

Death scape in Tyre: Between relocation and integration

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Abstract:

Current research focuses on the question of death and its spatial dimension, as well as borders and boundaries that marks the relations between the dead and the living in the city in general, and especially in Tyre, Tripoli and Beirut multi confessional city's. Approaches are in the fields of urban, geopolitical and landscape geography.

Introduction:

This article focuses on the spatial dimension of death, reflects on the relationship and links between the city and cemeteries as well as the role of cemeteries in cities.

It focuses on the location of the cemetery in relation to the city and the geographical distance between them. It questions their location as well as the relationship of the living in relation to their deaths.

The choice fell on the city of Tyre because it has a rich social, cultural, religious, urban and archaeological history, in which the cemeteries occupy a strategic location.

In addition, the discovery of the archaeological site near the cemetery site in 1960, led to many transformations that are interesting to highlight.

The cemetery in Tyre today is presented as a significant disadvantage facing the demands of profitability in this developing city.

Indeed, it is an essential element of the reorganization of the space of this city. New logics between the different actors and a new complex system of interaction are being put in place. The proposal to move cemeteries away from the city announce the change in the relations between the city of Tyre and its cemeteries.

The master plan established in 2002 proposed the relocation of the cemeteries to the south of the city, to allow the extension of the archaeological and touristic site; thus it pays no attention to the social and religious complications. The municipality skewed the problem and allowed the situation to rot in order to avoid religious and social conflicts. The DGA¹ has announced the interruption of archaeological excavations at cemeteries level. Its purpose is to understand and highlight the remains already present while waiting for the decision of the transfer. The Christian and Muslim religious authorities assume that this project is only virtual, because it is only possible in case of cutting of family ties between the living and the dead, which means the difference of at least three generations.

¹ DGA: Directorate General of Antiquities.

Inhabitants of the city, Muslims and Christians, who are the real actors of this project, are far from any decision². Addressing the question of sacred places, moving cemeteries far from the city, are only gestures that will cause pain to the inhabitants that are used to visit their dead relatives on a regular basis. They generate moral judgments against society, and can therefore trap decision-makers.

How to preserve the memory of the dead while preserving the desire of the living? Would it be possible to move cemeteries without leaving empty hearts, but on the contrary, a place of memory in good conditions?

Would remembrance be stronger than forgetfulness, respect for the dead should be privileged over the disinterestedness of the living?

How worthy would it be to destroy these spaces full of emotions, meaning and memory to ensure happy passage to the tourists?

In Western countries, attitudes towards death have been changed with the evolution of the spaces of death. [Phylippe Ariès, 1975; Philippe Ariès, 1977; Auzelle, 1965; Ragon, 1981; Thibaut, 1977]... Cemeteries are moved away from cities under the pressure of urban expansion and hygienic conditions. At the same time, a decline in funeral rituals and social practices has occurred around these spaces. [Poirier, 2001; Thomas, 1975; Jean-Didier. Urban, 2002; Jean-Didier Urbain, 2005; G Vovelle and Vovelle, 1970; M Vovelle, 1976]

² According to field surveys, 84% of residents believe that cemeteries should remain close.

Indeed, the idea of relocation cannot be easily accepted³. The relocation of a cemetery means that the existing cemetery is disused (closed) and is moved to another more suitable location. This relocation is justified by the fact that the cemetery no longer meets the legal conditions to be maintained: it has become saturated or it is located in a forbidden area for example next to residential spaces. All the graves are then transferred to a new cemetery. Once the transfer is decided, the existing cemetery is closed as soon as the new sites are ready to receive burials. In France and Alpes, the cemetery needs to be closed for at least 5 years before the relocation⁴.

In Lebanon and more particularly in Tyre, death and the funeral rituals that surround it are anchored in the social life of the inhabitants and the notion of distance between the residence of the dead and the cemetery seems fundamental. The location of the cemetery in this case reflects the close relationship of the living with their dead. Moreover, the cemetery in Tyre is described by the inhabitants of the city as a collective and socialized space but also as a close space⁵.

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⁴Following the association of town halls and presidents of the Alpine community- http://www.stradal-funeraire.fr/creation_extension_translation (consulted on 3 December 2008)

According to the General Code of Local Authorities:

Le Funéraire <http://www.afif.asso.fr/francais/conseils/legislation/cgctlegisl.html> (accessed October 5, 2014-)

⁵ Survey made on the site in 2008: Muslim inhabitants practice their funeral rites and visits to the dead more than Christians.

