

of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome

NEWSLETTER



Why Wings?

John Keats wrote in his 'Ode to a Nightingale':

"Thou wast not born for death – immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:"

I think Keats' "immortal bird" evoked the idea that a song, like a voice, like an ode, like a soul, could wing its way across generations, across time. Among those generations who buried their dead here in Rome, a surprising number tried to evoke an angel or some sort of winged courier.



The angel at Zone 1.15.43

Long before Keats, real, identifiable birds were entrusted with the memories, the souls, of the dead. In Pharaonic Egypt, this association was explicit. The glyph for the soul was 'BA', the falcon. At the moment of death, the departing soul was imagined taking wing as a falcon or a swooping swallow among the trillions of birds that once followed the Nile as a natural flyway from Africa to feed and breed on the vast food surpluses of northern summers, only to fly back home in autumn.

As in Egypt, buildings, monuments and tombstones in Italy were built or carved to last. For mourners in Rome, a preferred material for a memorial has long been the white marble of Carrara. In nearby Pietrasanta, many generations of skilled craftsmen have laboured to transform the various creations of artists into marble. Many of the more elaborate monuments in the Cemetery are in that material.

The model wing for Story's *Angel of Grief*

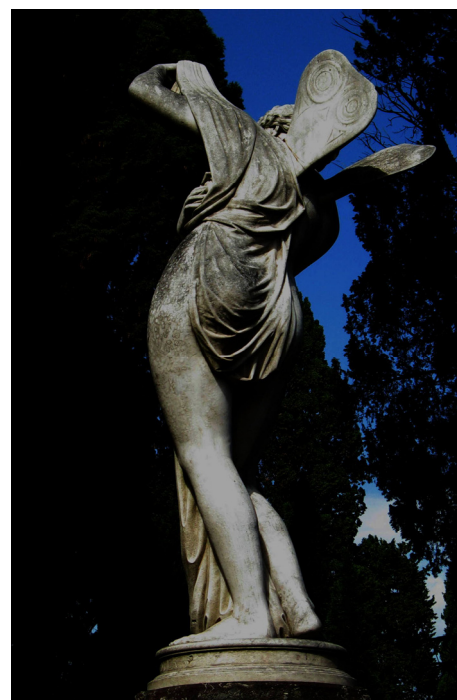


Franklin Simmons' *Angel of the Resurrection*

sculpture was clearly a swift, once one of the commonest and vocally the most assertive of Rome's summer visitors. It is one of several monumental angels that borrow the scythe-like contours of a swift's wings. In another carving of Carrara marble (Zone 1.15.43), the angel's wings form a heart-shaped umbrella reaching to the toe with long, swift-like flight feathers. Her intervening dorsal plumage shows a surprisingly realistic perception of a hybrid wing by the craftsman whose thinking hands guided the chisels. I see here something translated from actual experience into imagery, the outcome not only of the wishes of a patron but also of the authority of a well-grounded professional, his skills informed by real experience.

Another pair of swift's wings sprout from the shoulders of Franklin Simmons' *Angel of the Resurrection* (Zone 3.1.1.2). These are a striking contrast to those of Richard Greenough's *Psyche divesting herself of mortality* (Zone 2.21.1). From her slender shoulder blades there sprouts a pair of non-avian wings. Precariously held there by buried metal screws are the two blunt stone wings of a peacock-butterfly that signifies Psyche's transformation (in Greek, the word means both 'soul' and 'butterfly').

The impulse to express an idea such as an invisible soul through the concrete reality of bird wings tells us (perhaps even "betrays") something of the time, the iconography, and the order implicit in each and every tombstone. As eloquent of the Middle East as ancient Rome, the single most ordered, most strictly geometric representation of wings commemorates a Zoroastrian. The formalized winged crest of a vulture (which to me is reminiscent of ancient Egyptians bas-reliefs) is cast here in bronze (Zone 2.15.28).



Richard Greenough's *Psyche*

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The Farāvahār Zoroastrian symbol



The wings of cherubs

In striking contrast to many such classical allusions to the departure of distinguished adults are the more modest but often more touching memorials to children. The wings of these cherubim appear to me as if modelled upon those of newly-hatched quails, abbreviated tokens of lost future potentials. One of the most imaginative and striking of monuments is in memory of Phaedon Ioannis Stamoulis (Zone 2.8.26). A wing and pan-pipe include a musical score that soars over a vignette of children's toys: comb, car and teddy bear. I hear the lament – “sweet child, farewell!”

Jonathan Kingdon



The Stamoulis memorial

WHO THEY WERE

Tatiana Warscher: the Russian Pompeianist

In the southern corner of the Cemetery there is a weather-stained gravestone and, standing proud of the rough chisel-hewn surface of the travertine, is the carved relief of a Russian Orthodox cross. The border that frames the cross is crisply inscribed with three words: ‘Codex Topographicus Pompeianus’. On the reverse side, the Italian words for ‘Archaeologist’, ‘Patriot’, ‘Teacher’ and ‘Author’ frame a relief of a double-spouted Roman lamp and the name of the deceased. Memorials to the dead are reductive biographies of their lives and the tombstone of Dr Tatiana Sergejevna Warscher is just that.

