

A new *sepulchrum* from Aquileia between iconography and 3D models *

Un nuovo *sepulchrum* da Aquileia tra iconografia e modelli 3D

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Abstract

[EN] This paper presents some first results of a re-examination of Roman tombstones from Aquileia (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy) and discusses a significant case study of two tombstones, focusing not only on epigraphical aspects, but also on iconographic and technical elements. The analytical approach employed integrated archaeological inquiry and 3D modelling techniques to achieve a more precise dating of the tombstones, facilitate a comprehensive interpretation of the inscriptions, ascertain the provenance of both stelae from a single workshop and from the same context, a *sepulchrum* for a *collegium*.

KEYWORDS: Aquileia, tombstones, collegium, tomb, ministry

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[IT] Il contributo presenta i primi risultati del riesame delle stele funerarie di Aquileia (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italia) e discute un caso studio significativo costituito da due stele, focalizzandosi non solo sugli aspetti epigrafici, ma anche su quelli iconografici e tecnici. L'approccio analitico impiegato ha intrecciato la ricerca archeologica, comprensiva di indagini di archivio, e le modellazioni fotogrammetriche 3D, in modo da ottenere una più precisa datazione delle stele, migliorare la lettura e l'interpretazione dell'iscrizione, verificare la provenienza delle due stele da una medesima bottega e ipotizzare il loro impiego nello stesso contesto sepolcrale, un recinto per un *collegium*.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Aquileia, stele, collegium, botteghe, ministri

* The article was written by Luca Scalco except for the introduction, authored by Monica Salvadori, and section 2.2, authored by Emanuela Faresin

1. INTRODUCTION

A group of over 150 decorated tombstones belongs to the Aquileia's huge corpus of sculptures and inscriptions: it has been the subject of extensive research, primarily from an epigraphical perspective and with a particular focus on portraits, but in recent times there has been a little decline in the level of attention, a trend that is consistent with the broader tendency observed for other types of sculptures.¹ Consequently, a re-examination of Aquileia's decorated funerary tombstones has been carried out, to gather new data, test new analytical procedures that integrates different established methodologies and update artistic and historical interpretations for such grave markers and local sculpture in general.² The paper presents a case of study based on two tombstones, to show some first results of this approach, since it has been possible to propose for the first time an iconographic and technical analysis, a precise identification of stone, a new reading of the inscriptions, and a new contextual interpretation.³

¹ Main reference is still the catalogue SCRINARI 1972, integrated by Lupa and bibliography and notes listed in VERZÁR BASS 2005; VERZÁR BASS *et alii.* 2009; VERZÁR BASS 2017; CILIBERTO 2020, CILIBERTO 2022. For funerary sculpture recent significant publications are CIGAINA 2020; CIGAINA 2021; CIGAINA, SGOIFO 2023; CILIBERTO - VENTURA 2024.

² Project "Apparato ornamentale delle stele funerarie aquileiesi (I sec. a.C.-inizi IV sec. d.C.): repertorio, officine, committenza", prof. Monica Salvadori, Università degli studi di Padova. Materials from Aquileia cited in notes are all selected through close inspection, with full analysis of bibliography.

³ All photos belongs to monuments of the Museum of Aquileia and are "su concessione del Ministero della cultura, Museo Storico e il Parco del Castello di Miramare - Direzione regionale musei Friuli Venezia Giulia" (no download and reproduction allowed), with the exception of fig. 5i that has been authorized by MiC-Soprintendenza ABAP FVG (Ulteriori riproduzioni delle immagini sono regolate dalla vigente normativa (art. 108, co. 3 del D. Lgs 42/2004 s.m.i. - DM 108/24)

2. DATA AND METHODS

The two stelae are collocated in different branches of the Lapidarium of the National Archaeological Museum of Aquileia (fig. 1). The first one (Stele 1 or *Ministri's* stelae in the text) was discovered around 1840 in the Corner estate and was transferred in the Museum in 1894; the possessions developed in the actual Casa Bianca and the E-S-E cadastral units (480-482) and by the end of the XIX century the property moved to counts Zucco.⁴ The second (Stele 2 or Croccara tombstone in the text) was acquired by the Museum in 1885 after being reused as threshold stone by E. Prister near Croccara, 2 km east of Aquileia (fig. 1). Prister family had a vast estate between Aquileia and Fiumicello: the building that might match the notes of the museum's Director was in cadastral units 881-883, in Strazzonara near Croccara.⁵

The approach adopted in this study involves an integrated analytical procedure, encompassing iconographic, archaeological and archaeometric analysis, in conjunction with 3D modelling.⁶

e ne è vietata l'ulteriore riproduzione a scopo di lucro). 3D models have been realized by Emanuela Faresin (fig. 4b, c; fig. 6a, c; fig. 8); photos, drawings, tables and maps by Luca Scalco (figg. 2; 3; 4a; 5; 6b,d; 7; 8; 9), with the exception of fig. 1, taken by Elena Braidotti of the Museum of Aquileia.