Today in Tyre, a powerful relationship made of exchanges between the two worlds, living and dead, has been destabilized due to the mutations produced around the site because of two reasons: the closure and construction of walls between and around Christian cemeteries and those of Muslims creating borders between the dead and the living on the one hand and the decision to transfer the cemeteries far from the city, under the momentum of the planning strategies, on the other.

In Lebanon, the closed Muslim cemetery must remain in the state for 10 years following the Shia Sheikh Hsein Ismail⁶, something that has never been executed, and an undetermined period among Christians according to Father Charbel Abdallah⁷. However, among religious leaders, the time of three generations has been discussed but never yet accepted.

Thus, to understand the relationships between death, cemeteries and the city, and to clarify the question of the cemetery, the transfer of the cemetery outside the cities, the transformation of interfaces, boundaries, fences of cemeteries, we used several methods of investigation. The first resulted in an observation of the site, a regular and continuous visits of the cemeteries.

A second method complemented this work with the collection of information and a series of interviews with cemetery visitors, religious leaders and institutional actors who shed light on the observations made and enriched the work from written sources. A study of the dynamics of the evolving site supported by cartography studies completed the investigative work.

⁶ Sheikh Hsein Ismail was in charge of Muslim cemeteries in Tyre in 2008.

⁷ Father Charbel Abdallah: Head of the Maronite Archdiocese of Tyre.

Evolution of the Death Scape in Tyre

The evolution of the death scape in Tyre depends on the evolution of this city that has held for millennia a very important place in the history of Lebanese civilization. It was one of the most important Phoenician cities, but few of its archaeological remains date from this time. On the other hand, it preserves remarkable Roman remains, on the outskirts of the ancient city⁸ [Badawi, 2002], it thus benefits from a very important tourist potential and is for the region a centre for trade and services. The surviving buildings of the old city date mainly from the Ottoman period, this date is related to the emergence of the first tombs scattered outside the old walls of this same city⁹.

⁸ Badawi, A. (2002), *Geographical Development of Tyre and its Limits through History*, 322 pp, Holy Spirit, Kaslik, Beirut.

⁹ According to the interview with the Shiite sheikh Hsein Ismail, the first burials in the Muslim cemetery took place from 1750 date of the reconstruction of the city of Tyre but during our field investigations we could not find in the cemetery inscriptions that date from that time.

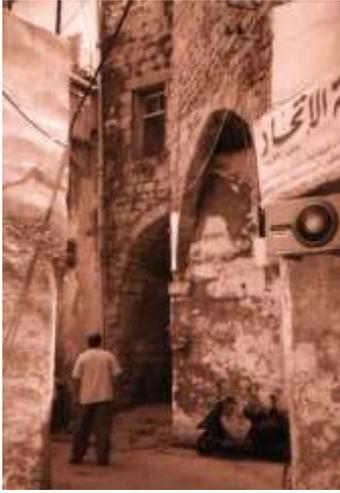


Fig 1- Archaeological site Fig 2- Archaeological site Fig 3-
cemeteries

It is characterized by a double heritage, the old town with the rank of built heritage and the archaeological remains. The city of Tyre is then identified through a double localized quality: "historical" and "archaeological"¹⁰. (Fig. 1-2-3).

¹⁰ This term is taken from the site of the description of Tyre in the UNESCO world heritage center whc.unesco.org/en/list/299



Fig. 3 - Evolution of the historical and archaeological city

Tyre did not begin extend beyond the narrow frame of its wall until the 1920s, at the time of the French Mandate¹¹ [Badawi, 2002]. (Fig. 4)

The city within the walls has also become densified by elevations in height, including central hall houses usually overlaid on the old courtyard houses

From 1930, the neighbourhoods are grouped around places of worship. Since that time, the city began to receive rural immigrants from the region. However, the increase in population exceeded the capacity of the existing neighbourhoods and construction began outside the traditional enclosure. As a result, cemeteries have begun to develop near places of worship; they are becoming denser and expanding to the surrounding sites.

¹¹ The first extensions were made outside the wall, on a plot established by the French mandatory authorities in 1926



Fig. 4 - Aerial photos of island Tyre 1926. Source: Municipality of Tyre



Fig.5–Aerial photos of Island Tyre 1975.

http://www.google.com/url?url=http://www.charbelnahas.org/textes/Amenagement_et_urbanisme/Cultural_Heritage_Report/F-Tyre_107-



Fig. 6 - Aerial photos of Island Tyre 2002. Evolution of the city.