Tatiana Warscher was born in Moscow in 1880 and, along with millions of other white emigrés, was forced to flee Russia in the after-

math of the Revolution. At the suggestion of her former University professor, the esteemed ancient historian, Michael Rostovtzeff, she moved to Italy in 1923 and began conducting the first systematic survey of the ancient ruins in Pompeii. Rostovtzeff would later write of her, ‘My early love was Pompeii. Tatiana inherited this love from me... In Pompeii she knows every corner and every stone’.

Through Rostovtzeff she was introduced to the Director of Excavations, Professor Amedeo Maiuri, and the distinguished epigraphist Professor Matteo Della Corte, and both later acknowledged that she knew Pompeii

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Tatiana Warscher with Richardson Lawrence (left) and an unidentified person, American Academy in Rome, 1954 (detail; *American Academy in Rome, Institutional Archive*)



Photo: S. Hay

Headstone of the grave



Photo: N. Stanley-Price

The headstone of Frank Timings

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better than them and revered her dedication. Her work in Pompeii initially entailed photographing and recording observations on the construction of the facades of the buildings along three main streets. But Tatiana knew that these neglected buildings had a story to tell and, motivated by her curiosity in the lives of those who had once lived and worked in these properties, she began documenting the buildings behind the facades.

Her work was abruptly interrupted by the outbreak of World War Two. Pompeii was subject to unintentional Allied bombing in 1943 and numerous ancient buildings and their decorations were irredeemably lost. Tatiana's documentation of these in the years preceding the bombardment became an inestimable resource, as they are often the only record of their existence. Returning to Pompeii after the war, Tatiana documented the damage wrought by the bombs, producing another indispensable record of the site.

Her notebooks, each resembling a child's scrapbook, were entitled 'Codex Topographicus Pompeianus'. Tatiana never published her work, despite having various versions of the Codex, regarding it as a 'storehouse' of information for future scholars to use as the foundation for their own research. In that vein, it was her American benefactor, Halsted B. Vander Poel who eventually published her work after her death in 1960 and, although he continued her research, only his name appeared on the cover.

Tatiana had a deep connection with Rome too. She lived in Monteverde and had become a familiar face at several of the foreign academies. She happily befriended the scholars and even organised a weekly tea-party at

her house, encouraging the fellows of the American Academy to pop in. While her guests supped tea and mined her knowledge, they also helped improve her English. During the war, she had risked her life harbouring Jews in her apartment in Rome; it was her natural tendency to selflessly help others, constantly putting their needs above her own despite her own destitution. In the post-war years, she humbly received CARE packages from her friends through the American Academy, such was her desperation.

Tatiana often walked down the hill from Monteverde and across the river to spend time in the Cemetery. Describing one of her trips, she wrote 'How nice it is to go to this cemetery for half an hour... Everything is so calm here.' Of all the graves commemorating people she had known, it was the tombstone of her friend the English scientist, Frank Leslie Timings (1904-1928), which she considered the finest. Within its heavy stone surround were thin translucent panels of alabaster resembling an arched church window and, when the sun struck them from behind, they glowed a warm orange. It was to this grave-plot (Zone 3.2.3.14) that Vander Poel sought permission to add the body of Tatiana. In January 1961, Tatiana was buried alongside Timings and the gravestone that Vander Poel had designed, incorporating the title of her unpublished work, was placed at the opposite end of the plot. The simplicity of that commemorative headstone belies the tale of Tatiana's extraordinary life.

Sophie Hay, Press Office and Communications, Archaeological Park of Pompeii



Pietro and Giovanni Singer and their Caffè del Parlamento

Rome as the capital of a newly unified Italy offered enticing business opportunities. Two of those who took them up were the Swiss brothers Pietro and Giovanni Singer. In 1870 they opened the 'Caffè del Parlamento' in Palazzo Ferraioli at the corner of the Via del Corso and Piazza Colonna. Situated near Palazzo Montecitorio and the Camera dei Deputati, the elegant café-restaurant quickly became the first choice for parliamentarians. It also attracted others from the business, literary and artistic worlds, providing private rooms, tea-rooms and a billiard-room in an elegant atmosphere different from that of the historic Caffè Greco.



The Ronzi and Singer pasticceria



Pasquale Ruggiero (1851-1915), *Piazza Colonna di notte*, 1889 (Museo di Roma in Trastevere, public domain)



Advertisement for Ronzi and Singer

A publicity brochure offered 'lunches, dinners, buffet, coffee, ice-cream in the Neapolitan style, with exquisite Roman, Milanese and French cuisine, and with many foreign and domestic wines'. Take-away orders were also accepted. Next door, it provided 'a complete Pasticceria and Confetteria, in the style of Italy, France and Germany'. The pasticceria became a famous landmark under the name 'Ronzi and Singer' (seen at the centre of the painting by Pasquale Ruggiero). Customers could also enjoy the regular performances of the city band directed by Maestro Antonio Vessella from a bandstand installed between the Column of Marcus Aurelius and the Palazzo Vedekind (on the Wedekinds, see *Newsletter* no. 33).

