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INTERPRETING TRANSFORMATIONS OF PEOPLE AND LANDSCAPES IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND ISSUES

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People and Landscapes in Northern Italy:
Interrogating the Burial Archaeology of the Early Middle Ages

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Introduction

Early medieval funerary archaeology in northern Italy has a long historiographical tradition and has indeed enjoyed an important revival in the last decade. Scholarly attention has focused above all on Lombard burials and their material culture, and recent publications include notable syntheses (such as Possenti 2014 and Giostra 2017), monographs on early medieval Lombard contexts,[1] papers on individual cemeteries[2] and bioarchaeological research including DNA and stable isotopes (Geary *et al.* 2015; Marinato 2016). Much less is generally published about 'non-barbarian' types of burial (not necessarily meaning unfurnished burials) and the majority of published cemeteries without ethnic features relate specifically to churches.[3] In both cases it is important to underline that we are only broadly dealing with 'special' burial contexts, where recovered inhumations represent only a small subset of the total early medieval population; they cannot therefore be considered a valid basis for accurately reconstructing burial rituality or demographic patterns in early medieval Italy. This problem is due to the lack of a systematic record of burial evidence for this period, and the paucity of research publications describing 'normal' cemeteries (A valuable first statement and synthesis of the problem was Blake 1983). It is recognised, therefore, that there is a clear need for a more systematic and broad study of early medieval cemeteries in Italy, which includes different kinds of contexts and populations. This paper provides an overview of current questions and issues, and of new approaches to tackle these as we seek to interpret more coherently the evidence of the available (and future) burial archaeology.

Recording Early Medieval People in Northern Italy: The CAMIS Project

Cimiteri Altomedievali in Italia Settentrionale (CAMIS) is a project developed since 2010 with the specific aim of recording all the published data from late antique and early medieval cemeteries across northern Italy (so far more than 1300, but for the analysis in this paper data from 1151 cemeteries were used)[4] (Fig. 14.1). By territory, the numbers of cemeteries in our database are: Belluno (96), Bergamo (134), Brescia (148), Como (10), Cremona (11) Gorizia (9), Lecco (6), Lodi (7), Mantua (36) Milan (50), Monza-Brianza (5), Padua (19), Pavia (33), Pordenonde (33), Sondrio (1), Turin (78), Trento (114), Treviso (75), Trieste (3), Udine (83), Varese (54), Venice (19), Verona (105) and Vicenza (48) (see Fig. 14.2). All the cemeteries are being recorded in an integrated archaeological and anthropological database with information fields on: the geographical context in which each cemetery was located; the type of settlement to which the cemetery was linked; its chronological range; the number and organisation of the graves; grave types; surviving grave-goods; and information about the individuals buried in each grave. Unfortunately, the information can often be very imprecise due to the synthetic character or date of the publications on which our study is currently based, and a progressive completion of the database using more accurate excavation reports is therefore strongly recommended.

The project is ongoing (we are now recording the far-western provinces of northern Italy) and is currently commencing the analysis of the geographical distribution of particular features (non-'barbarian' grave-goods, sarcophagi),
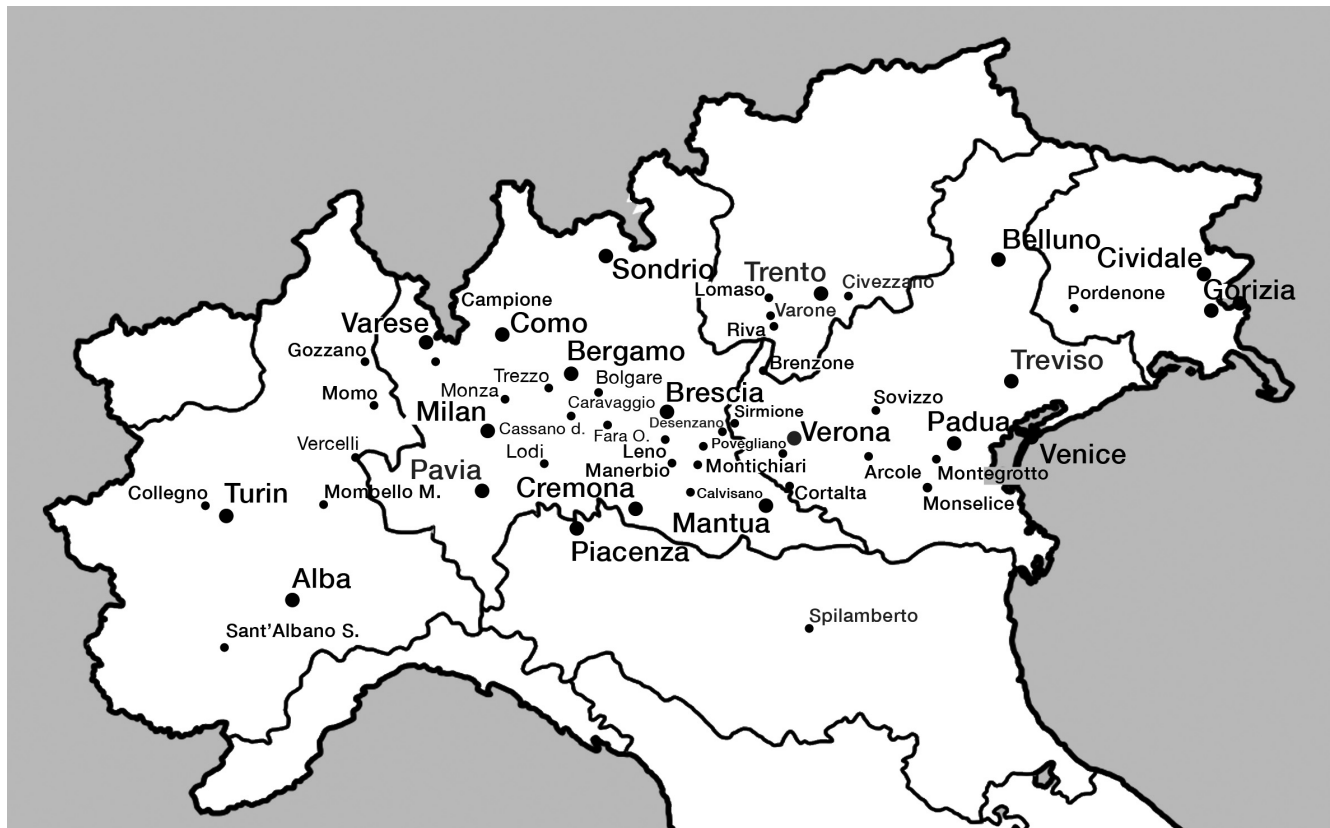
Figure 14.1 Location map of archaeological sites named in this chapter

extending the anthropological and bioarchaeological information, and exploring relationships between cemeteries and settlements, among other subjects. The whole database will eventually be uploaded on-line and connected to a user-friendly GIS platform in order to share and develop all the information with researchers and institutions (especially the Soprintendenze).

