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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The non-religious and the European city in the nineteenth century: the development of crematories in Milan and Gotha

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Abstract

While our knowledge of the entanglements of cities and religions is growing, the 'other' of religion and its impact on the city has not received the same level of attention in research so far. This article explores how this lacuna could start to be filled. Its focus is on the history of modern cremation that unfolded with strong secularist leanings during the long nineteenth century. I will look into the history of the first European crematories that were built in Milan and Gotha, the construction of the first cremation furnaces and the infrastructures necessary to make them work. My hypothesis is that what I call 'worldview technologies' and related infrastructures changed the faces of cities and were in turn influenced by these cities' histories and self-images.

Introduction

While the historical interconnectedness of cities and religions received only scant attention in the past, recent research has addressed it more thoroughly.[1] By contrast, the question of whether and how non-religion[2] has shaped the faces of modern cities remains to be explored. In this article, I attempt to probe how this urban–non-religious relationship could be approached. While non-religion in the form of atheism[3] has accompanied Christianity[4] for greater parts of its history, in this article, I consider some of its European manifestations of the nineteenth century more closely, namely, the

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[1]M. Christ *et al.*, 'Entangling urban and religious history: a new methodology', https://zenodo.org/records/7002796 (17 Aug. 2022), accessed 4 Dec. 2023; S. Rau and J. Rüpke, 'Religion and urbanity: reciprocal formations', *Religion and Urbanity Online*, www.degruyter.com/database/URBREL/entry/urbrel.13230336/html, accessed 4 Dec. 2023.

[2]On terminologies and theories of non-religion, see L. Lee, *Recognizing the Non-Religious: Reimagining the Secular* (Oxford, 2015), 21–69.

[3]D. Weltecke, *'Der Narr spricht: Es ist kein Gott': Atheismus, Unglauben und Glaubenszweifel vom 12. Jahrhundert bis zur Neuzeit* (Frankfurt/Main, 2010); I. Logan, 'Christian Europe', in M. Ruse and S. Bullivant (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Atheism* (Cambridge, 2021), 139–58.

[4]In the context of this article, the term 'religion' refers primarily to Christianity in nineteenth-century Europe.

developing secularisms.[5] These were advanced, notably in the second half of the century, by atheists, freethinkers, freemasons, socialists, monists and scientific materialists against the backdrop of waging European culture wars fought between church, state and different branches of civil society.[6] I understand secularism to be what Todd Weir has termed the 'fourth confession',[7] a multifold worldview of its own completing the confessional landscape of the various Protestantisms, Catholicisms and Judaisms of the time.[8] Secularists strove to replace religion by materialistic, non-transcendent, non-dualistic and civic convictions directed towards inner-worldly perfection.[9] Just like religious confessions, the secularisms, too, left their mark on modern European cities, as will be shown in this article. An important aspect to keep in mind when approaching this topic is that the boundaries between religion and non-religion are fluid. Both categories are intertwined. This has been emphasized by Talal Asad in his study of the religious and the secular, on which I rely methodologically.[10] In any case, this fluidity sometimes renders it difficult to label a historical phenomenon or practice as 'religious' or 'non-religious' without reservations.

In what follows, the focus is on secularist-encoded technologies[11] and infrastructures in modern European cities, specifically on the history of modern cremation in the Western world.[12] Other than in the Hindu context and unlike single cremations

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[5]I distinguish between the notions 'secular' and 'secularist'. The former refers to the separation of church and state, with religion considered a private matter; the latter describes attempts to replace religion with new, often rationalist and materialist worldviews. Secularist attitudes, thus, tend to be more critical of established religious beliefs, customs and the experts and institutions associated with them than secular ones. See J. Casanova, 'The secular, secularizations, secularisms', in C. Calhoun, M. Juergensmeyer and Jonathan van Antwerpen (eds.), *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford, 2011), 154–74. I prefer the plural, secularisms, to hint at the diversity of secularist worldviews.

[6]On the culture wars of the nineteenth century, on anticlericalism, anti-Catholicism and the materialist ideas that came with them, see G. Verucci, *L'Italia laica prima e dopo l'unità, 1848−1876: anticlericalismo, libero pensiero e ateismo nella società italiana* (Rome, 1981); C. Clark and W. Kaiser (eds.), *Culture Wars: Secular–Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 2003); M. Borutta, *Antikatholizismus: Deutschland und Italien im Zeitalter der europäischen Kulturkämpfe* (Göttingen, 2011); L. Dittrich, *Antiklerikalismus in Europa: Öffentlichkeit und Säkularisierung in Frankreich, Spanien und Deutschland (1848−1914)* (Göttingen, 2014). With regard to the urban aspect of the culture wars, J. Tyssens has worked on masonic funerary monuments and small-town secular burials in Belgium. See, e.g., J. Tyssens, 'Early secular burials in 19th-century Flemish provincial towns', *Secular Studies*, 4 (2022), 42–70.

[7]T. Weir, *Secularism and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Rise of the Fourth Confession* (Cambridge, 2014), 16.

[8]This approach differs from others, e.g. the idea of 'multiple secularities', which is based on the differentiation of religion itself. See M. Burchardt and M. Wohlrab-Sahr, 'Multiple secularities: religion and modernity in the global age', *International Sociology*, 28 (2003), 605–11. While religion and non-religion are certainly inextricably interwoven, the idea of a fourth confession lends secularism more distinct features and consequently allows it to stand on a more equal footing with other confessions.

[9]C. Kosuch, *Die Abschaffung des Todes: Säkularistische Ewigkeiten vom 18. bis ins 21. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/Main, 2024).

[10]T. Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, 2003).

[11]By 'secularist encoding', I imply that this technology developed against a particular secularist background, which will be detailed below. In turn, this technology reinforced manifestations of the secularisms and communicated them to the public.

[12]Comprehensively on cremation in past and present, see D. Davies and L. H. Mates (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Cremation* (Aldershot, 2016). The intertwining of urban history and cremation has been explored, e.g., for twentieth-century British history by J. Rugg, 'Lawn cemeteries: the emergence of a new landscape of death', *Urban History*, 33 (2006), 213–33.

on open wood pyres carried out in Europe, such as that of the drowned poet Shelley on the Mediterranean coast in 1822, modern cremation in newly invented crematories in Europe started to unfold as a technology-driven urban phenomenon in the later nineteenth century. This type of cremation was closely aligned with urban infrastructures, the urban public sphere and connected to a certain urban pride, as will be detailed below. The first modern crematories, which are at the centre of this article, were built in Milan (1876) and Gotha (1878)[13] with the full support of the city councils. Leading voices of the accompanying initiatives for cremation expressed views that ranged from sheer rejection of (Christian) religion to general anticlerical or, more specifically, anti-Catholic attitudes.[14] Cremationists' attempts to change the funerary culture of the time led to the invention of cremation technology[15] and inspired the construction of crematoria[16] as well as related facilities like columbaria. In addition, the nineteenth-century cremation discourse, including its technological and architectural materializations, overlapped with other recently established infrastructures and institutions: railroads for transporting corpses from afar to those cities equipped with crematories; modern mortuaries for observing and storing the dead awaiting their funeral;[17] and municipal cemeteries[18] under the supervision of communal administrations.

The next section starts with a brief history of cremation before moving on to the histories of Milan and Gotha. The article then develops an analysis of 'worldview technologies', namely the first cremation furnaces working in modern times, and side glances at related infrastructures like urn halls and columbaria.[19] These technologies and buildings changed the faces of cities and were in turn influenced by these cities' local needs and requirements. They blended into nineteenth-century cityscapes and became part of these cities' characters. In addition to a specific modern identity, they also endowed cities with a non-religious one formed in stone and iron, which had a symbolic presence that has received little attention so far.

Urban histories of cremation

In its beginnings, modern cremation in Europe was an urban phenomenon, not only a metropolitan one, but one that unfolded in both larger *and* mid-sized cities with a solid liberal-bourgeois and sometimes also socialist culture critical of religion, its

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[13]C. Kosuch, 'The rediscovery of cremation in Italy and Germany', *The Freethinker*, https://freethinker.co.uk/author/carolin-kosuch/, accessed 4 Dec. 2023.

[14]Kosuch, *Die Abschaffung*.

[15]The working principles of modern cremation furnaces have so far been studied primarily in connection with the Nazi concentration camps and their crematories; see A. Schüle, *Industrie und Holocaust: Topf & Söhne, die Ofenbauer von Auschwitz* (Göttingen, 2010).

[16]H. Winter, *Die Architektur der Krematorien im Deutschen Reich 1878–1918* (Dettelbach, 2001); H. Malone, 'Secularisation, anticlericalism and cremation within Italian cemeteries of the nineteenth century', *Modern Italy*, 19 (2014), 385–403; A.L. Pfeiffer, *Das Ewige im Flüchtigen: Eine Bau- und Zivilisationsgeschichte der Feuerbestattung in der Moderne* (Würzburg, 2015).

