



Roman funerary monuments

Epitaphs and sculptures

In the world of tombs size did matter. A large tomb could grab the attention of the passer-by. But once the passer-by had stopped the hope was that they would read the inscription and in saying the name of the deceased promote their memory.

Latin epitaphs were about names – the name of the deceased and often also the name of the person who had set up the memorial.

Names could reveal a good deal about a person, including their gender and their legal status.

Male Roman citizens generally had three names, the so-called *tria nomina*. The letter F adjacent to an initial letter indicated that the person was a free-born son.

Slaves only had one name, and this was often of non-Latin origin.

Freed slaves might have the *tria nomina*, but their previous servitude might be revealed by the inclusion of their former master's name and the letter L for *libertus*.

Inscriptions might add further details. Some epitaphs were like mini biographies, telling the deceased's life story or those parts of it that they or their commemorator wished to be remembered.

This inscription is part of the so-called *Laudatio Turiae*, a long inscription thought to be a copy of the eulogy delivered at a wealthy woman's funeral by her husband. It praises the woman's virtues and how she stood by her husband through thick and thin. It is thought to have been attached to her tomb serving as part of her epitaph.

Allia Potestas, a freed slave, was also commemorated by a lengthy epitaph. In this case the eulogy was written in verse and inscribed in two columns beneath her name.

These examples, however, are unusual. Most epitaphs provided only names, occasionally accompanied by details of age at death or the career or job of the deceased.

This epitaph was set up to a military cavalryman and provides details of his town of origin, military rank, age at death and number of years served.

Apart from military service, references to work could be regarded as demeaning to the free born. Slaves and freed slaves, by contrast, might define themselves by their occupation as if to compensate for shortcomings in their legal status.

These small plaques which originate from a columbarium reveal a variety of posts held by the slaves of a large household.

Such as Eros a doorkeeper and Gemellus a paedagogus (or childminder)

Sculptural décor could also add details about the person commemorated and their life, portraits of the deceased, mythological analogies that drew comparisons between the deceased and the gods.

Pictorial references to work might complement the epitaph or add previously unmentioned details.

At the *Isola Sacra* terracotta plaques were sometimes fixed next to the epitaph, providing indications of the work or trade of the tomb founders.

These suggest a blacksmith or ironmonger, a water carrier, a midwife or doctor and someone connected to the importing and processing of corn at nearby *Portus*.

So we can begin to see how the differing elements of the tomb worked together – inscription, décor, tomb type, scale and location.