

The Economy of Death: New Research on Collective Burial Spaces in Rome from the Late Republic to the Late Roman Time: Introduction

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The panel aimed to discuss economic aspects of Roman burial architectures for extended numbers of burials, such as columbaria, large hypogea, or catacombs, and all questions about their owners and users. We wanted to discuss how far economic reasons played a leading role in the invention, the development and the use of the big burial monuments in Rome and how these buildings, on the other hand, fulfilled the religious and social needs of their recipients.

Eventually, we find originally reserved or prepared spaces for family groups or any kind of associations, which in following generations may be still occupied by the same group or changes in propriety may occur, and the traces of related funeral art and inscriptions.

New studies in Roman funeral monuments document interesting evidence for the dynamic process of preparation and use of burial space, and especially in larger architecture for much more than a single family; the aspect of economy in ownership and use is promising. Who was the planner of the project, how and why was a special place and a specific architecture applied? How and where in the original project provided the owner and their families their own burials, and where and in which manner of distribution or acquisition were further tombs sold or given to others? How or why were various places or ornaments differentiated and how homogeneous was a projected and what was the real use? Do we find explanations for the changes? Was there a standardization of workmanship in building techniques and decoration to respond to economic necessity? Where and why did certain spaces remain out of use? And, after a first generation of users, how was the propriety of a funeral space used by the following generations? Do we see forms of new unions, or of smaller unities and fractions or scissions of former unified entities? And, in which way does architecture and artistic furnishing attest the evidence? How is epigraphy related to all architectural and artistic evidence?

We wanted to discuss these questions especially because during last decades a series of general studies on Roman burials and burial customs were necessarily based on older documentations, while new and more detailed analysis of single monuments often provided new and different insights to interpretation. Therefore, we propose to reopen the custom of funeral art, architecture and epigraphy in Rome under the general theme of economy.