

An archaeological landscape amid nature, culture, and atmosphere: preliminary considerations for the Co.R.A.Ve. Research and Conservation Project

*Original*

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restauro archeologico

Conoscenza, conservazione e valorizzazione  
del patrimonio architettonico  
Rivista del Dipartimento di Architettura  
dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze

Knowledge, preservation and enhancement  
of architectural heritage  
Journal of the Department of Architecture  
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# An archaeological landscape amid nature, culture, and atmosphere: preliminary considerations for the Co.R.A.Ve. Research and Conservation Project

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**Fig. 1**  
The archaeological  
and naturalistic  
context of the  
Banditaccia

## Abstract

The Co.R.A.Ve. research project, initiated by the Polytechnic University of Turin in 2020, focuses on the conservation of archaeological ruins in vegetative contexts, with particular attention to the Etruscan necropolis of Banditaccia in Cerveteri. This site constitutes a unique case of fusion between natural elements and Etruscan artifacts, creating a landscape of extraordinary historical, cultural, and emotional value. The necropolis is distinguished by a symbiosis between native vegetation and funerary structures, posing significant challenges to traditional restoration practices. The article thoroughly examines the complexity of the necropolis landscape, articulated on two scales: the landscape scale, concerning the relationship between monuments and nature, and the detail scale, focusing on individual artifacts. Vegetation, an integral part of the tomb structures, contributes to their aesthetic and historical perception but also presents a conservation challenge. The theories of Carlson and Assunto are employed to frame the landscape as a natural, cultural, and emotional phenomenon, highlighting the importance of human perception and the sentimental dimension. Described as an example of a “historic landscape,” the necropolis represents a unique interaction between nature and archaeology. This theoretical approach underscores the need for conservation interventions that maintain the balance between vegetation and ruins, avoiding both neglect and excessive interventions. The analysis of the Cerveteri necropolis landscape provides insights for developing new conservation methodologies that respect the complexity and integrity of the site, contributing to its enhancement and protection for future generations.

## Keywords

Conservation, Necropolis of Banditaccia, Archaeological landscape, Ruins, Vegetation.

## The Etruscan necropolis of Banditaccia in Cerveteri: Natural Environment, Cultural Landscape, and Emotional Atmosphere<sup>1</sup>

Among the numerous attempts to define the concept of landscape, the formulation by many experts (D’Angelo 2010, pp. 12-13) as nature perceived through culture appears highly agreeable and serves as a compelling starting point for framing a complex phenomenon.

<sup>1</sup> The first paragraph is written by Emanuele Morezzi, while the second and third are written by Tommaso Vagnarelli



opposite page

**Fig. 2**  
The archaeological  
landscape within  
the *Recinto*

**Fig. 3**  
The archaeological  
landscape within  
one of the *Aree*  
*Esterne*

This concise expression highlights some intrinsic characteristics of the landscape, including its existence solely as an object of perception, thus seen and visited by humans. Consequently, before being an aesthetic and ontological phenomenon of space, the landscape becomes an object of examination and engages in constant dialogue with an observer, who modifies and transforms it.

This introductory axiom, seemingly applicable to any natural context, acquires new meanings and interpretations in the specific reality of the Etruscan necropolis of Banditaccia in Cerveteri. This context offers useful analyses to frame how the Lazio reality represents a unique instance within the archaeological and naturalistic panorama (Fig. 1). Today, the necropolis, under the protection of the Archaeological Park of Cerveteri and Tarquinia – recently established with D.P.C.M. n. 123 of June 24, 2021 – presents a dual nature: a naturalistic space constituted by the native vegetation of the Lazio context and an anthropized space formed by a multitude of Etruscan funerary monuments, like tumuli and cube-shaped tombs<sup>3</sup>, primarily created between the 7th and 4th-3rd centuries BCE (Pallottino 1956; Torelli 1980; Proietti 1986; Cristofani et al. 1988).

While this characteristic is common to all archaeological parks, in the case of Cerveteri, this particularity assumes unique contours due to the historical, cultural, and environmental events that have affected this space in recent decades. The overall area of the Park is currently divided into two distinct sections, informally referred to as the *Recinto* – the enclosed section of the archaeological area – (Fig. 2) and the *Aree Esterne* – the external areas surrounding the enclosure (Fig. 3)<sup>2</sup>. The *Recinto* encompasses the area bounded by excavation and restoration efforts (Pace 1955, Porretta 2017) carried out first by the Director of Excavations, Raniero Mengarelli, between 1909 and 1938, and later by his successor, Mario Moretti, between 1947 and 1977. This section is a defined space, accessible through ticket purchase, where regular and frequent maintenance is ensured. The *Aree Esterne*, contemporary Etruscan spaces adjacent to the *Recinto*, have, until now, been excluded from specific musealization initiatives, except for some monuments, and have only undergone limited extraordinary maintenance activities. In this specific area, the balance and dialogue between vegetation and archaeological ruins have, over time, taken on the characteristics of a symbiosis that has allowed the development of a unique landscape where it is impossible today to establish with certainty the boundaries between nature and archaeology (Vagnarelli 2018; Vagnarelli 2020; Morezzi, Vagnarelli Borgioli, 2022). Therefore, the *Aree Esterne* represent a field of extreme interest for the discipline of restoration and conservation, offering themselves as places of significant cultural value but also as theoretical and operational challenges. Inappropriate intervention on one of the two entities forming this balance would indeed compromise the other, and at the same time, abstaining from any operation would harm the conservation and integrity of the surviving archaeological artefacts.