⁴ CIL V, 8253; Inscr. Aq. 669; CALDERINI 1930, pp. 177, 473, 526, 546, 551, 567; MAINARDIS 2005, p. 350; LETTICH 2003, n. 278, p. 217; Lupa 14068; EDCS-01601079; EDR117515 (C. Gomez); Lupa 14068; Archive of the Museum of Aquileia, Archivio storico, armadio 1, cass. 39.

⁵ GREGORUTTI 1885, nt. 6, p. 249; MAIONICA 1890, nt. 37, p. 159; GREGORUTTI 1891, nt. 16, p. 199; Inscr. Aq. 1885; ZACCARIA 1992, nt. 12, c. 173; LETTICH 2003, nt. 403, p. 285; EDCS-01400440; EDR117942 (L. Cigaina); Lupa 14418. Catasto secc. XIX-XX. State Archive of Gorizia, Fogli di possesso fondiario Distretto di Cervignano (1873-1971), b. 4, f. 7 (1884-1906) e b. 9, f. 15; b. 23 f. 43 (1884-1906) e b. 29 f. 50.

⁶ Main general reference not cited in other parts of the paper are MIGOTTI - SASEL KOS 2018; PILIPOVIĆ 2022; KARL *et alii* 2024.

2.1. *Archaeological analysis*

Archaeological analysis is the core part and merges bibliographic and archival research and in-depth direct analysis of the pieces;⁷ petrographic analysis have been carried out in collaboration with C. Mazzoli, of the Geosciences Department of the University of Padua. Samples were flakes taken with a diamond blade chisel: after a first macroscopic observation they have been analysed through optical microscopy on thin sections and attributed to specific geological formations according on fossil assemblages and textures.⁸

2.2. *3D modelling*

Multi-image photogrammetry, also known as Structure-from-Motion (SfM), was integrated in the analysis. It is a 2D to 3D modelling technique that enables the digitisation of surfaces and objects through the construction of photographic datasets. This method has been increasingly adopted in archaeology, and good practice standards for SfM documentation are also being established.⁹

In the photogrammetric survey of the stelae, a convergent-axis photographic capture was employed, distributed over several distances from the subject and over several heights, to obtain a high

⁷ Special thanks are due to E. Braidotti and A. Lepre of the Archaeological Museum of Aquileia and the State Archive of Gorizia, for the helpful support and advice in museum and archive research, and to M. Novello, director of the Museum for having granted access to material.

⁸ I would thank prof. C. Mazzoli, who carried out the analysis: a dedicated publication on a larger sample is in preparation. Recent references on similar analysis are SALVINI *et alii* 2022; SALVINI *et alii*. 2023.

⁹ SAMAAN *et alii* 2016; GUIDI *et alii* 2017; MATSUMOTO 2022.

percentage of overlap between the shots. The photographic capture equipment comprised a 24.2-megapixel Nikon D5300 APS-C (1.5x) sensor camera. All images were captured in .raw and .jpg format, with a resolution of 6000 px × 4000 px. The photogrammetric survey of the stelae yielded a total of 212 images for Stele 1 and 284 images for Stele 2. The data was processed using Metashape Professional 2.0.x software, which employs standardised procedures for 3D reconstruction, including camera orientation, dense point cloud generation, polygon mesh creation, and photo texture generation.

The models were processed with the objective of achieving the highest possible accuracy for alignment (<1 mm) and the highest quality for depth map generation. The data processing procedure has resulted in the generation of a highly detailed 3D model of Stele 1, comprising a total of 170464624 points and 32707141 faces; the highly detailed 3D model of Stele 2 is composed by 40173756 points and 3726324 faces. Subsequently, Digital Elevation Models were computed from the models, allowing the depth of surface details to be visualised in false colours. For Stele 1 the resolution of DEM is 0.108 mm/pix; for Stele 2 is 0.665 mm/pix.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE TOMBSTONES

Stele 1 measures 63.8 × 180.8 × 25.8 cm: the total height is aprox. 2 m, since the portion now visible must be integrated with part of the lower moulding and with the insertion tenon, reported by archive documents and now embedded within the brick base (fig. 2). The upper side is left rough and rises on the left; the lateral faces have

been levelled with a toothed hammer.¹⁰ On the left side, a finely lowered section contains a dowel hole measuring $3.9 \times 3.8 \times 3.6$ cm, with lead on the inside and a pouring channel at the top (3.5×1.5 cm). The rear shows toolmarks that are inconsistent with the others, probably for reworking: it is entirely smoothed – rather than left rough, as typical – except for a raised strip on the left, of irregular width (5-8 cm, 3 mm thick), that extends along the full height of the stele (fig. 2b, c). Originally, only the front side of the stele was further refined. Mouldings, rendered with various chisels, delineate both the tympanum and the inscription field: thus, the tombstone belongs to types Pflug IC = Cigaina IIIC = Verzár Bass A2, used between the 1st and 2nd centuries CE.¹¹

