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Why Europe has never been united (not even in the afterworld): The fall and rise of cremation in cities (1876–1939)

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Why Europe has never been united (not even in the afterworld): The fall and rise of cremation in the cities (1876–1939)

Asher D. Colombo

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Why Europe has never been united (not even in the afterworld): The fall and rise of cremation in the cities (1876–1939)

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ABSTRACT

An intriguing paradox emerges in the history of disposal of the dead in Europe: the countries (Italy, Germany, England, and Scotland) where, in the last quarter of the 19th century, cremation was introduced first, were the last ones to see the diffusion of cremation as a mass phenomenon. The contrary was true where—for an instance, in Switzerland and in Denmark—the start of cremation was initially delayed. Here the growth was very fast. To explain this puzzling enigma, I propose to abandon the usual nation-level approach and take cities as appropriate units of analysis. So, a database on presence or absence of crematoria and on trends in “annual cremation by deaths ratios” in the European cities with more than 5,000 inhabitants before 1939 was completed for an analysis of patterns of the early emergence of cremation and change of cremation rate at a local level.

A look at the current levels of cremation in European countries shows a pattern well known to any scholar working in the field of cremation studies. Although in some countries cremation is now the method of disposal chosen by the large majority of the population, in others cremation remains a minor, or even negligible, phenomenon. In today's United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Switzerland, and most of the Northern European countries, cremation is the preferred form of burial for nearly four out of five deceased persons. In another group of countries—Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium and Portugal—cremation accounts for more than one half of all burials. In Austria, Finland, Russia, Norway, Spain, and France, more than one third of people choose cremation as the preferred form of disposal of their dead bodies. However, in some other countries, citizens are far from favoring it. Cremations are below 20% in Serbia, Italy, Ireland, and are almost negligible in Romania (author's calculations from the International Cremation Statistics of The Cremation Society of Great Britain, 2013). The geography of the distribution of crematoria shows a very similar pattern.

Hence the ranking in popularity of cremation among the European countries seems unquestionable and largely consistent with common sense. Northern European countries occupy the highest positions and the Southern

and Eastern countries the lowest, with the Central European countries in the middle. There are some remarkable exceptions, however: Iceland, which is in the North but has a cremation rate lower than expected, and Portugal, which is in the South but has a higher rate.

A serious shortcoming of this picture, however, is the fact that at the beginning of the revival of cremation in Europe, during the last quarter of the 19th century, the situation was very different. The case of Italy is the most striking but is far from unique. From the last quarter of the 19th century to the first decade of the 20th (and therefore for more than a third of a century), Italy had the largest number of crematoria in Europe, recorded the highest cremation rates, was the first country with a legal framework regulating cremations, and was even the destination of corpses for cremation from countries in which no furnace was available. And, of course, it was the first country to celebrate a modern cremation.

Following standard practice, in this article I use the term *modern cremation* as distinct from ancient or traditional cremation. A complete and detailed account of the difference between the meanings of the two expressions, and a complete bibliographic references list, would fall outside the scope of this paper. For the time being, suffice it to say that modern is the cremation

started in Europe after a 10-century-long period in which cremation disappeared in Europe as a standard form of burial, with some exceptions in the case of wars or as punishment for certain crimes in some areas of Europe. The first modern cremation took place in 1876 in Milan and was preceded by some very exceptional cases starting in the mid-1700s. None of these cases is modern in the meaning used here. The term is employed mainly to refer to a method of disposal different from the traditional one in that the process takes place indoors, in an enclosed facility—a temple—instead of outdoors; the process takes place within a modern, technological, and industrial furnace where the corpse is laid on a metallic surface rather than in the open air on a funeral pyre made of wood; the process takes place without emitting smells or sounds of the crackling wood; the corpse is incinerated by irradiated heat rather than by naked flame, so that the body is consumed, not burned; the ashes produced by the process must be pure, white, and without any trace of bones or other uncombusted parts, and it must be unmix- ed with fuel.

In a sense, Italy was an exceptional case throughout a century and a half, and more: at the beginning, during the last quarter of the 19th century, by virtue of its leading position; at the end because of its comparatively negligible levels of acceptance of, and recourse to, cremation. Although Italy seems an extreme case in which the top country becomes the bottom one, closer inspection of the history of cremation in Europe reveals some sort of pattern: the countries (besides Italy also Germany, and some countries of the United Kingdom, i.e., England and Scotland) where, in the last quarter of the 19th century, cremation was introduced first, were the last countries to see cremation become a mass phenomenon. Indeed, the mass diffusion of cremation dates back only to the 1930s in Germany to the post-WWII period in the United Kingdom; and it is even more recent (and confined to the North) in Italy. The contrary was true in those countries (e.g., Switzerland and in Denmark) where the start of cremation was initially delayed. In some ways the first countries set the pattern for the latter, apparently in a kind of fashion effect, but here the growth was very rapid. Suggesting an explanation for this conundrum is the main aim of this article.