Before developing an appropriate intervention strategy on surfaces and historical artefacts, it is necessary to address the problem from a theoretical perspective, convinced that correct identification and classification of the theme, combined with an appropriate research methodology, are fundamental steps for identifying correct intervention strategies. These strategies are understood as the operational application of an architectural, cultural, and aesthetic project before being conservative (Romeo 2018). References to the definition of landscape mentioned at the beginning of the text are helpful to frame the theoretical-speculative dimension of the problem of the Cerveteri necropolis: how can we define the landscape reality of the Lazio necropolis? Given the characteristics above of fusion between the natural and archaeological realms, various scenarios open up before us that correspond to different ways of understanding the context, leading to very different intervention solutions. Based

<sup>2</sup> All place names in the text are retained in Italian.

<sup>3</sup> Tumuli and cube-shaped tombs are the two most common types of tombs in the necropolis. Tumuli consist of a circular stone base, often molded, topped by a mound of earth covered with vegetation. They were primarily constructed between the 7th and 6th centuries BCE. Cube-shaped tombs, on the other hand, are parallelepiped-shaped tombs built from the 6th to the 4th centuries BCE, representing an evolution of the tumulus in an attempt to rationalize the funerary space within the necropolis. Both types of tombs contained one or more burial chambers, designed to imitate the dwellings of the living. For an overview of the evolution of funerary architecture, see Colonna 1986.



on the naturalistic value of the place, one might hypothesize applying the theoretical reflections of scientific cognitivism on the landscape, mainly developed by Allen Carlson between the late 1970s and early 1980s (Carlson 1979; Carlson 1981), but which reached their definitive form around 2000 (Carlson 2002). Carlson's theories, articulated into three paradigms (objectual, landscape, and environmental), only partially frame the complexity of the Cerveteri context: the first paradigm, which invites observation of singularities present in the space, helps analyse the naturalistic and architectural emergencies present, but individually and not about the context. The second paradigm, also insufficient for perceiving the places coherently, invites the observation of nature by comparing it to a represented scene, a landscape painting, or a work of art, thus disregarding the observer's immersion in the places and their navigability and usability as real spaces. The third and final paradigm in Carlson's theories, helpful in overcoming the previous two and thus positioning itself as the final interpretative key, invites experiencing space through the natural sciences, moving from the representation of the artwork to the living space, intelligible through the natural sciences according to recognition standards.

This vision, already subject to critiques and interpretations (D'Angelo 2010, p. 15), although potentially useful for speculation regarding the natural environment, cannot apply to Cerveteri: relying solely on Carlson's paradigms would undertake a methodology of investigation and intervention close to methodical analysis of the physical environment but inattentive to the cultural dimension of the landscape. Thus analysed, the constituent elements of the Lazio reality would be studied only for what they are, not also for what they represent. Indeed, Carlson avoids using the term natural landscape, preferring the idea of the natural environment. To overcome this vision, born in the American context and very close to ecology as a phenomenon of study and care of the natural context, it is necessary to think of the Etruscan necropolis of Cerveteri in its naturalistic dimension but also, and above all, in its cultural value as a historical space. This theoretical overcoming can be found in some writings that have dealt with the identification and definition of the historical (and cultural) landscape, particularly in Rosario Assunto's work (Assunto 1973), preceding Carlson's writings but presenting itself as an extraordinarily current text, capable of overcoming scientific cognitivism theories and moving from the idea of knowing the environment to the idea of perceiving the landscape as a cultural and aesthetic phenomenon.

This vision, close to environmental aesthetics studies, raises two fundamental questions for understanding and planning a conservation intervention, especially in the Cerveteri context: firstly, it reaffirms the historical dimension of the landscape, absent in Carlson, implicitly recalling the 1922 Italian regulations and Croce's theories, which affirmed the importance of «natural beauties [...] particularly related to civil and literary history», establishing an intrinsic historical dimension in the landscape, potentially absent in the concept of the environment. Secondly, and even more significantly for the area of interest, it asserts the existence of a landscape only as a perceived datum by humans, establishing an indissoluble bond that is the basis of landscape theories: «all the landscape we know as natural is a landscape shaped by humans: it is nature to which culture has imprinted its forms without destroying it as nature» (Assunto 1973, p. 29).

