evidence from tomb architecture and ritual installations at Porta Nocera (particularly funerary dining features) demonstrates that the necropolis was more than a static site of monumentalisation and burial: it functioned as a socially active space that transformed commemoration into an everyday social practice of Pompeii.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE NECROPOLIS OPERATE AS AN ACTIVE SOCIAL AND RITUAL SPACE?

Methodological framework

Theoretical lenses used

1. Carroll (2006): funerary ritual as ongoing social practice
2. Cooley (2012): inscriptions as communicative acts
3. Emerson (2010): visibility, movement, and audience
4. Graham (2011): commensality and non-elite ritual behaviour

= This poster reads tombs as active social installations, combining architecture, epigraphy, and spatial context rather than treating monuments in isolation.

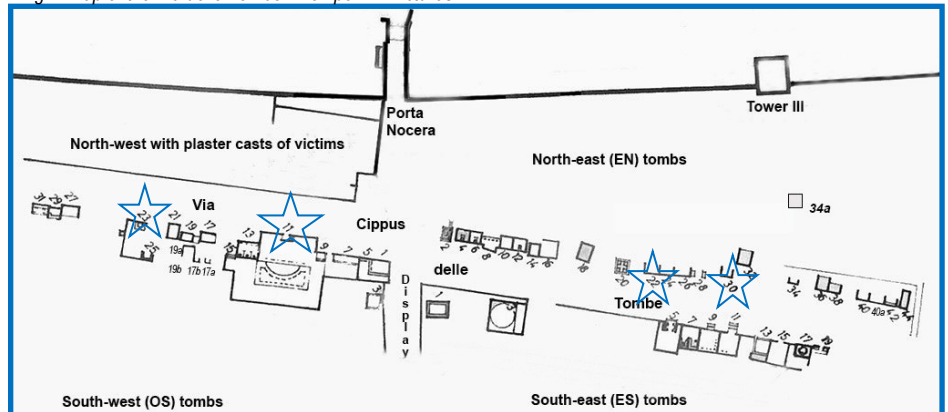
★ THE TOMB OF EUMACHIA (110S) - KEY CASE STUDY ★

- Monumental semi-circular exedra tomb with open seating and terrace, in a prominent roadside position.
- Built for Eumachia, a priestess of Venus - importance of maximising tomb visibility (3)
- Architectural emphasis on space and visibility = expectations of visitors gathering and interacting with the funeral space beyond simple burial

Social Elements:

- Fixed seating for groups - enabled repeated ritual engagement (1) rather than a static act of display
- Spatial provision for funerary banquets - remembrance through embodied social engagement (4)
- Roadside position: expectation of an audience/visit
- Design blurs the boundary between funerary monument and communal space - idea of a 'lived' necropolis

Fig 2. map of the Via delle Tombe - Pompeii in Pictures



★ TOMB OF PUBLIUS VE-SONIUS PHILEROS (230S) ★

- Elaborate aedicula-style tomb with inscriptions and herms, dominated by inscriptional text detailing social relationships and memory
- Rich narrative evidence (2) shows how funerary spaces reflect lived social networks and memory
- Roadside placement: intended to be repeatedly read (3) and engaged with - funerary memory depending on interaction, not static display
- Commemoration here depended on repeated encounters rather than architectural scale alone

★ TOMB OF LUCIUS PUBLICIUS SYNEROS ET AL (22EN) ★

- Family burial with inscription commemorating multiple named individuals
- Highlights collective memory and cumulative identity (2) maintained through ongoing ritual engagement
- Multiple individuals suggests continuity (4) - a space repeatedly revisited by families.
- Reinforces relevance of long-term social bonds with the dead

★ TOMB OF MELISSAEA + TWO MARCUS SERVILII (30EN) ★

- A modest named tomb, north-east side of the Via delle Tombe
- Inscriptions as social inclusion (2) - asserted belonging and identity
- Shows variation in family and social status representation
- Illustrates how everyday commemorative acts contributed to the necropolis' lived character

RETHINKING THE NECROPOLI DI PORTA NOCERA

Funerary memory as an active process sustained through...

- seating and gathering (110S)
- inscription (230S)
- family continuity (22EN, 30EN)

★ Necropolis operates through interaction, not isolation → the dead as continuing members of the community

★ Necropoli di Porta Nocera functioned as a hybrid zone of ritual, visibility, and social interaction.

Reference List

1. Carroll, M. (2006) *Spirits of the Dead: Roman Funerary Commemoration in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Cooley, A. E. (2012) *Pompeii and Herculaneum: A Sourcebook*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge.
3. Emmerson, A. (2010) "Urbanism, Visibility, and Monumentality in Roman Funerary Landscapes." In *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, edited by J. Pearce et al., 159–178. Oxford: Oxbow.
4. Graham, E.J. (2011) *The Burial of the Urban Poor in Italy in the Late Roman Republic and Early Empire*. BAR International Series 2290. Oxford .
5. Fig 1. Madain Project
6. Fig 2. Pompeii in Pictures