The external triangles in the pediment are each decorated with a dolphin (depth 0.7 cm). Its head, with a bordered eye and pinched snout, is crowned with a smooth dorsal fin curled at its tip; below a lateral fin is sculpted, featuring two longitudinal incisions to render the ribbing (fig. 5a). The body is long and sinuous, coiled twice upon itself and ended in a caudal ribbed fin. In the tympanum, a rosette with four heart-shaped petals and central button is carved (fig. 5b).

The epigraphic field has been refined using a similar process. The upper portion was chiselled in preparation for the inscription, which ends along a horizontal step parallel to the moulding's line. The portion below is recessed but not uniformly levelled: in the first 30 cm the surface is relatively even, lowered by 3 mm from

¹⁰ BESSAC 1987, pp. 60-67. Other references on toolmarks are NOGUERA CELDRÁN - ANTOLINOS MARIN 2002; NOLTE 2006; CLARIDGE 2015; RUSSELL - WOOTTON 2017.

¹¹ PFLUG 1989, p. 37; VERZÁR BASS 2009, p. 170; CIGAINA 2016, pp. 79-80.

the inscription plane; further down it becomes more irregular, between -1 and -4 mm from the inscription level.

Coherently with its recent history, Stele 2 is significantly more weathered (fig. 3). Toolmarks are far less evident than those on Stele 1, the decoration of the pediment is barely discernible, and the front face is slightly concave around its mid-height. Nonetheless, the piece's functional reuse preserved it in its entirety: the slab measures $62.7 \times 185.7 \times 23.5$ cm, excluding the insertion tenon now embedded in the brick-base but recorded as 14 cm high and 25 cm wide. Consequently, dimensions are consistent with Stele 1 and mouldings of the two stelae are also very similar (fig. 5c, f). The remaining traces of the decorations indicate that motives are identical and with the same disposition in both tombstones (fig. 5d, e). Lastly, the epigraphic field is very similar to that of the *Ministri's* stele, since here too the inscription is followed by a horizontal step parallel to the moulding, as clearly visible in the 3D model (fig. 4).

Preserved toolmarks are very similar to those on the *Ministri's* stele. Differences are due to reuse. Part of the left side has been levelled with a modern bush hammer; on the front, a square hole was made with drill and point chisel (4.7×4.9 cm), and two similar holes appear on the right side:¹² one square (2.7×3.9 cm) near the rear face, and another larger hole towards the front, regular on its inner portion (4.3×5 cm) but rougher on the outside (fig. 7 below). The rear side is abraded because of weathering and reuse; no traces of raised strips are present.

¹² E.g. Inscr. Aq. 2775, 2812.

Another point of similarity is the lithotype, since both are made of Aurisina limestone, the most common for funerary sculpture in Aquileia, in the “granitello” type.¹³ The stone is very similar and only minimal differences are noticeable: Stele 1 has a relatively fine grain with well-sorted rudist fragments, sparry cement, and minimal micritic content, while Stele 2 displays larger bioclasts and an even lower micritic component.

4. NEW INSIGHTS IN DATING, INSCRIPTION AND PROVENANCE

4.1. *Dating*

Dating of both stelae has been proposed on epigraphic basis to the 1st century CE, though Stele 1's interval has been also extended into the 2nd century. Due to absence of a stratigraphic context, it can be based solely on paleographic and stylistic criteria: nonetheless, the latter help to better define the chronology of the tombstones.

The dolphin motif lacks precise parallels in Aquileia, but its characteristics connect it to monuments of the late Julio-Claudian and the Flavian period (fig. 5g). However, in the two examined stelae the execution is less organic and the style more rudimentary, like in the versions of the late 1st – beginning of the 2nd century CE¹⁴ (fig. 5h). The rosette appears on Aquileia's stelae mainly from around the mid-1st century CE to roughly the mid-2nd cen-

¹³ LAZZARINI 1978, p. 202; MARITAN *et alii* 2003; PREVIATO 2015, pp. 416-434, 468-486.

¹⁴ Inscr. Aq. 905, 909, 1063, 2735, 2791.

ture¹⁵ (fig. 5l, m), though the most reliable *terminus* is provided by a stele dated to 63-68 CE (fig. 5i).¹⁶ Similar indications come from paleographic analysis, although such dating method is not completely conclusive.¹⁷ Even if the letters do not perfectly match that of the 63-68 CE stele, similarities are noticeable, as well as with other funerary and public inscriptions from the Domitianic to early Hadrianic period, whose dating is precisely based on historical elements. This group also includes another funerary stele, chronologically positioned in the late Julio-Claudian or Flavian period according to portraits' features.¹⁸ In conclusion, according to such elements the two tombstones can be dated to the last decades of the 1st century CE, even if a broader range (66-133 d.C.) is more cautious and perhaps preferable.