[17]N. Kreibig, *Institutionalisierter Tod: Die Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der Berliner Leichenhäuser im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2022).

[18]N. Fischer, *Vom Gottesacker zum Krematorium: Eine Sozialgeschichte der Friedhöfe in Deutschland seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 1996); Malone, 'Secularisation'.

[19]In the sense that these technologies and infrastructures were linked to secularist ideas of how to deal with the dead.
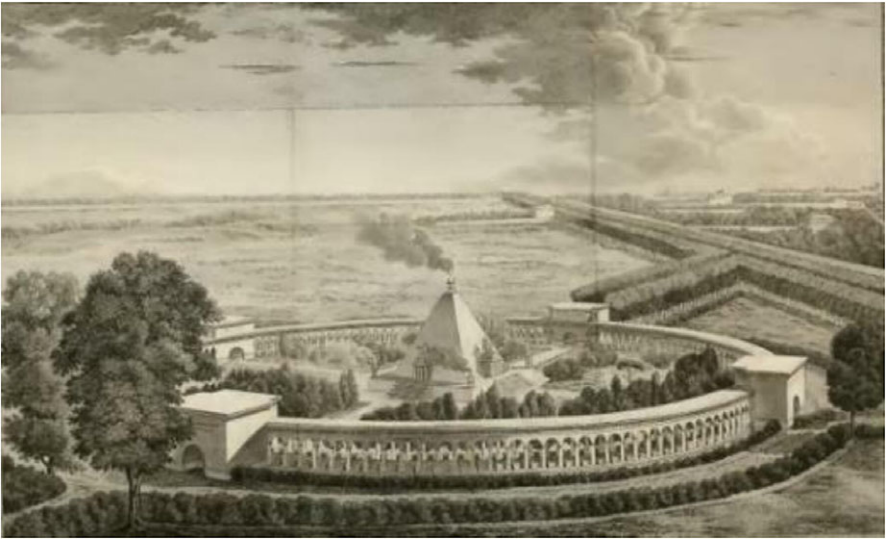
Figure 1. Draft of a crematorium in a pyramid-shaped building, surrounded by columbaria.
Source: P. Giraud, *Les tombeaux, ou Essai sur les sepultures* (Paris, 1801), 64.

influence in society, its institutions and representatives. Among them were cities as diverse as Milan and Gotha, but also Paris and Woking near London. Incineration of the dead had been practised in antiquity and among non-Christian people in Europe. In late Roman antiquity, earth burial prevailed, which Charlemagne adopted as the norm for his reign in the eighth century.[20] While instances of cremations on open wood pyres continued to occur over the centuries,[21] earth burials dominated in Christian Europe, albeit in a variety of forms, ranging from burials in crypts or in churches for those with a certain religious or worldly status, to burial pits for the poor, to storage of bones in ossuaries, to name but a few.[22]

Earth burial experienced a first major challenge during the French Revolution. With its anti-Christian, laicist culture,[23] this event accelerated previous efforts to implement changes in the funerary culture of the time.[24] The Revolution affected the living *and* the dead. In an attempt to establish rituals and practices not codified in Christian terms, discussions of the treatment and commemoration of the dead during this period drew on Ancient Egyptian (Figure 1), Roman and Greek models, but also referred to customs among other peoples such as the Ancient Chinese or

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[20]R. Schmitz-Esser, *Der Leichnam im Mittelalter: Einbalsamierung, Verbrennung und die kulturelle Konstruktion des toten Körpers* (Ostfildern, 2014), 47–51.

[21]Winter, *Die Architektur*, 14; B. Effros, 'De partibus Saxoniae and the regulation of mortuary custom: a Carolingian campaign of Christianization or the suppression of Saxon identity?', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 75 (1997), 267–86. Thanks to Mateusz Fafinski for pointing me to this article.

[22]T.W. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton, 2018).

[23]M. Papenheim, *Erinnerung und Unsterblichkeit: Semantische Studien zum Totenkult in Frankreich (1715–1794)* (Stuttgart, 1992); J. Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead in Revolutionary France: Revolution and Remembrance, 1789–1799* (Cambridge, 2007).

[24]T. Kselman, 'The dechristianization of death in modern France', in H. McLeod and W. Ustorf (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000* (Cambridge, 2003), 145–62, esp. 147–9.

Persians.[25] The ashes from the first cremations taking place on open wood pyres in various French cities during the Revolution were put in urns and placed in local Temples of Reason.[26]

These first initiatives to reintroduce cremation did not last, but fell into oblivion in the course of the Restoration. It was not until the later nineteenth century – and in response to efforts by European hygienists[27] supported by secularists who promoted cremation during the cultural wars between church and state in the nineteenth century – that the topic gained renewed and lasting momentum, and that the Catholic church officially started to oppose cremation. From 1886, Catholics were forbidden this mode of corpse treatment, a ban that lasted until 1963.[28] Many Protestant churches initially reacted with similar restraint, but then gradually accepted cremation by the end of the nineteenth century.[29] While cremation retained its secularist character, especially as it became part of the developing socialist culture of the early twentieth century,[30] this acceptance by Protestant churches also made it compatible with Christian ideas.[31] Not every urn placed in modern cemeteries, therefore, testified to a secularist attitude on the part of those who opted for this practice in the nineteenth century.

Milan

The discourse on cremation and civic forms of commemorating the deceased established during the French Revolution resurfaced in Italy's emerging secularist circles in the second half of the century.[32] Cultural contacts between French and Italians had not been without conflict during Napoleonic rule over the peninsula, but left a lasting mark, not least in the field of death, since Napoleon had introduced French administrative structures and secular cemetery regulations in Italy.[33] The first modern European crematorium was built in the Lombard capital of Milan. One question we might ask is: why this city? While an answer to this probably leads to a circular argument, glimpses into the history of Milan as it was remembered and constructed during the *Risorgimento* offer insights into how this city was perceived and with which narratives it was surrounded.

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[25]Fondazione Fabretti Turin, Institut de France, *Mémoires*, 1–7.

[26]Pfeiffer, *Das Ewige*, 167–82.

[27]I will return to the topic of hygiene on the following pages.

[28]Z. Suchecki, *La cremazione nel diritto canonico e civile* (Vatican City, 1995).

[29]A. Heike-Gmelin, *Kremation und Kirche: Die evangelische Resonanz auf die Einführung der Feuerbestattung im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2013).

[30]J. Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und organisierte Religionskritik: Proletarische Freidenkerverbände in Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart, 1981). See also C. De Spiegeleer, '"Funerary culture wars" in late 19th- and early 20th-century Europe and the case of the Brussels' freethought movement', *Secular Studies*, 4 (2022), 9–41.

[31]From the later nineteenth century, cremation took on the character of a movement, particularly in the German and later also in the British and American contexts, to which not only secular and secularist, but also liberal-Protestant and liberal-Jewish voices contributed. Cremation as a movement, however, is not at the centre of my considerations.

[32]See, e.g., G. Pini, 'La cremazione dei cadaveri', *Rivista Massonica* (1876), 6–16.

[33]H. Malone, *Architecture, Death and Nationhood: The Monumental Cemeteries of Nineteenth-Century Italy* (London, 2017), 35–6. On Milan under Napoleon, see also A. Pillepich, *Milan, capitale napoléonienne: 1800–1814* (Paris, 2001).

In their search for historical references that would legitimize the idea of national unity, early historians of the *Risorgimento* had directed their attention to events of the Middle Ages, which they reinterpreted in national contexts.[34] The Lombard League of 1167, an alliance of northern Italian cities directed against the claims of the Hohenstaufen Emperor Frederick I, became a role model for the Italian national movement of the nineteenth century. As an antithesis to foreign domination symbolized by the Hohenstaufen, communal medievalism inspired the uprisings during the *Risorgimento*, among them the *Cinque Giornate* of Milan, which paved the way for the First Italian War of Independence against Habsburg domination.[35] Influential radical philosophers of the *Risorgimento* like Carlo Cattaneo took the Lombard League, with Milan at its core, as a revolutionary model of a federal nation.[36] Interestingly, this interpretation of the League corresponded to a nineteenth-century risorgimental disdain for church and clergy: Pope Pius IX's lack of support for the national cause after the Revolution of 1848/49 found reflection in the commemoration of the League. In Giuseppe Ricciardi's history of the League, *La Lega Lombarda* (1869),[37] for instance, Pope Alexander III, opponent of Emperor Frederick I in the twelfth century, equalled his modern successor Pius IX. He appeared as a conspirator and traitor switching sides, while Ricciardi emphasized the liberation struggle of the common people. The pope, once the bearer of national hope, in Ricciardi's portrayal symbolized reaction.[38]

Besides such narratives of independence, nonconformity and autonomy, Milan – along with the city's hinterland – was also a centre of economic prosperity in agriculture and silk production, and increasingly, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in finance and industry, especially mechanical engineering.[39] These economic developments were spearheaded by an already established urban middle class that could resort to long-standing European trade contacts.[40] The construction of new infrastructures such as railroads and power plants, solving the energy problems of the coal-scarce region, further accelerated industrialization.[41] By mid-century, gas lighting was introduced, endowing northern Italian cities, among them Milan, with the latest form of artificial illumination.[42] Cremation and crematories fit both into the anticlerical framework set by the *Risorgimento* and its historiographers, and into that of industrialization, without, of course, assuming that such frameworks and trends alone would have led to the idea of cremating the dead in modern cities.

