Chapter 5

From Corpse to Ancestor: The Role of Tombside Dining in the Transformation of the Body in Ancient Rome

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ABSTRACT This article uses the house tombs of the necropolis of Isola Sacra as case studies of a type of funerary monument in the Roman world whose form was intended to encourage the visitation of those charged with the duties of funerary ritual, in particular dining tombside. The location, layout and decoration of the house tomb, in particular the provision of an attractive, high-status and comfortable site for dining, speaks to the owner's concern for the attentive and continuing presence of relatives and dependents to tend to the ancestral cult. Furthermore, the placement of these tombs on crowded and highly visible sites suggests that the post-burial banquets, dictated by custom and calendar, were viewed as publicly interactive performance intended to be viewed by the larger community.

Introduction

On specific festival days of the Roman calendar, cities of the dead swelled with the living as Romans traveled out to necropoleis and held funerary banquets in or near monuments to their beloved dead. These semi-annual banquets were the key ritual action for the transformation of the dead from polluted body to sanctified ancestor, and suggest this change in status was not fixed after burial rites and interment, but had to be perpetually renewed and renegotiated post-mortem.

Dining with the dead in the Roman world was a ritual activity insistent in its denial of the corpse and affirmation of the ancestral spirit in need of actual and symbolic sustenance, and this act of propriation and provision formed the second element in the transformation, the creation of memory. The strongest physical evidence for the importance of this ritual comes from those tombs that encouraged visitation and dining by providing an appealing, high status and comfortable site for the banquet.

The layout and decoration of one particular type of funerary monument built in and around Rome in the second and third-centuries was a direct response to this desire by the owner for a living audience to remember and dine with the deceased. While the tomb facade engaged and presented information to an external audience that can be generally characterized as the both the "casual passerby" and those arriving tombside for ritual, the interior was for the latter only, visitors with some tie to the deceased. The decoration of the interior space with frescoes, stucco and mosaic enhanced the experience of being inside the tomb and rewarded those who visited by providing an attractive space in which to make offerings.

The form of the monument as a collective tomb with loci for a number of individual burials was also a meaningful part of its communication to this "internal" audience, and for those who entered the tomb the message was pointed. Most of the visitors to the monument were also likely future occupants, and viewing the niches not yet filled would be for them a reminder of a promise extended by the tomb owner in exchange for their attendance to the needs of those already interred within.

The Roman House Tomb

The second and third-century tombs of Isola Sacra and the Vatican Necropolis are the best-preserved examples of this type of collective tomb, given the modern name "house tomb". Its form is derived from an earlier communal tomb type called a columbarium, in particular small-scale, above-ground columbaria built for either a family or a *collegium*, a professional, social or burial club. The popularity of the house tomb as a monument type is supported by examples found within many of the necropoleis skirting Rome, including those near the Via Taranto, Via Salaria, Via Ostiense, Via Appia, Porta Portuense and the Circonvallazione Gianicolense. The largest number of extant tombs survives at Isola Sacra, a cemetery along the west side of the Via Severiana between Portus Augusti and Ostia, while the best-preserved examples (with the exception of the roofs) exist in the Vatican Necropolis underneath St. Peter's in Rome.

Figure 1. Isola Sacra, Tombs 75, 77. Photo Regina Gee.

The general appearance of this type of mausoleum is as follows. They are aboveground chambers, barrel or cross-vaulted, square or rectangular in plan, with niches for both inhumation and cremation burials lining the interior walls. By the middle of the second century, house tombs had fairly standardized dimensions, typically ten by ten, twenty by twenty, or ten by twelve Roman feet. The earliest examples date to the Trajanic-Hadrianic period (98-138) and feature concrete exteriors faced with a combination of *opus reticulatum* and brick, with an increasing number of brick-faced facades appearing by the Antonine period (139-180). The principle façade, usually faced with a fine–grained red brick, is typically arranged with a central door framed by a travertine jamb and sills, a marble titulus inset above the door, and splayed windows either flanking or cut into the titulus (Fig.1).