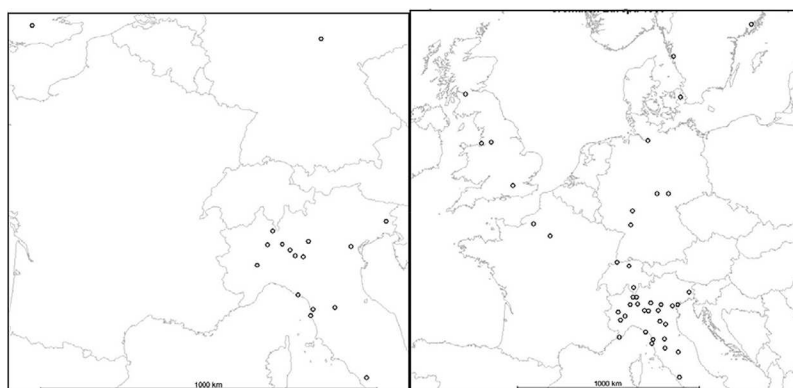
Cremation in historical and comparative perspective

In the last quarter of the last century, the birth of modern cremation in the Western world became established as a field of inquiry for historians. These

historical studies consider different countries, but they share a common perspective, a methodological point of view, and some underlying questions. After a first season of pioneering historical reconstructions (presented in De Cristoforis, 1890; Eassie, 1875; Erichsen, 1887; Maccone, 1932; Piattoli, 1774; Thompson, 1884, 1891), a new wave of studies focused on Italy (see Comba, Vigilante, & Mana, 1998; Conti, Isastia, & Tarozzi, 1998; Filippa, 2001; Novarino, 2006; Marco Novarino & Prestia, 2006; Pini, 1885; Sonetti, 2007), on England (Jupp, 1990, 2006; Koskinen, 2000; Parsons, 2005), on Sweden (Åhrén, 2009), on Germany (Ameskamp, 2006, 2008; Ferziger, 2011; Redlin, 2009; Schulz, 2013), on France (Pasteur, 1997), on Austria (Pasteur, 1994), on Norway (Hadders, 2013), on Romania (Rotar, 2013), and on the Czech Republic (Nešpor, 2011). All of them are national or local case studies focused on reconstruction of the histories of the cremationist associations, the social and cultural backgrounds and motivations of their founders, and the lives of the cremationist pioneers in one country or city. They then consider the political and institutional events that paved the way to the opening of crematoria, the achievement of legal reforms allowing cremation, and the obtaining of space in cemeteries where furnaces and temples could be built.

The basis provided by these historical studies allows consideration of some further questions. After a crematorium became available, it was no longer possible to prevent anyone from choosing this form of burial—or, put differently, after the political and institutional success, at least partial, of the various cremation movements—what happened to cremation as a distinct cultural phenomenon? Would this form of burial be chosen by the general citizenry?

To answer this question, a methodological shift is necessary. Rapid inspection of a map of the crematoria established in Europe between 1876, when the first crematorium and columbarium were created in Milan, Italy, and 1914, at the start of WWI, shows why (Figure 1). The map shows a cluster of points in the northern part of Italy, extending southwards but without crossing an imaginary line just below Livorno, and eastwards stopping before another line connecting Padova and Udine. The only exception, namely Rome, does not change the pattern, given the negligible number of cremations celebrated in the following years in the former capital city of the Papal States. This is the nucleus from which modern cremation spread. In the first part of this period, only two cities outside Italy had a crematorium: Gotha, a small town in the Duchy of Saxon-Coburg-Gotha, now Germany, and Woking, in the outskirts of London, England.



Source: History of Cremation in European Cities Database

Figure 1. Crematoria in European cities in 1885 (on the left) and 1899 (on the right). Source: History of Cremation in European Cities Database.

Q4

The map on the right side depicts the spread of crematoria outside the original Italian nucleus in two main directions. The first connects some Swiss cities, namely Zürich and Basel, with some German ones located along or near the basin of the River Rhine, like Heidelberg, Offenbach, and Mannheim. A second line connects Hamburg, København, Göteborg, and Stockholm, moving towards the Baltic Sea.

According to this chart, the onset of cremation in Europe exhibits two main patterns. First, since the time of its birth, modern cremation has never been a Europe-wide phenomenon; it does not concern the whole of Europe. Only some areas of Europe showed an interest in the reform, whereas others were entirely indifferent. Something similar happened in United States, where cremation is the chosen means of disposal for more than half of the dead bodies in some states, less than 5% in others and even within the same states, the cremation rate varies between rural and urban spaces (Davies & Mates, 2005).

Second, modern cremation is largely independent of the European political borders of that time. The boundaries between an initial cremationist area and a noncremationist one appear to be cultural, and they are apparent more within countries than among them. Italy is visibly split between cities in the center and northern part of the country and those in the southern part; the Swiss Confederation between the largest German-speaking cities near the German border, on the one hand, and the remaining territories on the other; Germany between cities in some of the partially autonomous north-central political entities, on the one hand, and the southern ones on the other; France—as usual—between Paris and the rest of the country.