4.2. *New insights on inscriptions*

Stele 1's text is correctly reported in previous publications: it presents an intestacy and five lines of names (fig. 6). 3D model clearly indicate that punctuation marks were triangular and permits to assess that, despite the narrow line spacing and the ample void below the carved step, the inscription is crafted with care, as indicated by the uniform 3-mm-deep triangular incisions, the consistent size of the character adjusted according to their density, the alignment of the final letters of each *cognomen* on the right, the line measure-

¹⁵ Inscr. Aq. 1337; 2883: anyway, spiral columns are already known in Tiberian age (Inscr. Aq. 916, 1176, 1337).

¹⁶ Inscr. Aq. 2769 = GÓMEZ PANTOJA, CASTILLO SANZ 2014, p. 513.

¹⁷ COOLEY 2012, p. 423.

¹⁸ Inscr. Aq. 2797; PFLUG 1989, n. 84, p. 190 = REBAUDO 2007, cc. 115-117.

ments (tab. 1), and the overall uniform margins (top 2,1 cm, left 1 cm, right and bottom 0.9 cm).

Stele 2's text is more problematic. Almost all editors report the first line only: nevertheless, more letters are still present, many of them have been already recorded by Enrico Maionica in 1891. 3D model consented to confirm such reading and to add some new elements. The text now conserved is:

LOC MON
A [---] US
[L ---] S
[---] S
[---] S
[---] S

Here too the inscription develops on six lines. The first contains the heading with the formula *loc(us) mon(umentum)*, the followings list male names in nominative, as suggested by the presence of an "S" at the end of each line. The second line begins with an A, for *Aulus*. The initial letter of the *praenomen* of a second man (line 3) is also discernible, roughly aligned with the A of the previous line. This is likely the remnant of an L, with the horizontal element almost entirely eroded; it might alternatively be a T, though slightly shifted to the left, while a P is less likely, as there is no visible upper loop.

Compared to Stele 1, there is more room for the letters in the last line, but in general the two texts are very similar both in content and design: in Stele 2 the margins measure 21 mm above and below and 10 mm on the sides. Letters' height is similar too: the main difference is in line 1, likely for the difference in characters' num-

ber, twelve for Casa Bianca and six for Croccara stele, thus making them wider and more spaced out.

	Stele 1				Stele 2		
	Min	Max	Average	DevSt	Min	Max	Average
Line 1	4.2	4.7	4.42	0.2	5.3	5.7	5.51
Line 2	2	2.3	2.08	0.14	2	2.2	2.1
Line 3	2	2.3	2.16	0.1	2.3	2.4	2.35
Line 4	2.1	2.4	2.24	0.13			2.3
Line 5	2.1	2.4	2.24	0.1			2.2
Line 6	1.9	2.3	2.08	0.16			2.3

Tab. 1. Measurements (in cm) of letters in the inscriptions, calculated on a homogeneous sample of six characters for every line. In Stele 2 values lack due to poor conservation.

4.3. *A reconstruction proposal for a collegium's tomb*

The similarities stressed so far indicate that the two tombstones were very probably realized in the same workshop: in fact, if Stele 1 has been categorized within the Aquileia's «orizzonte a S decorativa» (cluster of decorative S), due to the placing of the final letter of the *cognomen* along the right margin,¹⁹ the data newly acquired consent to classify Stele 2 in this same group too, as five S letters are aligned at the end of the five lines. Even so, while there are examples, within the rich corpus of funerary stelae from Aquileia, that presents some similarities, these two pieces are exceptional in their near-perfect resemblance and should be considered iden-

¹⁹ BLASON SCAREL 1997, pp. 473-476. Main references on epigraphic and artistic workshops are the papers in GAGGADIS ROBIN *et al.* 2009; KRISTENSEN - POULSEN 2012; DONATI - POMA 2012; DJURIC 2019.

tical. It is a unique case, and it is consequently possible to assert that the two tombstones were very probably created for the same context, given that two further elements directly connect them.

First, to our knowledge the two steps that delimit the epigraphic field are not elsewhere known in stelae from Aquileia: these are therefore custom features, repeated on both stelae and not for reuse. In fact, the similarity in text's layout and in the extent of the area levelled with toothed chisel suggests that such step was planned alongside the text, but at the same time, the fact that the recessed area rarely matches or exceeds the depth of the letters' incision rules out the possibility of an erasure.²⁰ Consequently, the groove should be interpreted as an adaptation of the stela, executed around or shortly after its completion to prevent additional names from being added: the step, indeed, is not uniformly executed and shows a slight narrowing at both ends, indicating it was added after the mouldings were completed.