First Reflections on the Demography of Early Medieval Italy

For more than half of the cemeteries (865) it is possible to estimate the number of graves (so far 13,425), which have given, at least, more than 5000 individuals. This figure reflects how many of the skeletons within the graves have disappeared due to soil conditions but also (and more frequently so) because many publications do not specify how many skeletons were recovered during the related excavations. In general, only major publications include anthropological data (e.g. Collegno, Mombello, Montichiari), although the publication of detailed anthropological information is increasing also for minor sites. Specialist synthesis on palaeobiological aspects tend to focus again on the aforementioned 'special' cemeteries and therefore the sample is clearly biased (for example, Piedmont in Bedini and Petiti 2014; Lombardy in Mazzucchi *et al.* 2014). Cemeteries in which it has been

possible to try a demographical calculation tend to show a larger number of men respect to the women (a problem underlined by Barbiera 2008 and 2012); but in some cases the number of indeterminate sex is extraordinary high due mainly to the state of skeletal conservation or the lack of clear evidences (sexual dimorphism) that permit to define the sex of the deceased: for example, at Saint Quirico in Bolgare with 171 undetermined, 135 men and 188 female; San Pietro in Mavinas with 85 undetermined, 44 male and 20 female; and Ovaro 5 men, 5 female, 4 infants and 17 undetermined). Sometimes, as at Montichiari (Bs), the problem lies in the research because only a small part of the cemetery was analysed (Lamanna 2018).

Another major problem relates to the chronology of cemeteries since many (particularly those without grave-goods) have not been subjected to systematic C14 analysis and so are very broadly dated (between the fourth and tenth centuries), causing great difficulty in understanding their evolution. Valuable efforts have been made to understand the composition and evolution of some Lombard cemeteries through dating their grave-goods (Giostra 2017b, 23): some of these (such as Collegno or Spilamberto) seem to last two to three generations (calculated at 40 years each) and were occupied by an average of 30–40 individuals organised in enlarged familiar groups of 10–12 individuals; whereas other burial grounds such as Leno show larger groups, with 70–80
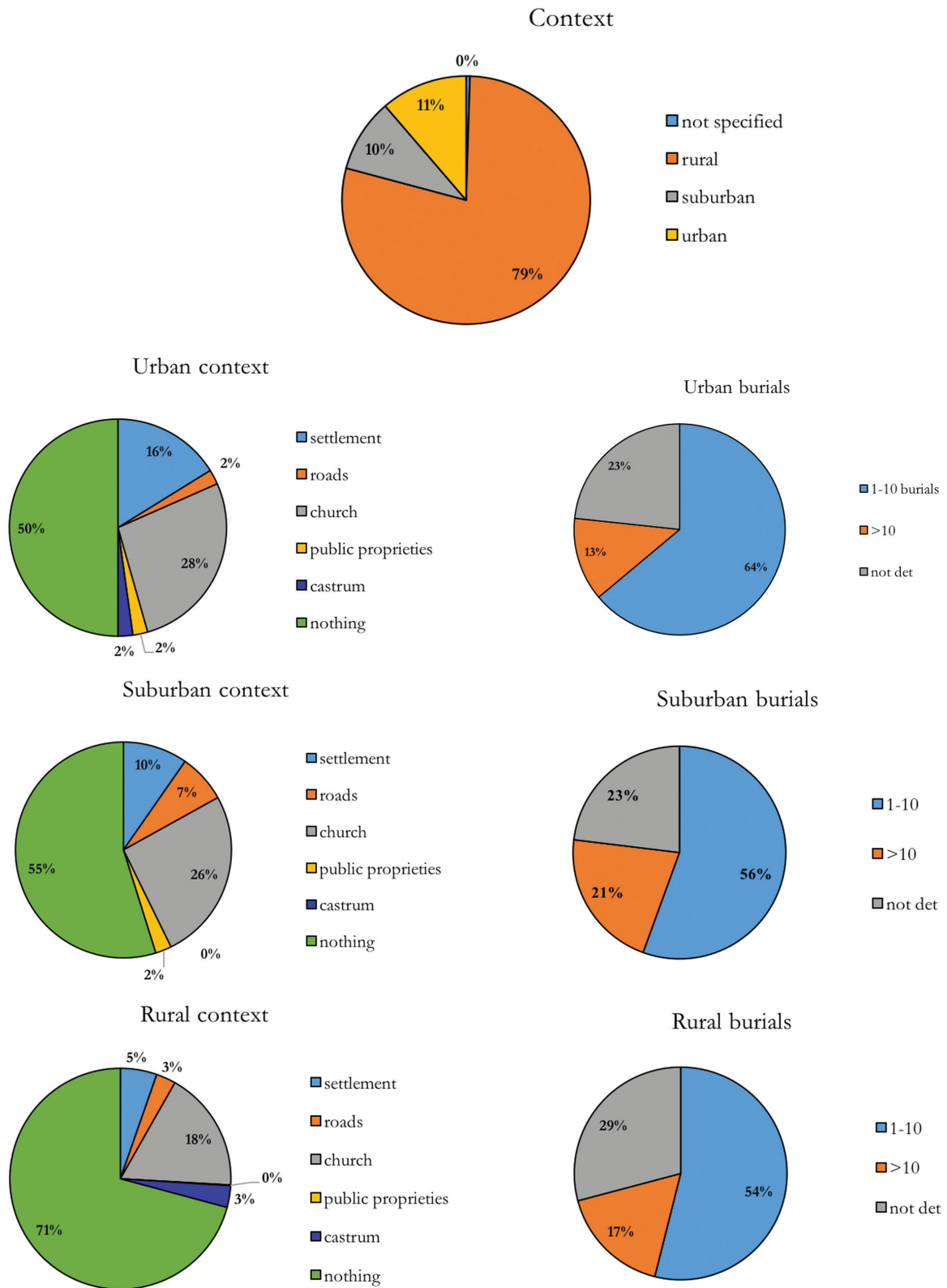
Context

Urban context

Urban burials

Suburban context

Suburban burials

Rural context

Rural burials

Figure 14.2 Number of cemeteries by provinces (based on published information – CAMIS)

individuals for each of the three generations identified in the cemetery.

The published data recorded in the CAMIS project form, therefore, in our view, an insufficient basis for a fully secure or even plausible demographic approach, although earlier efforts have tried to sketch early medieval demographic profiles for the sixth to eleventh centuries based on data from far fewer (14) Italian cemeteries (Barbiera and Dalla Zuana 1997). Currently, the only certain observations we can make are that there are a wide variety of characteristics, both in the composition and ordering of the cemeteries, and in the physical attributes of the recovered individuals.[5]

Diversity of Burial Practices as Markers of Political and Social Fragmentation?

Most current researchers agree that between the end of the Roman West and AD 1000, an individual burial might be made in diverse locations either in/around towns and in the countryside. This variety of burial locations potentially can shed light on wider political changes, the presence or impact of new powers, the process of Christianisation and the role of ecclesiastical authorities, the socio-economic context of the inhumed, as well as more generally on the changing use of urban space and on transformations of rural landscapes and ownership during the Early Middle Ages. In Italy's case we need to bear in mind the disruptions and upheavals from the later fifth century through to the eighth, from the conquest and occupation of the peninsula by the Ostrogoths (AD 489–*c*. 550), the damaging Byzantine-Gothic War (AD 535–554), the brief Byzantine control, then the Lombard invasion which split the peninsula after the 570s although with the majority of north Italy Lombard territory from the early seventh century, if with ongoing conflict with the Byzantines (and papal territories) into the mid- to late eighth century until Carolingian annexation. Archaeology has long been used to help chart the changing powers and possible population and ownership changes and/or continuities, and burials especially offer important insights to evolving societies and attitudes across this timeframe.