If this is the case, a country-level analysis would neglect this subnational and supranational structure of

the birth of cremation in Europe, and the subsequent pattern of its spread.

This makes sense. Cremation has to be a local practice. Only if a furnace is present in the city where people live can they choose cremation. The utility of a furnace in the same country decreases with distance. Of course, a corpse can be cremated in a different city. Indeed, this circulation of corpses was a common, and well documented, practice in the pioneering era; but it could be an option for only a very limited part of the population, the most affluent, open-minded, and “committed to the cleansing flame”, to use the incisive expression coined by Brian Parsons (2005). Instead, the general population needs a local facility and personnel. Hence this study takes the city, not the country, as its unit of analysis, and considers patterns of cremation at the city level.

Focusing on the cities with a crematorium makes it possible to move from analysis of the relationships between the reform movement’s leaders and political institutions—undertook by historians—to analysis of cultural and behavioral change. Indeed, the cremationist associations went through two different phases to install crematoria in cities. First they raised the funds. This was a very selective activity addressed only to higher economic strata of the population, where potential donors were present. These were the people able to put acceptance of the ideal of cremation into effect by making donations to build a furnace or even a columbarium. In this first phase, the pioneers appealed mainly to the industrial high bourgeoisie, the ruling classes, and the high ranks of the military; and they mobilized different rhetoric modulated according to the sensibilities of those classes with economic, aesthetic, and rational arguments.

Second, these associations struggled to persuade local or national governments to authorize the construction of crematoria and to provide space in cemeteries for

them. The associations produced propaganda aimed more to demonstrate the need for the reform to the authorities than to recruit new supporters. Many years after, in 1937, all the national-based associations even undertook to establish a stable and permanent partnership and gave birth to the International Cremation Federation. This was an important step in the diffusion of cremation in Europe (Davies, 2005.). But, after the crematoria had been opened and activated, the challenge for the cremationist movement changed completely. It now had to persuade real men and women that the centuries-long inhumation should be abandoned and replaced by the new, more ecological, effective, clean, modern, and scientific, way to dispose of the dead. But, what conditions favored this outcome?

The history of cremations in european cities database

A peculiar historical circumstance supplies the resources required by the above-mentioned methodological shift. The revival of cremation in Europe is to be attributed mainly to a wide array of free associations. The main goals of these associations were to raise funds for the building of a crematorium, to receive from the local government space in the grounds of cemeteries to establish a furnace, and to persuade the national government to change the law and grant the right to be cremated to those who asked for it during their lifetimes. After achieving these goals, the associations started to collect data on the yearly number of cremations in their city or country, sometimes also with information on the age, gender, profession, religion, place of birth, and place of death of the cremated persons, and final destinations of the ashes. Unfortunately, these data are scattered among a number of irregularly published journals, printed or unprinted bulletins, yearbooks, association documents, archives, accounts reports, or books. To conduct the research on which this paper is based, all these raw and sparse data were collected in a database. The list of the data sources is too long to be published here. It will be on a website after the database's completion. Instead, the almost complete time series date at the national level are already available in the appendix of the fundamental *Encyclopedia of Cremation* (Davies & Mates, 2005). The History of Cremation in European Cities Database contains information on the numbers of cremations, deaths, and population by year for all of 301 European cities with a crematorium opened before 1939. The main purpose of the database is to analyze the dimensions and patterns of change of cremations at a local level. Many other data on covariates have been added

for the purpose of in-depth analysis. This article is based on a subset of the original database, focusing on the analysis of the data for the period 1876–1939 on 227 cities out of the 247 with a crematorium opened before 1934, which means 91.9% of the total, and 3,574 city-by-year observations (namely the values on each city for any single year) out of the 4,990 ones possible, which means 71.6%, of the yearly number, in absolute value, of cremations in all European cities with a crematorium opened before 1934. Cities where cremation started after 1934 were excluded because the five years span was too short to perform the analysis. Where figures on cremations were not available, estimation was provided.

Beside this, the same information has also been collected on any European city with more than 5,000 inhabitants, to analyze the differences between cities that have opened a crematorium and those that have not.

The main indicator used in what follows will be the cremation by death ratio (i.e., the number of cremations by 1,000 deaths per year). The main purpose of this indicator is to capture the trends of cremations in Europe at the city level rather than at the country level.

What follows should be regarded as a first analysis of the History of Cremation in European Cities Database focused mainly on the historical trends of cremations in European cities, and as a tentative analysis of the factors that determined, at least in part, the success or the failure of this new method of burial.