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[34]See, e.g., J.C.L. de Sismondi, *Histoire des républiques italiennes du Moyen Âge* (16 vols., Paris, 1807–18), who presented medieval personalities and places as constitutive of the nation.

[35]See R. Lukenda, *Die Erinnerungsorte des Risorgimento: Genese und Entfaltung patriotischer Symbolik im Zeitalter der italienischen Nationalstaatsbildung* (Würzburg, 2012), 139–51.

[36]C. Cattaneo, *Dell' insurrezione di Milano nel 1848 e della successiva guerra* (Milan, 1986).

[37]G. Ricciardi, *Opere scelte*, vol. VI: *La Lega Lombarda* (Naples, 1869).

[38]See on Pius IX, H. Wolf, *Der Unfehlbare: Pius IX. und die Erfindung des Katholizismus im 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2020).

[39]C. Besana, 'Business, entrepreneurs and local institutions in Milan from the unification to the economic miracle', in D. Zardin (ed.), *The Milan's Heart: Identity and History of a European Metropolis* (Milan, 2019), 157–68, esp. 157–61.

[40]A. Lunati, 'Ideas of ambiente: history and bourgeois ethics in the construction of modern Milan, 1881–1969', ETH Zurich Ph.D. thesis, 2018, 27–9.

[41]S.A. Conca Messina (ed.), *Leading the Economic Risorgimento: Lombardy in the 19th Century* (London and New York, 2022).

[42]D. del Curto and A. Landi, 'Gas-lighting in Italy during the 1800s: a history of lighting', in M. Rüdiger (ed.), *The Culture of Energy* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2008), 2–29.

More concretely, three factors facilitated the construction of the first crematorium in Milan. First, as elsewhere in the nineteenth century, the idea of hygiene found support in Italy, too.[43] In essence, nineteenth-century hygiene was about improving living conditions, reducing child mortality and preventing deaths caused by malnutrition, poor working and living circumstances and infectious diseases. But hygiene also featured social-missionary, educative and eugenic components.[44] Cremation and hygiene joined forces at a discursive and actor level: Gaetano Pini, a freemason, secularist, physician, philanthropist and prominent hygienist in Italy, who lived and worked in Milan,[45] was also among the leaders of Italy's developing cremation initiative. Along with other physicians, such as Ferdinando Colletti and Giovanni Dujardin, and notorious freethinkers and secularists, such as Jacob Moleschott,[46] Pini promoted both hygienic ideas and cremation in publications and at scientific congresses and campaigned tirelessly for the new method of treating the dead.[47]

The death of the silk merchant Alberto Keller in 1874 marked the second factor.[48] In his will, Keller had provided a sum for the construction of a crematory in which he wanted to have his body incinerated. In doing so, Keller had also wished to introduce a new, future-oriented and secular mode of treating mortal remains.[49] Keller's corpse was embalmed and kept for two years in a chapel at Milan's *Cimitero Monumentale*, a new municipal cemetery opened in 1866 with sections for Jews and non-Catholics.[50] Prior to Keller's proposal, experiments with cremation furnaces had already been conducted by inventor, mathematician and geologist Paolo Gorini in Lodi near Milan[51] (Figure 2) and by Milan professor of chemistry Giovanni Polli together with engineer Celeste Clericetti (Figure 3). Keller had corresponded with all three of them before his death. It was Gorini who embalmed Keller's mortal remains in his additional capacity as a preparator and inventor of a new method of preserving human corpses.[52] The same Gorini, due to his strictly materialistic and secularist convictions, planned to transform the cathedral of the city of Lodi into a giant crematory, with the bell tower serving as a chimney.[53]

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[43]On the general idea of hygiene and its implementation, see P. Sarasin and B. Hanrahan, 'The body as medium: nineteenth-century European hygiene discourse', *Grey Room*, 29 (2007), 48–65.

[44]On hygiene in Italy, see C. Pogliano, 'L'utopia igienista (1870−1920)', in F. Della Peruta (ed.), *Storia d Italia, Annali 7: Malattia e medicina* (Turin, 1984), 589–631.

[45]M. Novarino and L. Prestia, *Una battaglia laica: un secolo di storia della Federazione Italiana per la Cremazione* (Turin, 2006), 12. The Italian *Società d'Igiene* was established on Pini's initiative.

[46]C. D'Elia, 'Group portrait with freethinker: Jacob Moleschott, Risorgimento culture, and the Italian nation-building process', in C. Kosuch (ed.), *Freethinkers in Europe: National and Transnational Secularities, 1789–1920s* (Berlin, 2020), 109–30.

[47]G. Pini, *I cimiteri di Milano* (Milan, 1880).

[48]Little is known about Keller. Concerning his cremation, some records are preserved in the Italian cremation archives of the Fondazione Fabretti Turin, 'Atti della cremazione di Alberto Keller: Eseguitasi nel Cimitero Maggiore di Milano, Addi 22 Gennaio 1876'.

[49]A. Boi and V. Celsi, 'Il tempio crematorio nel Cimitero Monumentale di Milano', *Ricerche e progetti per il territorio, la città, l'architettura*, 8 (2015), 100–13.

[50]M. Pietrantoni and G.B. Gardin (eds.), *Il monumentale di Milano: il primo cimitero della libertà, 1866–1992* (Milan, 1992).

[51]P. Gorini, *Sulla purificazione dei morti per mezzo del fuoco: considerazioni, sperimenti e proposte* (Milan, 1876).

[52]Novarino and Prestia, *Una battaglia*, 15.

[53]On Gorini's materialist beliefs, see P. Gorini, *Memoria di Paolo Gorini nella causa civile promossagli dai Signori Poma e Venini per annullamento del brevetto del crematoio lodigiano* (Lodi, 1880), 17.
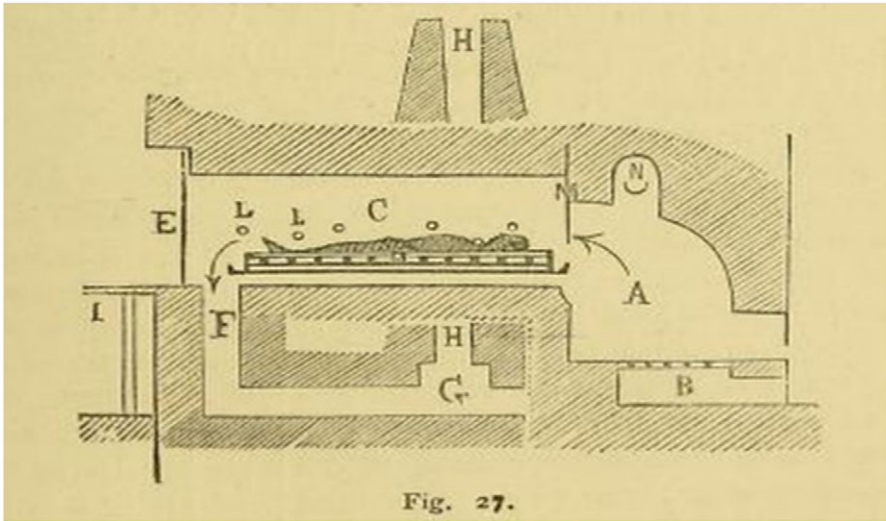
Figure 2. Crematory designed by Paolo Gorini in Lodi near Milan. Gorini's model was used widely. The first British crematory in Woking near London, for example, was designed by Gorini.
Source: G. Pini, *La Crémation en Italie et à l'étranger de 1774 jusqu'à nos jours* (Milan, 1885), 148.

The idea behind the new crematories was again a hygienic one: corpses were no longer to be cremated in the open – a practice considered unhygienic and a sign of impiety by later secularists[54] – but in a modern technical device created exclusively for incinerating human remains. The crematories took on a secularist connotation since it was secularists who built and promoted them and who associated them with a secularist mission to gradually replace Christian earth burial by cremating the dead on communal sites. That way, these particular furnaces not only reflected hygienic but also and above all secularist convictions which, through cremation, were imprinted on corpses and, in turn, reinforced secularist–materialist concepts. In this sense, these furnaces could be understood as 'worldview technologies'. Keller's corpse was finally incinerated in an improved version of Polli's and Clericetti's crematory financed by the money from his will. The furnace and its surrounding building were placed at the *Cimitero Monumentale* after the city council had approved it. Immediately after Keller's cremation, which was accompanied by speeches from Pini, Polli, Clericetti and a Protestant pastor named Paira who lauded cremation and uttered humanist thoughts,[55] a cremation society was formed.[56] Many of the overwhelmingly middle-class members of this society were convinced that Milan was 'always at the forefront of every progress, rightly deserving the title of Moral Capital of Italy'.[57]

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[54]Fondazione Fabretti Turin, 'Atti della cremazione di Alberto Keller', 27.