Among the higher levels of society, we can observe how social status might be displayed – as in Roman times – through the use of monumental graves or *mausolea* at prominent locations close to roads or at sites that could be easily seen by contemporaries. Christian buildings in cities and in the countryside became the favoured burial place for the upper classes but the large number of burials discovered close to suburban funerary churches implies that lesser economic and politically privileged urban groups were also buried in connection with these Christian buildings. Privilege was probably indicated by their position in relation to specific focal points of the church. However, not all Christians were buried at church cemeteries. Many

rural groups used open-air community burial grounds, or were interred close to habitations, and sometimes in areas that were unsuitable for other purposes, such as abandoned buildings. Some individuals might be buried at particular or strategic places whose meanings were probably clear to their contemporaries, but are more difficult for us to understand. Some isolated or 'deviant' burials (cf Reynolds 2009) might be linked to people removed from society (criminals, victims of plague, etc.), but such explanations cannot be confirmed without supporting palaeopathological evidence (see below). Below we outline the diverse settings and interpretations of burials across late antique and early medieval north Italy, in cities and in the countryside and in relation to individual churches.

Cities and Cemeteries

In recent decades, the study of late Roman and early medieval cities has witnessed an extraordinary development in Italy, as elsewhere. In Mediterranean areas it is clear that even if townscapes experienced deep transformations, especially in the loss, reuse and robbing of public spaces and buildings, and in increased craft and agricultural activities, these changes did not mean the end or abandonment of these towns which continued to act as central places for most territories, and as the sites where civilian and military authorities were based and where bishops had their sees and promoted the Christianisation of their territories (see Brogiolo 2011b). Recent research in Spain also shows that many of these changes are not exclusive to post-classical cities, since some sites were affected as early as the later second century (see Romero Vera 2016; Ruiz Bueno 2018 for an overview; Diarte-Blasco 2012 on public spectacle buildings). But a key difference between classical and post-classical 'functional' changes seems to be the use of intramural areas for funerary activity. Traditionally this 'entry' of burials within the towns has been interpreted as a consequence of urban Christianisation, with intramural burials being linked to new churches. However, close analysis shows that intramural churches rarely attracted burials before the eighth century (see Chavarría Arnau and Giacomello 2014; Chavarría Arnau 2009, 188–189) and that, in any case, intramural burials are very rare before the seventh century (Chavarría Arnau in press).

For the whole of the Early Middle Ages the most common settings for burials in cities were suburban areas. Roman suburban cemeteries, traditionally located next to the main approach roads to the cities, seem not to have been abandoned during Late Antiquity, although, already from the third century, sources mention Christian areas within the cemeteries of Rome and other western cities, or even of *cimeteria christianorum* organised by bishops. From Constantine (d. 337) onwards, Christian buildings start to be erected in these suburban cemeteries, often linked to a

martyr's tomb. Their function was probably originally that of covered cemeteries – *coemeteria subteglata* (Fiocchi Nicolai 2016, 630) – where ceremonies linked to funerary cults were arranged, but very soon other liturgical ceremonies were performed within them. The presence of martyrs and their relics, the conduct of liturgical ceremonies, in addition to the continuity of use of these areas from earlier centuries, attracted the favour of the highest urban elites, from bishops – who throughout the Early Middle Ages were mainly buried in such suburban 'basilicas' (Picard 1988) – to the civilian upper classes. Lesser status people were also probably buried there, but perhaps in specific areas. It is clear not only from the written sources but also from the archaeological evidence that church space was strictly controlled by the ecclesiastical authorities, who decided the identity and distribution of the graves, in accordance with Christian virtues and, undoubtedly, the value of economic contributions – something that the ecclesiastical authorities had, of course, tried to ban as early as the sixth century.

It would be interesting to identify fourth- or fifth-century suburban cemeteries not linked to monumental churches to see what kinds of burial types were used and what range of people were buried there. The situation at Cividale del Friuli in north-east Italy is particularly informative because several suburban cemeteries, datable to the sixth to seventh centuries, have been traced and sampled archaeologically (Borzacconi 2013; Ahumada Silva 2014) (Fig. 14.3). While these burial grounds have mainly been studied locally from the perspective of Lombard settlement, there is scope to explore for any particular differences between the population buried in pre-existing funerary areas (such as the cemetery of Cella–San Giovanni), and those buried in new cemeteries (e.g. San Mauro, Ferrovia, Santo Stefano); to ask whether there were late 'Roman' suburban cemeteries not related to churches here; and to compare all of this evidence to graves found inside the city (such as at Piazza Paolo Diacono and the Cathedral area), especially to understand their comparative chronology and to consider whether they reveal any social or economic differences.

While Roman and late antique legislation prohibited cemeteries being set up inside the urban *pomerium* (see Prieur 1986, 50–51)*,* archaeology reveals that, especially after the sixth century, scattered burials were being made inside the original limits of the majority of the ancient cities (Lambert 1997, 2003; Chavarría Arnau in press). At least in northern Italy, these burial 'plots' were generally very small (between one and ten burials) and can often be related to abandoned private and public buildings. Scattered burials have been found in almost all Italian cities, in both Lombard and Byzantine areas. (For Byzantine Ravenna and Classe: Ferreri 2011 and 2014. For Rome: Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani 1995; Meneghini, this volume). Burial inside the city is not to be viewed as a sign of marginalisation or low social status, but can sometimes denote privilege: thus, in

Verona a very high status female tomb dated to the earliest seventh century was discovered in the area of Palazzo Miniscalchi/Cortalta (*Curtis alta*) (La Rocca 1989, 42); at Verona, the burial place of the first Lombard king, Alboin, was under the staircase of his palace (Paul the Deacon, *HL*, II, 28); and at Cividale a sarcophagus containing rich mid-seventh-century grave-goods was recovered in 1874, in this instance possibly associated with some form of public or aristocratic building (Brogiolo 2001; Lusuardi Siena and Giostra 2012, 277–278). The characteristics and grave-goods of some of the graves recovered in Bergamo (via Osmano–vicolo Sant'Andrea) reveal an élite Lombard community and again the graves seem to be linked to some kind of public building and a monumental staircase (Fortunati *et al*. 2014, 141–144) (Fig. 14.4).

But elsewhere the characteristics of such graves could indicate that they indeed belonged to a low status, perhaps servile population, as was originally suggested by Brogiolo (1994, 560) for some graves close connected to sunken huts identified at Brescia (The number of scattered tombs known in late antique–early medieval Brescia totals 65: Brogiolo 2011, 49–50, with wider discussion on the uses of urban spaces for burial, 139–146). Similar data have been recently reviewed for other north Italian cities such as Pavia, Cividale, Piacenza and Alba by Giostra (2014b). Again, one must underline the extreme variability of the data and the possible related interpretations which indicates multiple ideological, social and economic traditions. The occurrence of formal burial activity inside the city before the seventh century is not, therefore, necessarily an indicator of Christianisation or evidence for the establishment of a church, but more probably relates to the changed ways of conceiving and using urban space in the post-Roman period.