After the start: Cremation in european cities

Observing the variations of the cremation by death ratio in the European cities, a clear regularity emerges. The pattern of cremation trends among the cities considered is highly differentiated. No matter the country, in some cities cremation spread very rapidly almost immediately after the opening of the facilities. In those cities cremation had already superseded any other form of burial after fewer than 10 years. By contrast, in other cities cremation did not grow in amount, and its popularity remained confined within very limited social circles. In a few of the cities belonging to this second group, the number of cremations even fell. This bifurcation does not follow a countrywide pattern. Cremation grew in some Italian cities, did not in others, and, as seen, decreased in yet others; but exactly the same happened in France, Germany, Switzerland, and England. There are no statistically significant differences between countries in three out of four decades considered as determined by a one-way analysis of variance performed taking annual mean growth of the cremation by death

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum value of the mean annual variation of cremation by 1,000 death ratio for 199 cities with a crematorium opened before 1934 and data available on cremations and on death, by country; 1930–1939; European countries at the current borders.

Country	<i>n</i> of cities	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	City w min value	City w max value
Austria	5	−12.9	16.2	−29.0	9.3	Linz	Graz
Belgium	1	16.6		16.6	16.6		
Czech Republic	10	2.4	4.8	−7.7	9.0	Most	Olomuc
Denmark	11	12.4	6.8	4.0	28.1	Svendborg	Kolding
Finland	1	1.7		1.6	1.6		
France	5	4.3	3.8	0.8	9.6	Marseille	Lyon
Germany	92	8.3	4.6	−2.9	22.4	Krefeld	Saarbrücken
Italy	32	12.1	39.1	−6.8	166.6	Venezia	Lodi
Netherlands	1	9.2		9.3	9.2		
Poland	1	5.7		5.7	5.7		
Romania	1	−2.5		−2.5	−2.5		
Sweden	12	13.4	5.7	5.9	23.6	Ekilstuna	Trelleborg
Switzerland	18	2.5	2.4	−3.0	6.2	Chur	Solothurn
United Kingdom	9	14.4	7	4.4	29.0	London	Edinburgh
Total	199	8.2	17	−29	166.6	Linz	Lodi

Source: History of Cremation in European Cities Database.

Q5

ratio in all the cities considered as a dependent variable. This happens in the following decades: 1900–1909, 1910–1919, and 1930–1939. Only in the decade 1920–1929 the difference between countries is statistically significant. Inspecting more thoroughly inside the decade 1920–1929, the country level comparison shows that only Italy is different from others, namely Czech Republic, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and Switzerland. Indeed in that decade the death by cremation mean rate in Italy was falling; meanwhile everywhere else it was growing. So, if we remove Italy from the dataset, this decade behaves like the others (Tables provided at request).

Table 1 synthesized this evidence showing that mean annual variation of cremation by death rate in European cities varies among countries and within them, as showed by the standard deviation, and minimum and maximum values.

Closer inspection of the trends at city level in three countries reveals the bifurcation mentioned. Germany, Switzerland, and Italy were chosen because in the 1920s they have a sufficient number of facilities to allow the depiction of divergences in trends. To maintain readability, the graphs presented in the figures are focused on only some cities. These cities are taken as paradigms exemplifying the prevalent trends among all cities in the database for each country. The graphs in Figures 3–5 describe the trends of cremation in those cities. Germany and Switzerland are considered first. In both countries, the trends proceed in parallel from the introduction of crematoria until 1920. As the lines show, during this first period, cremations grew only slightly. But the graphs show that after 1920 something happened in both countries. Although in some cities cremations continued to grow, and even more rapidly, in others the growth halted. The former group

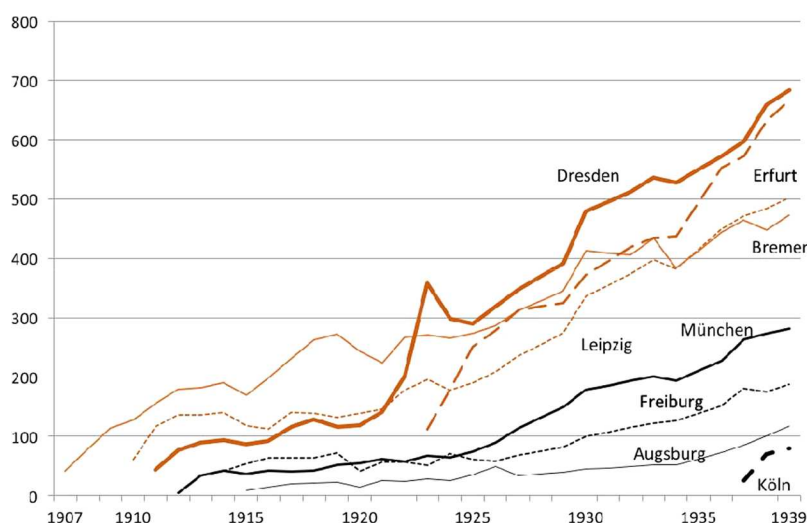


Figure 2. Cremation by 1,000 deaths in some German cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants, 1907–1939.