Second, Stele 1 features a mounting hole on the left side only. This hole can be considered ancient, as in other tombstones,²¹ but it is not suitable for nails or pins, because it is singular, large, and positioned off-centre without relation to other elements of the tombstone's design.²² Like the recessing of the inscription field, this hole was added to a completed stele, since the surface has been irregularly lowered. Stele 2 has an identical situation but mirrored on the right side: the shape of an ancient mortise is still visible de-

²⁰ LETTICH 2003, p. 217. Corrections or erasures are shorter and deeper in the stone (Inscr. Aq. 2587, 2745).

²¹ Like Inscr. Aq. 931 = MASARO 2017, n. 22, p. 106.

²² Inscr. Aq. 619; 865; 1115; 2832.

spite the reuse, and matches the characteristics of the hole in Stele 1. The position is identical, as on both stelae the axes of the holes are 8,3 cm from the front edge, and the border is approximately 85 cm from the lower edge and 100 cm from the upper edge. Form and dimensions are closely comparable (max. gap 0,3 cm). The pouring channels are in the same location, with identical width, and they both stop near the top boundary of the levelled area, thus causing a slight difference in length (fig. 7). Such anomaly is coherent with the different height of the step and the consequent variation in the inscriptions' margins: these measurements discrepancies are the highest recorded in the comparison, up to 3 cm.

When considered as a whole, these features may suggest not only a common realization, but also a common use for the tombstones. In fact, when the two slabs are aligned at the level of the lower edge, since stelae stood vertically on a basis as their tenons indicate, the two side holes are placed at the same height, with a discrepancy of just 0,1 cm. Consequently, it seems evident that holes and lowering have been realized on finished products and it is plausible that Stele 2, with its more precise layout, served as a model and that the other was adjusted accordingly: the distance from the step to the upper edge is identical on both slabs (45 cm), but the inclined profile and lower corner on Stele 2 likely led to an adjustment – and consequently to a measurement error – when the step, the lowering on the side and the pouring channel were replicated on Stele 1. Given these similarities and consequently the high probability that the two tombstones stem from the same context, it is possible to attempt a general reconstruction of the *sepulchrum*'s frontside (fig. 8).

Considering that each stele has only one fastening hole, it is quite likely that the two slabs were linked by a structure and positioned at its ends, with the mortises facing inward: Stele 2 to the left, and Stele 1 to the right. It was probably made of stone,²³ and the edge created between the vertical stele and the horizontal plane of the balustrade is also indicated by a light horizontal erosion mark on Stele 1, at the height of the upper limit of the fastening hole. The narrow area of the reworking makes probable that a light bench connected the two tombstones, rather than a sequence of stone slabs like in the tombs of the *Curii* or the *Iulii*.²⁴ Its dimensions are unknown but, considering the levelled portion and assuming that pouring channels were centrally placed, two alternatives can be proposed. In the first, the bench would be about 15 cm wide (two *palmi*) and either one *palmus* (7,4 cm) or 10.5 cm deep: the slab thus stops approximately 1,4 cm from the front edge of the stele. In the second, the balustrade aligns with the front-side edge of the tombstone: the reconstructed dimensions would then be approximately 17,5 × 7,4 cm (fig. 7).

It is possible that such horizontal slab was supported by a masonry structure, like the enclosure of the *Trebbii*, or by small pillars, like the enclosure of the *Statii*, which are dated similarly to the stelae under examination.²⁵ Unfortunately, no traces of such arrangement survive, and neither of the basement, whose length in fig. 8 is

²³ A metal bench is not likely, due to the different insertion system known in a decorated pilaster (VERZÁR BASS 2006, fig. 12).

²⁴ For the *Iulii*'s BRUSIN 1941, p. 29; for the *Curii*'s one studies are abundant, from BRUSIN 1929, p. 253 to CILIBERTO 2012, n. 3, pp. 63-66.

²⁵ BRUSIN 1941, pp. 10, 35; SCALCO 2020a, p. 201.

esteemed 16 pedes because it is the most typical measurement for Aquileia's necropolis.²⁶ The back of the slabs does not offer data to reconstruct other parts of the enclosure: anyway, there is no evidence that structures, if present, were anchored to the stelae.²⁷

The text in the inscriptions is consistent with their positioning: in fact, the formula *locus monumenti* is a common designation for the boundary stones of the tombs in Aquileia. These markers frequently appeared in pairs at the corners of the enclosures, with the inscription's text either repeated or divided between the two stones. An example is the tomb of *P. Veidius Regillus*, where the name, in genitive, was split into two different *cippi*.²⁸ Such stones are usually plain, but in some rare case decorated markers are also attested, with similar motifs to those of the steles and likewise located in the upper part of the slab.²⁹

The tomb composed of Steles 1 and 2 would therefore have had a structure like those with two boundary markers: the main difference is the absence of *indicatio pedaturae*, which, however, could be deemed superfluous, since the size rendered the markers sufficiently immovable and identifiable limits. As with the tomb of *Veidius Regillus*, the first line was to be read horizontally, divided between the two stones: the left side bears the *locus monumenti*, while the right side has the genitive *ministrorum*

²⁶ ZACCARIA 2006.