As already observed by D'Angelo (D'Angelo 2010, p. 33), this passage offers new interpretative scenarios for the idea of landscape, surpassing the vision of the environment to embrace a further complexity, historical and cultural, which is a substantial characteristic of the Etruscan necropolis of Cerveteri, where, although the image of the places seems shaped only by nature's action, it is actually the result of a synergistic action of humans and vegetation. This is true not only when analyzing the two main components, natural and architectural, consti-

tuting the space but also considering the conservation and restoration interventions carried out in recent decades, which have consolidated this balance, enhancing it without hierarchising the archaeological emergency over the vegetative one. From Assunto's observations, therefore, Cerveteri's space can be read as a cultural landscape understood in its historical characterisation, also linked to the transformation of taste and perception. Although this theory seems much more suitable for formulating an intervention project coherent with the existing space than Carlson's views, it still does not seem sufficient to embrace the complexity of the necropolis.

Although enriched by cultural and historical characterisation, the dimension of observation and perception still needs a reading that can be considered complete because it disregards the sentimental dimension. Referring to Rilke's (Rilke 1998) and Simmel's vision, it is appropriate to refer to a sentimental dimension of the landscape, not so much as the idea that the landscape responds to our feelings but rather that the landscape *evokes feelings in us* (Fig. 4), placing us in an emotional state. This line of thought, born in the romantic context and then developed by numerous scholars over the decades, enriches our vision with a further characterisation that allows, after the idea of the natural environment and cultural landscape, to study the Cerveteri necropolis as an emotional atmosphere. The idea of atmosphere recalls Böhme's theories, where the perception of the landscape is primarily the perception of atmospheres (Böhme 1995, pp. 66-84), characterised by the sentimental and emotional realm, referencing the already mentioned Simmel and his definition of *Stimmung* as a "state of mind," "tone of feeling," typical not so much of the simple perception of a place but rather of its frequentation and experiencing it at a new depth that transcends mere scientific analysis (Pane 1981, p. 3).

Studying the Cerveteri necropolis through these consolidated lines of thought allows basing the reflections and theories of conservation intervention on the awareness of the heterogeneous values of the landscape in question. Following only one of these readings would not allow planning a conservation project capable of preserving the complexity of the places: the Cerveteri necropolis, especially in the *Aree Esterne*, is today more than a natural environment, a cultural landscape, and an emotional atmosphere. Rather, it is appropriate to affirm how the sum of these analyses and these parallel readings of the context has highlighted the need to develop new conservation systems capable of maintaining the balance between the vegetative and the ruin dimensions, between the humanities and the atmosphere of the places. Aware, moreover, that intervention on a landscape scale is possible only by paying attention and planning operations even at the more detailed scale, related to the surface of the artefacts (Fig. 5), it was necessary to develop reflections that connect the theoretical framework with the patina and detail of the Etruscan tumuli, characterised by widespread degradation, often developed due to the lack of adequate protections. The superficial datum, indeed, was at the center of the considerations precisely because, as reiterated by Bellini, «the surface records the monument» (Bellini 1990, pp. 1-11). Therefore, the intervention on the asset's surface had to be designed and developed both at the detail scale and considering the repercussions it would have on the landscape scale. Thus, the alterations—and not the degradations, as Carbonara recalled (Carbonara 2017, p. 35)—of the Cerveteri necropolis have become important historical traces of the asset, capable of summarising the cultural and natural dimension of the landscape and the object of potential conservation.

Facing the need to protect and preserve both the natural and archaeological data and being aware of a limited range of operational possibilities to intervene in a landscape and superficially complex reality, the path of experimentation and the establishment of interdisciplinary teams was attempted, with the hope of identifying new intervention and restoration strategies. These reflections have been channeled, since 2020, into the Co.R.A.Ve – Conserva-



**Fig. 4**  
The evocative relationship between architecture and nature inside a 5th century B.C. burial chamber

**Fig. 5**  
A tumulus from the 7th-6th century B.C. in a symbiotic relationship with the vegetation developed on the walls, mosses and lichens, and on the cap, herbaceous and woody vegetation



tion of Archaeological Ruins in Vegetative Contexts research project, carried out by the Department of Architecture and Design of the Polytechnic University of Turin, in collaboration with the company C.T.S., of which this article aims to provide an overview not so much of the methodological and operational moments, which will be the subject of another article, but of the theoretical premises.

#### **A Landscape of Ruins «like Living Beings»: Observations on the Co.R.A.Ve. Project Sites**

The phase of developing the Co.R.A.Ve. project, its experiential and theoretical precursors, is closely connected with the place – the Etruscan necropolis of Banditaccia in Cerveteri – where the study began. The relationship between the project and the area of investigation does not fit into the usual dimension of the “case study,” where the chosen place often corresponds to the most suitable context among a series of similar possibilities to validate predictions and hypotheses elaborated with a view to an expected result. Instead, this relationship appeared, at least at the initial moment of the research, reversed: it is the place, with its peculiar characteristics, that has shown the possibility of a study of this type, having directed its formulation first and then its realisation. Paraphrasing a beautiful expression by James Hillman, who stated that «it is necessary to stay in a place for a long time so that the imagination can respond (Hillman 2004, p.94)», so that «the place can suggest to us, give us answers» (Hillman 2004, p.43), it is the frequent and slow observation of the necropolis, to which the research group dedicated itself during studies preceding Co.R.A.Ve., that allowed the emergence of a precise direction of investigation. This approach, almost in response to being attuned to the site, formed the project’s backbone. This consists, on the one hand, of having observed how the suggestions transmitted by the necropolis reside primarily in that inseparable binomial of ruins and vegetation that characterises this place on various scales of landscape and surface, finding confirmation of this also in the dialogue established with the community of citizens who daily frequent these places. On the other hand, how this natural element, though so indispensable, represents the main conservation issue of the area,