Source: Google Europa technology

In the early 40s, the city witnessed an important horizontal extension¹². However, it was not until 1960 that the city expanded considerably and developed eastwards on the other side and away from the cemetery site.

The rapid growth of the city of Tyre has created adverse effects on the natural sites due to the urbanization of agricultural land and sensitive natural areas. The site of the cemeteries, still structured on the scale of the old city, mirror of a modest society, has been able to preserve until now the south-west façade from the urban extension¹³. (Fig.5-6)

¹² This evolution can be seen in Charbel Nahas' report: Sour(Tyre)
http://www.google.com/url?url=http://www.charbelnahas.org/textes/Amenagement_et_urbanisme/Cultural_Heritage_Report/F-Tyre_107- Seul le site des cimetières garde une place constante qui a pu préserver la façade maritime et a pu éloigner le développement urbain autour du site.

¹³ Only the cemetery site retains a constant place that has been able to preserve the seafront and has been able to distance urban development around the site.

It enjoys a distinguished location, at the end of the maritime axis of the ancient city and is the first contact with the archaeological site.

Moreover, it is a kind of introduction to the whole landscape of Tyre in relation to all its components and it's surrounded by the three areas of different structures and characters, the ancient city, the beach as a natural and tourist site and the archaeological site. Indeed, it runs along the public beaches and is located in-between the archaeological, cultural and historical interest of the city.

It fits into the archaeological site, dominates the tourist site, tells the story of the old town, introduces the new city and takes advantage of the most strategic position of Tyre. (Fig. 7)



Fig. 7 – cemetery site surrounded by two archaeological sites

By their surface, their cultural richness and their historical past, the cemeteries constitute an important and dominant component of the maritime façade of the city of Tyre around which the other elements composed of great landscape diversity are articulated. They intersect and intertwine forming a heterogeneous fabric.

They are built on land belonging to the domain of religious grounds, which gives the place its character as a community space.

They are composed of two cemeteries, Christian and Muslim and are presented as an enormous space covering a significant area compared to the scale of the city. (Fig. 8)



Fig. 8: Funerary landscape of Tyre consisting of two Christian and Muslim cemeteries. Source: sourcity.com

The spaces of death marked by the importance of their urban positions are located in the immediate extension of the ancient city. They are surrounded by two emblematic religious poles of the Medina (great mosque, and the church ...) ¹⁴ (Fig. 9)

In this complex space, different lifestyle habits and social dynamics have been developed.

¹⁴ It is important among Muslims and even more so among Christians to locate cemeteries near places of worship, where prayers are practiced before transporting the deceased to the cemetery by a procession on foot.

Muslims and Christians have cohabited together since the construction of Tyre with respect and friendship, even during the years of the recent war.



Fig. 9 - two emblematic religious poles of the Medina, symbol of the cohabitation of Muslims and Christians

As the city develops, new tourist practices of all kinds in contradiction with the sacred nature of this site materialize: cultural at the level of the archaeological site, social and sports at the level of the seafront, wooden cafes are installed and fishing activity is intense at the end of the rocky plateau.

The needs of cemetery visitors and tourists become unequal and require different spatial conditions, hence the municipal decision to isolate these spaces.

