

# THE MYSTERY OF THE MOUND



An analysis of the stair-like  
structure in front of sepolcro S2

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## Abstract

Following a documentation of the second sepolcro in laterizio on the Via Appia Antica in Rome, a strange annex of the construction, facing the ancient road, raised a multitude of question regarding its purpose and its time of origin. Using information gathered on site, together with historical drawings, photographs and publications it was possible not only to find out the period when this structure was constructed but also its function, making it possible to paint a picture regarding the way this monument could have looked like in the second century AD.

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## Exposé

As part of the module "Building history and construction research", a trip to Rome was made, with the purpose of researching sepulchral architecture on the Via Appia Antica. Using the example of two temple mausoleums, *sepolcri in laterizio*, situated by the fifth milestone, not only the object by itself was researched, but also the way it reacts and interacts with its surroundings. On a broader scale, starting with the two *sepolcri*, the research was extended to the whole area, including not only Via Appia Antica, but also other archeological parks and Roman roads such as Via Latina or Park of the Caffarella. The focus of this paper will be the second *sepolcro in laterizio*, which will be referred to as S2. This was researched extensively and documented during the trip in Rome using not only traditional techniques like drawing and hand measuring but also developed technology such as laser scanner, in order to achieve precise results, of the highest quality.

The *sepolcro* S2 is not a big construction, but it is for sure a complex one, bearing a lot of history. Giving that an extensive research about this construction would be a rather heavy task, this paper will focus on one of the most striking features of the tomb, the mound on the south-west facade, the one oriented towards Via Appia. This is a rather specific characteristic of this monument, nothing similar existing anywhere on Via Appia or other historical parks in Rome. Giving the heavy alteration, this *sepolcro* suffered over the years, not only because of its change in purpose during the medieval times, but also because of several earthquakes, anything that can be seen today has to be interpreted with a little bit of precaution, the ancient trails not being quite as obvious as one might think. Special attention will be given to the south-west facade, which contains a lot of clues that could help solve this enigma, beginning with the different wall construction that build this facade and ending with the presence of a hidden window behind the mound. In this deceiving context, this paper will try to solve the mystery of the mound, giving information as reliable as possible about its function, its placement and the period when it appeared.

In this paper there will be presented and analyzed a number of possible theories regarding this mound and its function, of particular importance being the period when it appeared. Going back to ancient time, the first theory will consider the mound as an ancient element, belonging to the second century AD. Looking at the development history of the numerous tomb types, if the mound did indeed belong to the ancient period, there are several functions it could have had. It could have been part of the decoration of the tomb, a statue base for example or an element bearing a commemorative plate. Other possible theories for its function include the possible

presence of an altar or an *aedicula* construction. However, the theory that will mainly be processed in this paper will be the one regarding the mound as an ancient stair. There are however certain things that speak against such an early appearance of the mound, in which case the next possible period will be analyzed, the medieval one. As part of a fortification tower, the mound could certainly not have been a stair because of safety reasons, but it could have been part of a fortification structure. In this part of the paper the possible existence of a mound similar structures around the *sepolcro* S2, at some point in history, will be researched together with the function that this might have had in case it would have been the only such structure. Going forward through history a possibility will be explored, which attributes the mound to Luigi Canina's work on the Via Appia. This theory will also include the possibility of the earthquake facilitating the forming of the mound. This paper aims to look at the mound from every single possible angle throughout history, leaving nothing out, no matter how absurd it might appear. A thorough analysis and interpretation of every single available clue is absolutely needed in order for the results to be as close to the truth as possible.

In order to proceed with the investigation of the mound, the things that are known so far about the *sepolcro* S2 are of crucial importance. To be able to place the mound in a certain point in time, any kind of documentation from any period is extremely important. Fortunately, many artists have drawn or painted the exact same part of Via Appia, where this research is conducted, however, because of the lightly unusual placement of the *sepolcro* S2, it being slightly pulled back from the street, in many paintings the view of this tomb is blocked by the other *sepolcro in laterizio* (which will be referred to as S1). Nevertheless, the available drawings made by Piranesi and Franzetti in the eighteenth century will be of great importance for the research conducted in this paper. Further documentation of Via Appia made by Luigi Canina, drawings and reconstructions by the French architect Auguste - Gabriel Ancelet and a collection of photos from the beginning of the nineteenth century will help support or debunk the theories previously presented. As far as literature is concerned, there are a lot of publications regarding Via Appia in its various stages, however, for some reason the *sepolcro* S2 seems to be left out most of the time. Canina for example, took interest in the *sepolcro* S1, documented, reconstructed and turned it into an exhibition. In his book "La prima parte della Via Appia dalla Porta Capena a Boville" he describes the first *sepolcro*, barely mentioning the second one. The same happens in the case of Thomas Ashby, who photographically documented Via Appia between 1891 and 1925, he photographed and described S1 but there is no mention of S2. One of the only historical books that pays attention to the second *sepolcro in laterizio* is the one published in 1907, named "Sull'Appia Antica". This mentions S2 and describes it in a few rows, painting a

picture about how it looked like at that time, including the mound. Besides this, the only tools left to use in solving the mystery are books describing tombs in general, such as the one written by Henner von Hesberg and other publications regarding monuments, that will be used as comparison elements in order to find answers.

To get the needed answers several tools and methods will be used. A very important element of this paper will be the documentations and measurements done personally in Rome. This will provide much needed information about the different construction and reconstruction phases as well as information about the wall types belonging to different periods. As previously said, historical drawings and photographs will also be a very important tool that will help establish a timeline regarding the development of the mound. Giving that there are not many publications regarding the *sepolcro* S2, information found about other, more important, but similar monuments will be used to draw a parallel and hopefully find some answers.

This paper will be structured in three main parts. First of all, the analysis of the information personally gathered in Rome. This will be as far as possible a subjective documentation of the current status of the second *sepolcro in laterizio*, which will provide reliable information, that will be further used to support or debunk the presented theories. The second part of this paper will be the presentation and analysis of the main theories presented earlier above. This chapter will be written as impartial as possible, aiming to present pros and cons in an objective way, as to allow the reader to form a personal opinion. The third and last part will be a personal interpretation of the results, which will tilt the scale in favor of one of the two main theories presented in the second chapter. The results of this research are intended to be as accurate as possible, but a personal opinion in forming this answer is impossible to avoid.