[55]*Ibid.* The involvement of Paira points to the intertwining of the secular(ist) and the religious in the sense of Asad's theory.

[56]F. Conti, 'Italy', in Davies and Mates (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Cremation*, 273–5.

[57]Cited from F. Conti, A.M. Isastia and F. Tarozzi, *La morte laica: storia della cremazione in Italia (1880−1920)* (Turin, 1998), 223 ('sempre alla testa di ogni progresso, e che ben ha ragione si è meritata il titolo di Capitale morale d'Italia'). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.
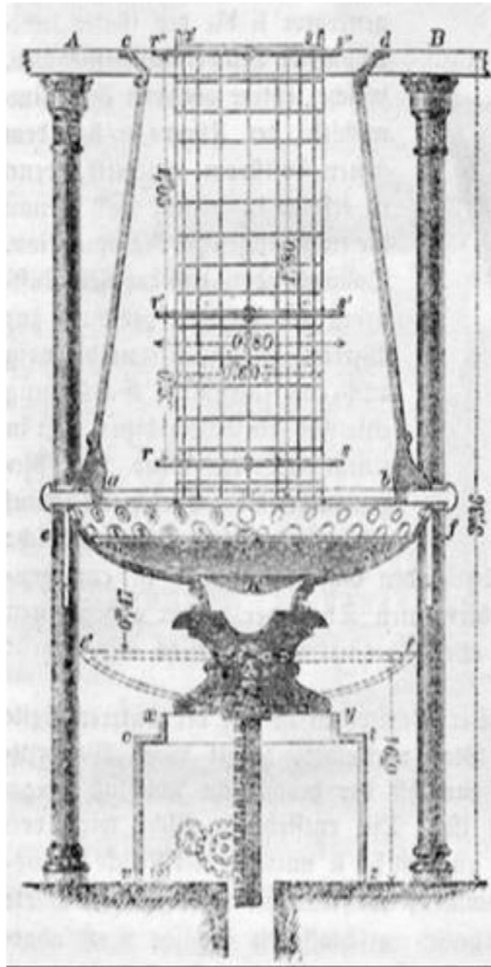
Figure 3. Crematory built by Giovanni Polli and Celeste Clericetti (1872). This device, which never left the experimental state, resembled an antique urn. The corpse could be inserted into the wire rack, where it was consumed by hundreds of tiny flames.
Source: F. Fischer, 'Ueber Leichenverbrennung und Friedhöfe', *Polytechnisches Journal*, 214 (1874), 382–92, at 387.

After several cremations of corpses in Polli's and Clericetti's furnace, the city of Milan replaced this device with a new model designed by the engineer Giuseppe Venini. Measured against the demands of those in favour of cremation, this model provided better and faster results (Figure 4).[58] But how did this new method of treating the dead, favoured by secularists and frequently addressed by

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[58]M. De Cristoforis and G. Pini, *Bolletino della Società per la cremazione dei cadaveri di Milano* (Milan, 1876), 3–4. Requirements were pure white ashes unmixed with other substances, rapid combustion without major smoke development, no odour emission and the indirect combustion of the body only by heat, not by direct contact with flames.
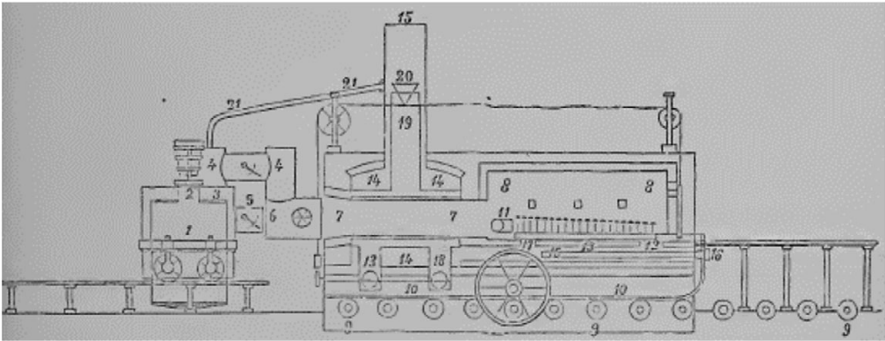
Figure 4. Crematory designed by Giuseppe Venini with a wheel system to mechanically feed the corpse into the furnace.
Source: Pini, *La Crémation*, 157.

journalists,[59] concretely intertwine with the city, its administration and its landscape? This leads to the third factor: compliance of local policy.

In terms of administration, cremations in Milan and later in other Italian cities[60] had to be approved on a case-by-case basis by the Ministry of the Interior. It took several attempts by Pini, senator and physician Carlo Maggiorani and others to legalize cremation in the Italian Sanitary Code of 1888 as a measure to protect public health and hygiene. Subsequent bodies of law further specified this new practice.[61] At a local level, after unification, Milan expanded considerably. Incorporation of surrounding territory was pursued by the council, especially under Mayor Giulio Bellinzaghi,[62] an investor in infrastructures like railways and industrial plants, who stemmed from a family of merchants and financiers.[63]

The idea of hygiene resonated strongly in Milan's city council, which authorized plans for a new system of drinking water supply, a new sewage system, a hospital for contagious diseases and – in the 1880s and 1890s – a new cemetery, the *Cimitero Maggiore*, replacing older ones.[64] Included in these measures was the permission for constructing the crematorium on the *Cimitero Monumentale*, a cemetery closer to the city centre than the later *Maggiore.* In the meeting held by the city council on 20 July 1875 under the chairmanship of Carlo Servolini, deputy to the mayor, the following resolution was adopted: the crematorium with the furnace inside would be erected close to the cemetery wall, perpendicular to the ossuary, and it would be

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[59]Modern cremation became a media event. The topic was taken up and popularized in scientific journals such as the *Annali di Medicina*, in freethought journals such as the *Libero Pensiero*, as well as – in a disapproving manner – in the Catholic and – in both positive and critical ways – the Jewish press of the time.

[60]For a list of crematories built before the turn of the century, see Società Anonima Cooperativa per la Cremazione dei Cadaveri in Napoli, *La società, progetto dei tempio, statuto* (Naples, 1900), 17.

[61]On legal aspects, see C. Kosuch, 'Clashes, competition, and common goals: Italian secularisms and the liberal state', in J. Tyssens (ed.), *The Nonreligious and the State* (Berlin and Boston, 2024).

[62]Bellinzaghi was twice mayor of Milan: 1867–84 and 1889–92.

[63]See Anonym., 'Necrologio', *L'Illustrazione italiana*, 4 Sep. 1892.

[64]D. Bardelli, 'The "moral capital": social vitality and municipal outlook in Milan between the 19th and 20th centuries', in Zardin (ed.), *The Milan's Heart*, 169–74, at 171.
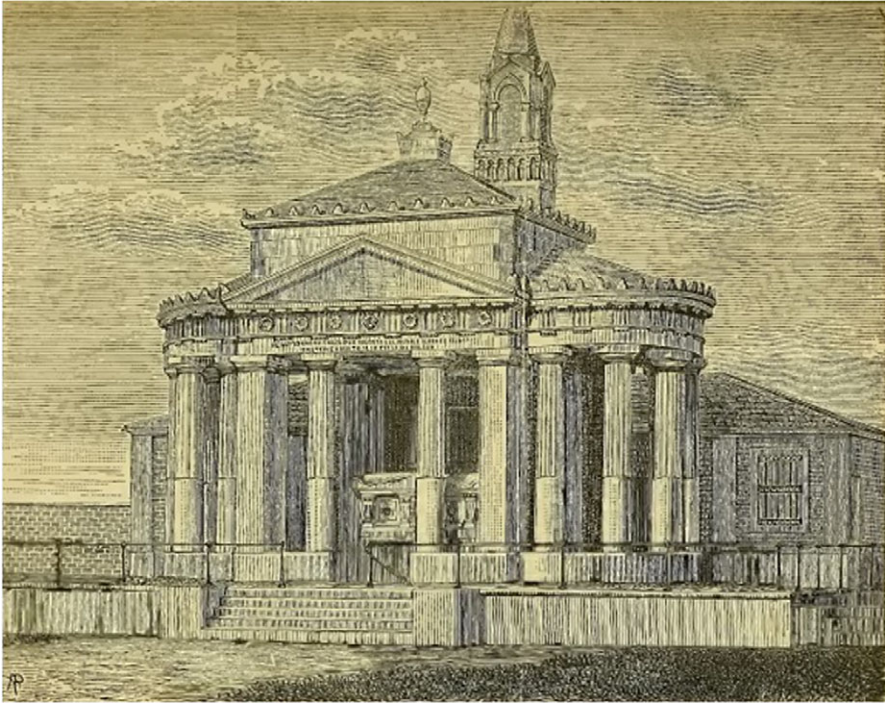
Figure 5. Crematorium at Milan's *Cimitero Monumentale.* Polli's and Clericetti's cremation furnace shows through the pilasters of Maciachini's design.
Source: Pini, *La Crémation*, 11.