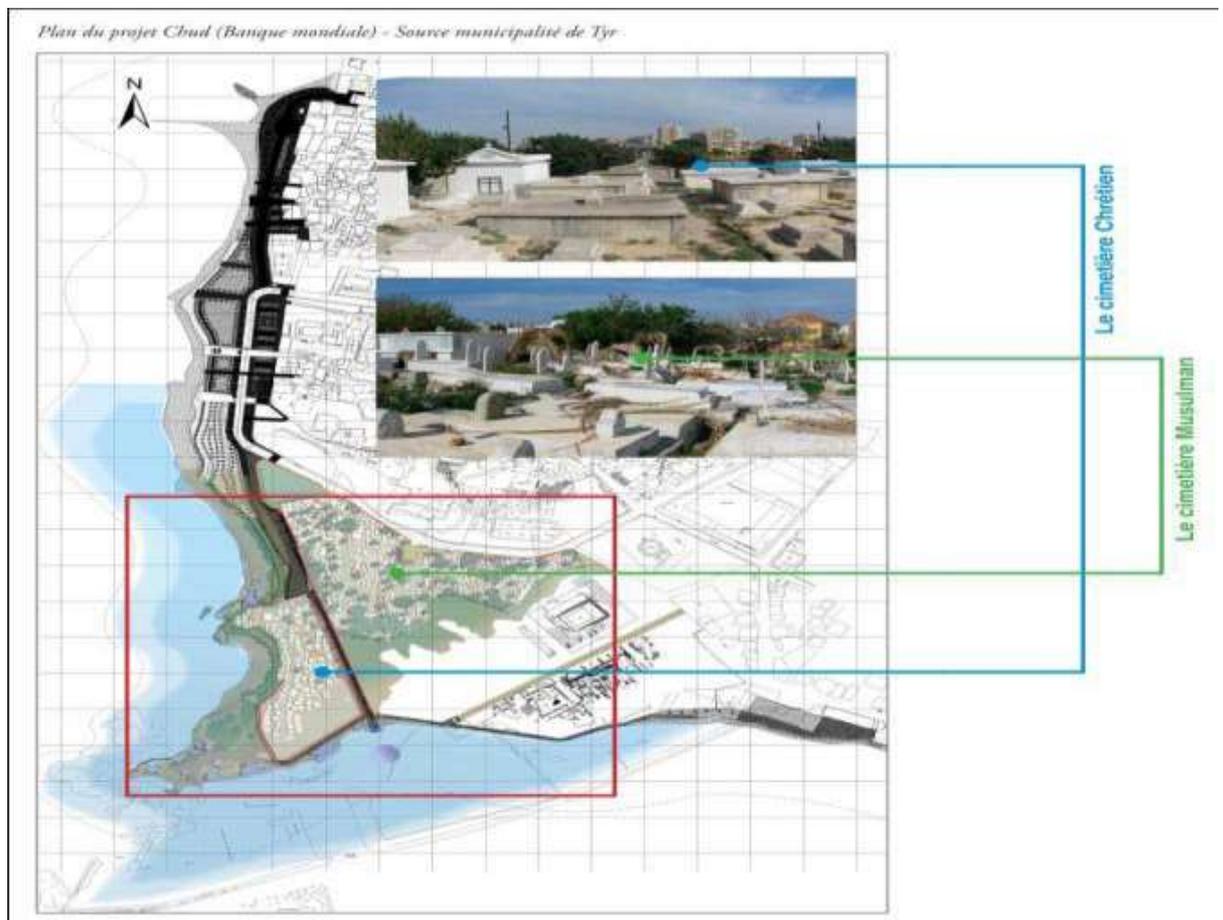


Fig 10 – Location and structure of the two cemeteries: Muslim and Christian, Christian cemetery open on the west side on the beach. Muslim cemetery open on the south side on the archaeological site.

Open to nature and the environment since their emergence, Christian and Muslim cemeteries were fenced off during the 60s. Not very high walls made of natural stones erected on the scale of cemeteries that produced a first visual break between the sites of different natures and the spaces of death of the two religions. Completed from 1970 by higher fences in systematized concrete. (Fig 13)

They remained partially open to their surroundings, the Christian cemetery open on the sea side, the Muslim cemetery completely open on the south side towards the archaeological site. (Fig. 10-11-12) It is possible to access both sites without having to go through the main gate.



Fig 11 - Christian cemetery completely open on the west side towards the sea



Fig 12 - Muslim cemetery completely open on the south side towards the archaeological site

The walls and doors, built borders, produce a visual disruption, lead to a control of the uses of the space visited and prohibited the free circulation that was current before. Cemeteries in Tyre, were for the first time visually excluded from the landscape that surrounds them. But the desire not to completely isolate these spaces is visible from the openings, breakthroughs and passages still existing today especially around the Muslim cemetery which is fenced but from time to time breakthroughs let the visitor discover this sacred space. (Fig. 13-14)



Fig. 13 - Openings, breakthroughs and passages on the side of the Muslim cemetery



Fig. 14- Openings, breakthroughs and passages on the side of the Muslim cemetery, Wall of different heights and materials

On the Muslim side, the cemetery hosts a "Hsainieh"¹⁵, an area of prayer and sacrifice where the population of the city gathered for rituals. Thousands of simple tombs of small and almost identical scales are visible because according to the Qur'an all Muslims are equal in front of God¹⁶.