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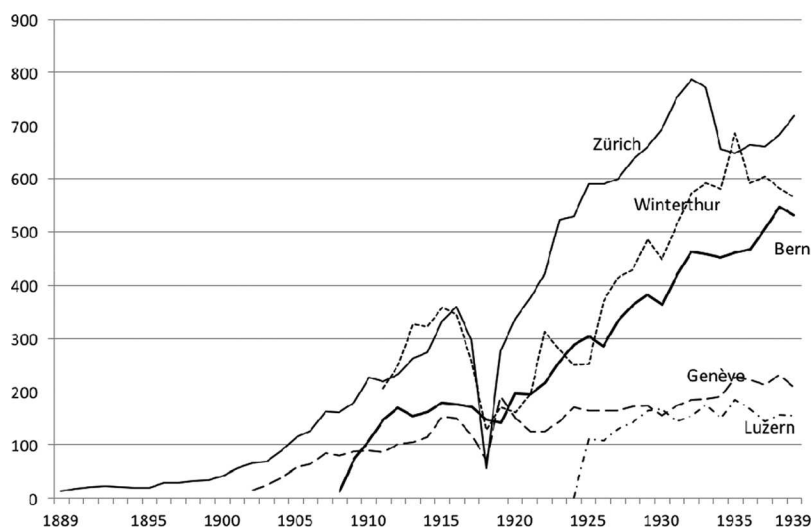


Figure 3. Cremation by 1,000 deaths in some Swiss cities, 1907–1939.

comprises Dresden, Bremen, and Leipzig in Germany and Zürich, Winthertur, Basel, and Bern in Switzerland. Belonging to the latter group are Freiburg and München in Germany, Genève and Luzern in Switzerland. The same pattern was visible in Italy, however already a decade previously. The bifurcation among Italian cities is less evenly balanced, with only Livorno (Leghorn) on one side, and all the other cities on the other. Surprisingly even those cities that pioneered cremation, like Milano, Genova, Torino, did not record any growth in the number of cremations. This indicates that a small part of the higher classes continued to use this method of disposal, but its members were unable to convert to the reform not only the middle and working classes but also even the members of their own class. Note that even some leaders and founders of the main European cremationist associations changed their ideas right

before death and were not cremated. The pace of growth in Livorno was somewhat slower than in Dresden or Zürich, but the split is the same.

Hence, in the period between 1906 and 1939, the European cities in which cremations started moved in two different directions. The first was the spread of cremation as the main method of burial. The second was the circulation within a restricted elite of the notion of cremation as a mark of distinction. Thus, even the history of the European areas at the head of the cremation movement bifurcates. Some of them experienced rapid and constant growth until they reached very large numbers of cremations in a few years—in many cases, more than half of all burials in fewer than ten years. In other cities, cremations barely reached a lower ceiling and became stable for at least a century. Hence, cremations reached a ceiling in some

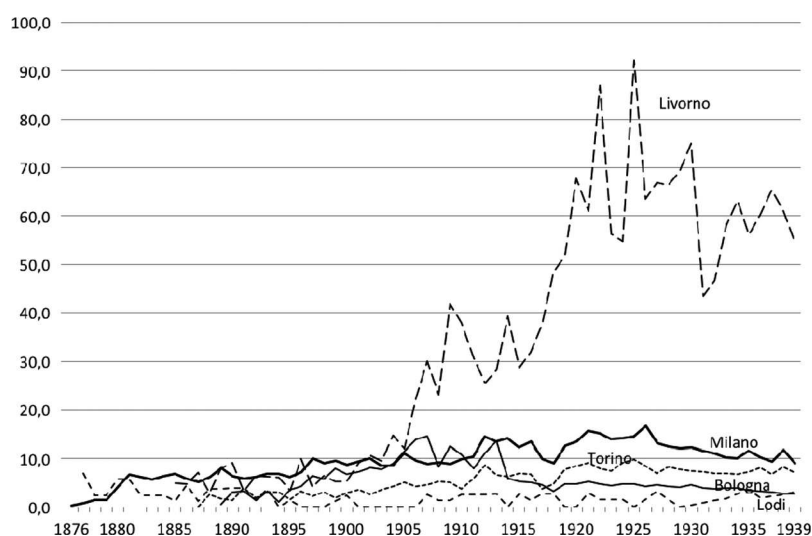


Figure 4. Cremation by 1,000 deaths in some Italian cities, 1876–1939.

citizenry were addressed to three main targets. Besides trying to convince women that cremation was gentle and polite, and the lower classes that cremation was cheap and a symbol of social equality, one of the main efforts was directed to persuade the devout that there was nothing sinful about cremation, despite the claims of ministers, priests, popes, and rabbis. This was a very difficult task to accomplish.

The existence of systematic differences in cremation acceptance by class, gender, and religious faith emerges in a speculative or anecdotal fashion in part of the historical literature. No data have been presented to support this pattern, however. The analysis of the effect of gender, social class, and religious affiliation on attitudes on cremation will be the topic of a future publication (but see Laqueur, 2015).