In 1980 the grand-daughters of the Singer brothers gave the Cemetery a short, typewritten history of 'Ronzi and Singer', which corrects and amplifies published accounts. Pietro Singer (1827-1897) and his younger brother Giovanni (1829-1903) were born into a Reformed Evangelical family of 'Free Walsers' settled at Zuoz in the Canton Grigioni in the Engadine. While still teenagers, they sought some

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income and experience by working as apprentices at a confectionery-maker in Lyons. They then opened their own confectionery business in Livorno which flourished until 1870 and their move to Rome.

Their thriving business was threatened when the Piano Regolatore of 1883 required this stretch of the Via del Corso to be widened. Demolitions led to the construction of the innovative Magazzini Bocconi, inaugurated in 1887 (later Rinascente and now Zara) and, much later, following demolition in 1889 of Palazzo Piombino that stood across the road from Ronzi and Singer, the building of the Galleria Colonna (finally opened in 1922; now Galleria Sordi).

With the death of the only Ronzi partner, a bachelor with no children, the Singers could have bought out the Ronzi share and become sole proprietors. But they honoured longstanding family friendships by inviting a young Rodolfo Ronzi in Switzerland to join the business in 1906. Eventually, in the 1930s, the Singers sold their share to the Ronzis who then ran 'Ronzi and Singer' until its closure in 1978. It is now a TIM telephone showroom.

While in Livorno, Giovanni Singer had married Fanny Camenisch, also of a Reformed Evangelical family from the Engadine, but he was soon widowed and left with three young children to bring up. In Rome Pietro married Orsolina Morell from the same Canton Grigioni. On arrival in Rome, in order to supply their café-restaurant with fresh produce, the brothers bought land at 'Santa Marta' near St Peter's. Orsolina managed this side of the operation (until the Vatican expropriated the land) as well as supervising the book-keeping for a business that employed around 150 people.

Their daughter Natalina married Giovanni's youngest son, Enrico, i.e. her first cousin. After selling up to the Ronzis, Enrico and Natalina took over the Caffè Latour in Piazza SS. Apostoli in the building that is now the Wax Museum. Managed by others but owned by the Singers, that too was known for its elegant ambience and aristocratic clientele.

Giovanni Singer's heartbreak at the early loss of his wife Fanny is said to be reflected in his poetry which was published either in pamphlets or in anthologies in Italian, French, German and Romansh. There are two Singer family tombs in the Cemetery, the first acquired for Orsolina and Pietro (Zone 1.8.26) and a second one nearby for Giovanni (Zone 1.7.24). An inscription records that Enrico and Natalina rest in their homeland at Celerina – Grigioni – Svizzera. The Ronzis have a family tomb at Zone 1.6.50.

Nicholas Stanley-Price



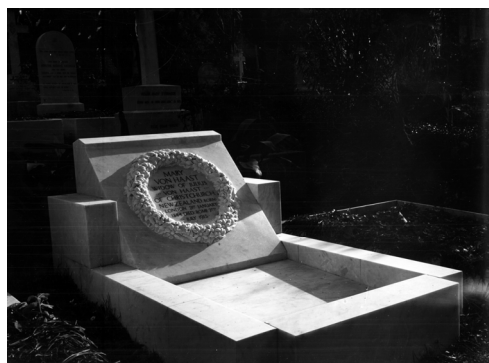
The family-tomb of Pietro and Orsolina Singer



The gravestone of Lady Mary von Haast

The grave of Mary von Haast (1844-1913; Zone 3.1.2.22) catches the eye for its unusual design: a wreath of small flowers on an inclined slab set within a block-built surround, all of it in Carrara marble. Now indistinct, her name would have been recognised by any passing New Zealander.

Mary's father Edward Dobson, a railway engineer who immigrated to New Zealand in 1850, came to know the German geologist Julius Haast while surveying new rail routes in the Canterbury area. The latter (a widower of 41, with a teenage son) duly married Dobson's nineteen-year-old daughter Mary. With Mary's support while she was raising five children, Haast became renowned as a geologist and as founding director of the Canterbury Museum. Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria gave him a hereditary knighthood (hence the 'von'), and Queen Victoria a knighthood for organizing New Zealand's stand at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886. But Von Haast died only a month after the couple's return from eighteen



The Von Haast grave
(photo: M. Piermattei, Cemetery archive)

months spent in Europe for this event, leaving Mary a distraught widow in her early forties.

In 1896 Mary moved to Vienna from where she travelled widely in Europe. She spent the winter of 1912-13 in Palermo and, after some months in Rome, died there in July. Her son George, an artist living in England, was with her at the end.

Nicholas Stanley-Price, with thanks to Sascha Nolden and Karen Manton for their help.



(photo: M. Piermattei, Cemetery archive)

HOW TO BECOME A FRIEND

This Newsletter is made possible by the contributions of the Friends of the Cemetery.

The Friends also help fund the care of the trees in the cemetery and the restoration of tombs. Please can you help us by becoming a Friend? You can find a membership form at:

www.cemeteryrome.it

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