As far as the timeline of this paper is concerned, in order to understand this topic an extended research is needed. This should be finished by the beginning of the year. Not all results of this research will be presented, only the most important and relevant ones. Another long period, about a month, will be needed for the in depth analysis of the personal documentation, giving that this is a very important part of this research paper and also the foundation of the future answer regarding the mystery of the mound. The more fictional part of the paper will collide with the documentation and the research over the last month of work, hopefully leading to some satisfactory results.

# Introduction

Walking along Via Appia Antica, approaching Villa dei Quintili , somewhere around the 5th mile one could see the second *sepolcri in laterizio*. At first, there is nothing out of the ordinary, a tomb like many others along the ancient road, with a mound right in front of it, an appendix that has seemingly nothing to do with the rest of the structure , as if it were randomly dumped there. But at a closer look things start to reveal themselves and questions start to arise. What at first appeared to be an earth bump is actually an *opus caementicium* structure, laid with bricks on both sides. The carefully executed joints between the mounds masonry and the one of the tomb makes one ask himself about the, maybe important, role of this construction. A closer look at the wall facing Via Appia, is followed by more interesting discoveries such as the irregular opening in the second floor, that may or may not have been a door, or the U-shaped hollow in the upper part of the mound. What could this structure have been? When did it appear? Why can't we find anything similar along Via Appia? And the most important question, what was its function?

Building history research is a hard task, especially because of the fact that the sense of certitude is always missing. One can never be sure of the things he reads or sees and a certain level of doubt is always needed. Even the most professional written documentations are full of personal interpretation, just as this paper will be, therefore it is rather difficult to differentiate between the hard facts and the objective opinion of the writer.

Buildings always tell a story, especially when they are almost 2000 years old. This is the only unaltered and 100% reliable source of information one working in this field can have. However, a certain know-how is needed to read this information and understand the story and the importance of patience and thoroughness is not to be underestimated. This is why great attention has been given to the analysis of the current state of the mausoleum S2. This was at first overwhelming, but at a closer look everything starts to make sense and the thousand year old stories start to reveal themselves before one's eyes.

Nothing is what it seems and books can lie, but this paper aims to give a truthful response to all the questions regarding the mound in front of the *sepolcro* S2. The reader will embark on a rollercoaster full of theories filled with hope, followed by the disappointment of things not being what one hoped them to be, but in the end it will be a ride filled with answers and satisfaction.

# 1. Analyzing the building

Having to work with a construction that can hardly be divided into singular pieces, giving that every single one of them says a story that entangles with the next one, looking singularly at the mound is not an option. In order to solve the mystery of the mound, every single detail of it and any relevant adjacent parts must be carefully analyzed. The most relevant part and also the biggest one of this analysis is represented by the south-west wall of the building. This tells a complex story, in which every single brick is relevant. This will be handled not only as a facade, but as a whole, having three layers, the outside, the core and the inside.

## 1.1. The materials on the exterior south-west wall

When looking at the south-west facade, the mound is the first thing that stands out, but looking more carefully one can begin to see the other particularities of this wall. It is made out of a variety of materials, that clearly belong to different time periods and therefore to different construction phases.

Looking at Fig. 3, at the right corner of the building, at the base level, fragments of the antique brick masonry can be seen, which will be attributed to the first construction period (C1). In some places, this masonry is covered with plaster. The exact measurements of the bricks and joints can be found in Fig. 1. This part of the wall, and probably the left corner of the base of the *sepolcro*, which is too damaged to tell for sure, were likely part of the original construction. The mound will not be looked at in detail in this chapter, giving that its construction period and the exact material composition is a much more extensive task.

Further analyzing the bottom right part of the wall, it can be observed that in the middle this suffered some extensive damage. Here the exposed surface has a reddish color and the distance between the bricklayers is wider. This could mean either a change in the still ancient wall, or just a damaged place, where the ones who conducted the reconstruction didn't bother to fill in the gaps with new bricks and instead just filled it with mortar. Moving left from this spot, traces of plaster can be observed. Even though this covers extensively the masonry, it can still be seen that the brick pattern used behind it resembles the one in the damaged spot, having wide bed joints. Above this spots, a reconstruction can be seen, whose properties can be seen in Fig. 1.



Number	Color	Brick measurements	Joint measurements	Material properties	Mortar properties	Period	Phase
N1		L= 20,5-24cm ; H= 3cm	HJ<= 1mm ; BJ= 2-3 mm	yellowish bricks, with porous surface	light colored, with redish bits	Antique	I
N2		-	-	big basalt stones, opus caementitium	grey-colored mortar with vegetation	?	?
N3		L= 9- 27 cm; H= 4cm	HJ= 2mm- 1,5 cm; BJ= 2cm	yellow-reddish color, with smooth surface	grey-colored, layed back about 0,5 cm	Restauration	IV
N4		L= irregular, H=2,8-3,3cm	BJ= 2mm(between bricks); BJ > 1,5 cm( between brick and peperin); HJ= 1cm	Peperino(1 layer=11-13cm)and Brick (2 layers=10cm)	light-colored, aggregates up to 1,5 cm	Medieval	II
N5		-	-	irregular dark-grey peperin	slightly reddish color, crumbly	Medieval	II
N6		-	-	white spoils in the Peperino wall	-	Medieval	II
N7		-	-	different colored stones, different measurements	light-grey mortar	?	?
N8		-	-	unidentifiable stones,coverd with mortar	light-grey mortar	?	?
N9		-	-	marbel piece	-	Antique	I

Figure 1. South-west facade analysis



Figure 3. South-west facade material mapping



Figure 2. South-west facade picture

The bottom left side is extremely damaged and it has a mixture of restoration phases, original ancient substance and also places where the original *opus caementicium* core is uncovered. On the floor, in front of this wall there is an ancient marble piece, but it can't be said for sure whether this was part of this *sepolcro* or another one in its vicinity. Most of the top part of the monument has the typical attributes of a medieval construction. This is mostly made out of *peperino*, having bipedal layers in some places, where the *peperino* work is leveled with two layers of bricks. Near the biggest opening in the south-west wall it can be observed that this layers have been restored, using the same bricks as the ones used for the restoration of the antique wall in the bottom left part. Giving that on the corners there are still traces of bipedal layers, it could be presumed, that this belonged to an early medieval construction phase, which was followed by the one using solely *peperino*. A third medieval construction period, or maybe a reconstruction, can be seen crowning the top of the south-west wall.