It should be borne in mind that the main religious confessions in Europe at that time—Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, Islamic—had (and still have) different burial practices, but they shared common roots and beliefs. Even without any precise indications in the sacred texts, their main teachers had always, or at least for a long time, prescribed internment (or burial in a crypt) and banned cremation. But when the revival of cremation started in some parts of Europe, different reactions arose among those religious groups.

At least implicitly, an important question occupied the center of the debate: how to behave with people who claimed to choose cremation? Since cremations had begun, Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Christians, and Jews had disagreed less on attitudes toward cremation than on attitudes toward the cremated people, or the would-be cremated. At present, I do not have data on Muslims, so this article does not mention this important group reaching about 4 million people in Europe before WWII, excluding the eastern countries and Russia. The main questions concerned those who decided to choose cremation as a form of burial and those who were members of the cremationist associations. Even if a large part of the cremationists were unaffiliated and considered cremation to be not only a method of disposal of the body but also a specific kind of ceremony – so threatening the monopoly of the Church—some of them were devout members of one of these denominations, and many claimed that cremation was nothing but a form of disposal of the body and did not interfere with religious practices and beliefs. As a consequence, bishops, ministers, popes, and rabbis were asked to take a position on cremation by devout members of their religious communities. A wide range of positions emerged in response to this new challenge. But in general two main answers were given to the question “What should be done with people who choose to break this precept?”

The first answer came from the solid, compact, and almost unanimous position of the Roman Catholic Church. To answer the questions repeatedly raised by certain bishops, the Congregazione del Sant’Uffizio (i.e., the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office) in 1886 pronounced on the matter and issued two distinct decrees, on May 19 and December 15, followed by three others on July 27, 1892, August 3, 1897, and June 19, 1926. In the two first decrees—named “Quoad cadaverum cremationes” and “Quoad corporum cremationem”—the Pope not only confirmed the prescription of inhumation but introduced two specific sanctions for two categories of people: the members of associations promoting cremation, and those who chose cremation. First they were excommunicated; second they were banned from consecrated ground in the cemeteries, the majority of which, in the Catholic countries, were under the rule of the Church. Priests were banned from celebrating Mass for the cremated, and even from being present at the incineration ceremony. None of these sanctions was symbolic. By enforcing them, the Catholic Church threatened to separate the cremated not only from the community of the faithful but also from their relatives already buried in family graves within a consecrated cemetery. No data are available on how strictly this rule was enforced by the priests. But the concrete possibility to receive such harsh sanctions was probably enough to keep Roman Catholics distant from cremation for a long time. It is worth pointing out that this attitude became so rooted that it persisted among the faithful even after partial removal of the ban in 1968. In the course of my research, I collected evidence that, even after the removal, some Catholic priests continued to be hostile to cremation, claiming that the official position of the Church was opposed to it. And even some faithful shared the same certainty long after the lifting of the ban. Belief in this claim kept the faithful away from cremation for many decades after the ban’s removal.

The members of the so-called Old Catholic Church, the members of the various Protestant denominations, and the Jews reacted in a very different, far less unanimous, manner. The first accepted cremation very rapidly (Ameskamp, 2006; Maccone, 1932), but they were few in number. Given the absence of a strictly centralized hierarchy, a variety of practices and opinions emerged among Protestants and Jews. Initially, the position was similar, if not exactly the same, as that expressed by the Catholic hierarchy. Protestants and Jews condemned cremation, at least from a theological point of view. However first in some Jewish milieux, and then in some Protestant ones, new and more open attitudes emerged.

The belief that, according to rigid Mosaic Law, cremation was unacceptable acquired a certain consensus among rabbis. But discussion began on the sanctions and on what to do with faithful leaving the disposition to be cremated in the last will or with de facto situations when a Jew is already cremated. The idea that breach of this norm was less serious than the violation of others, like the abstention from circumcision or respect for the Shabbat (the day of rest), began to spread. This happened not only among the so-called reformist or liberal rabbis, but also among some of the orthodox ones. The latter two of the above sins pushed the faithful outside the community. But what about the law-abiding members of the community, fully compliant with the precepts who, at the very end of their lives, for personal reasons without anything to do with an intention to breach religious norms or subvert religious values, but only to not comply with a custom, choose cremation as a form of disposal? In regard to this situation, some rabbis confirmed that cremation was forbidden but, after it had been carried out, that a proper burial could be given in consecrated ground within the boundaries of a Jewish cemetery. On the contrary, scattering of the ashes and giving special place for the cremated could not be allowed. Based on this argument, some rabbis chose not to include these members of the community in the list of the sinners the community doesn't mourn or doesn't give proper funeral rites. After 1887 the rabbis who accepted that argument started to give a religious burial, a space in the cemetery, and a standard funeral rite to the cremated. The only exception concerned those who had chosen cremation to take a stand against the religious authorities or precepts. Thus the prescription of perpetual internment was maintained, but its violation did not produce the harsh consequences that observant Catholics faced (Benamozegh, 1905; Ferziger, 2011, 2012; Rabinowicz, 2008).

