

Studio 1: Documentation and Analysis of Historic Buildings

Project 3: Field Documentation and Formal Analysis

Rionda-Goin Mausoleum

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10/14/2013

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Located in the northwest quadrant of the Bronx Woodlawn cemetery, the Rionda-Goin mausoleum is reached by traveling north from the main entrance along Filbert Avenue toward the Butternut area. An unassuming locale, the burial plot is situated perpendicular to Filbert Avenue recessed behind a row of other burials, effectively denying a direct axial approach for visitors. (Fig. 1) Access to the mausoleum itself is further occluded by a dearth of formalized directional cues, such as a walkway, landscaping, or decorative urns commonly used to inform a visitor of the proper approach to the building. Taken together, the rather subdued site presentation leads one to conclude the owners of this particular mausoleum were not interested in ostentatious displays of wealth or mourning. This almost stoic mentality is visibly reinforced in the mausoleum itself.

Originally purchased for \$880 by Mrs. Belle M. Nash for the interment of her late husband, Mr. George Nash who passed away on November 29th, 1915; Mrs. Nash retained services of New York architect Charles E. Birge's office and the construction order was placed on March 2, 1916.¹ The mausoleum was later resold to Mr. Manuel E. Rionda in 1926.² As a monument purchased second hand, there is little evidence to link stylistic choices made by either Mr. Charles Birge or Mrs. Belle Nash to the current occupants, the Rionda-Goin family however, the overall structure harkens to ancient Greco-Roman funerary monuments and therefore must have presented an attractive option to Mr. Rionda and his family. The nephew of Cuban sugar baron, Manuel Rionda Sr., Manuel E. Rionda Jr. served as Vice President for the NY office of the Czarnikow-Rionda Company; additionally holding office as mayor of his hometown Alpine,

¹ Columbia Avery Archives, Woodlawn Cemetery Records, Belle M. Nash, file ID 738185

² Columbia Avery Archives, Woodlawn Cemetery Records, Belle M. Nash, file ID 738185
On December 27, 1926 the remains of George Nash were removed to Erie, Pa.
On December 28, 1926 deed of ownership transfer No. 11,703 granted to Mr. Manuel E. Rionda for lot #13683.

New Jersey.³ Given this particular position in both the sugar importation industry and in local governance, one would expect some sort of decorative mention, but none exist on either the exterior façade or within the interior space. Visitors are left wondering if perhaps this may be due to the communal nature of the Rionda-Goin family burials.⁴

The mausoleum itself is a closed form⁵ situated on a plinth⁶ and measures approximately 134 inches (11'2") in length by 138 inches (11'6") in width by 147 inches (12'3") in height. (Fig. 2) The front façade consists of cut granite ashlar blocks⁷ and a set of bronze double doors.⁸ Two steps lead up to the main door set within a battered post and lintel frame. Vitruvius refers to this battered frame design as Doric however it also bears similarity to his descriptions of the Tuscan style doorway.⁹ The roof is capped with an undecorated pediment reminiscent of ancient Greek Doric temple design—complete with raking and horizontal geison and sima decorative elements, though without the ubiquitous Doric triglyphs and metopes along the cornice. It is interesting to note, given Vitruvius's preoccupation with ratios, that the Rionda-Goin pediment measures one fifth the height of the total front façade. Additionally, the vertical line created by

³ McAvoy, Muriel. *Sugar Baron: Manuel Rionda and the Fortunes of Pre-Castro Cuba*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003.

⁴ Six members of the family are interred in the mausoleum, Manuel E. Rionda, his wife Ellen, her parents James and Josephine Goin and Placido and Adelinda Alonzo.

⁵ Exterior blocks set in White Atlas cement and white sand mixed in 2 part cement, 1 part sand Columbia Avery Archives, Woodlawn Cemetery Records, Belle M. Nash, file ID 738185

⁶ 1 part Atlas cement, 3 parts sand, 5 parts native crushed stone. Woodlawn file ID 738185

⁷ Mount Airy quarry for Ashlar blocks 10" thick from North Carolina Woodlawn file ID 738185

⁸ Double shut bronze (U.S. bronze) doors with cast bronze grilles, frame and bronze mouldings and bronze saddle, also bronze grill vents. Woodlawn file ID 738185

⁹ Vitruvius, Pollio and M.H. Morgan. *Vitruvius: The Ten Books on Architecture*. New York: Dover Publications, 1960. p 119

the apex of the pediment bisects the face of the building; thereby creating symmetrical halves. Affixed beneath the unadorned pediment, in bronze lettering, is the name “Rionda-Goin”. It is worth mentioning that in archival plans, no indication of the recessed area in which the current “Rionda-Goin” lettering is found, thus perhaps indicating the preceding “Nash” was carved away once the new mausoleum owners took over.