## 1.2. The window

As previously mentioned, it is impossible to solve this enigma without looking at the wall in question as a whole. Changing the perspective, going inside the building and looking towards Via Appia a strange opening can be seen. At first glance this does not seem to be of much interest and might not even catch one's attention. The link between the opening and the mound is difficult to observe, until looking at it in section. In Fig. 4 it can be seen how the mound is placed right in front of the opening, leading to further questions about what this could have been. There are two possibilities, either a niche or a window. The first explanation, is the easy one, possible to analyze without difficulties, using the example of similar elements in the *sepolcro* S2 and not raising any other questions. Looking at the section of a niche in the top level of S2, on the north-west inner wall, the following characteristic of such an element can be observed: this has a 35cm depth, about a half related to the entire wall that is 70cm thick and it has a relatively even surface with no subsidence worth mentioning. The characteristic of the opening behind the mound however, are quite different than the one of the niche. The surface here is more irregular, the depth varying between 20 cm and 35 cm. As opposed to the niche in the top level, where the back wall was neatly designed with approximately defined linear rows of light-grey colored stones, the opening behind the mound has a rather sloppy back wall, made with randomly arranged basalt stones, that bear a resemblance to the ones in the constitution of the mound.



Figure 4. Longitudinal section

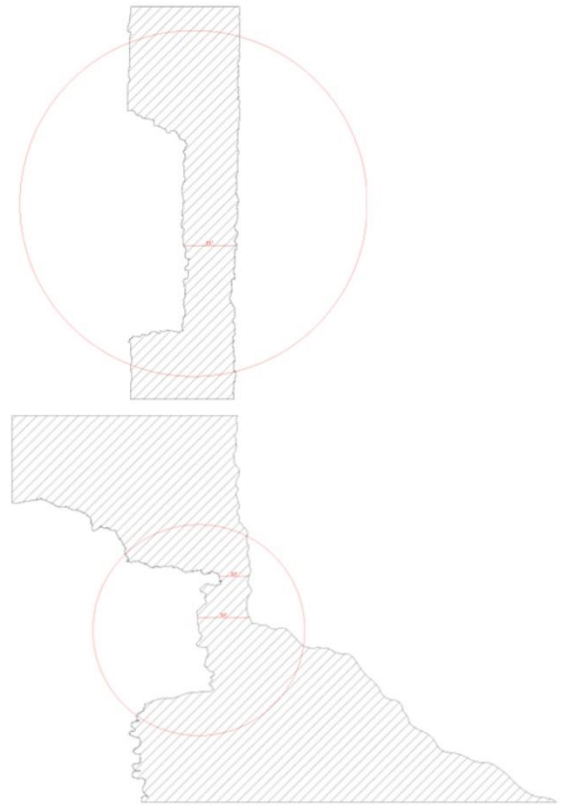


Figure 5. Window vs. Niche

Analyzing this data, it could be said that the opening behind the mound is indeed a window, that was blocked when the structure in front of the *sepolcro* was build, but at the same time, looking at the similar depths of the opening and other niches of S2, it could also be the case of a sloppier made niche.

### 1.3. The mound

As far as it can be seen today, the mound is made out of *opus caementicium*. Although, it could be easily put in the same category as the rest of *opus caementicium* works in the *sepolcro*, this construction has a particularity, the basalt stones. Most of *opus caementicium* elements in this building, which can be traced back to ancient times, have red-colored or light-grey colored stones in their composition and a slightly reddish mortar. Even though in some parts of the mound a similar composition can be seen, most of it is made out of dark-grey or even black basalt stones, held together by a light-grey with hints of green composition.

Another interesting topic regarding the mound is the bricks that cover it on the sides. Looking on the right side, at the bottom part, similar wall construction as in Fig. 7 can be seen. What appears to be antique bricks, using different, much wider joints as the rest of the antique elements of the *sepolcro*, bears traces of plaster. The last 8 rows however have the same attributes as the grey colored area in Fig. 3, which can be attributed to a much later restoration period. As far as the connection between this part of the mound and the rest of the wall is concerned, there is not much that can be said, giving that this particular area is covered in a thick layer of plaster.

A further interesting point concerning the mound consists in the U-shaped hallow at the top. Looking at it from all perspectives, using front views from the outside wall, as well as from the inside wall and sections, the U doesn't seem to have any connection with any element of the building. It is set beyond the floor of the top level. When looking at the section, it can be observed that the bottom of this hallow is placed at around the same height as the upper edge of the opening. The top part of the U, which is at the same level where the mound ends, is placed at around the same height as the highest point of the arch in the entering room of the *sepolcro*, but giving the fact that it is extremely damaged, this can't be taken into account as a reliable information.





Figure 6. The mound



Figure 6. The SW bottom right corner



Figure 8. New bricks in the mound



Figure 9. Brickwork of the mound



If it were to be made a comparison between the highest point of the mound and the height of the interior space, the first one is placed 25cm above the second. This information will be also interesting when analyzing the function of the mound, giving that it ends right about where the ceiling construction of the first level of the sepolcro begins.