Among the Protestant clergy, disapproval of cremation was initially strong, at least in some areas of Protestant Europe. In Germany, Protestant ministers shared with the Catholic bishops a strong condemnation of cremation. In an 1898 pamphlet, the German Protestant church expressed vociferous opposition to cremation (Ferziger, 2011; Leaney, 1989), but this was mainly a reaction to the emergence of a wide variety of positions. In Saxony and Bayern, the Protestant clergy were largely free to decide by themselves how to respond to a request for religious celebration of a cremation ceremony and funeral, whereas in Berlin the *Evangelischer Oberkirchenrat* forbade ministers from celebrating within crematoria. However, many of them decided not to deprive the faithful of spiritual comfort.

Ameskamp estimated that more than 80% of the cremations were celebrated with the presence of a minister (Ameskamp, 2006). When, in 1911, the Prussian government legalized cremation, the Protestant church immediately removed the ban (Pasteur, 1994).

The clerics of the English Church were also divided. Some of them opposed cremation with the argument that it undermined belief in the resurrection of bodies, but many others favored cremation and even subscribed declarations in favor of it (Leaney, 1989). Hence the English clergy welcomed the sanitary rationale that the cremationists promoted, and they actively participated in the initial commitment to spreading the idea of cremation and conducting the funeral rite. Some of them saw cremation as a way to increase religious participation (Maccone, 1932). A photograph of 1929 shows civic and religious authorities gathered together at the inauguration of the new crematorium in Edinburgh; an image barely imaginable in Catholic settings like the Italian cities (Maccone, 1932). The Protestant clergy very soon removed the ban and opened a new phase of tolerance, then of acceptance, and finally of full religious institutionalization. An advertisement for a funeral home services in 1920 already showed a minister scattering ashes on a cemetery lawn (Unknown, 1939).

Hence the main difference between Protestant (and Jewish) clergies, on the one hand, and Catholic ones on the other, was that, from the outset, the latter were united against cremation, whereas the former were divided and started to discuss the issue, looking for benefits and disadvantages. The debates first persuaded the Protestant clergies to accept the idea of conducting a ceremony after cremation, but they then accepted even to be present within the crematorium and to celebrate the rite; a choice that Catholic Church postponed until 1969 and definitively accepted in 1983. Incidentally, this is exactly what had already happened in Milan since 1876, when a modern cremation took place for the first time in Europe. On that day, in the great lobby of the temple in the Monumental Cemetery, an evangelical minister described the cremation of the body of Albert Keller as nothing more than fulfillment of the last wish of the Swiss captain of industry living in the Italian city. But the minister went even further, saying that the act served for the moral enhancement of the witnesses and for the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth (Unknown, 1876).

These different reactions stemmed from different understandings of the afterlife between Catholics and Protestants. As Stannard noted, the Catholic idea of Purgatory rests on a conception of the postmortem faith of the dead as being largely influenced by the efforts, the

prayers, the requiem masses, and so on, of the living—
 like family, friends, but even a passerby, whom an
 inscription on a gravestone often asks for a prayer or
 even only a thought (Le Goff, 1981; Stannard, 1977).
 With the Calvinist idea of predestination, instead, there
 is nothing that living men and women could do to alter
 that fate (Stannard, 1977). As a consequence, the funeral
 ritual, and everything that follows, is of no importance.
 Hence, among Protestants, not only is the method of
 disposal of little interest, but a method allowing the
 preservation of the dead body is also without meaning.

But there is another reason for the different reaction
 among Protestants and Catholics. If one considers the
 relationships between the faithful and the Church—as
 opposed to the relationships between the faithful and
 God—these are authoritarian and un-egalitarian among
 the Catholics, and liberal and egalitarian among the
 Protestants (Todd, 1990). Furthermore, Catholics focus
 on obedience to the priests, conformity and compliance
 to the beliefs, whereas Protestants focus on responsi-
 bility, individual autonomy, and choice. Therefore,
 given the fact that their religious conscience was demo-
 cratized, only the latter is given the right to choose
 freely among different ways of behavior.

The different reactions had consequences. Cremation
 freely developed only in milieux where there was a
 greater willingness to accept social and cultural change.
 Here, even the strata and categories of the population
 more resistant to it, like the lower classes and women,
 embraced the reform.

The analysis of the relationship between professed
 religion and the growth of the cremation-to-death ratio
 in cities of bi-confessional countries, namely Swiss and
 Germany, seems consistent with this hypothesis. The
 graphs show that in both countries, the more Protes-
 tants there were in the cities, the higher the cremation
 rate. Note that regression coefficients from a multivariate
 model between percentage of Protestants and mean
 cremation by death rate in the German and Swiss cities
 in the decade 1930–1939, controlled for population
 dimension and numbers of years since the opening of
 first crematorium, are 0.62 for Germany and 0.83 for
 Switzerland.