Decorative architectural elements embellishing the tomb facades include projecting architraves above the door, marble insets for the windows, terracotta frames of varying degrees of elaboration around the titulus and windows, and an entablature, in some cases "supported" by pilasters of projecting brick. Several tombs from Isola Sacra and a single example from the Vatican Necropolis feature decorative terracotta plaques inserted into the facade near the top of the doorframe and the entablature (Fig. 2). Where extant examples of the upper section exist, a triangular pediment topped the façade.

The most common facing materials for the interior of house tombs were reticulate and block work in the earliest examples from the Trajanic/Hadrianic period, changing to brick or brick and block work by the Antonine period, always covered with stucco and painted.

Many feature the generous use of molded stucco to create architectural frames around individual loculi, figurative friezes, and coffered ceilings. Frescoes enliven the spaces between niches as well as their interiors, and draw from the established decorative repertoire for both house and tomb of simple floral/vegetal motifs, animals, birds, portraits of the deceased and mythological scenes. The majority of extant pavements are black and white mosaics of geometric and vegetal designs. Examples of black and white and, less frequently, polychrome mosaic pavements with more ambitious figural designs survive from both Isola Sacra and the Vatican Necropolis, and the subjects include hunt scenes, Nilotic landscapes with pygmies, mythological scenes, and representations of the seasons.

The Tomb Owners

Inscriptional evidence tells us the owners of these tombs were almost without exception male and the head of household, and the names suggest that for the most part the occupants were non-elite but prosperous Romans, often freedmen or descendants of freedmen. In the text of the titulus, the public record of who was and could be buried within, the builder identifies himself as the dedicant and names his blood kin and his freedmen and their descendents as the group for whom he is providing a tomb. Occasionally, the tomb owner gave a space within a tomb as a gift to a friend of the family, and there are

Figure 2. Isola Sacra, Tomb 100. Photo Regina Gee.

also recorded instances of the sale of unused space within the family tomb as when at Isola Sacra, Valeria Trophime sold part of the enclosure in front of her tomb to C. Galgestius Helius.[1]

The function of these monuments as a sort of architectural invitation to visit, dine and remember may have held increased importance for this group in Roman society, members of the *libertini* or freedman class. Legally, former slaves did not have a *familia* with its attendant history and thus lacked the personal and societal connection to ancestors Romans used as the foundation supporting the duties of creating and tending memory. Their response was to fashion a history for themselves to the best of their ability, using the immediate network of kin and dependents as the lynchpin holding together their post-mortem transformation into ancestral spirits needing tending and sustenance. In addition to relatives, the freedmen and freedwomen of the deceased, connected to the dead through ties of obligation and loyalty, were often responsible for carrying out these visits to the tomb. There are also descriptions, like that of Artemidorus, of instances in which friends of the deceased, sometimes members of the same *collegium*, gathered at the "dwelling of the deceased" for a memorial dinner (*Oneirocritica* 5.82).

The House Tomb as *Monumentum*

The examination that follows considers these house tombs within the context of visitation, funerary ritual and activity relating to the cult of the dead in and around the tomb in the hope of elucidating the relationship between the appearance of these tombs and their function. This kind of analysis brings to the forefront the fundamental nature of the tomb as a *monumentum*, something built to evoke memory. As a *monumentum,* the house tomb functioned in several ways. It created a record of existence for a group of individuals. While the tomb itself did not architecturally resemble a Roman house, it did preserve the social hierarchy of familial relationships and in this sense, as Nicholas Purcell notes, the house tomb was more domus than insula in spirit (Purcell 1987:39).

[1] For the inscription see H. Thylander, *Inscriptions du Port d'Ostie* (Lund, 1951-2), 124.

Figure 3. Isola Sacra, Tombs 72, 73. Photo Regina Gee.

By looking at where the name was written, on the exterior titulus, for example, versus below a row of identical niches on the back wall, visitors could understand the relative importance of each individual within the larger family. In addition – and this aspect has been under examined in discussions of this type of monument – the house tomb offered a location or staging area near witnesses to the actions which build memory.