²⁷ Enclosures structures present a huge variety in northern Italy, and it is possible that only the front side was built: G. Cavalieri Manasse gave a first classification, that was adopted and integrated in further research (CAVALIERI MANASSE 1990, pp. 25-31, see SCALCO 2020a, pp. 188-199 with bibliography).

²⁸ Inscr. Aq. 2532.

²⁹ Inscr. Aq. 679.

ministrarumque. The subsequent lines divide the names of eleven people into two parts but distribute them evenly across the two stelae:³⁰ five lines with five male names on the right, five lines with four male and two female names on the left. Reading text from left to right means that men's names would have been placed first, and women's second, exactly as done in the intestacy, which recalls *ministri* first and then *ministrae*. This proposed arrangement, in addition, clarifies the ambiguity surrounding the interpretation of the text of Stele 1, since both *ministri ministrarunt*³¹ or *ministorum ministrarumque*³² have been proposed. The latter is preferable, thus the *locus monumenti* formula no longer requires a theoretical integration, as usually recorded before the reconstruction here proposed. Therefore, the enclosure would have contained the burials of eleven attendants of the cult: according to their names, they all were free citizens, albeit of uncertain status and possibly of freed origin, as consistent with the epigraphic records of *ministry*.³³

The proposal reconstruction, if accepted despite the evident flaws in structures' documentation, is mainly tackled by the difference in provenance recorded by archive documents. Anyway, it should not be considered problematic, since it is only reported and not precisely attested, especially for Stele 2 that was reused in XIX century. It is also important to consider that Zucco's and Pris-

³⁰ SCALCO 2020a, pp. 203-204 on burials' number in enclosures.

³¹ Brusin in Inscr Aq. 669, criticized in MAINARDIS 2005, p. 349 but maintained in EDR.

³² LETTICH 2003.

³³ MAHRBACH 1932, BULHART 1966, cc. 999-1006; MAINARDIS 2005.

ter's estates were quite large and the cadastral units where stele were probably found were collocated next one to the other, with the border situated between Casa Bianca and Strazzonara, where the Prister's building was collocated. So, although there is no completely reliable information, it is concretely possible that Stele 2 was originally discovered in the same location as Stele 1. Anyway, if the provenance reconstruction should be revised, the site of Stele 1's discovery and the one of Stele 2's reuse were 500 m away, located within the same eastern necropolis along the road to *Tergeste*.³⁴ It is well-documented that the city's suburbs were for centuries a sought-after destination for stonecutters seeking building materials or ancient artifacts to resell, and cases of tombstones appearing in different sites through centuries or sites dug in different moments are also known³⁵ (fig. 9).

5. THE MINISTRI'S MONUMENT IN THE NECROPOLIS OF AQUILEIA

The reconstructed arrangement of the area finds some parallels in other findings from Aquileia. Here it is not uncommon to have tombs with two identical decorated monuments or sculptures,³⁶ like the two ossuary altars of the gens *Cornelia* found in the Casa Bianca, the same site as Stele 1. Similarly to the tombstones in question, these *arae* share identical dimensions, type and inscribed text.³⁷ The use of decorated tombstones at the corners of the burial

³⁴ BERTACCHI 1997, p. 154; GIOVANNINI 2009, p. 184, fig. 1; pp. 189-192.

³⁵ MAINARDIS, ZACCARIA 1993, pp. 64-70.

³⁶ BRUSIN 1941, p. 11; BOTTOS 2021, pp. 322-323.

³⁷ Inscr. Aq. 1038, 1041. See also BUORA 1995a.

area is quite uncommon, but it is attested elsewhere in the *Regio X*, in Verona, as originally proposed by Brusin, and maybe also in other cities.³⁸ With the reconstruction here proposed, it is possible to attest such sepulchral arrangement also in Aquileia.

A final comparison stems from an enclosure along the road to Emona, just over 2 km N-E from the Casa Bianca. The area is known thanks to inscriptions attributing it to the *cultores* of *Mars*: it is therefore a burial association, like the one analysed here.³⁹ Inscriptions of this tomb also belong to the “cluster of decorative S”, as do Steles 1 and 2;⁴⁰ furthermore, accepting Maurizio Buora’s reconstruction, the best-preserved *titulus* has been dated to between the last quarter of the 1st century AD and the 2nd century AD, thus within a substantially similar timespan to the stelae under study.⁴¹ The area’s overall structure must have been quite complex: the vast enclosure was marked by stones, canonical in both form and text, and measured 45 × 90 *pedes*.⁴² Additionally, multiple inscriptions are recorded, thus suggesting that burials were arranged in different clusters: the fact that new tombs – and their inscriptions – were permitted only “*permissu collegii*”,⁴³ i.e. with the authorization of the association’s members, reflects the same dynamic of the Casa Bianca’s stelae, where the intentional lowering of the epigraphic field effectively precluded any further names from being added to already completed markers.