## 1.4. The opening

Looking at the south-west facade of the building, a significant feature is the opening above the mound. It has a height of 95 cm and an approximate width of 50 cm. There are three possibilities concerning this element, it was either a door, a window, or it is simply a damaged wall. Looking at it from the interior, it is placed about 80 cm above the ground and its top edge is about 2m above the ground. So, as it looks from this perspective, it is possible that this might have formerly been a door. However, when looking at it from the outside, in particular in connection with the mound, the theory that this might have been a door is not so logical anymore, the distance between the top edge of the mound and the lower edge of the opening being 1,5 m. Looking at the other openings in this wall, as well as in the rest at the upper level, it can be observed the fact that this opening doesn't match anything else in the construction. It is placed too low in comparison with the other windows and it is much too big to be considered a formerly scaffolding hole or a shooting hole.

The analysis in this chapter is supposed to be a subjective one, however, giving the state of the construction and its age, this would have been an impossible task. Most of all, when talking about topics like the opening or the window, just a listing of measurements and observations would have been dry and not exceptionally informing without a certain degree of interpretation. The information presented in this chapter constitutes the base for future theory development and discussion, together with the researched books.

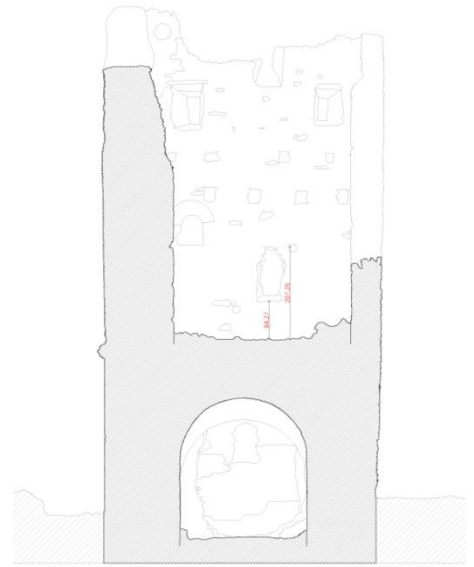


Figure 7. Inside view of the opening

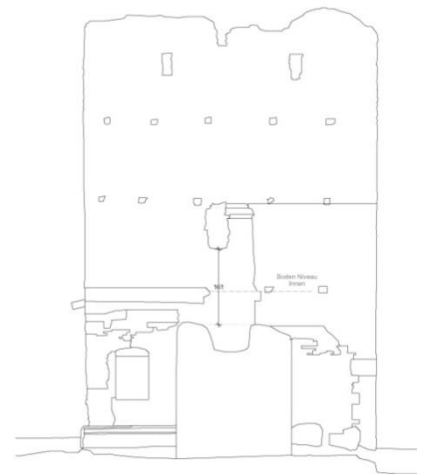


Figure 8. Outside view of the opening

## 2.Theories

### 2.1. The mound as an antique stair

Along with the appearance of funerary roads, such as Via Appia Antica, different types of monuments began to develop. In a crowded landscape, full of different types of tombs and memorabilia, one more beautiful than the other, the wish to be different, outstanding, started to appear. High constructions began to rise on Via Appia, multistory tombs, crowned with altars or other sorts of *aedicula* constructions. Next, in order to achieve a sacred aura, tombs started to borrow elements of sacred buildings, such as temples, leading to the development of the temple mausoleums type. The mound in front of the *sepolcro* S2 could indicate the presence of such a tomb in ancient times, this being the stair leading to a higher level.

The history of the roman tombs has plenty of examples of temple mausoleums. Among such constructions, there are two worth mentioning in connection with the mystery of the mound, one of them even on the Via Appia, in close vicinity of the *sepolcro* S2. This is the *Sepolcro a Tempietto*, near the fifth mile. This construction is smaller and not as well preserved as S2, but it has some similar elements. The most striking one is the construction in front of it, expending over its whole length, which, besides its measurements, bears a resemblance to the discussed mound in front of S2. The second example of a temple mausoleum found in Rome, which might be even more relevant in this study, is the *Tomb of Annia Regilla* in the Caffarella Park. The porch of the *sepolcro* can't be seen anymore today, a similar situation to S2, if the theory of the ancient stair is true. However, in the case of this second mausoleum the stair is also missing, but there are traces on the east



Figure 12. Sepolcro a Tempietto



Figure 13. Tomb of Annia Regilla



Figure 14. Il Tempio della Salute

facade that show that up to a point there was one. Drawing documentation made by Piranesi around 1750, belonging to the same collection as the drawing that will be later analyzed, that is supposed to portray S2, shows that at that time a damaged but nevertheless existing temple front was attached on the east facade of the Annia Regilla tomb. On the Appia Nuova there is another sepolcro, *Il Tempio della Salute*, that shares some similar elements with S2, although there is no typical temple front and the stair is placed inside the construction. However, the situation of the wall where the stair is placed bears a striking resemblance to the south-west facade of the *sepolcro* analyzed in the first chapter.

Besides the similarities between the *sepolcro* S2 and other funerary constructions in Rome, that were proven to have been temple mausoleums, another fact that strongly supports this theory are reconstructions through history. Nowadays, after the many alterations that this construction has suffered, it is hard to tell what it could have been, fortunately this is not the first time people took interest in the ruins of Via Appia, being curious about how it might have looked like. Luigi Canina, an Italian architect and archeologist, began in the mid nineteenth century some intensive restorative works on Via Appia. His purpose was to recover as much as possible from the ancient tomb ruins and try to bring it to life in his era. In order to do so, he used his architectural knowledge to document the state of Via Appia at that time and also to make proposals about how these buildings might have looked like, based on the remains he could find. As far as literature and documentation regarding Via Appia is concerned, people who helped develop this topic usually overlooked the two *sepolcri* S1 and S2, this being surrounded by, in their opinion, by much more interesting monuments. Canina however, took his time to document the state of S1, reconstruct some of its elements, in order to give more