constructed in a solid way covered by a stone roof.[65] Designs were made by architect Carlo Maciachini, who also bore responsibility for the conceptualization of the whole cemetery (Figure 5). Between 1880 and 1883, to the left and right of his Neo-Greek style crematorium, additional columbaria were installed for the above-ground storage of urns.[66] This had been an important demand of the secularists promoting cremation; mortal remains were not to be interred, as in Christian custom, but should remain part of the material world of the living in the form of ashes.[67] Since the dead were purified by fire – a common catchphrase of early cremation – they no longer posed a threat to the living and their health. Rather, both could share one space – the city – again. This, at least, was the theory of many nineteenth-century cremationists, who wanted the dead to return to the city as role models for the living, and hoped they would function as building blocks of the emerging inner-worldly community, rather than simply being consigned to

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[65]Fondazione Fabretti Turin, Mazzo 16, Fascicolo 40, 'Giunta Municipale di Milano, Processo Verbale della Cremazione di Alberto Keller'.

[66]Malone, *Architecture*, 135. These columbaria were designed by architect Augusto Guidini, a cremationist himself. Columbaria picked up ancient Roman designs rather than Christian traditions.

[67]See, e.g., F.G. Trottarelli, 'La cremazione', *Rivista Massonica* (1910), 60–71, at 68, who proclaimed that the white ashes of the dead would remain forever with the living.

cemeteries outside inhabited spaces.[68] The place of the dead in the world of the living was, one could conclude at this point, not determined in *longue durée* perspectives. In antiquity, they had to leave the urban space; in the early Middle Ages they were allowed back in; from the eighteenth century on they had to leave again, only to be welcomed back in having first been rendered harmless hygienically by fire, in modern cremation.

According to the decision of the city council in 1875, the gas tank[69] and the pressure vessels necessary to operate the cremation furnace were to be placed outside the cemetery, yet in its immediate vicinity. The entire facility was supervised by city authorities. Obviously, it was important to both the city officials and the constructors of the furnace to maintain an impression of piety and to this end avoid giving the crematorium an overly factory-like appearance. Municipal regulations determined '[t]hat the smoke pipe from the interior of the crematory passes underground through the shortest pathway to the cemetery wall, through which it then vents outside the cemetery and beyond the plants surrounding it, so that those in the cemetery are deprived of the possibility of seeing the chimney'.[70] The new crematory, built with Keller's money according to the rules of the Provincial Sanitary Council and in line with ministerial provisions, remained the property of the city.[71]

Polli and Clericetti for their part underscored that the crematorium surrounding their furnace occupied a prominent space in the cemetery and did not hide in a remote corner: 'No – it rises majestically above the silhouette of the cemetery, and in front of the ossuary, in front of the Famedio; it confirms its equality with the tombs of earth burial.'[72] Following municipal resolutions, the crematorium was built opposite the entrance where the Famedio – a final resting place for famous personalities – and monumental individual and family tombs were situated.

Thus, while Polli and Clericetti were right that the crematorium was a monumental one fitting well into the existing funerary silhouette of the *Cimitero Monumentale*, it still was located at the outskirts of the cemetery. While this can be explained by the infrastructures required to run the furnace, historically, such peripheries were also places for those who died in poverty, for the unknown dead and for the dead with low social status like criminals or for suicides. All considerations regarding technical infrastructures aside, the placement of the crematorium on the margins rather than at the centre of the cemetery could also be read as an echo of such long-established encodings. As for the question of worldview, this positioning suggests that the non-religious was only in the process of emerging. By no means had it already achieved a status of equality that would have been evidenced by a more central placing of the crematorium.

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[68]Gorini, *Sulla purificazione*, 222, 227.

[69]The crematory was heated with city gas. Fondazione Fabretti Turin, 'Giunta Municipale di Milano'.

[70]*Ibid.*, 40 ('Che il condotto del fumo dall'interno del crematojo passi sotterra per il viale più breve, il muro di cinta, attraversato il quale abbia poi sfogo fuori del Cimitero ed al di là delle pianti che lo circondano, in modo che sia tolta, a chi trovasi nel Cimitero, la possibilità di vedere camino').

[71]*Ibid.*

[72]Fondazione Fabretti Turin, 'Atti della cremazione di Alberto Keller', 22 ('No – esso sorge decorosamente altero sulla traiettoria della necropoli, e di fronte all'ossario, di fronte al famedio; esso si afferma da pari e pari coi monumenti della inumazione').

Gotha

The second modern crematorium was built in 1878 in the city of Gotha, from 1826 to 1918, together with Coburg, the capital of the dukes of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. A centre of Protestantism,[73] Gotha had a reputation for its enlightened, educational, scientific and liberal traditions, all of which were encouraged by its rulers.[74] In addition to flourishing porcelain manufacturing,[75] the establishment of the Justus Perthes Geographische Anstalt laid the foundations for another thriving and world renowned enterprise in the later eighteenth century.[76] Thanks to Perthes, the publisher of Enlightenment literature and cartographical material, Gotha turned into a 'Hotspot'[77] of knowledge that research travellers, missionaries and geographers built up with the data they sent to Gotha from all over the world. Gotha was also the birthplace of the German Socialist Party in 1875. In the age of industrialization, it developed into a traffic hub connected to the Leipzig–Frankfurt rail line and also gained recognition for its high-quality metal production, mechanical engineering and growing life insurance industry.[78]

As elsewhere in Europe and the German Empire, the idea of cremation also found appeal in Gotha during the second half of the nineteenth century.[79] In a way, the concept matched the city's image of itself as progressive, innovative and liberal. Notions of hygiene, the fear of growing cities producing a rising number of dead that would have to be dealt with, but also a wish for liberalizing, rationalizing and secularizing the handling of corpses were key elements in the German initiatives for cremation.[80] They, too, were borne of anti-Catholic and anticlerical considerations and placed hygiene, health and productivity above religion. As a professor of medicine and an advocate of cremation, Karl Heinrich Reclam stated in his polemics against opponents of the new practice printed in the popular German family magazine *Die Gartenlaube*: 'Only one thing matters to me: the gain for health and productivity of the human being. If this benefit is available (and I am firmly convinced that it is [in cremation]), then I give up "tradition", "symbols" and "churchyard" for its sake.'[81] However, given Protestantism's weaker resistance

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[73]D. Gehrt, 'Die Anfänge des protestantischen Bildungssystems in Gotha', in S. Salatowski (ed.), *Gotha macht Schule: Bildung von Luther bis Francke* (Gotha, 2013), 10–19.

[74]For the history of Gotha in the nineteenth century, see M. Wenzel, *Gotha im 19. Jahrhundert: Bilder erzählen Geschichte* (Erfurt, 2020). For Gotha as a centre of science, see M. Rekow, 'Von der Sternwarte einst zu einem kulturhistorischen Denkmal heute: Der "Meridian Gotha" als Ursprung der Triangulation und Gradmessung im Thüringen des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Gotha Illustre: Jahrbuch für Stadtgeschichte* (Gotha, 2021), 13–34. Thank you to Susanne Rau for pointing me to this article.

[75]S.L. Marchand, *Porcelain: A History from the Heart of Europe* (Princeton, 2020).

[76]I. Schröder, 'Eine Weltkarte aus der Provinz: Die Gothaer Chart of the World und die Karriere eines globalen Bestsellers', *Historische Anthropologie*, 25 (2017), 353–76, at 356–8.

[77]*Ibid.*, 358.

[78]M. Wenzel, *Von der herzoglichen Residenz zur Industriestadt: Kompendium zur Industrialisierung in Gotha vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zum Beginn des Nationalsozialismus* (Gotha, 2002).

[79]On the formation of Gotha's cremation society in September 1874, see Gotha City Archive, folder 3545, vol. 1, 1874, loc. 51, no. 37, 'Die Einführung der fakultativen Leichenverbrennung'. In the German context, too, cremation found a strong echo in the media. Besides its influence in popular journals such as the *Gartenlaube*, the daily press reported on cremation and fuelled the debates surrounding its practical implementation. Two German-language periodicals, *Die Flamme* (Berlin, 1884–1942) and *Phoenix* (Vienna, 1888–1939), dealt exclusively with cremation and its advancement.

