



Roman funerary monuments

Fragments as clues

Thousands of inscriptions survive from the city of Rome, and the majority of these are funerary inscriptions or epitaphs. These are often presented to us as disembodied texts.

Fragments from larger memorials that line museum walls and fill the pages of volumes of inscriptions.

This reflects the reality of survival. Items have been re-used, monuments fragmented and cemeteries destroyed.

But inscriptions were only one part of a monument. An epitaph was written on a tomb or grave marker, which might be sculpted, or have architectural details. Originally some tombs may have even been painted in bright colours. The monument could be large or small or any size in between; it may have stood alone or been part of a group of memorials.

To what extent can we re-create the impact of these funerary monuments and gain a feel for the Roman cemetery as a place? Can we understand how memorials communicated? And what they revealed about the people and the families commemorated?