Figure 15. Piranesi drawing- Tomb of Annia Regilla

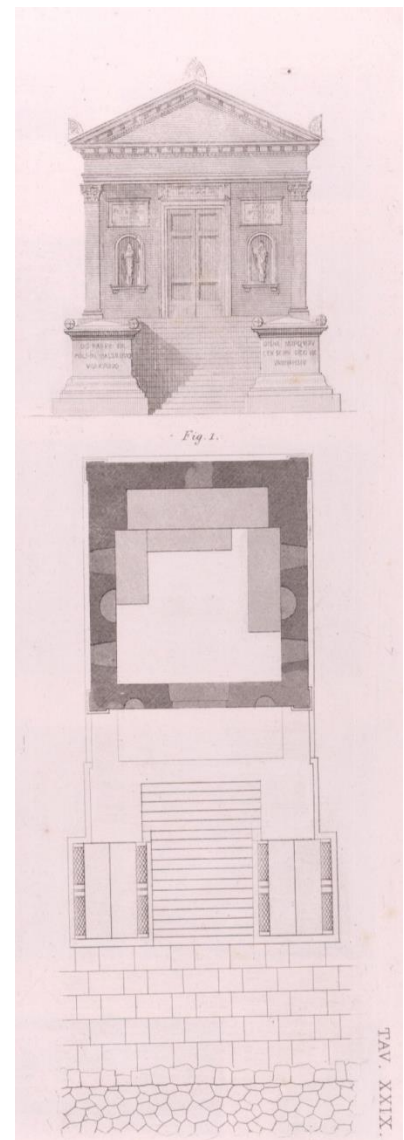


Figure 16. S2 Canina Reconstruction



information about its initial state, and even built a tiny exhibit in this building. S2, like many other times throughout history, was once again overlooked, nonetheless looking through Canina's book "Gli edifizj antichi dei contorni di Roma cogniti per alcune reliquie", published in 1854, there might be some information regarding S2. The book consists in a multitude of drawings by Canina, documentation as well as reconstruction ideas. These are logically placed in the publication, following the structure of the Via Appia and using the milestones as reference point. In the book, where the monuments in the vicinity of the fifth mile are being analyzed, on the same page as a reconstruction of S1, there is also a reconstruction of another tomb. Looking at the elements and characteristics of this monument and also the convenient placement besides the S1 reconstruction, there is a high possibility that this indeed is a reconstruction of S2 made by Canina. If this is so, giving the evidence that he found when excavating Via Appia in 1850, which could have been much more conclusive than what can be seen today, he came up with the same explanation regarding the mound. Another character that put together a similar reconstruction of the *sepolcro* S2 is the French architect Auguste-Gabriel Ancelet. In this case, it is known for sure that the suggested reconstruction, made by him in 1855, is indeed of the tomb S2. Just the same as Canina, he did not only draw the monument the way he imagined it used to look like, but also the way it looked like when he visited Via Appia. These drawings give a very good impression about the way this temple mausoleum used to look like in 1855, information that in the case of Canina is missing. However, giving that Ancelet's reconstruction suggestion came after Canina's work on the Via Appia, it is a high possibility that the latter influenced the French artist. Even if he would not have been familiar with Canina's drawing, it is a possibility that the original construction found in 1850 by the Italian architect had already been altered by him, just the way he did with S1,

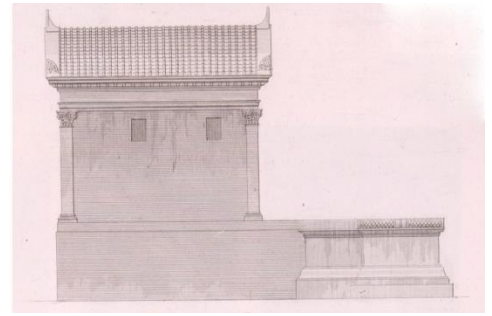


Figure 17. S2 Canina Reconstruction

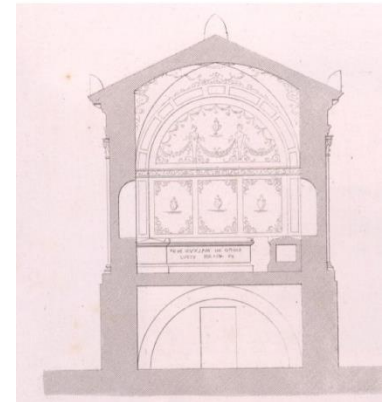


Figure 18. S2 Canina Reconstruction



Figure 19. S2 Ancelet Documentation



Figure 20. S2 Ancelet Reconstruction

by the time Ancelet got there. This would mean a subtle, but nevertheless important manipulation of the French architect's imagination, giving that during his work on the Via Appia, Canina tried to reconstruct it in such a way that it would be able to offer a glimpse in the glorious ancient times.

No matter how compelling the facts that support this theory might be, the ones that might debunk it can't be ignored.

Over the years this "avenue of the death" known as Via Appia Antica, has attracted many artists. Especially in the mid and late 17th century, before Canina got to work in this area, many artists documented this road, each in their one unique way. Two of them, of significant importance for the topic, who researched this in their papers, were Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Agapito Franzetti. They both put on paper the *sepolcro* S2, that they saw around the 1750s. Even though the style of the two artists is quite different, Piranesi's drawing having a fictional touch of imagination, they both have something in common: the stair is missing. In Franzetti's image it is hard to tell that it is a representation of the S2, but when comparing it with Piranesi's, that also includes S1 and is surely a drawing of the two tombs researched in this project, the similarities are striking. However, it can be said for sure that it is not a copy and that Franzetti indeed drew what he saw. What speaks for this drawing as being an original and not a Piranesi imitation is the tomb behind the *sepolcro* S2. In Piranesi's drawing, made in 1756 this tomb has quite an intact and thick back wall, while in the one made by Franzetti in 1795 this wall looks slightly damaged and is thinning towards its base. Giving that there are two distinct representations of the temple mausoleum S2, made at a distance of nearly 50 years, it could be said that the missing mound is neither a coincidence nor an artistic interpretation and it was indeed non-existent at that time.

The analysis made in the first chapter of this paper could also provide some counterarguments regarding the ancient stair. In subchapter 2 an opening that might have been a window has been analyzed. Of course, the possibility of a niche has to be taken into consideration, in which case the opening is irrelevant for this topic. However, if this opening was indeed a window, belonging to the original structure it would clearly mean that the mound came after the window, blocking it, leading to the conclusion that this was not part of the original substance of the *sepolcro*.