[80]Fischer, *Vom Gottesacker*, 94–105.

[81]K.H. Reclam, 'An die Gegner der Feuerbestattung', *Die Gartenlaube*, 38 (1874), 608–10, at 609 ('Mir gilt nur das Eine: der Gewinn für die Gesundheit und Leistungsfähigkeit des Menschen. Ist dieser Gewinn

towards cremation noted above, the polemics against religion appear less pronounced in the German cremation discourse. Rather, it was a strategy of German cremationists to emphasize the compatibility of cremation with Christianity or to avoid questions of religion entirely and by doing so lower the hurdles for the introduction of the new practice. This worked as long as Protestant clergy co-operated. Once they refused, the underlying rejection of the church as an institution of tradition and of established Christian burial traditions surfaced, as illustrated by this protest letter printed in the cremation journal *Die Flamme*:

> To the Church Council: In a letter dated 10 October addressed to the local cremation association and signed by Provost Becker, you…refuse the construction of an urn hall…The position adopted here is unacceptable…An icy breeze of bygone times blows at us, we are faced with a piece of the dark Middle Ages.[82]

Such examples indicate that cremation in the German Empire was given a reformist but also a secular and secularist colouring.

It was engineer Friedrich Siemens who designed the first German cremation furnace. Siemens had spent long periods of time in Britain where he lived with his brother Wilhelm. Both invented industrial regenerative furnaces capable of generating the amount of heat necessary for steel and glass production. Encouraged by the leader of the British cremation movement, the queen's surgeon Sir Henry Thompson,[83] the brothers had initially experimented with the incineration of animal cadavers before considering a cremation furnace for human remains.[84] While Wilhelm abandoned these experiments, Friedrich Siemens continued to develop the crematory in Löbtau near Dresden on the property of his glass factory. Impressed by results of test cremations with animals, leading members of the Gotha cremation society, among them engineer Carl Heinrich Stier and Wilhelm Ewald, administrative lawyer, member of the state parliament and trusted friend of Ernest II, duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, petitioned the state ministry of the duchy for approval of cremation.[85] The ministry had no reservations but left the decision on the matter to

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vorhanden (und er ist es nach meiner festen, innigen Ueberzeugung), dann gebe ich "Tradition", "Symbolik" und "Kirchhof" um seinetwillen auf)'.

[82]H. Runge, 'Offenes Schreiben an den Kirchenvorstand Kiel', *Die Flamme* (1899), 2906–7 ('In einem an den hiesigen Feuerbestattungs-Verein gerichteten, von Herrn Probst Becker gezeichneten Schreiben vom 10. October verweigern Sie…die Errichtung einer Urnenhalle…Der hier angenommene Standpunkt ist unhaltbar…Ein eisiger Hauch längst vergangener Zeiten weht uns an, wir haben ein Stück finstern Mittelalters vor uns').

[83]On the British cremation movement, see B. Parsons, *Committed to the Cleansing Flame: The Development of Cremation in Nineteenth-Century England* (Reading, 2005).

[84]Siemens Archives Berlin, Lr 519, 'Festschrift Regenerativofen'. See also F. Siemens, *Ueber die Vortheile der Anwendung hoch erhitzter Luft für die Verbrennung im Allgemeinen sowie im Besonderen in Bezug auf die Verbrennung von Leichen und die Zerstörung organischer Ueberreste* (Berlin, 1887).

[85]On the Gotha crematorium and its history, see Stadtvorstand (ed.), *Gedenkschrift zum 50jährigen Bestehen des Krematoriums in Gotha* (Gotha, 1928). See also Gotha City Archive, Stadtrat Gotha 1875, folder 532, loc. 51, no. 55a, 'Die Erbauung eines Leichenverbrennungsapparates auf dem Friedhof an der Langensalzener Str.', and folder 3545, vol. 1, 1874, loc. 51, no. 37, 'Die Einführung der fakultativen Leichenverbrennung'.

the discretion of individual municipalities. Gotha's city council voted in favour of this project, financed by the cremation society, which launched a fundraising campaign to gather the 15,000 Marks needed for this project.[86] The undertaking was supported by a new police code, which stipulated that any cremation in Gotha had to be authorized by the local police authority after a proper post-mortem examination of the deceased.[87] Correspondence between Gotha's city architect Julius Bertuch, who oversaw the construction of the crematorium, and Siemens' engineer Richard Schneider, responsible for the construction of the furnace, reveals that it was the explicit request of the city of Gotha to add a mechanical elevator for corpses to the crematorium – at a cost of 2,425 Marks (Figure 6).[88] This enhancement made the cremation furnace even more 'modern' in the eyes of those in favour of cremation. It displayed the technical advancements late nineteenth-century engineering was capable of – something the city and its businesses were particularly proud of. Thus, although the Gotha cremationists were not the trailblazers of the German cremation discourse dominated by prominent physicians such as Reclam or Rudolf Virchow,[89] they were the first to put cremation in their city into practice. A commemorative booklet for the fiftieth anniversary of the crematorium and what it called 'wise and free-thinking' supporters stated:[90] 'One may think whatever one likes about Thuringia's state particularism in the last century, but one good thing came out of it: the residence cities turned into dense cultural centres, the relevance, richness and importance of which cannot be found anywhere else in Germany.'[91]

The crematorium was constructed in a neoclassical style according to Bertuch's designs on the newly established cemetery number V on the outskirts of the city. Today, it is Gotha's main cemetery.[92] This cemetery was as new as the crematory: it opened in 1878 and was extended in 1908 and 1920. Bertuch's facility consisted of two temple-like sections, one of which served to store the bodies awaiting cremation, while the other accommodated the cremation furnace and a funeral chapel (Figure 7). Comparable to the columbarium in Milan, an urn hall was erected in Gotha at a later stage (1892), challenging Christian earth burial.[93] Its ground plan

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[86] In co-operation with the First European Cremation Congress in Dresden (1876), where share certificates were sold, Gotha's cremation association was able to raise the sum. Single donors like a certain Elfriede, who wanted to be remembered on a metal plate on the crematorium wall for her charity, donated 6,000 Marks. See G. Schneider, 'Geschichte der Leichenverbrennung', *Allgemeine Augsburger Zeitung*, 348, 14 Dec. 1877.

[87] Gotha City Archive, folder 3584, loc. 51, no. 48a, 10 Nov. 1876, 'Die polizeilichen Bestimmungen über Feuerbestattung Verstorbener sowie der Nachtrag zur Friedhofsverordnung vom 1.7.1875'. See also N. Fischer, 'Gotha 1878: Das erste Krematorium und die Anfänge der modernen Feuerbestattung in Deutschland', *Ohlsdorf – Zeitschrift für Trauerkultur*, 83, IV (2003).

[88] Gotha City Archive, Stadtrat Gotha 1875, folder 532, loc. 51, no. 55a, 'Die Erbauung eines Leichenverbrennungsapparates'.

[89] R. Virchow, 'Rede im Preußischen Abgeordnetenhaus, 12. März, 25. April, 1. Juni 1875', in C. Andree (ed.), *Rudolf Virchow: Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 34, II (Berlin, 1999), 90–2, 195–6, 217–33.

[90] Stadtvorstand (ed.), *Gedenkschrift*, 3.

[91] *Ibid.* ('Man mag über die thüringische Kleinstaaterei im vorigen Jahrhundert denken was man will, ein Gutes hat sie zur Folge gehabt: Die Residenzen wurden Sammelpunkte von Kulturstätten, wie wir sie in ihrer Bedeutung und Reichhaltigkeit und mit ihrem Wert sonst nicht in Deutschland finden').

[92] Stadtvorstand (ed.), *Gedenkschrift*, 3.
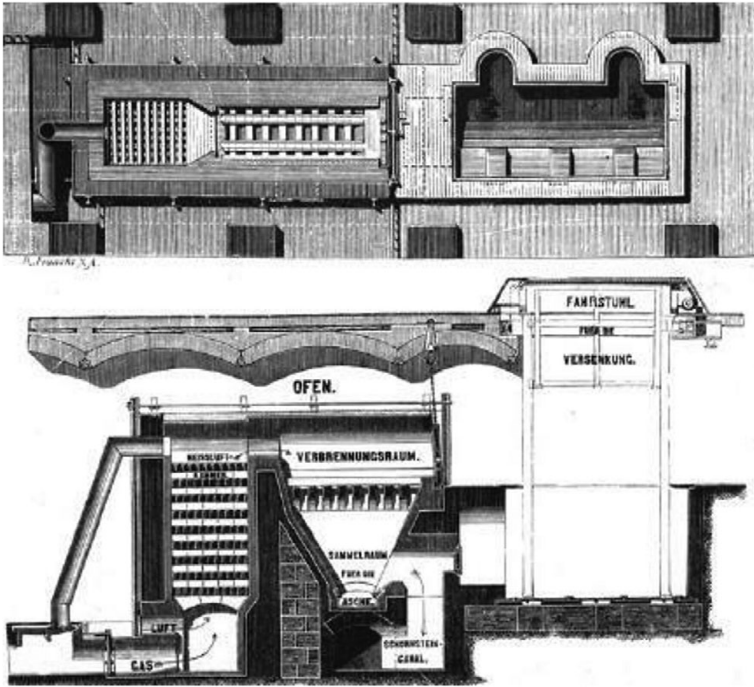
[93] Pfeiffer, *Das Ewige*, 221–6.