which constantly results in even severe damage to the structures. Recognising this antinomy and, more importantly, its seemingly insoluble nature given the specificities of this context, laid the foundation for the Co.R.A.Ve. project, which aimed to address an issue that will undoubtedly become one of the crucial questions the Archaeological Park will need to answer in the near future.

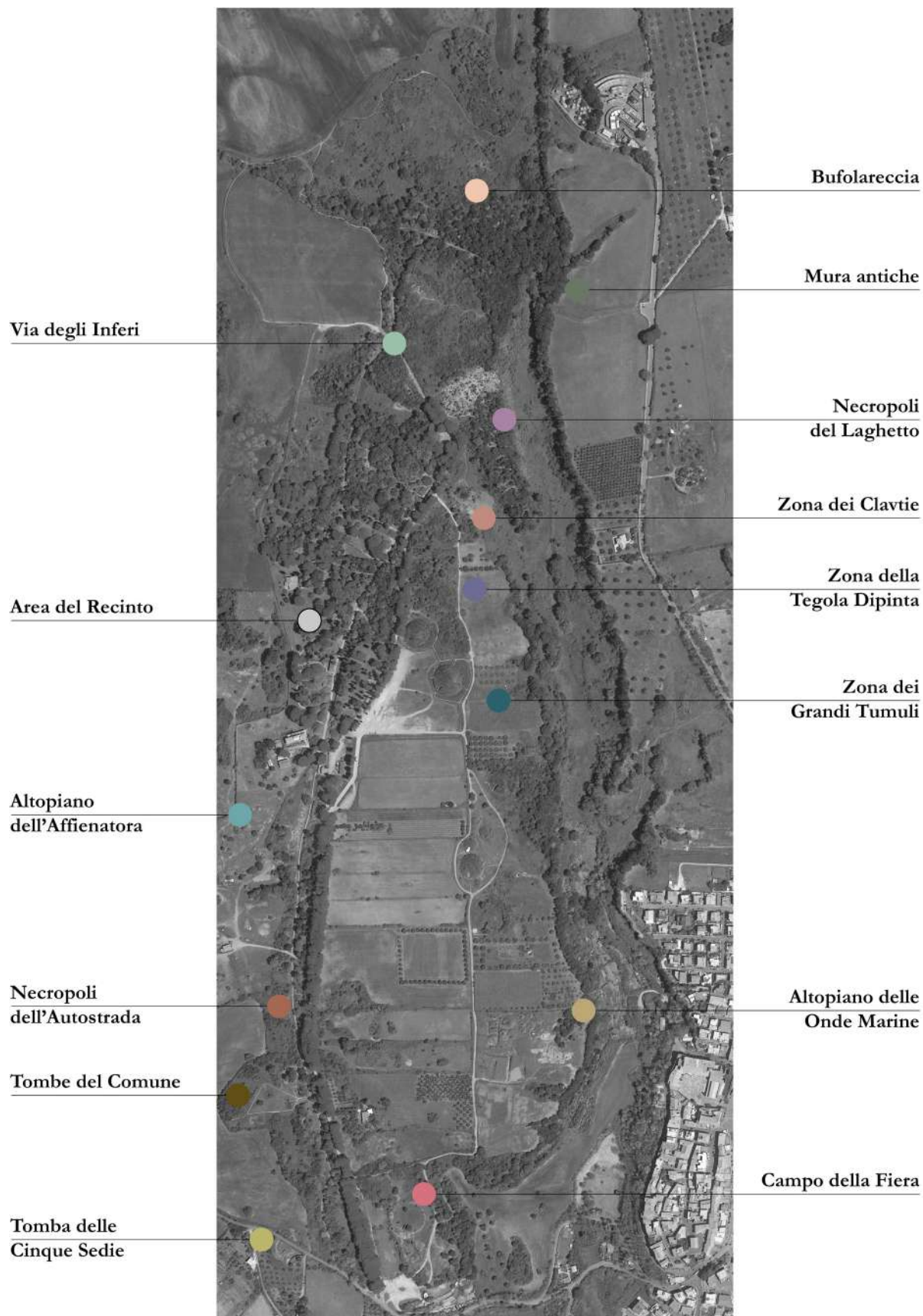
As mentioned, the issue addressed by the project moves on two scales: the landscape scale, concerning the relationship of the monuments with the other constitutive elements of the territory, primarily natural, and the surface scale, at the level of the individual monument, where the vegetation, as will be discussed later, is not just ruderal vegetation, a consequence of limited human action, but, on the contrary, an integral part of the architectures themselves, as presumably imagined already by the Etruscans.

