

This panel explores expressions of identity in funerary monuments in ancient Italy. With a wide chronological spread, we will look at monuments from pre-Roman societies, to late Republican Rome, to the Christian era of the Roman Empire. All the contributions are interdisciplinary in nature, taking into account text, location, imagery and other factors to come to new conclusions about the kinds of messages being expressed. Each paper shows that multiple viewpoints are needed to fully understand these kinds of objects, and that the bringing together of different fields such as epigraphy, linguistics and archaeology can substantially alter our understanding of ancient Italy.

PAPER ABSTRACTS

Speaker 1: Katherine McDonald, University of Cambridge
Oscan Funerary Monuments of Southern Italy

There are a limited number of funerary monuments from the South Oscan area, and those that exist are far from straightforward. Several of the monuments seem to have been set up to individuals of mixed origin, with Greek, Roman, Lucanian (Oscan) and Messapic identities all in evidence to different degrees. Their forms include stelai, cippi, and painted tombs. This paper takes the four inscriptions most commonly identified as funerary, and questions (a) the extent to which these different cultural identities are really in evidence and (b) how safely these texts can be identified as funerary.

In some cases, for example, the Greek influence on the naming system seen in the inscription has been exaggerated or misunderstood in past work, while in one text from Anxium the level of borrowing from Greek has been underestimated by some scholars. The forms of the inscribed objects are also subject to influence from Greek and Roman culture, particularly since Oscan-speakers may not have had a strong tradition of inscribed funerary monuments.

The identification of these texts as funerary monuments should also be questioned. In one case, the name that appears is almost certainly the name of the painter rather than that of the deceased. In our longest 'funerary' text, the appearance of the word *bratom* 'favour, grace', otherwise known from dedicatory inscriptions, may tell us something significant about funerary ritual - or it may show that this text is actually a dedication.

This paper takes an interdisciplinary viewpoint - combining linguistics, epigraphy and archaeology - on these ill-understood texts, to see if we can better understand the funerary culture of South Oscan.

Speaker 2: Fiona Mowat, University of Edinburgh
Freedmen and Family Identities in the Roman Empire: The Epigraphic Habit Revisited

It has been estimated that the majority of funerary inscriptions from the Roman Empire have a connection to freedmen and their families (Frank 1916, Ross Taylor 1961, Mouritsen 2005). The freedman's motivation to exhibit their newfound status has been suggested as the reason for the erection of such inscriptions (Ross Taylor 1961, Mouritsen 2005). Yet Ross Taylor herself (1961) declared that two thirds of her dataset, drawn from the CIL VI sepulcrales, included people with no declared status.

This paper argues that whilst these incerti may well be freedmen or their descendants (as has been suggested based on Greek cognomina models, Frank 1916, Mouritsen 2005 and an absence of voting tribe, Ross Taylor 1961): the fact that this group avoided clearly mentioning their legal status indicates that their status itself and their motivation for commissioning an inscription may not be clear cut.

Using a dataset of inscriptions collated from ash chests and altars we can make a distinction between different types of inscribed monument. The inscriptions in this dataset are dedicated to a number of incerti, slaves, freedmen, and freeborn people, as well as known elites, tied together through the familia. This paper highlights the requirement for further research on epigraphic trends by examining the roles of familia and grief in a more precise epigraphic context. This ultimately leads us to a more complicated picture of Roman society and calls for a reassessment of the freedman's epigraphic habit.

Speaker 3: Gabriela Ingle, University of Edinburgh

Christian identity in the Vatican Necropolis? The case of the tomb of the Julii.

In 1574, during the rebuilding of the Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican, some workers accidentally entered an ancient tomb situated underneath the church's foundations. The vault of the monument was beautifully decorated with a colourful mosaic that, as they believed, depicted the victorious Christ in a chariot represented as Sol – the Sun God. The tomb was rediscovered in 1940s, and the interpretation confirmed by the contemporary researchers. The Christian character of both the image and the tomb itself was supported by the remains of the representations of Johan, the Good Shepherd and a fisherman that decorated the walls of the monument.

In 2009 the Christian interpretation of the monument was re-examined and eventually repudiated by Sven Hijmans in his extensive work on Sol-Invictus. In one of the chapters Hijmans argued that the depiction on the vault most likely represents Sol, not Jesus, and other images (i.e. Jonah and the Good Shepherd) are not necessary Christian as they also belonged to the pagan repertoire. In addition, Hijmans suggested a new interpretation of the decoration, which, in his opinion, represented the cosmos.

In this paper, I will re-investigate both the Christian and the pagan interpretations of the Christ-Sol mosaic. The Christian character of the tomb of the Julii has been emphasised by the Vatican authorities and the Christian researchers to confirm the religious settings for St. Peter's grave. On the other hand, the comparison of the images on the mentioned mosaic with the decoration of other Christian funerary monuments confirms their similarity. I will therefore suggest a new possible (more compromising) solution and provide a new identity for the tomb's commissioners.