Figure 6. Crematory designed by Friedrich Siemens. This device was equipped with a lift with which the corpse could be lowered in the combustion chamber. As with Venini's crematory, Siemens' model featured a mechanism with which the coffin could be introduced into the furnace.
Source: Siemens, *Ueber die Vortheile*, 6.

extended around a semicircle with an inner courtyard covered by a glass roof at its centre (Figure 8).[94]

In 1877, Gotha's city council determined that urns should be kept in this space for no longer than 20 years, unless relatives requested otherwise. The time regime on the new cemeteries, thus, extended to urns as well.[95] Since the crematory opened the same year as the new cemetery and since Siemens' furnace could be fired with coke and coal,[96] therefore requiring no gas tanks or pipes, the entire complex moved closer to the centre of the cemetery when compared to Milan. On a symbolical level, this could be read as an indication that the crematory and cremation had enjoyed a greater degree of acceptance in Gotha and its mainly Protestant society. Most importantly, the crematorium manifested the liberal-progressive self-image the city wanted to be recognized for. As mentioned earlier, modern cremation initially had a strong

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[94]Gotha City Archive, folder 3607, loc. 51, no. 67, 1879, 'Die Einrichtung des Columbariums auf Friedhof V'.

[95]Gotha City Archive, folder 3584, loc. 51, no. 48a: 'Handschriftliche Verfertigung zur Urnenbeisetzung 1. Juli 1875 – 4. März 1877'. A little later, the city council conceded a period of 30 years. For this, 25 Marks had to be paid to the city treasury (folder 3650, loc. 51, no. 114, 1889).

[96]Stadtvorstand (ed.), *Gedenkschrift*, 22.
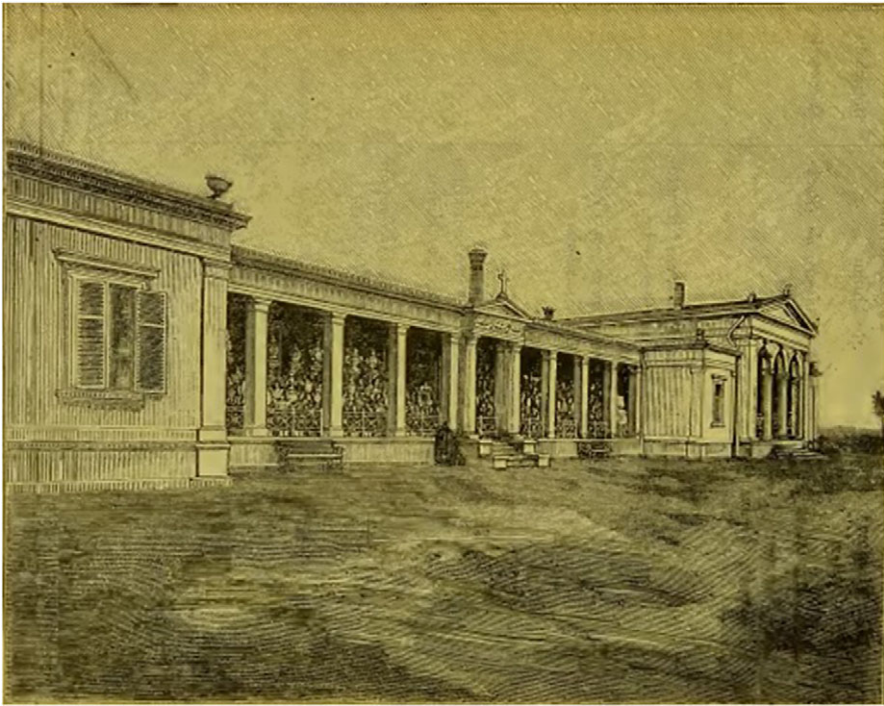
Figure 7. Crematory in Gotha.
Source: Selbstverlag des Vereins für Feuerbestattung 'Die Flamme' (ed.), *Catalog der Crematistischen Ausstellung des VIII. Internationalen Congresses für Hygiene und Demographie in Budapest, 1.–9. September 1894* (Vienna, 1894), 126.

secularist encoding, but the boundaries between the religious and the secular(ist) were again fluid. In the case of Gotha, the city's cremation records revealed a rational-administrative rather than an anti-religious tone. To be precise, religion was not an issue at all in these documents. This could be considered a secular moment as it reflected the shrinking influence of the church over the dead and their spaces. It was the city, civil institutions and physicians, not the church or the clergy deciding about the dead and their cremation. This laic supremacy resulted from a longer historical development of gradual secularization in the sphere of dying, death and burial from the eighteenth century onwards, with milestones such as Napoleon's *Décret impérial sur les sépultures* or the General State Laws for the Prussian States. Cemeteries moved out of the cities for hygienic reasons with local authorities gaining authority over these spaces.[97] Individual religious (or non-religious) confessions were not affected by these regulations.

Due to such developments, in the nineteenth century, requests for cremations had to be directed to the city council. Citizens who petitioned for this kind of treatment of their mortal remains often paid money to the council in advance to ensure a quick and uncomplicated cremation, either because they did not want to burden their relatives with this task or because they did not trust them to fulfil this very special and

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[97]R. Sörries, *Ruhe Sanft: Kulturgeschichte des Friedhofs* (Kevelaer, 2011), 156–63.

Figure 8. Coloured postcard, urn hall, Gotha. With such postcard greetings from Gotha, the city's liberal and innovative self-image was sent out to the world.
Source: www.zeno.org – Henricus – Edition Deutsche Klassik GmbH.

socio-confessionally charged last wish, which could potentially damage reputations in a mainly Christian society. To them, the city and its administration obviously seemed a neutral executor. Moreover, while reasons for cremation are mostly absent from these requests, sometimes the applicants clearly expressed a desire to be cremated without church ceremony, as for example city councillor Dr A. Rueb in his letter to the council.[98] In any case, the city of Gotha allowed the crematory and associated infrastructures in its new cemetery, willingly accepting the confessional challenges they would cause.

The above-mentioned engineer Stier was the first to be cremated in Gotha's new crematory. Like Keller, he died before furnace and building were ready, which is why his corpse, like Keller's, was embalmed.[99] But unlike Milan counterpart, Stier was buried in a metal coffin in a provisional earth grave. A year after his death, on 10 December 1878, his cremation took place in Gotha. Like Keller's, Stier's cremation was attended by a Protestant pastor, Superintendent Seydel. In his address, Seydel pointed out the unconventionality of cremation and that it had been 'our high authorities'[100] who had permitted it. Next, Seydel made it clear that he would *not* perform any Christian rituals during this cremation, since Stier had already been buried in a proper Christian earth grave the year before. While this was a sound explanation, behind it was also an insecurity about what to do and a certain reluctance to take immediate action from the church's side. But, as Seydel conceded

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[98]Gotha City Archive, folder 3665, loc. 51, no. 129, 1911, 'Anträge auf Feuerbestattung'.

[99]*Gothaische Zeitung*, 10 Dec. 1878, 'Locales'.

[100]*Ibid.* ('unsere hohen Autoriäten').

in words, if not in deeds, the Protestant church in Gotha would not refuse its participation. On the contrary, it wanted to demonstrate publicly that cremation was compatible with religion and that church officials were prepared to accompany both burials and cremations in the same way.

Thus, the church and its officials embraced the narrative of innovation and liberalism, and tried to combine both with Protestant Christianity.[101] As the *Gothaische Zeitung* reported on the event of the first cremation, a cheerful atmosphere prevailed at the cemetery among the many guests, high officials from Gotha, the duchy and out-of-town visitors alike. Many critics of cremation seemed to have been won over by the simplicity of the procedure.[102]

As seen earlier with the letter of complaint in *Die Flamme*, Protestantism and cremation did not easily co-exist in every German city. The crematory in Gera, 100 kilometres east of Gotha, that went into operation in 1910, featured a so-called 'hole for monists',[103] a special sinking shaft called for by the regional church congregation of the duchy of Reuss in order to separate cremations carried out with Christian support from non-religious ones. The secularist German Monist Association, with prominent figures like Ernst Haeckel and the Nobel Prize Winner Wilhelm Ostwald, who became known for his Monist Sunday sermons, was founded in 1906 in the neighbouring city of Jena.[104] Members of the region's cremation societies were often at the same time monists and held secularist worldviews.