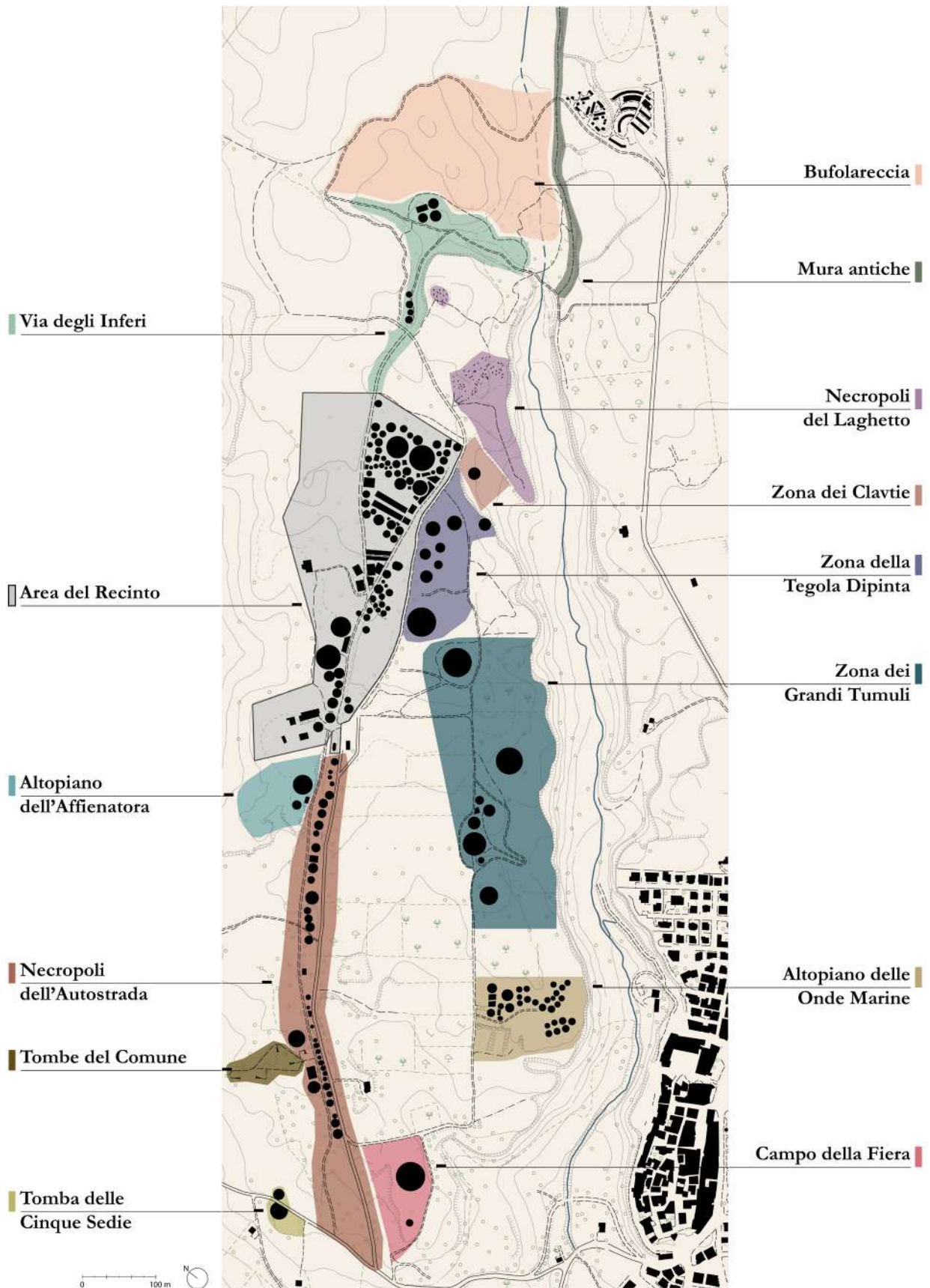
Starting from the first, the vast scale, the current archaeological landscape of the necropolis can be mainly attributed to the period of excavations, restorations, and transformations that began in the early 20th century and continued until the 1970s, leading to the creation of what is the current perimeter and musealized sector of the necropolis, about ten hectares in size, known as the *Recinto* (Porretta 2017). In this area, most of the tombs investigated in the 20th century are condensed, which were then restored and, in many cases, reconstructed – with a certain degree of interpretative freedom – in an effort to restore what was presumed to be the original image of the necropolis (Fig. 6, 7): a true “city of the dead,” mirroring that of the living, consisting of an uninterrupted and labyrinthine succession of tumulus tombs, cube-shaped tombs, rock-cut tombs, and hypogea, organised around a complex network of burial roads and squares. Besides this reconstructive aspect, which significantly influences the contemporary visitor’s perception of this place, the landscape that can be appreciated within the confines of the *Recinto* is perhaps even more influenced by another design choice by Raniero Mengarelli: the planting of numerous ornamental plants, including pines and cypresses – alien to the previous native context of the necropolis – in this sector, to transform the area into a garden that would serve as a new scenography for the ruins, following a practice that, already started in the 19th century, became a sign of that process of self-le-