J.-D. Urban: "Muslims have continued to bury their dead in the earth, wrapped in a simple shroud in the open space of their cemeteries.....a simple tomb that barely slices on the earth.... The tomb will be a faint mound, bounded by two stones and which will level gently over the years. Here no real sustainable burials, no monuments in the Western sense of the term. [Jean-Didier Urbain, 2005].

¹⁵ Place of prayer, commemoration and preparation of funeral ceremonies among Shia Muslims. Named after "Hussein Bin Ali" the Imam of the Shiites.

¹⁶ The tombs of Muslims are almost identical, they have the same scale, but differ from one era to another because according to the Qur'an, all believers are equal

The Spatial organization all oriented towards the "qabaa", direction of Mecca. (Fig 15) They are sometimes tightened and sometimes cut by arbitrarily arranged channels. The tombs of the martyrs are a little more decorated by Koranic inscriptions next to a "Sabil"¹⁷ on which is inscribed the "Fatiha"¹⁸, the prayers to be recited every Thursday or Friday afternoon¹⁹. Gatherings of tombs inside a wrought iron fence mark the belonging of the deceased to the same family.



Fig 15 – Muslim cemetery: presence of a "Hsainieh" and tombs that have the same scale and orientation.

On the Christian side, in the extension of the maritime axis of the ancient city, hundreds of heterogeneous burials of different forms extend facing the beach on the west side. The location of the tombs follows a slightly more regular route, most of which consists of squares of a larger scale than the Muslim tombs spread on either side of a funerary path²⁰.

¹⁷ Source of sacred running water among Muslims: running water following Sheikh Hsein Ismail can take with it the sins of the deceased.

¹⁸ Prayer among Muslims, recited for the deceased, inscribed in the first chapter of the Qur'an and consisting of 7 verses.

¹⁹ In Tyre the visits are mainly on Thursday afternoons.

²⁰ The graves among Christians receive several deceased from the same family hence the need to enlarge the scale.

There are different shapes and scales of relatively varied tombs: From the concrete square to the decorated mausoleum dedicated to the richest deceased²¹. (Fig 16) The oldest tombs are influenced by Muslim tombs because of their cohabitation in the same city throughout history.



Fig 16- Christian Cemetery: Tomb of different shapes and scales

The space of death, necropolises, tombs and funerary architecture are part of the maritime landscape of the ancient city of Tyre, and do not benefit from the care of the living.

Two religions, two rituals (cemeteries/Muslims), two landscape structures different both in their orientation and in their scales, are separated by high fence walls, causing psychic limits and forming a barrier between these two groups of the same city.

In this sacred space, lie the souls of the dead of this city. The livings of both religions comes to celebrate the great occasions very close to their ancestors. It is as if the dead unite, and reunite the living, as if they are always present among them and participate in their joys and sorrows.

²¹ The forms are heterogeneous to show the social status of the deceased.

Evolution of rituals around the spaces of death in Tyre

The space of death is usually the place of burial and gathering of the dead, and the rituals that flow from it.

In Tyre it is impossible to consider the cemetery without referring to both Christian and Muslim religions. Unlike European cities, cemeteries in Arab cities, in Lebanon and especially in the city of Tyre, are non-secular spaces but highly religious, spiritual and social spaces. In Tyre, burial is always presented as a strong, communal social act. Death is at the heart of social life.

In all societies, death makes a break in the development of life and creates a confusion that rituals are supposed to frame. According to Patrick Baudry, Funeral rituals reaffirm the belonging of the deceased to his community and represent death as the place of the sociability of the living and the dead; They are supposed to be "useful" to the deceased, it can be said that they sanctify his existence, sacrifice to his memory, establish his measure as a man or a woman, and signify the loss he inflicts on those who remain. [Baudry, 1999]

Thus, to reassure the community and allow the dead to reach eternity, the deceased must be buried according to the rituals of each religion: Believing in the afterlife, the individual perceives death as a passage, a stage and a separation in anticipation of the Last Judgment and the resurrection ²²[Philifert, 1998]. In the Islamic tradition, death and life do not oppose each other but complement each other²³.

²² Pascale Philifert borrows her expressions from Nadjm Oued and Dine Bammate in: *Le désir et la prière : «Massignon» Cahiers de l'Herne* (Paris) p.244-254 <http://www.bammate.fr/son-oeuvre/les-textes.html> (accessed September 20, 2014)

²³ *Layers of Dying and Death, Papers Presented at the Fourth Global Conference: Making Sense Of Dying and Death, Wednesday 12th July – Friday 14th July 2006, Mansfield College, Oxford, Edited by Kate Woodthorpe, Oxford, United*

Death, in Islam and as an integral part of existence. According to the Qur'an, all believers are equal, the rich as well, and is a key moment in social life.