It is noticeable that churches, and in particular cathedrals, in Italy did not attract formal burial grounds until a later date and never before the seventh century (Chavarría and Giacomello 2014). Some of the earliest burials found close to cathedrals seem rather to be linked to other contexts, either pre-dating church construction or of a period when the building was out of use, as in the examples of Alba (Micheletto 1999, 34; Lambert 2003, 230), Trento (Guaitioli 2013, 116–121), Brescia (Breda 2007, 240–242), Cividale (Borzacconi 2003) and Padua. At the latter, detailed stratigraphic excavation and a range of C14 dates clearly attested the complete destruction of at least part of the episcopal complex at the beginning of the seventh century followed by domestic activity comprising two huts with its burial plot (3 adults and 2 infants) (Brogiolo *et al.* 2017; Marinato 2017b for isotopic analysis) (Fig. 14.5). The area perhaps did not regain a religious function until the tenth or eleventh century, when a large building (possibly the baptistery) was built, with a large privileged funerary area attached to its walls (infants) and northern area (on the burials, see Canci *et al.* 2017).
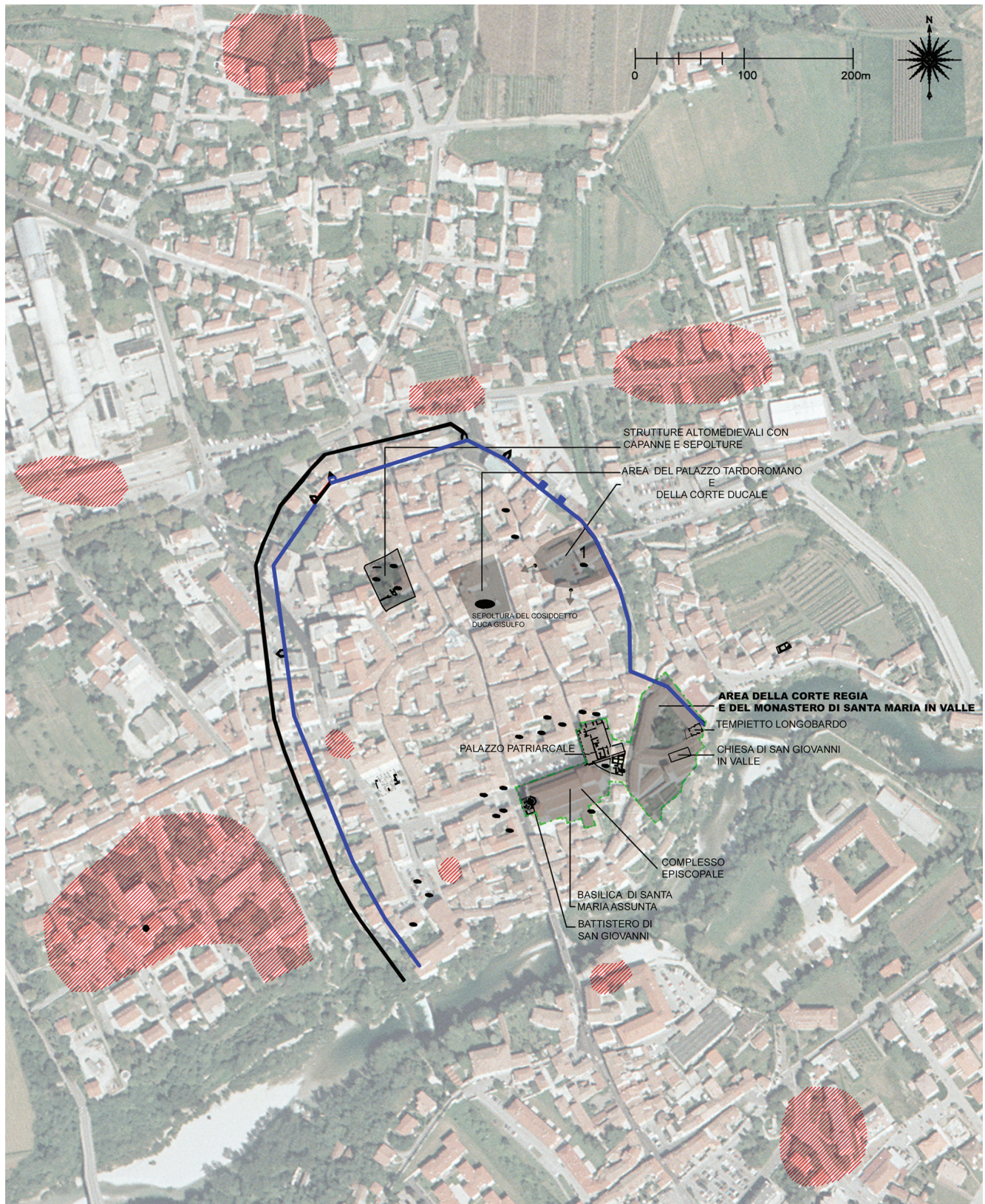
STRUTTURE ALTOMEDIEVALI CON
CAPANNE E SEPOLTURE