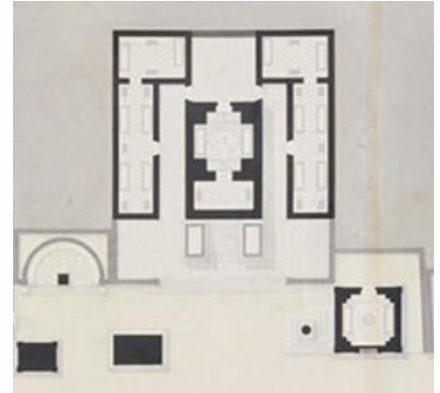


Figure 21. S2 Ancelet Reconstruction





Figure 22. Franzetti drawing



Figure 23. Piranesi drawing

Another fact that could speak against the mound being part of an ancient stair is the function of the *sepolcro* S2 in medieval times, when it was used as a fortified tower. As seen in other such constructions, the safety element is very important. A difficult entering situation for the ones that are not welcomed in the tower is part of this safety.

Regarding this fact, a big imposing stair, facing the main road and leading to an opening would have been an unfortunate situation. Also, as seen in most examples of fortified towers, the access to the building was facilitated by a mobile wooden stair, that as soon as it wasn't needed anymore was pulled back up. The whole staircase was also inside of the building, making outside access impossible. The analysis of the opening made in the previous chapter shows clearly that in order to go through the opening when sitting on the mound, nothing is needed except some upper body strength perhaps. Of course, there is still the possibility that the opening was not there during medieval times, meaning that the mound would not have been a threat for the safety of the building, which leads to the next theory.

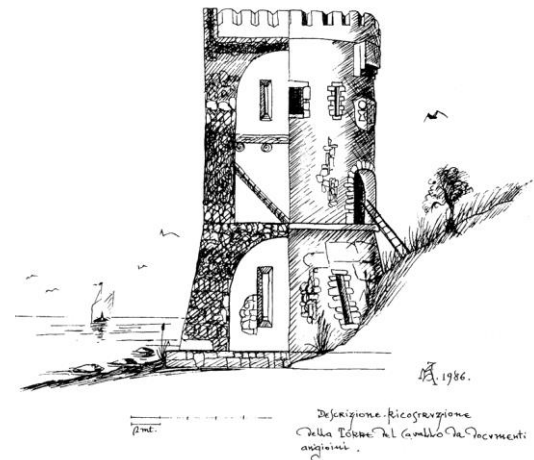


Figure 24. Stair system of fortification towers

## 2.2. The mound as a medieval static element

If the theory previously presented is not true, there is a possibility that the mound appeared during the medieval period, when the monument S2 was being used as a fortified tower. In this case, like other examples on the Via Appia show, this could have been a static element. However, in order for this to be a viable possibility, the opening on the south-west

facade should not have existed back then, giving the reasons previously explained. The first thing that supports this theory is the window behind the mound. As explained above, if this was indeed a window and was blocked by the mound, than this would obviously mean that the mound came later, as a part of the fortified tower for example.



Figure 25. Torre Leonardo - Frattocchie



Another supporting element of this theory is the similar constructions found not only on the Via Appia but in the entire Italy. Most of the fortified tower construction usually had an inclined base, a slope, that would not only strengthen the construction, but also prevent people from climbing up. This inclined base manifests itself not only as an entire inclined wall, but also as several inclined shorter segments in front of the normal, straight facade. A good example in this case is *Torre Selce*, a fortified tower on Via Appia erected on top of a former *sepolcro*. At first glance, there are a lot of similarities between this construction and the *sepolcro* S2. However, when looking closer at it, this comparison starts to debunk the theory rather than supporting it. First of all, a potential function of the mound's similar elements in *Torre Selce* could have been to level the surface for the construction of the fortified tower, giving that the *sepolcro* beneath had a rather uneven surface, not suitable for constructing anything above. This is not the case when looking at the *sepolcro* S2, this being turned into a fortified tower. The materials also don't match. Whereas in *Torre Selce* a medieval building technique was used for these elements, consisting in a rough construction with *peperino*, by the *sepolcro* S2 the sides of the mound were covered in brick and bear traces of plaster. This does not indicate towards a quickly constructed element, with pure practical usage. Also, as seen in *Torre Selce*, this kind of elements don't come alone, meaning there should be at least traces of similar constructions on the other sides of the building. Although, on the north-west facade the wall is clearly damaged and it could indicate the presence of such an element at some point throughout history, the other walls are hard to read. However, when looking at this problem from a certain point of view, it is not impossible that the other walls could once have been



Figure 26. Torre di Selce



Figure 27. North-West facade S2



Figure 28. North-East facade S2

bearer of mound similar structures. The middle of the north-east wall is a recent reconstruction, even more recent than Canina's reconstructions, giving that in the plans drawn by Ancelet there is still a door to be seen there. This door was also there in 1987 when Henner von Hesberg visited and documented Via Appia. There is a high possibility that this was the door used for the ancient *sepolcro*, but it is only logical that it would have been closed in the medieval times for safety reasons, and this is where the mound similar element could have been erected. After the mausoleum served its use as a fortified tower, the door could have been brought back in order to make the tomb look more like how it used to in its glory days. This is a farfetched theory, but it should not be ignored. Last but not least, the south-east wall. Here it can be seen that almost half of the wall does not belong to the ancient period and is built in medieval times. There are no damaged spots that could indicate the presence of a mound on this side, but there is a door, that does not belong to the original or even pre Canina construction. So, it is possible that a mound could have been placed here, even if it would cause an asymmetry by not being in the middle. However, even if this exaggerated theory would have been true, going back again to the Piranesi and Franzetti drawings, it can be observed that any traces of the mound or mound similar elements are missing. Nevertheless, giving that these drawings debunk both theories in spite of the strong supporting arguments, maybe an even more careful examination of the drawings, in comparison to what can be seen today has to be done in order to reach a verdict.