Muslim rituals in Tyre are strongly applied: prayer of the last moments, purification of the corpse by ritual washing, body wrapped in a shroud. Stretcher sometimes carried on the back of a man if the house is very close but the majority of times a convoy of cars brings the deceased to cemeteries. A public procession is manifested on foot by a procession of men who continue in the cemetery. Burial and orientation of the corpse to Mecca, simplicity of the tomb, prolonged prayer around the tomb that continues at home with a funeral vigil.

Among Christians, death is only a passage from this world to another; sin is forgiven by the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ by which humans (who have become children of God) will participate in the very life of Christ who will resurrect the bodies on the last day²⁴. Among Christians, the soul separates itself from the body that falls into corruption after its death, while it, immortal, faces the judgment of God (Mercy). Among Christians, the rituals are less visible in cemeteries since the ceremony and prayers are done in the church and then the body is transported to the cemetery with a small procession of men formed by a few relatives. The time spent at the cemetery is on average 10 minutes. The priest recites a last prayer and the farewell is done very quickly since the separation is done above all in the church.

²⁴ The Bible, New Testament, John 3, verse 16

So Muslims and Christians believe in the resurrection of the dead; but each religion, in its particular specificity, gives a particular meaning to death. In Christians death is spiritual, it is a passage from this world to another. For Muslims, who also believe in the resurrection, death is material, the tomb is the dwelling of the dead, his sins must be washed and purified like his body through the prayers of the relatives in order to leave the tomb and be resurrected. For this reason, social practices are regular; gatherings are practiced every Thursday and Friday afternoon and on holidays. The weekly meeting around the tomb to recite the Koran is mandatory among Muslims. While among Christians visits are less intense, prayers are primarily done in the church.

We emphasized the difference in funeral rituals between Muslims and Christians in general and in Tyre in particular.

In Tyre, the cohabitation of the dead and the living plays a fundamental role in the organization of society. There is a very strong relationship between the city and the cemetery based on the principle of proximity and close space.

This close relationship is being transformed and the strong relationship that exists between cemeteries and the city will change with the transfer of cemeteries away from the city.

Conclusion

Approaching the dislocation of the dead out of the city of the living is related to an intimate and singular pain, it touches societies and religions.

Moving cemeteries away from the old city is only a disruption created by the actors under the pretext of the future development of this city. Should we not approach this taboo subject, by the principle of continuity and not by that of rupture?

The persistence of the past in this city gives hope for the preservation of a common heritage. The persistence of the cemetery as a collective space of proximity is changing today in Tyre under the pressure of the practices of administrative actors.

The master plan in 2002 proposes the transfer of cemeteries far from the city and the rejection of the dead out of the world of the living and not taking into consideration the practices of family and identity anchoring that has long prevailed in Tyre. Disrupting the old conditions of location and proximity, the cemetery would be less frequented and less intimate as well as a social and cultural distance with time will be established between living and dead.

Unlike the problem of any other city, the cemeteries in Tyre are located today close to the old city and far from the urban development of the new city. The question of hygiene that arises in Western cities does not arise in Tyre.

Contrary to the problem of cemeteries that have become secular in Western countries, the space of death in Tyre presents itself as a sacred and exclusively religious place.

It is a visited space and funeral practices are still used due to its proximity. In addition, a strong religious and cultural imprint is visible on the site and collective practices around funerary traditions are still observed today.

There is a relationship of dependence between the dead and the living in the city of Tyre.

How we can accept a deterioration of cemeteries in the city, its transformation of use to touristic activities and its remoteness to more distant peripheries under the impetus of the planning strategies of the actors?

But the reasons of hygiene, urban expansion, secularism and changing attitudes towards death that have led Western countries to move their cemeteries out of the cities do not exist in the city of Tyre.

May be we should question the transfer of cemeteries and try to preserve the history of this city through the inscriptions in the cemeteries and keep this close relationship that is at the origin of the development of rites around the site of the spaces of death in Tyre and try to integrate these sacred spaces into their environment.

Should we not preserve this human heritage using the concept of integration, just as we preserve the architectural, natural and archaeological heritage in Tyre?

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