AREA DEL PALAZZO TARDOROMANO
E
DELLA CORTE DUCALE

SEPOLTURA DEL COSIDDETTO
DUCA GISULFO

AREA DELLA CORTE REGIA
E DEL MONASTERO DI SANTA MARIA IN VALLE

TEMPIETTO LONGOBARDO

PALAZZO PATRIARCALE

CHIESA DI SAN GIOVANNI
IN VALLE

COMPLESSO
EPISCOPALE

BASILICA DI SANTA
MARIA ASSUNTA

BATTISTERO DI
SAN GIOVANNI

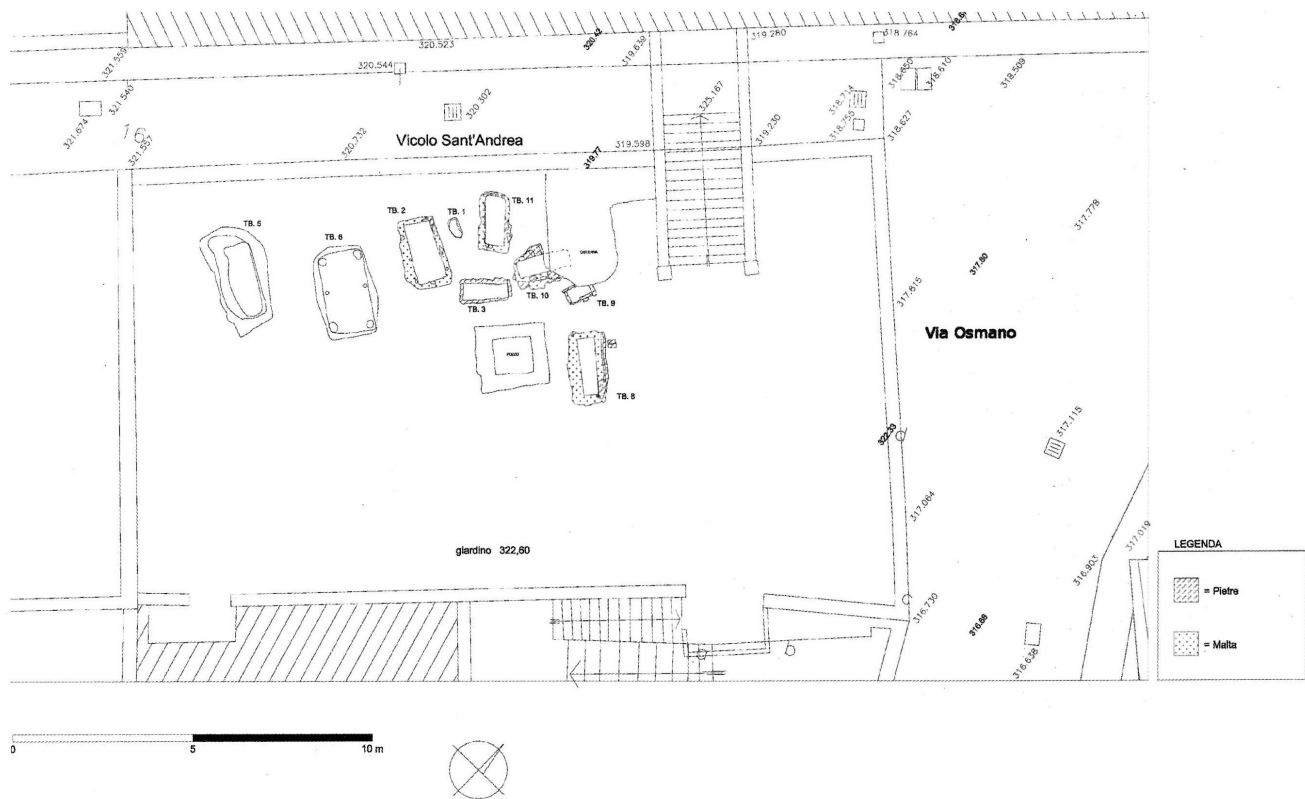*Figure 14.3 Early medieval cemeteries at Cividale del Friuli*

Figure 14.4 Bergano: urban burials at Via Osmano, Sant'Andrea (from Fortunati et al. 2014)

It is interesting that a number of lay people feature among the earliest, seventh-century graves that can reliably be linked to cathedrals, and for whom an identity can be proposed. At San Salvatore in Turin, inhumations, C14 dated to between AD 660 and 770, were identified by anthropological analyses to be members of the military aristocracies of the city (Pejrani Baricco 2003, 316). At Mantua, two monumental urban baptisteries existing during the seventh century (probably related to the different Arian/catholic confession of Lombard/local inhabitants) in Cortile del Seminario and via Rubens, were occupied by burials with weapons or clothing with gold brocade sometimes outside the building but also in the internal deambulatory (Menotti and Manicardi 2004; Manicardi 2015, 56–61 for via Rubens, 38–39 excavated by G. P. Brogiolo in 1987). An inscription from the baptistery of Santo Stefano in Milan refers to a certain *vir honestus* called Lucifer, but in this case we lack a precise date (Lusuardi Siena and Sannazaro 2001, 657). The earliest textual references to ecclesiastical burials in cathedrals (presbyters and bishops) seem to come slightly later, from the eighth to ninth centuries (Picard 1988).

By the seventh century, members of the Lombard aristocracy in north Italy were still being buried in the pre-existing suburban churches (such as the old suburban church of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius in Pavia, the church of Saint Ambrose in Milan, and at Saint Eusebius in Vercelli) (Lusuardi *et al.* 2000, 273–283), but by then they were building new churches outside as well as inside the cities that they inhabited or served in.

Cemeteries in the Countryside

From the fifth century onwards, the transformation of the rural economy and of the economic strategies of landowners are reflected in a dramatic change in settlement patterns characterised by the abandonment or transformation of classical Roman settlements (Brogiolo and Chavarría 2015). Although recent research has focused on the problem of the end of the late Roman/antique *villae* (see bibliography in Castrorao Barba 2014), no definitive answers have emerged to explain these changes: interpretations range from the slow decay in the lifestyle of the late Roman elites (who, occasionally, may have continued to occupy these buildings) in light of wider state and economic decay, to an abandonment by previous owners and the reoccupation by other kinds of settlers (e.g. dependent or free farmers, new immigrant populations). Written sources seem to support both possibilities, such as citing the existence of centres of large properties, frequently at the top of the fiscal property hierarchy (royal and ducal *curtes*), in civilian or ecclesiastical hands, and sometimes even belonging to large
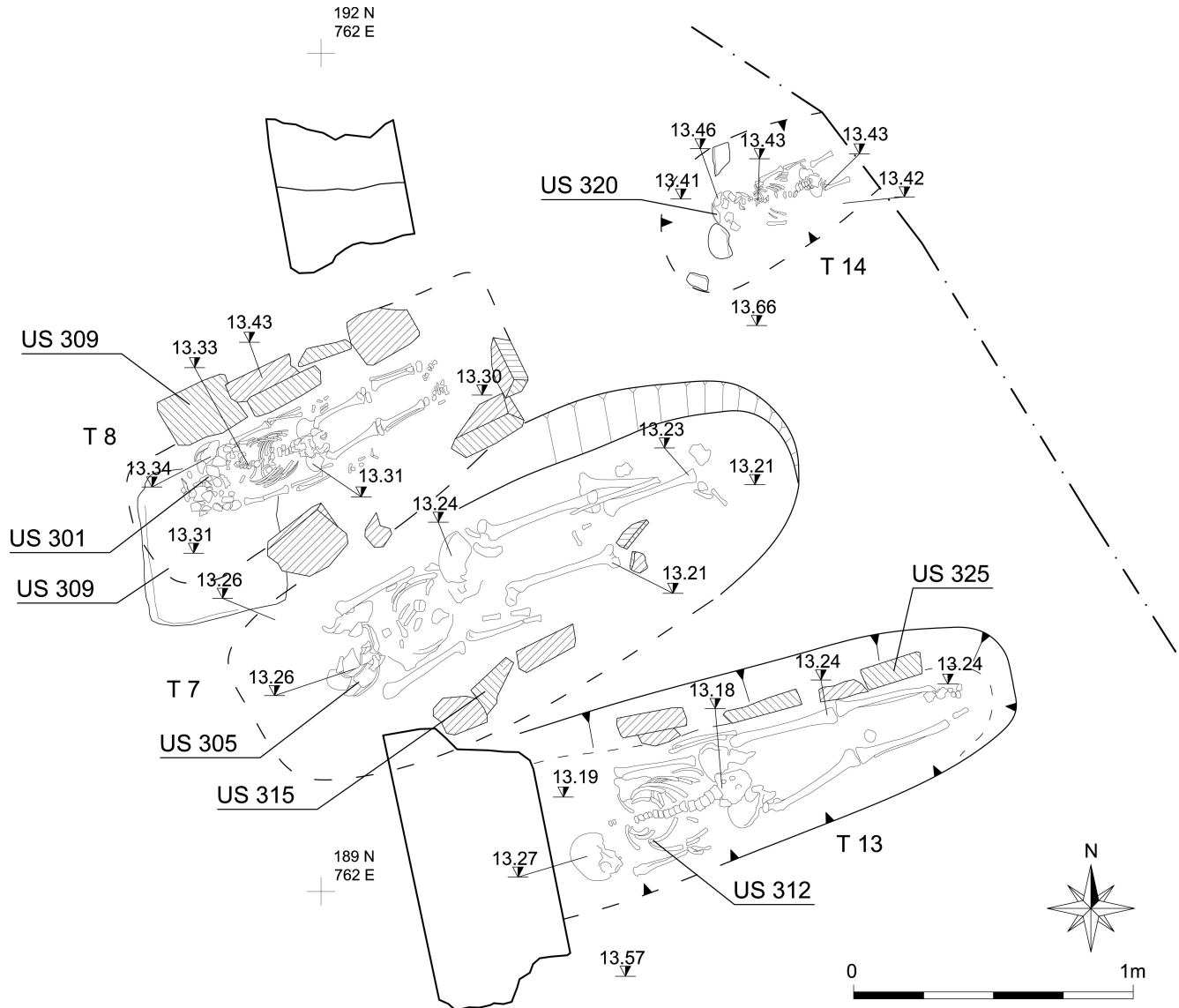
Figure 14.5 Early medieval burials from the Duomo excavation (tombs 7, 8, 13, 14) (from Canci, Marinato and Zago 2017, 133)