**Fig. 6-7**  
The interior of the enclosure. The tombs are primarily reconstructed, and the landscape is modified by including ornamental vegetation, such as pines and cypresses

*next pages*

**Fig. 8**  
On the following pages. Map of the sectors of the necropolis, including the *Recinto* and *Aree Esterne*







**Fig. 9**  
The *Via degli Inferi*

opposite page

**Fig. 10**  
The *Necropoli del*  
*Laghetto*

gitimization of the regime that made enormous use of the rehabilitation of archaeological ruins (Pallottino 2018, pp. 325-334) between the 1920s and 1930s.

Around this circumscribed area develops, instead, the rest of the burial ground, the so-called *Aree Esterne* (Fig. 8): these, consisting of zones largely freely accessible today, identify their most characteristic feature in having been only marginally affected by the transformation process that involved the *Recinto*, allowing them to preserve themselves, although repeatedly investigated in the 20th century, in a condition of stratification that could almost be defined as “pre-archaeological.” Here the ruins, physically and perceptually continuous, succeed each other for tens of hectares, dotting a territory where, interspersed with spontaneous wooded areas and Mediterranean scrub, the traditional agro-pastoral activities – grazing and fields cultivated with olive, wheat, and vine – that have belonged to these places for centuries still impact. These areas, whose place names were generally attributed during excavation surveys or in subsequent phases of research, can be imagined along an itinerary proceeding from the northeastern extremity of the necropolis towards its western extensions:

- **Via degli Inferi** (Fig. 9) (Zifferero 1980; Enei 1986; Brocato, Galluccio 1993): This section of the burial ground starts just beyond the boundary marked by the remains of the ancient city walls – Caere in the Etruscan era – and borders a sector only partially investigated of the necropolis, now impassable due to the dense scrub, called Bufolareccia. According to current knowledge of the site’s morphology, it represented the main road connecting the Etruscan Cerveteri, Caere, with the rest of the Banditaccia. Today, the *Via degli Inferi* appears as a deeply sunken road in the tuff, about four hundred meters long, with facades of dozens of chamber tombs carved into its walls, dating from between the 7th and 3rd-2nd centuries BCE, and from which several secondary roads branch off, the main one leading to a nearby sepulchral quarter of Orientalizing tumuli. A peculiar characteristic of the *Via degli Inferi* is that, having been dug deeper over the centuries as the space on the walls for burials was exhausted, the higher tombs are the oldest, while those closer to the current road level are the most recent. Here, the archaeological landscape is among the most evocative and problematic of the necropolis due to the forest



around it, pushing to the edge of the two walls of the *Via*, with numerous trees growing directly on the tombs. As a result, many detachments of materials from the monuments are caused by the disintegrating action of the plant roots and the occasional fall of trees from above.

- **Necropoli del Laghetto** (Fig. 10) (Linington 1980): A few dozen meters after the end of the *Via degli Inferi*, after the path carved into the tuff emerges at ground level, you reach the necropolis of Laghetto. This sector of the burial ground, created on a large tuff outcrop, is characterised by a complex stratification of tombs from the 8th to the 3rd century BCE, such as pre-Etruscan pits and wells, remains of tumuli, and cube-shaped tombs, up to the more recent burials from the Romanization period of Caere. The area, difficult to interpret due to the use of the land for agricultural and quarry purposes and the overlapping of tombs over the centuries, is, however, a place of particular suggestion, both for its overlooking the Fosso del Manganello, the valley separating the Banditaccia plateau from that of the Vignali where Cerveteri stands, and for the presence of numerous open-air tombs that have become small ponds rich in herbaceous vegetation and inhabited by small native fauna. Larger trees and shrubs grow sparsely due to the outcropping tuff, but where present, numerous cracks can be seen in the stone material.
- **Clavtie Area** (Fraschetti 1977): Continuing beyond *Laghetto*, a narrow valley, a sort of inlet in the Banditaccia plateau, hosts some chamber tombs carved into the escarpment walls and topped on the edge by some tumuli. Here, almost in the center of the valley, is the well-known Hellenistic-Roman tomb of the Clavtie, brought to light in 2022 by a collaboration between the Superintendence and GAR, after being almost forgotten following its discovery in the early second half of the 20th century, and an Orientalizing tumulus characterised by an unusual drum nearly four meters high. The valley landscape here is free of trees and defined by predominantly herbaceous vegetation due to the area's past agro-pastoral use. At the same time, many figs, hackberries, and holm oaks have grown over the years on the tumulus's dome, which, as a result, shows a drum crossed by deep cracks, within which the roots of the trees above are clearly visible.