The second crematory on German soil was not opened until 13 years after the one in Gotha in Heidelberg. Even though numbers of those choosing cremation in the nineteenth century were modest,[105] Gotha continued to receive a steady inflow of dead bodies transported from all over the German Empire and Europe for cremation. This also meant a considerable source of income for the city's hospitality industry. Advertisements placed in cremation journals testify to this (Figure 9). Once cremation gained popularity, the *Königliche Preußische Eisenbahnverwaltung* (Royal Prussian Railway Administration) even constructed special wagons for the transportation of corpses to crematories (Figure 10). This was an expensive enterprise, since this service entailed additional costs like wagon use (30 Marks), fees for no-load routes, fees for the transport of the coffin (30 Pfennige/km) and the ticket for the accompanying person.

Innovations associated with a certain amount of confessional upheaval also had an economic dimension. Cities with crematoria and corresponding infrastructures benefited or hoped to benefit from them.

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[101]On Protestantism's adaptability to new trends in the funeral system, see F. Rehlinghaus, *Die Verkirchlichung der protestantischen Bestattung im bürgerlichen Zeitalter* (Kassel, 2008).

[102]*Gothaische Zeitung*, 10 Dec. 1878, 'Locales'.

[103]N. Fischer, *Zwischen Trauer und Technik: Feuerbestattung, Krematorium, Flamarium, eine Kulturgeschichte* (Berlin, 2002), 38 ('Monistenloch').

[104]*Ibid.*, 38–9.

[105]Before the turn of the century, numbers barely reached 200 per year. After 1900, they began to rise steadily, from 1,074 in 1903 to 11,138 in 1914, also because more cities allowed the building of crematoria. This trend continued through wartime and the post-war period. Davies and Mates (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Cremation*, 438–55. Special insurance policies made cremation affordable for workers and their families and gave it a socialist colouring in the later nineteenth century. S. Prüfer, *Sozialismus statt Religion: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vor der religiösen Frage, 1863–1890* (Göttingen, 2002).

Figure 9. Advertisement for Gotha's Hotel Herzog Ernst. Corpses were transported to Gotha by train. Those who escorted the dead or travelled to Gotha to attend cremations were enticed by the hotel's proximity to the station, its quiet location appropriate to the occasion, and other amenities.
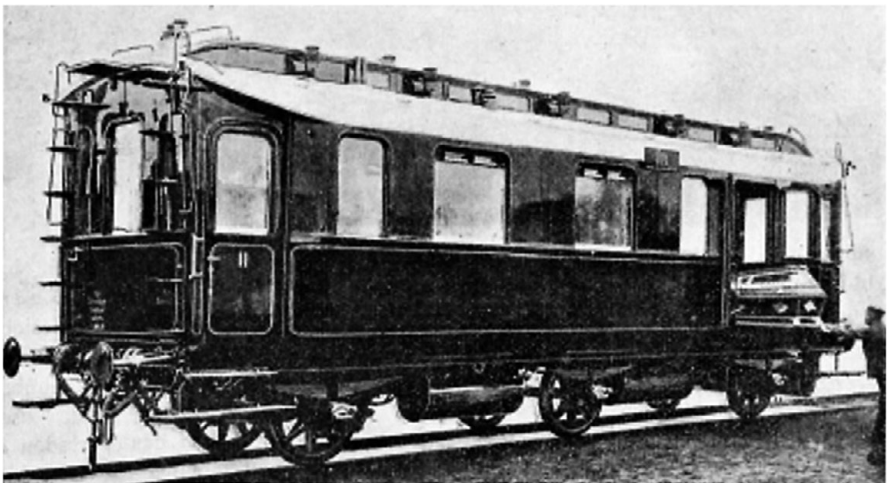*Source: Die Flamme* (1905), 4436.

Figure 10. Special wagon of the Royal Prussian Railway Administration (with a mechanism for loading the coffin) by which corpses could be transported to cities with crematories. Before this invention, coffins were transported in closed freight cars.
Source: Die Flamme (1905), 4437.

Conclusion

This article's focus has been on developments in two European cities of the long nineteenth century, a period of city building and urban growth and a century in which the city was increasingly attractive for residents and industrial workers alike.[106] The city during that time was a space of liberalization and hopes for a better future for many, promising and offering new ways of living together, of communicating, believing (or not believing), of creating, socializing, inventing, learning and consuming. At the same time, it faced severe critique and rejection for this very liberality and the hopeful promises that were belied by the lived experiences of many.[107]

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[106]J. Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 2010), 360–5.

[107]On the city of the nineteenth century, a topic that has been comprehensively studied, see J.-L. Pinol (ed.), *Histoire de l'Europe urbaine* (2 vols., Paris, 2003); A. Lees and L. Hollen Lees, *Cities and the Making of*

The history of modern cremation was closely entwined with this urban take off, with the flourishing public and political life in cities, and the negotiations of power between the secular and the religious within. The history of the first crematories confirm what Simon Gunn has concluded more generally for cities and their infrastructures in the later nineteenth century: 'infrastructural complexes' he writes, had 'knock-on effects for the performance of citizenship'.[108] The often tireless engagement of citizens with cremation in the nineteenth century bore witness to that. Interestingly, as has become evident in this article, modern cremation in its beginnings was not so much part of the history of metropolises like London, New York or Berlin, but of large cities like Milan or smaller residential cities like Gotha. Both modern cities associated cremation with a sense of self-determination and liberty, of rationality and progress, of multiple choices and advanced technology. For these cities, the crematorium represented a special proof of their modernity, which the metropolises were in no hurry to prove since they were already perceived as centres of modernity. But they, too, quickly authorized the construction and commissioning of crematories in response to overcrowded cemeteries and hygiene requirements, for example in Paris at Père Lachaise cemetery in 1889.

As has been illustrated, secularist concepts influenced modern cities and intermingled with religious positions and institutions. It also became apparent that cremation technologies and their associated infrastructures carried worldview aspects. They were not neutral artefacts, but embedded in a dense web of secularist ideas, religious-reformist attitudes, visions of high culture, progress and notions of hygiene that emerged in modern nineteenth-century cities. One aspect that has only been briefly addressed here are the architectural designs of the new crematoria, which revived ancient forms with their often monumental and neoclassical façades. While the architecture of the crematoria has already been the subject of several studies,[109] some remarks on worldview and cities could be added here that have not been explicitly mentioned in these works. Indeed, the reference to the city as a specific space of innovation, open-mindedness and as an engine of progress was a decisive factor in the historical cremationists describing themselves as 'modern' in the sense they gave this term, namely characterized by science, technology, rationality, unbiasedness, aesthetics and progress. As Paolo Gorini, the Italian inventor of crematories, commented on his home city which allowed him to carry out his cremation experiments: 'It is an undeniable fact that there is no other city, even in Lombardy, than Lodi, which can pride itself more strongly of being emancipated from any shameful prejudice.'[110] All this was at the expense of Christian and sometimes Jewish religion, which were discursively marginalized and overwritten by references to antiquity – not least through architecture as has been shown with the columbarium

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Modern Europe, 1750–1914 (Cambridge, 2007); A. Lees and L. Hollen Lees, 'Europe: 1800–2000', in P. Clark (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cities in World History* (Oxford, 2013), 464–82; F. Lenger, *Metropolen der Moderne: Eine europäische Stadtgeschichte seit 1850* (Munich, 2013).

[108]S. Gunn *et al.*, 'Cities, infrastructure and the making of modern citizenship: the view from north-west Europe since *c.* 1870', *Urban History*, 50 (2023), 565–83, at 569.

[109]Winter, *Die Architektur*; Pfeiffer, *Das Ewige*; Malone, *Architecture*.

[110]P. Gorini, *Autobiografia* (Rome, 1881), 16 ('è un fatto incontrastabile che non vi è altra città nemmeno in Lombardia, che possa vantarsi più di Lodi emancipata da ogni degradante pregiudizio').

and temple-like crematoria. In the cremation discourse with its anticlericalism and anti-Catholicism, antiquity was portrayed as a time of non-Christian high culture.[111] Cremationists – in the nineteenth century stemming mainly from the bourgeoisie with its claim to set the tone in society – thus seem to have considered the city as what Jörg Rüpke has called a 'market for the shaping of the self'.[112] Cremation, its technology, infrastructures and architecture, intermingled with debates about religion and worldview, contributed to this self-fashioning and self-labelling: of individuals, groups and the cities they inhabited.

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[111]See, e.g., L.T. Neumann, *Urne statt Sarg* (Vienna, 1875), 4–20.

[112]J. Rüpke, *Urban Religion: A Historical Approach to Urban Growth and Religious Change* (Berlin, 2020), 150.