monasteries (The archaeological identification of these *curtes* is now a notable subject of research).

At the same time, the late Roman period sees the emergence of fortified settlements (*castra*) that were part of a broader military system composed of castles, towers and barrier systems (Brogiolo 2014, 143–156; Brogiolo, this volume); and, from the fifth century, churches and, slightly later on, monasteries become new, distinctive features of the landscape. All these started to form foci for burial activity.

In Roman times, rural cemeteries frequently lay not far from villa buildings, often protected by a walled enclosure and generally near a road.[6] Grave structures show a clear hierarchy of burials, with some combining elaborate funerary monuments with multiple grave-goods, and others as much simpler graves. Such contrasting deposits suggest that villa owners and their dependent workers were probably buried together in the same cemetery. In some cases, *mausolea* were located closer to the villa, marking out the social, economic and cultural importance of the proprietors or one particular member of the family. These burial places might remain in use until the abandonment of the main buildings, which seems to have occurred during the fifth century. From that moment on, burial practices diversified.

In some cases, small groups of burials came to be inserted in abandoned areas within the villas (sometimes with other spaces of the complex still active); these groups might be identified as small family groupings, as at Montegrotto, Terme Neroniane (Pd) a villa abandoned in the fourth or fifth century; similar are Desenzano (Bs), Sirmione (Bs), Manerbio (Bs) and Varone at Riva del Garda (Tn). The difficulty in all these cases is to understand when exactly the villas were abandoned, whether this event was rapid,

slow or partial, and if there was a gap in time between the site's abandonment and the establishment of the graves (these not always well dated) – factors which can much alter the interpretation of the burials. The villa of Castelleto di Brenzone (Vr) had been robbed for its marble decorations and then colonised with a domestic structure before burials were set into some of the rooms (Bruno and Tremolada 2011, 99–102. See Nicosia *et al.* 2013 for soil micromorphology and physicochemical analyses of dark earths here).

At Arcole (Vr), the reuse of part of an Augustan villa as a small cemetery was preceded by the building's destruction by fire (of the late fourth century?), the silting up of the structures by multiple episodes of flooding, possibly contemporaneous with some sort of rural settlement dated between the seventh and tenth century, built in perishable materials (Bruno 2011). Anthropological analysis suggests a family group (11 graves, with six identified as those of three men, one woman and two infants), who practised hard physical activity (probably agriculture) with a very low hygiene and personal care (Marinato 2016). We might expect comparable data for many other post-villa funerary clusters. But it is extremely difficult to identify who these people were and what relationship they had with the old villa complex or estate. In the cited examples they look very much like free or unfree farmers (*coloni* or serfs) working a property belonging to somebody else (perhaps even the Church) likely living in the city.

In other cases (e.g. Sovizzo (Vicenza), Spilamberto (Mo), Trezzo sull'Adda (Mi), Mombello Monferrato (Al), Calvisano (Bs)), larger cemeteries might occupy areas some distance from the main villa buildings. The existence of clear elements that link this burials to non-Roman populations could be an indicator of property changes (as argued for Collegno and Mombello, both in Piedmont) linked to the settlement of barbarian groups in (probably) public lands as recently proposed by Pierfrancesco Porena (2011) regarding the settlement of the Ostrogoths in the 480s and 490s. At Trezzo, for example, written sources attest a number of late Roman fiscal properties which passed at some point to the patrimony of the royal crown and of Lombard elites such as the *vir magnificus* Rottopert. This has now been confirmed by the evidence of a large cemetery examined through anthropological analysis, DNA, and the typology and technology of grave-goods (Lusuardi Siena and Giostra 2012).

Many so-called 'open-air cemeteries' (Reihengräberfelder), such as recognised at Collegno, Albano Stura, Leno and Montichiari, are also related to settlements built in perishable materials (and thus less likely to be observed casually through agricultural work), and seem to be connected to the land routes and river network, sometimes at a local strategic control point, such as a bridge. In northern Italy, their distribution is seen to reflect the advance of Lombards from east to west and the occupation of the fertile plains of the *pianura padana*, especially close to the main political and strategic centres such as Verona, Brescia, Bergamo and Turin.

In the case of fortified settlements (*castra/castella*), burials are frequently located at the foot of a hill and close to the roadways controlled by the fort. Unsurprisingly, these cemeteries frequently include graves of armed males (e.g. Civezzano: Terzer 2001). At Monselice, burials with military grave-goods instead occurred inside the area of the *castrum*, and it is still uncertain whether these burials were linked to a fortified tower or whether this tower had been already transformed into a church (Brogiolo 2017b, 26–28) (Fig. 14.6). Churches in *castra*, at least during the first centuries of their use, did not attract large numbers of burials. The character of funerary areas at *castra* can be related to the functions of these settlements: in their early phases, the site roles are focussed primarily on defence and may have had small garrisons, perhaps not always in residence; only when *castra* become the seats of administrative districts do we see more regular burial, reflecting stable communities; however, as yet, none of the cemeteries linked to this kind of settlement has been extensively excavated. Observing gender ratios in these cemetery sequences might help in clarifying early to later site roles. This seems to be the case at the *castrum* of Monselice were all the burials have been identified as male or infants (Marinato 2017a).

