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**Social Differentiation and Servile Identity: The *tabula* Inscriptions from Roman Columbarium Tombs**

Material evidence and epigraphic sources often convey a vivid picture of the social identity and organization of urban non-Elites in the early and high Empire. Recent scholarship has consequently shown growing interest towards the social, religious, and professional life of the lower echelons of Roman society, which is, paradoxically, equally well reflected in burial customs and commemoration of the dead. At Rome, slaves and ex slaves were often buried collectively in columbarium monuments, in which each burial niche was accompanied by a funerary epitaph. My presentation offers a statistical analysis of the demographic information of these *tabula* inscriptions, each recording the existence of an individual in a collective environment. Based on this epigraphic survey, I address how the inscriptions and monuments reflect and maintain social identity and ranking.

The *communis opinio* regarding the interpretation of columbarium tombs has accepted two observations: (1) the main purpose of the tombs' compact form is to meet increased cost of real estate by accommodating a maximum amount of burials in a confined space. (2) The internal orientation of the chamber tombs reflects a culture of reduced self-representation in the early imperial period. I offer an alternative to this interpretation: the function as collective burial spots, creating a communal identity for the buried individuals, is equally important. The quantity of epitaphs and their architectural setting show that the monuments continued to be a medium of presentation, but the audience had changed from public domain to circles of relatives and amici.

My presentation posits three essential constituents of a 'servile identity': social status, professional careers and familial relationships. These three variables characterize the users of columbarium monuments as socially homogeneous groups united and defined by shared burial spots. At the same time, one can differentiate between tombs that are, for example, different in clientele or construction date. Additionally, slight differences within particular monuments indicate that social differentiation was openly displayed in the tomb. Visible to everybody with access to the monument, *tabula* inscriptions thus define the identity of the deceased, with the background of ñ but also in contrast to ñ an assembly of dozens or even hundreds of other individuals. In this way, the burial monument provides a frame of reference for their living users who could see the deceased's social position reflected in a textual commemoration, but also the fittings, size and location of the burial niche. This approach thus reveals the interplay between textual and visual means to express and display a servile identity in the capital of an empire that was largely based on slave labor.