Figure 29. Hesberg documentation 1987



Figure 30. South-East facade S2

### 3.The solved mystery

Up to this point there have been two theories discussed, both debunked by the same issue, the drawings made by Piranesi, so in order to proceed and be able to solve the mystery of the mound, the problem with these drawings must be settled. First of all, analyzing the situation assuming that the drawings are indeed telling a true story might provide some answers. In this case it would mean that the mound appeared around 1800. Somewhere between this point and the one where Ancelet documented the *sepolcro* S2 in 1855, the mound must have appeared. Giving that Ancelet arrived on Via Appia after Canina, it is safe to assume that what he saw might have already been altered by the Italian architect. However, if the mound was not there when Canina started to work on the Via Appia, what could have inspired him towards such a reconstruction, not only physical but also theoretical, meaning the drawing. Another farfetched theory would be that in the earthquake that hit Rome in 1812, the *sepolcro* was damaged, collapsing and therefore forming the mound in front of it. Later came Canina and seeing the mound, the result of the earthquake, he interpreted it as being part of the building and reconstructed it in such manner. As previously said, this is a very exaggerated and shaky theory but nevertheless worth exploring. The biggest argument that could speak against the theory of the earthquake is the fact that the south-west facade of the *sepolcro* doesn't seem to be missing such a big amount of substance, as in enough material to form the mound. Also the U-shaped hollow that was analyzed in the first chapter is too regular and symmetric to be the result of a random collapse. The mound is also centered in the middle of the facade, fact that can't be a coincidence. Another explanation for the missing stair in Piranesi's drawings and the one that appeared in Ancelet's drawing might be given by other restored fortification towers around Italy. In the case of such buildings it is not uncommon that after they served their purpose



Figure 31. Torre dei Monte Pucci



Figure 32. Torre Fortore



and all the safety measures such as the retractable stairs are no longer needed or used, the top level can't be accessed anymore. Some buildings remain that way, a portable stair being needed in order to access these levels, which sometimes may even remain out of reach, but other constructions, especially the ones that are used for tourism purposes, get a new permanent access stair. *Torre dei Monte Pucci*, in Peschici Italy, for example, has a newly made concrete stair that grants access to the top level. *Torre Fortore* in Puglia Italy is accessible today by a brick masonry staircase with double arch that replaced the original retractable devices. However, even if this would be the case, there is still the problem of the materials, that will be further handled.

The element that speaks the most again Piranesi's drawings is the south-west facade, analyzed in the first chapter. As seen in Fig. 2 after in depth analysis of the entire temple mausoleum S2, including the wall containing the mound, it resulted that the entire bottom left corner consists of ancient substance and is part of the original, second century *sepolcro*. Even though in the previously mentioned figure this part of the facade is treated as a whole, there are some interesting differences between the bricks that form it. This topic has been mentioned in the first chapter too, but at this point in the paper, giving that this issue is a critical one in solving the mystery of the mound, an even more intense analysis is required. Looking at Fig. 33, one can say for sure that the red area belongs to the original construction. It consists of ancient bricks, mostly yellow, with some light-red additions, having a length between 20, 5 cm and 24 cm and a height measuring 3cm. The joints in this type of masonry are very thin, head joints measuring 1mm or less and the bed joints 2-3 mm. This brick construction is typical for ancient outside wall, but the same can't be said about the construction in the orange area. Here the joints are much wider, being obvious that this is not an exposed brickwork, carefully made, like the corner of the *sepolcro*, but a construction made to be