³⁸ BRUSIN 1958-1959, pp. 39, 41-44; SCALCO 2020b, p. 94.

³⁹ BUORA 1995b. Material has been reconsidered in MAGGI, ORIOLO 2021, p. 34.

⁴⁰ BLASON SCAREL 1997, p. 475.

⁴¹ Inscr. Aq. 676, 677, 681.

⁴² Inscr. Aq. 2595

⁴³ Inscr. Aq. 680.

In conclusion, the *Ministri* enclosure is quite unique but not exceptional for Aquileia, since it aligns with other funerary solutions documented in the city around the late 1st century AD. Despite that the two stelae from Croccara and Casa Bianca experienced a troubled and obscure recent history, that led to a collocation in different areas of the museum's lapidary, the updated research focus has made it possible to propose a probable reconstruction of their shared past and to bring new depth to the study of the «antiche lapidi di Aquileia», as the first editor of the two tombstones called the Roman inscriptions in one of the earliest *corpus* of the material from Aquileia.⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ GREGORUTTI 1877.

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Figures

Fig. 1. The two tombstones in the Museums of Aquileia's lapidary.



Fig. 2. Stele 1: front side (a), edge between right and rear side, with the raised strip and with different surfaces' finishing (b); rear side polished (c).



Fig. 3. Stele 2. Front side (a); edge between rear and right side (b) and between rear and left side (c).

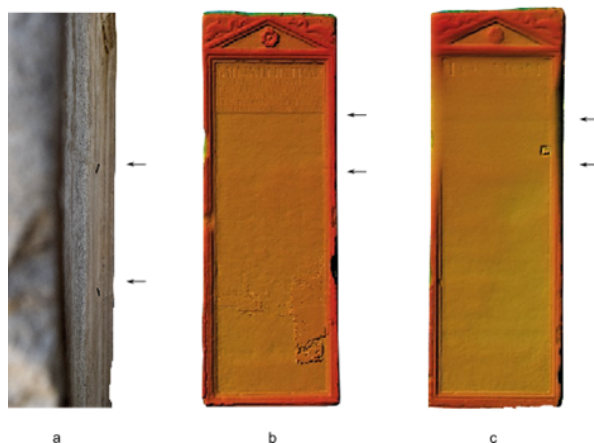


Fig. 4. The step in the inscription's field, marked by the first arrow and the extension of the area homogeneously lowered marked by the second arrow. Stele 1 (a= photo with graphic indication of the gap; b = DEM); Stele 2 (c = DEM).

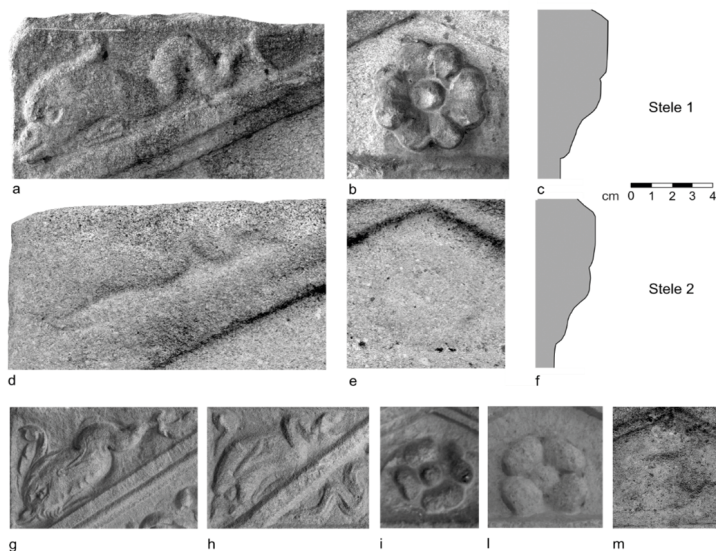


Fig. 5. Decorations (a-b, d-e) and mouldings (c, f with measurement) of the two tombstones. Photos g-m are decorative elements of other aquileian tombstones taken as comparison in the text.



Fig. 6. Inscription of Stele 1, 3D model (a) and photo (b), of Stele 2, 3D model (c) and photo (d).