The symmetrical layout of the façade is carried over into the interior via the alignment of the doorway and the stained glass window located in the mausoleum’s back wall.¹⁰ As one enters, the viewer is confronted with a narrow passage constructed of granite flooring and marble cladding along the walls and ceiling. A marble font protrudes from the western wall just beneath the stained-glass window. The stained-glass depicts a cross and wreath design which casts shades of red, green and orange across the white marble cladding of the loculi, or burial plots, positioned on either side.¹¹ The loculi are stacked three high and when viewed in conjunction with the narrow interior space reinforce a sense of rigid verticality.

Design precedents for this style of funerary monument may be found predominately in the Greco-Roman world, specifically the hybrid Greek temple/oikos and funerary stelai.¹² (Fig. 3) Greek funerary stelai present painted or sculptured figures ensconced within their surroundings; usually a *naiskos* (temple) demarcated by pilasters and a pediment.¹³ (Fig. 4) As

¹⁰ Stained glass with sheet of plate glass outside
Woodlawn file ID 738185

¹¹ White Italian polished marble set in neat cement
Woodlawn file ID 738185

¹² Grossman, Janet B. *Greek Funerary Sculpture: Catalogue of the Collections at the Getty Villa*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2001, p 5
“Types of stelai: 1) plain stelai, 2) stelai with relief panel, 3) pedimental stelai, 4) naiskoi, 5) flat-topped naiskoi, and 6) sirens”

¹³ Vassilika, Eleni. *Greek and Roman Art*. Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p 66
See also: Ridgway, Brunilde S. *Fourth-century Styles in Greek Sculpture*. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, p 161

scholar Eleni Vassilikà describes, “A naiskos-stele tends to show the deceased sitting or standing within an architectural setting framed by vertical antae, an architrave often inscribed with the name, and a pediment crowned centrally and laterally by akroteria.” This trend first appears in the Archaic period and fully develops following the end of the Peloponnesian War¹⁴ in the fourth century B.C.¹⁵ These stylistic trends are then recognized in Etruscan cinerary urns and Roman aedicule house tomb construction.¹⁶ With the enduring popularity of Greco-Roman art and architecture, one may see the attraction for this quiet and contemplative funerary design.

“When the relief slab is topped by a pediment supported by antae, the human figures appearing within this architectural setting would have conveyed the impression of cult images within a small temple, of which several existed in Athens.”

See: Hurwit, Jeffrey. “Image and Frame in Greek Art.” *American Journal of Archaeology*, 81.1 (1977): 1-30.

See also: Ridgway, Brunilde S. *Fourth-century Styles in Greek Sculpture*. p.161

“...a frame ... was adopted for the Classical Athenian tombstones, both for the protection of the relief and for its implications of permanence and status.”

¹⁴ Boardman, John. *Greek Sculpture: The Classical Period: a Handbook*. New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1985. p.66

“...we detect tendencies already apparent in the Late Archaic...towards an architectural setting for the reliefs, with side pilasters (antae) and roof or pediment.”

¹⁵ Pollitt, J.J. *Art and Experience in Classical Greece*. Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1972. p.141-142

“...concern with private emotional experience became the principal new motivating force behind the art of the fourth century.”

¹⁶ Ridgway, Brunilde S. *Fourth-century Styles in Greek Sculpture*. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. p.160

“During the second half of the fourth century, in fact, the most popular type of funerary sculpture was undoubtedly the elaborate, multi-figured stele in very high relief, or virtually in the round, within an architectural, ever deepening frame.”

Image List



Figure 1



Figure 2

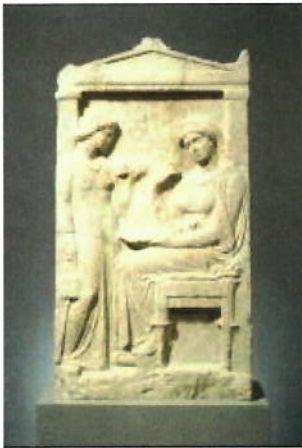


Figure 3



Figure 4¹⁷

¹⁷ The Walters Art Museum
48.2759

Source List

Boardman, John. *Greek Sculpture: The Classical Period: a Handbook*. New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1985.

Columbia Avery Archives, Woodlawn Cemetery Records, Belle M. Nash, file ID 738185

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