Figure 33. South-West facade S2



Figure 34. Floor Plan S2 2018



Figure 35. Floor Plan Annia Regilla 16th century



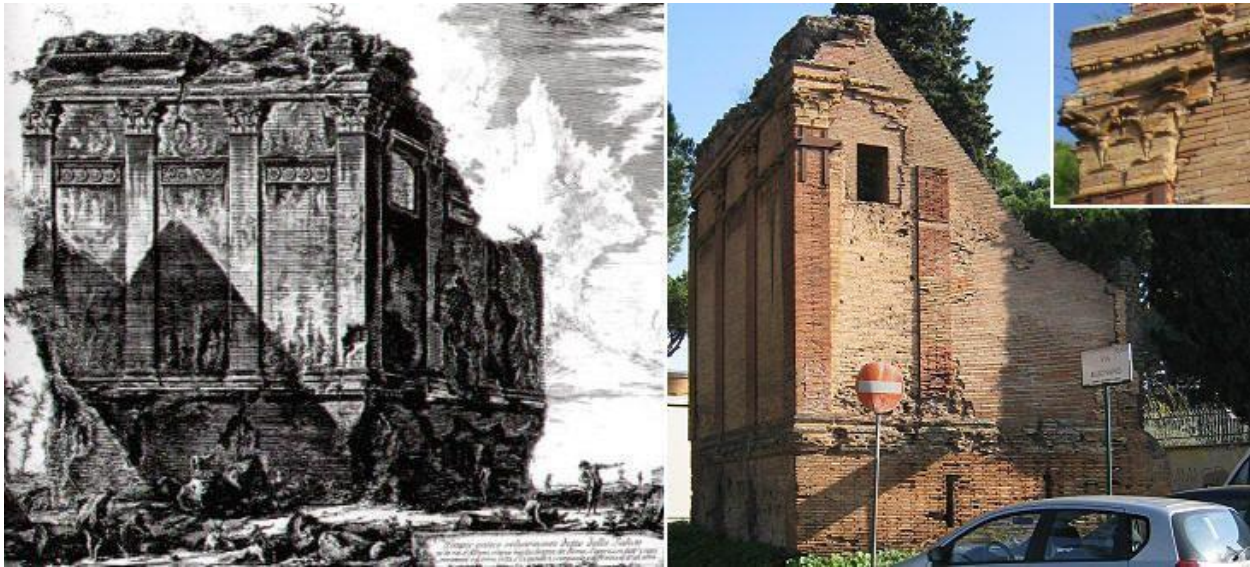


Figure 36. Tempio della Salute Piranesi vs. present

covered. This type of brickwork with 2 cm wide bed joints and 1 cm wide head joints, covered in plaster is typical for inside walls, however it is still ancient masonry. So is the green area, even if damaged, the similar characteristics between this area and the previously mentioned one can't be ignored. The only part of this wall that is not from ancient times is the blue area. Fig. 37 shows that this part could be a reconstruction made at least in the beginning of the 20th century. Nevertheless, after the analysis it is obvious that most of the wall belongs to ancient times, meaning that it could not have been damaged at such an extent as presented by Piranesi. This character has a reputation for exaggerating certain features of the subjects of his drawings, so it could be very possible that he saw a damaged part in the wall, maybe the bottom right corner of the south-west facade, which up to this day is still damaged, and decided to portray the entire wall in that way. Another similar monument mentioned earlier, has in the present the same features as *sepulcro* S2 and was in the mid 18th century drawn by Piranesi, the same way as the discussed mausoleum, with a thinned base. This could indicate towards the fact that this way of portraying buildings was a personal preference of the artist and didn't have much to do with the way it actually looked, even if the rest of the construction is represented perfectly accurate.

Having the issue regarding Piranesi's drawing out of the way, the theory of the mound as an ancient stair begins to be more and



Figure 37. S2 at the beginning of the 20th century

more plausible. There is still one problem that needs to be solved: where is the rest of the temple porch? Looking at similar former temple mausoleums, usually the entire porch can still be seen, such as in the case of the *Tomb of Annia Regilla*. It is logical that in the case of *sepolcro* S2 the portion of the porch behind the mound is missing, this having been changed during medieval times, when the entire top part of the south-west facade was build, but the side construction of the stair is still missing. Looking again at the orange area in Fig. 33 , that indicates that this part was not made to be seen, a possible explanation would be that this side construction was memorabilia pieces, made out of valuable materials, such as marble, which were stolen, leaving this part of the wall exposed.

Having analyzed all the details of the *sepolcro* S2 and the available literature and examples, finally a verdict can be reached. The mound in front of the temple mausoleum S2 is part of the ancient construction, having been used as a stair that led to the top level, where the funeral ceremonies were being held. This out in the open stair was the only way to reach the top level, the ground one, which contained the funerary cells, being reached through a door on the north-east facade and having no connection to the ceremony room.

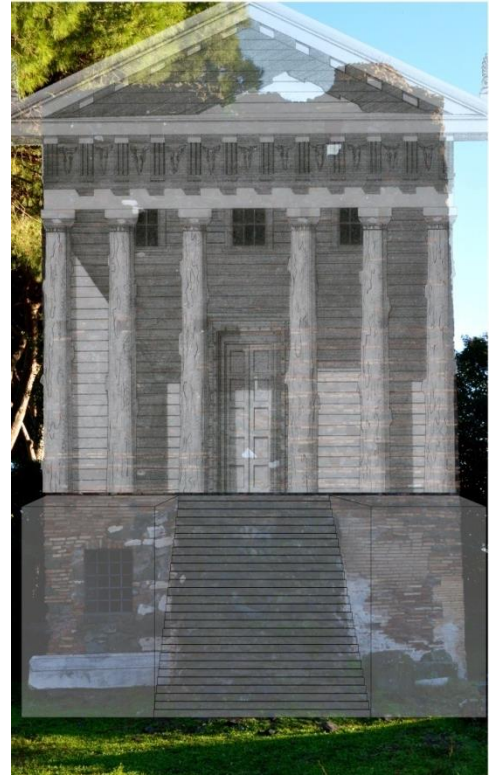


Figure 38. Simina Nicolaescu Reconstruction

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explain the mystery of the mound, when and why it was build and possibly how the construction looked like before it was build. For this purpose information gathered personally in Rome was used along with the extensive existing literature about Via Appia Antica and graphic representation of the funerary road, belonging to different time periods. Worth mentioning once again is the fact that even though this research was intended to be as accurate as possible, it was impossible to control every aspect of it, so that the answer remains to some extent in the fictional sphere. Even though this answer followed a logical path, using hard facts and well reviewed literature, there is a possibility this could be just one of the many explanations for the mound sitting in front of the *sepolcro* S2. In the process of solving the enigma, at some point certain personal decisions have been made, so it can't be said that the answer is 100% objective, however it is not the first time in history that after extensive research and documentation, this verdict has been reached.

The explanation that this paper provides for the existence of the mound is the same that was given by at least two other people in the past, Ancelet and Canina. Following all the information gathered it was concluded that the mound in front of the *sepolcro* S2 was a stair that can be traced back to the second century AD. All the evidence shows that this stair belongs to the original construction phase, being erected at the same time as the rest of the monument, which now can be said for sure was a temple mausoleum. Giving the fact that the aspects of such research can't be taken out of the big picture and have to be analyzed as part of the whole, taking into consideration the relationship between elements, this process did not only help solve the mystery of the mound but also provided further information regarding the original state of the monument. The temple mausoleum S2 used to be a two - story high funerary building, of a most likely wealthy family. The first floor, which could be accessed from the back (the side opposite to Via Appia) was housing the funerary cells. It is not certain who could have been buried here, but given the fact that the upstairs room, which was much more important, also has places where the remains of the family could have been stored, this could have been the funerary room of the free people surrounding the family and maybe slaves. The second floor, was not at all connected to the first, and was accessed from Via Appia using the imposing stair. This would lead to an open porch, possibly having a row of columns, which would further lead to the festive room. This room was dedicated to all funerary festivities and rites and would have probably contained the remains of the most important members of the families. Giving that this was a temple mausoleum, this room could have also contained memorabilia in form of statues or paintings of the deceased,

some of them even possibly stored in the still visible niches . One could imagine this space as an imposing room, with heavy decoration, paintings and stucco on the walls, it being lined with precious sarcophaguses containing the remains of the deceased and the niches on the walls containing either urns with further remains or works of art containing the images of the deceased .

The works on Via Appia's, necessary to its reveal secrets, are far from being over, not even the ones regarding a tiny portion of it, such as the second *sepolcro in laterizio*, won't come to an end any time soon. However, the results of this research will hopefully bring us one step closer to understanding the fascinating mystery that the ancient roman empire used to be.

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