Fig. 11  
The *Grandi Tumuli Area*

opposite page

Fig. 12  
The *Altopiano delle Onde Marine Area*. Behind, the city of Cerveteri

- **Tegola Dipinta Area** (Moretti 1955, pp. 1049-1136): Ascending from the Clavie tomb, you reach the *Tegola Dipinta* area, named after a large tumulus here. The area, adjacent to the dirt road bordering the south limit of the *Recinto*, appears as a zone of dense vegetation, dominated by a young forest developed, as evidenced by period aerial photos and recent satellite images, in the last two decades. Among these trees are numerous tumuli of great interest for their architectural quality and the state of conservation of the hypogeal chambers, but they are very damaged on the external parts due to the roots of the many surrounding plants. The area, which is difficult to traverse, is crossed by some paths connecting the main tombs.
- **Grandi Tumuli Area** (Fig. 11) (Cristofani et al. 1988, p. 83; Vighi et al. 1955): Starting from this burial ground area, directly connected with the *Tegola Dipinta* area, the spontaneous vegetation gradually thins out, leaving space for crops and pastures, which from here on become the characteristic feature of the necropolis landscape. In this area, fields cultivated with olive, vine, and wheat are dotted with imposing tumuli, with diameters of thirty or forty meters, inside which are important burial chambers such as the Moretti Tomb, the *Tomba degli Animali Dipinti*, and the *Tomba degli Scudi e delle Sedie*.
- **Altopiano delle Onde Marine** (Fig. 12) (Benedettini, Cosentino 2017, pp. 7-38): Without apparent continuity solution with the *Grandi Tumuli* area, except for the presence of a metal fence preventing access, there is the *Altopiano delle Onde Marine*, a sector of the necropolis excavated several times starting from 1951 and still subject to archaeological investigations by the Superintendence. This area appears as a stretch of medium-small tumuli, cube-shaped tombs, and hypogea, which give an overall image – in terms of density, tomb arrangement, and relationship with the surrounding natural context – not dissimilar to what the *Recinto* area must have looked like before Mengarelli's work transformed its spontaneous landscape. Contributing to this impression, besides the presence of the «green wheat meadow» already observed in the early 20th century by Lawrence, which for centuries must have characterised the Banditaccia's surface, is the fact that the domes of the tumuli and cube-shaped tombs have been preserved here.
- **Necropoli dell'Autostrada and Altopiano dell'Affienatora** (Fig. 13) (Pace 1955). Return-



ing towards the plateau's interior, in its longitudinal crossing axis direction, one encounters the so-called *Necropoli dell'Autostrada*, which borders the current paved road leading to the *Recinto*, from which it takes its name. This sector develops around the central axis of the necropolis, beyond the southwest boundary of the *Recinto*, representing the natural continuation of the *Via degli Inferi* and the *Via Sepolcrale Principale*, around which most of the *Recinto's* tombs are arranged. It is a road, about eight hundred meters long, along whose sides numerous tumuli, cube-shaped tombs, and hypogea are arranged. Many tombs in this section appear modified by Mengarelli's interventions. Near the first stretch of this burial road, close to the *Recinto's* boundary, a flat area of the necropolis extending westward into the countryside, where two tumuli and several cube-shaped tombs are present, is named *Altopiano dell'Affienatora*. These areas, if on one side delimited by the paved road, on the other fade into the surrounding fields, and it is not uncommon here to encounter flocks of sheep and goats grazing directly on the tombs, contributing to the pre-archaeological image of the *Aree Esterne* mentioned above. However, a prolonged lack of maintenance has also allowed numerous trees, some of which are large, to grow above the monuments, causing significant fractures in the walls of the tombs.

- **Tombe del Comune** (Fig. 13) (Cristofani et al. 1988, p. 83). Walking along the *Necropoli dell'Autostrada* in a southwesterly direction, near the road axis, towards its end, one finds the so-called *Tombe del Comune*, five monumental façade tombs, hypogea, dating back to the 4th century BCE, representing the peak of the funerary architecture of the period, corresponding to the final flourishing moment of Caere. The tombs, which were involved in an enhancement intervention aimed at improving their accessibility in 2014, are located in a grassy area free of trees.
- **Campo della Fiera Area** (Cosentino 2018, pp. 343-364) and **Tomb of the Five Chairs** (Proietti 1986, p. 111). After passing the *Tombe del Comune*, the road continues for a few more dozen meters, reaching the southern boundary of the Banditaccia plateau, where the two areas of *Campo della Fiera* and the *Tomba delle Cinque Sedie* meet. Both burial quarters develop around two main monuments: the *Tumulo di Campo della Fiera*, the largest





Fig. 13  
The Altopiano  
dell'Affienatora and,  
on the left, part  
of the Necropoli  
dell'Autostrada

opposite page

Fig. 14  
The Tombe del  
Comune

in the necropolis, with six burial chambers, and the *Tomba delle Cinque Sedie*, a unique tomb in Cerveteri due to the presence of five small chairs carved into the tuff, on which as many anthropomorphic terracotta statuettes were seated. These two areas are today enclosed by a fence, accessible only on special occasions or by requesting access from the volunteer associations caring for them since the early 2000s.