The same pattern is clearly visible even in Hungary,
 where only one city, Debrecen, had a crematorium
 before the end of WWII; it was already opened in
 1932. Debrecen is the one and only Protestant city in
 a predominantly Catholic area, as far it was uniformly
 Protestant in the 16th century, and where, in the period
 under examination, slightly less than 40% of the
 residents still are Protestant.

The hypothesis presented here requires further
 in-depth analysis. First, because the chart shows that

the position of some cities is not consistent with the
 hypothesis, so that other variables must be at work in
 determining this position. Second, because the time
 span considered does not allow account to be taken of
 the different points of entry of cities in the time series.
 Consequently, it is possible that the growth rate over a
 10-year span had different levels if the cremations
 started one year after the first year considered, or if they
 started 10 years after, or even more. Further analysis
 should take both these considerations into account.

Conclusion: A widening cleavage

The first analysis, based on the History of Cremations in
 European Cities from 1876 to 1939 database presented
 in this paper, suggests some hypotheses that apparently
 warrant further research and study.

The first hypothesis is that the revival of cremation
 that began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century
 was not a Europe-wide phenomenon. Some areas of
 Europe were affected by the interest in this method of
 burial, but others remained completely unaffected.

A second hypothesis concerns the political geography
 of cremation in Europe. The analysis has suggested that
 treating cremation as a country-level phenomenon is to
 neglect an important part of its story, maybe the most
 important. Even in countries where cremation began,
 some areas were completely unaffected, whereas others
 had numerous crematoria and cremations.

The third hypothesis, more closely analyzed in this
 article, has to do with acceptance of cremation and
 the rapid social change that ensued in some European
 cities. As the preliminary analysis presented in this
 article suggests, the spread of cremation among the
 cities where cremation started was twofold in its pace.
 In some cities cremation rapidly became a mass
 phenomenon, while in others it remained an elite one.
 The analysis suggests that there is a factor that played
 an important role in determining the fate of this way
 of disposal. This factor is what political scientist Stein
 Rokkan called the cultural cleavage of the conceptual
 map of Europe determined by the Protestant Reform
 (Rokkan, 1981).

Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and
 Jews reacted in different ways to the cremationists'
 challenge. Some Jews and Protestants were soon willing
 to accept it, and even to leave inhumation and to
 embrace cremation. They were the drivers of a long-
 standing social change. By contrast, Catholics and
 Orthodox Christians resisted cremation for a long time,
 and in some ways still do so today. Generally speaking,
 the position of the Orthodox Church was even more
 rigid than that of the Catholics, but some differences

exist among Serbian, Romanian, Russian, and Greek authorities (Davies, 2005; Rotar, 2013). I shall return to this point in a future publication. Speaking about today, however, if the Orthodox Church still opposes cremation (Rotar, 2013), the Catholic Church opposes some aspects of it, like scattering of the ashes (Conferenza episcopale italiana, 2011, and personal interviews with parish priests in Italy).

Not only do the different speeds of the spread of this method of disposal tell us something about the existence of a deep cleavage in the burial custom in Europe. In some ways they deepened this cleavage and created two divergent—even if hidden or latent—systems of values concerning relationships of the living with the dead in Europe. Grainger found systematic differences between European countries matching the one depicted as regards as the architectural style of the crematoria in her seminal study about the design of British crematoria (Grainger, 2006). This cleavage constantly widened for a long part of the 19th and 20th centuries and is now far stronger than it was a century and a half ago.

The analysis of cremation extends far beyond knowledge of a burial custom. The study of death as an institution makes it possible to reveal and make transparent fundamental social and cultural issues. According to this way of thinking, the issue of death throws into relief the most important cultural values by which people live their lives and evaluate their experience (Metcalf & Huntington, 1991). Every society rests on its burial institutions, a discourse about itself and the system of values with which it identifies. If this system of values undergoes a crisis, burial customs may change as well (Childe, 1945; Stannard, 1977; Vidor, 2012; Warner, 1959). Hence a change in burial customs may prompt a change in certain values, and a spread of burial customs may prompt a spread of certain fundamental values.

The overlap between the European religious cleavage dating back to the 16th century and the geography of the approval of cremation suggests the existence of two divergent values systems in Europe concerning the relationship with death. If death, together with its biological meaning, continues to be a pivotal institution of societies whereby men and women distinguish themselves in how they see the linkages between—and across—generations, and in how they think the appropriate way to show respect for the dead, then it is probable that the cleavage revealed by the history of cremation shows the existence of two (or more) systems of values and of organization of social life in Europe. These systems of values are not only different and in opposition, but the distance between them is changing.

The recent widespread recourse to cremation even in areas where it was absent for a long time is moving the

boundaries between these two spaces, maybe resulting in a reduction of the internment space. But it does not change the fact of the existence of two different spaces. It is precisely this cleavage that warrants further scrutiny.

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