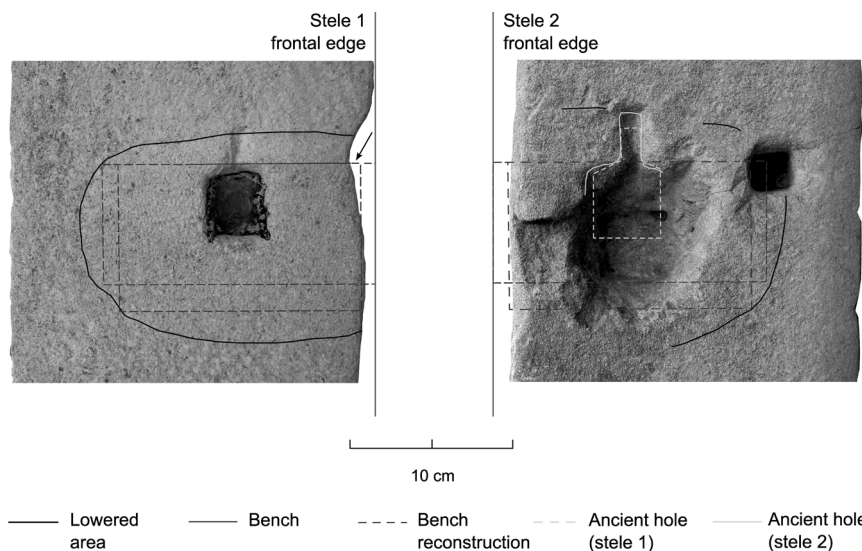


Fig. 7. Scaled photos of the two holes on the sides of the tombstones, with indication of lowered areas and of fastening of the bench. The vertical line marks the position of the original edge of the stelae, the arrow the point where the bench has been removed.

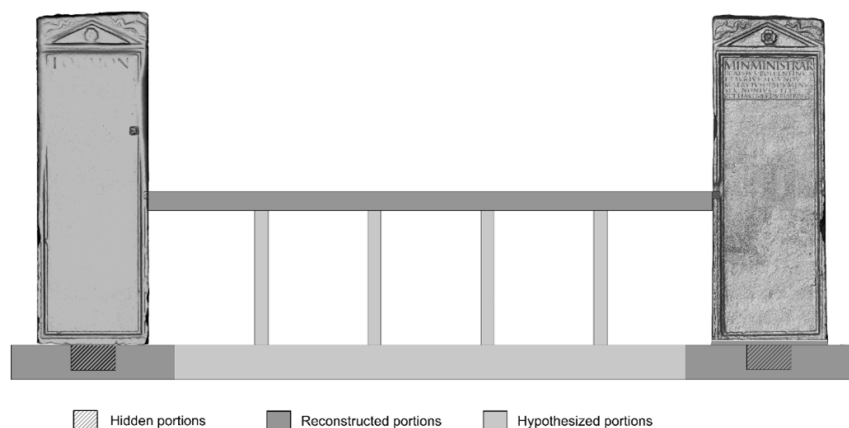


Fig. 8. Reconstruction of *Ministri's* enclosure with the 3D models of the tombstones, with a length of 16 *pedes*.

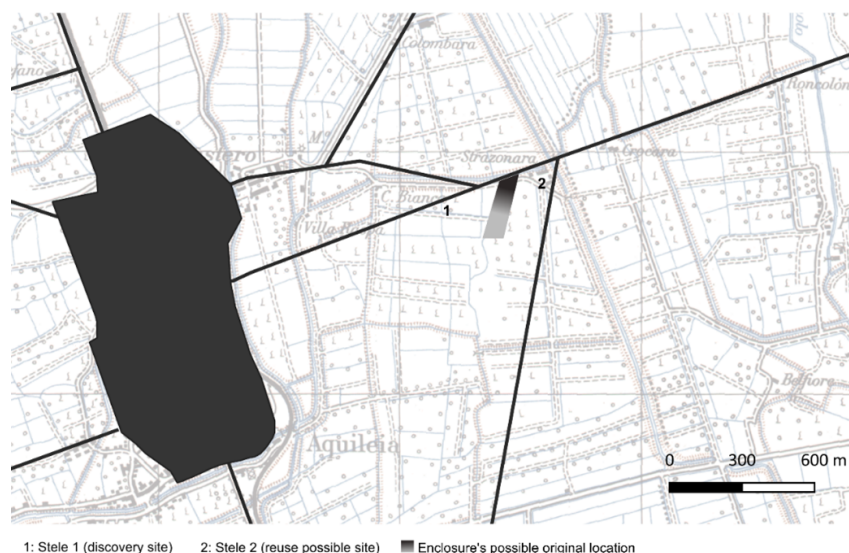


Fig. 9. Roman Aquileia and its roads (based on Maggi, Oriolo 2012, fig. 2) on modern cartography 1:25.000 (Geoportale Nazionale, CC-BY), with tombstones positioned (numbers 1 and 2).