The brief itinerary proposed here through the *Aree Esterne* aims to highlight an aspect that direct experience of these places immediately grasps: that of a changing archaeological landscape, where the heterogeneity of forms assumed by the ruin-vegetation relationship, in addition to stimulating the observer's imagination in ever-different ways, becomes a trace of the historical use of this territory, of its different vocations that have so far continued to coexist, from agro-pastoral to museal. Such variety, therefore, appears as a value to be preserved – a value that is at the same time historical, aesthetic, psychological, and ecological – but it poses complex questions that require urgent answers, especially at this precise historical moment, a few months after the acquisition of the Archaeological Park of most of the *Aree Esterne*, which will be involved in an inevitable transformation process.

A first category of questions underlying the Co.R.A.Ve. project thus arises from these landscape-scale reflections, which emerged during slow walks aimed at embracing the necropolis in its multifaceted expressions, values, and criticalities. A second, however, relates to the smaller scale, that of the monument and surface, where, again, this place presents partly new problems. These lie in the fact that not only would the removal of vegetation from the monuments be undesirable for all the reasons stated in the first part of this article, but such removal would be entirely impractical if not at the cost of what would appear as an actual “demolition”: it would indeed be impossible to strip a tumulus of the vegetation that, along with the earth, constitutes its dome, as it is an integral part of this architectural form, in fact, its core. Thus, for the tumuli – and also for the later cube-shaped tombs that preserved a memory of the earth domes in reduced form – one can speak of architecture that is already nature in its conception, a true hybridisation between the two elements, placing these structures between biological and artificial form. This impression was already recorded by Cesare



Brandi when, visiting the Banditaccia, he observed that the tumuli appeared to him «like living beings undergoing enormous sandblasting» then adding: «They contained the dead, but nothing is less funerary» (Brandi 1996, p. 131). From a conservation perspective, this implies that the reflection, valid for any other ruin, about the opportunity to maintain ruderal vegetation forms does not make sense in these cases. It must necessarily be preserved. Embracing this historical-architectural perspective and coupled with environmental, cultural, and emotional reasons justifying the maintenance of this binomial, the question then can no longer be whether it is appropriate to preserve surface vegetation, but how to do so.

### **Conclusions**

In response to this question, the direction explored by the Co.R.A.Ve. project is one that sees the possibility of coexistence between the two elements necessarily mediated, albeit through minimal actions, by constant human intervention, capable of managing the «process of transformation over time of the remains and vegetation» (Mancini, Rossi Doria 2017, p. 39), so that the latter does not entirely overtake the former. For this approach to translate into operational reality, however, it is necessary to identify a boundary point, recognising, that is, the moment beyond which vegetation ceases to be an alteration and becomes more properly degradation, capable of producing a macroscopic loss of the asset's material. A limit that, for the purposes pursued by the project, is intended to be set a step beyond what would generally be allowed and which, for this reason, is even more essential to identify precisely. This is because it is precisely this boundary that becomes the key site of an intervention that, having identified the most urgent risks and vulnerabilities, can, on the other hand, welcome and preserve what lies behind it, that is, vegetation as alteration, which, although subtracting something from the stone substrate, returns to the ruin that additional sense which, transcending its mere historical-documentary value, opens up broader horizons of meaning. The mediation of such human intervention becomes inevitable because that spontaneous harmony between nature and archaeology that seems perceived when walking through the necropolis is but an illusory impression: however suggestive it may appear, it is not equi-

**Figg. 15-16**  
Some of the tumuli in the Aree Esterne of the necropolis still have their original covering caps

*opposite page*

**Figg. 17-18**  
Several situations in which the lignified roots of tree and shrub species have produced severe damage to artefacts





librium but only a moment in the slow and inexorable reappropriation of spaces by vegetation removed by human action. As botanist Maria Adele Signorini reminds us (Signorini 2017, pp. 287-288),

if left alone, in every place, the vegetation spontaneously tends to develop into increasingly complex and structured communities until reaching the climax, that is, the type of community in equilibrium with that environment [...]. In our latitudes, the climax is almost always an evergreen forest dominated by holm oak and other trees and shrubs with leathery leaves.

Those holm oak forests that are now growing even in places that were occupied by fields and pastures just a few decades ago are evidence of a condition in which nature has been left free to move towards its climax for decades and whose progress, although imperceptible to the human eye, continues. If nature is thus managing to achieve its equilibrium condition, what is lacking, on the other hand, is the balance needed by the ruins to preserve themselves from the damage inevitably caused by vegetation.

Given the complexity of these relationships, it becomes evident that the future of these places, especially during this decisive moment for the necropolis, will be determined by the ability of the conservation actions put in place to read and interpret the multiple contrasts that have shaped this archaeological landscape, defining its uniqueness. The premises of the Co.R.A.Ve. project lie in the willingness to mediate between these needs and the awareness of the risks that inaction leads to, but even more so the damage that overly invasive interventions often cause to archaeological heritage (Romeo 2012, pp. 231-238).

**Figg. 19-22**  
Several situations  
in which the  
lignified roots  
of tree and  
shrub species  
have produced  
severe damage to  
artefacts



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