More often than might be expected, our census records a very large number of isolated or very small groups of burials dispersed in the countryside with no apparent relationship to any settlement. While these are traditionally interpreted as the tombs of marginalised communities, their frequency recommends a rather different explanation, as proposed in other parts of Europe, notably Anglo-Saxon England (Petts 1992; Reynolds 2002) or late Roman Gaul (Gleize 2017). Such burials could, for example, be linked to particular features of the landscape, such as property boundaries, secondary paths or points of assembly – whether for trade or even for justice. But this cannot be the only interpretation. Gleize has hypothesised that they could also be identified as dependent farmers of free or unfree status (2017, 206, with other interpretations). In many cases they probably demonstrate the persistence of dispersed settlements throughout the period and the possibility that farmers and their families were buried on their own land, near their residences.[7] Further research is also needed on this subject (cf Pecquer 2003 for France).

Burials in Rural Churches

In the rural context, churches (ones generally connected with settlements, including *castra*) tended to attract privileged burials during the Early Middle Ages. In contrast to urban sites, where the functions of intramural cathedrals and suburban basilicas (funerary and martyrial) are relatively well established,[8] in the countryside the meaning and use of

Figure 14.6 Monselice: Lombard burials excavated by the tower (from Brogiolo 2017a)

ecclesiastical buildings are more problematic matters. While it is already very difficult to understand the complex variety of churches described in the written sources (public, private, privately founded but with public functions, for pastoral care, funerary, monastic dependencies, and churches linked to royal and ducal *curtes*) (see Chavarría Arnau 2016 for the Lake Garda region), there are even more difficulties in the archaeological record.

Many problems persist concerning the study of burials inside churches due to the lack of detailed plans and accurate dates, and the often partial nature of the excavations. The impression, however, is that the inner spaces of churches were rarely used as mass burial places, with, normally, only a small number of graves (between 1 and 5) located in the aisles, but with a more conspicuous number tending to concentrate in annexes such as the vestibule or atrium; the majority of the burials of course lay outside the church. Exceptional, therefore, are cases where the church interior saw intensive burial use. At San Lorenzo di Gozzano (Fig. 14.7), the presumed tomb of its founder San Giuliano formed a magnet for privileged burial (Pantò and Pejrani Baricco 2001), especially after the saint's *Vita* was first composed and disseminated (Beghelli 2011). Anthropological analysis identified a predominance of adult males among these burials, and chiefly older persons. One grave (t2) located close to the altar contained a glass vessel which might signify member of the ecclesiastical hierarchy buried with an oil balsamary.[9] Potentially here the presence of relics attracted priestly burials. Interestingly, the archaeologists identified one of the church tombs as that of a revered figure, perhaps in fact the founder saint, San Giuliano, because his head was placed at the eastern end of the grave. Texts state that the clergy in death should occupy
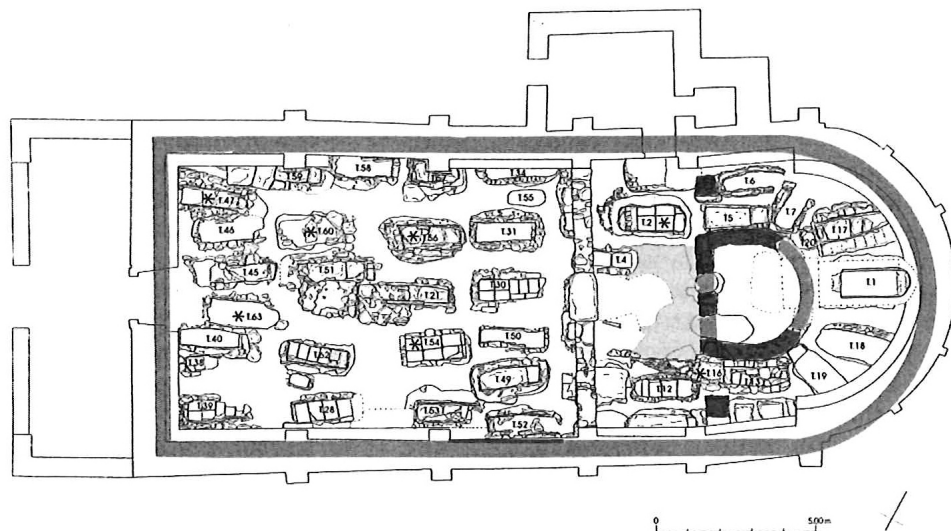

Figure 14.7 Church of San Lorenzo di Gozzano (Novara) (from Pantò and Pejrani Baricco 2001)

Figure 14.8 Church and cemetery at San Cassiano (Riva del Garda) (from Amoretti 2011)

the same position in the church as during life, i.e. facing the people whom they had taught and blessed in Christ's name.[10]

Anthropological data can offer valuable insights into the dynamics of burials linked to settlements and church use. Generally, there seems to be a gender distinction, with men more often buried in privileged locations, mainly inside a church, whereas women are frequently buried outside. Thus, at San Cassiano near Riva del Garda (Trento) (Fig. 14.8), the eight monumental graves placed in the church (of the end of the fifth or the first half of the sixth century) were all male (seven adults in their 40s and an infant: Amoretti 2011); such data contradict the view of the excavators that the church was used for family burial.[11] Women were instead buried in the external cemetery, located first in the northern area, but later occupying space in front of the church. It is even less likely that the inhumed inside were the priests of the church, since these adults all showed signs of much horse-riding. In fact, the dimensions of the church and the complexity of its liturgical arrangements (which include a *synthronon* or priest's seat and a monumental *loculus* for relics) point instead to some kind of public enterprise and the interred men probably belonged to the highest, probably military, local elites of this community.

A family-private use has been proposed instead at the church of San Zeno di Campione (Co) (Fig. 14.9) with at least 15 burials belonging to three generations of the same family, starting with that of the founder, a Lombard slave-merchant called Gunduald at the end of the seventh century, up to the last – a certain Totone – who gave the building to the church of Saint Ambrose in Milan in *c.* 807 (In this instance, the archaeological and anthropological data neatly mesh with a rich written documentation: Brogiolo 2005). The limited number of burials and the dimensions of the building could similarly indicate a private character for the oratory of San Quirico in Bolgare (Bg): measuring 4.5×12 m, and containing seven graves, including one infant aged about 1 year, a 12-year-old child, and a couple of men and women aged about 30 to 40 years (Mazzucchi *et al.* 2009).

The process by which cemeteries moved progressively closer to churches during the last centuries of the Early Middle Ages has not been studied in Italy, unlike in Gaul or Britain (Galinié and Zadora-Rio 1996; Zadora-Rio 2003; Buckberry and Cherryson 2010). Nor do we know when the creation of the parish cemetery as a consecrated burial ground strictly controlled by clerics took place; most probably this began in the ninth century, but it was, as in other areas, a
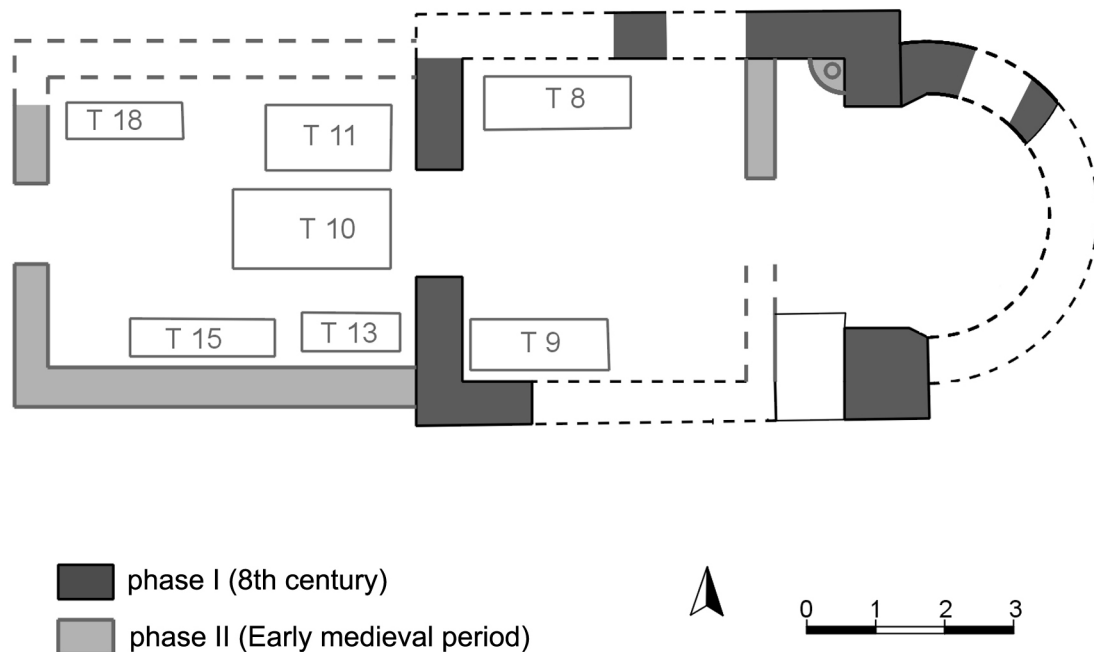
Figure 14.9 Private church with family cemetery at San Zeno di Campione (Como) (from Brogiolo 2005)

slow process, as the continued presence of dispersed groups of burials dating to the ninth and tenth centuries show.

Conclusion

The great variety of burial modes (in terms of location, funerary architecture, rites) that has been outlined above certainly mirror different social entities resulting from the many periods of fragmentation and instability, in contrast to stable societies (such as the Roman, Islamic or late medieval epochs) which had funerary norms and traditions with largely unified burial rites (see Fierro 2000; Halevi 2007). The diversity evident in the early medieval period also reflects how funerary rites depended much on familiar groups and local initiatives. The preference for one type of tomb or another, the presence and range of grave-goods, the use of monuments over the graves and actual location all served to mark the varying social and economic status of the deceased, but this varied locally depending on multiple factors. The growing influence of Christianity and the presence of churches and churchyards where people could be buried will have had a notable impact on the funerary customs of the diverse early medieval populations. Yet researchers also agree that the influence of the Church upon burial practices was less than was once thought, arguing that its authorities, notably bishops, were little concerned with the mode and place where ordinary people were interred; their main concern was to ensure that only ecclesiastics and civil elites (in other words, patrons) were buried in appropriate ecclesiastical buildings. However, this assertion rather contradicts the fact that, already from

the third century, bishops were making provisions for the acquisition of special funerary areas for the poor. Did the attitude of the Church authorities perhaps change over the course of the Early Middle Ages as the character of the people who made up those authorities changed? Only from the late seventh century onwards, with the definitive end of Arianism and the triumph of Catholicism among the Lombards in north Italy, and later from 774 with the alliance between Carolingian kings and the Church, was a certain political and spiritual stability achieved, leading to greater unity in burial practices, and the creation of blessed cemetery areas near churches which slowly but definitively became the primary, designated places of burial in both town and country. Graves in churchyards were to become more anonymous, as shown by the frequent cuts between graves and the multiplication of ossuaries. However, elites did not lose their visibility in death since they continued to express their distinctiveness by the position of their tombs inside the church, by funerary inscriptions (De Rubeis 2000 and 2005) and by the ceremonies of remembrance.

Notes

1   A sample of key sites and publications could be Collegno: Pejrani 2007; Mombello: Micheletto 2007; Montichiari: Breda 2007; Spilamberto: Breda 2010; Trezzo sull'Adda: Lusuardi and Giostra 2012.

2   For example, Momo and Albano Stura discussed in Micheletto *et al.* 2014; Fara Olivana and Caravaggio in Fortunati *et al.* 2014; Povegliano in Giostra 2014a; Sacca di Goito and Mantova in Menotti *et al.* 2014; and Cassano d'Adda in De Marchi and Simone 2014.

3   Examples include the burials at Trino: Negro Ponzi 1999; Saint Quirico in Bolgare (Bg): De Marchi and Fortunati 2006; San Pietro di Limone: Chavarría Arnau 2008; churches in the Lake Garda area: Brogiolo 2011; and San Martino di Lomaso: Cavada *et al.* 2014.

4   Funded by the University of Padua between 2010 and 2013 but ongoing thanks, mainly, to the enthusiasm of many students. The project also included the participation of various staff of north Italian Soprintendenze, such as Maria Fortunati, Andrea Breda and Brunella Bruno who permitted study of some funerary contexts, and specialists from other institutions such as Marina De Marchi, Caterina Giostra and Elisa Possenti. Their help was greatly appreciated throughout.

5   Note that recent research on late Roman and early medieval demography (Lo Cascio and Maiuro 2017) tends to be critical about the possibility of achieving plausible numbers based on 'classical' calculations (e.g. the capacity of public entertainment buildings, water circulation in cities) and proposes more complex analysis (for the countryside, for example, based on regressive analysis of agrarian landscape productivity – see Brogiolo 2017a).

6   To my knowledge, there is still no general study of rural Roman cemeteries in Italy. Some of the best studied cases are the cemetery of 'El Lucone' at Saló (Brescia): Massa 1996; Massa and Brambilla 1997 and San Cassiano (Riva del Garda): Bassi 2013.

7   In general we still do not know how many different burial locations might have been used by a single settlement (or a cluster of farms and villages) at the same time or successively, making it difficult to draw conclusions on the form of settlement on the basis of discoveries of scattered cemeteries (Blake 1983, 189–191).

8   The dichotomy between *ecclesia-basilica* and their different functions is now well established thanks to the detailed studies of Christian topography initiated in France by the group *Topographie Chretienne des cités de la Gaule* and adopted later with similar analyses in both Italy and Spain. Some reflections on the different uses of both kinds of churches and Chavarría Arnau 2009.

9   Another unspecified glass object was found in a tomb located close to the *synthronon* or seat for the priests at the church of San Pietro in Mavinas: perhaps another balsamary or a glass paten or another kind of liturgical vessel of an ecclesiastical member of the community. On the sacred vessels and objects deposed in the burials of members of the ecclesiastical authority, see Ferotin, *Liber ordinum*, XLIII and XLV, col. 139–146.

10   Hildebert of Tours, *Sermones*, ed. by Migne, col. 896, cited by Thurston 1908.

11   Amoretti 2011 proposes family links between the males because of some morphological and epigenetic characteristics; but without bio-molecular analyses such family links cannot be certain.

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