The concern for the perpetuation of the memory of the deceased in Roman funerary art has drawn the attention of several scholars in recent years. Penelope Davies discusses the particularly Roman concern with creating a "living memory" by means of funerary monuments, which were blatantly manipulative in their pleas for attention (Davies 96: 49-52 pp.). Michael Koortbojian's treatment of late republican and early imperial funerary reliefs erected by freedmen and their descendants focuses on the complex relationship among text, image and viewer in the evocation of memory (Koortbojian 1996:210-234 pp.). For a number of reasons the chamber tomb was an architectural form well suited to participate in the exercise of drawing the gaze in the pursuit of *memoria*. Romans who purchased them could employ a variety of enticements including size, decoration and unique design features to encourage an external viewer to pause long enough to look at the monument and read the deceased's name. The attention of a person in the vicinity could be captured by the scale of the mausoleum, impressive in its sheer size whether standing alone or in a row of similar tombs. Builders focused attention on the principle facade through fine brickwork and the architectural decoration described earlier of entablatures, pilasters topped with terra-cotta capitals, and terra-cotta frames around the windows, and titulus. In some examples, attention to the decorative potential of the facade included using different colors for the brickwork, warm yellow for the pilasters, for example, against a red background (Fig.3).

An important part of the visual presentation was the titulus, the title deed, prominently and centrally displayed above the door in most cases. The titulus contained the all-important *nomen*, the tie that legally bound the tomb to a particular individual and spoke publicly of patronage and provision. The common placement of the titulus directly above the door, use of white marble to create a contrast to the surrounding red brick/terracotta frame and formulaic funerary inscription worked together to ensure the information was easy to find and to read (Fig. 1).

Figure 4. Isola Sacra, Tomb 87. Photo Regina Gee.

The importance of addressing viewers through the titulus is made clear on tomb 97 at Isola Sacra. Although the door is on the side of the monument, the titulus remains centrally placed on the wall facing the road, oriented toward the greatest number of potential viewers (Fig. 4).

The House Tomb as Site for Ritual Activity

Feast days listed on the official calendar as well as unofficial annual occasions regularly brought Romans out to the necropoleis encircling the city. Within the context of these semi-annual visits, the house tomb can be characterized as a locus for the staging of ritual.
While funerary cult practice was private in the sense that the family and friends performed the necessary activities, elements of the Roman constructions surrounding public performance, audience, and spectacle were also present. Moving in and out of the house tombs with lights, incense, flowers and offerings of food and drink, and dining outside in the tomb precinct were highly visible activities. The location of the tombs on publicly accessible land allowed individuals to be seen performing their roles properly in front of an audience consisting of passersby on the nearby road and visitors to adjacent tombs. For these reasons, the enactment of ritual tombside does not fit easily into the category of either private or public activity, but rather belongs to the more mutable area of Roman social performance that combined aspects of both.

Like the rituals surrounding the funeral itself, graveside dining was a dynamic performance enacted to articulate and fix proper relationships between the living and the dead, and one of a series of rituals surrounding the cult of the dead concerned with separation, transition, and transformation.[2] The initial graveside banquet in honor of the deceased, the *Silicernium*, took place very soon after

2 The series of ritual actions relating to proper burial included the ritual cleaning of the house (*exverrae*) after the removal of the body, the period of mourning (*feriae denicales)*, the sacrifice of a pig to Ceres which cleansed the family of pollution and made the grave legal (porta *praesentanea*), and the ritual of cleaning and purification with fire and water after the funeral for those who had participated in the interment (*suffito*).

the burial.[3] The *Cena Novendialis,* held the ninth day after interment, marked the end of the immediate post-burial period and the family's imminent return to society. Other traditional days for a sojourn to the cemeteries are listed in the epitaph of a Roman who made financial provisions for sacrifices in his memory on four annual occasions: his *dies natales*, the *Rosaria*, the *Violaria*, and the *Parentalia*.[4] Of these, the *Parentalia*, also referred to as the *dies Parentales* or *dies Ferales*, was the only commemoration listed on the *Fasti,* the official calendar drawn up by the Rome's pontiffs. The *Parentalia* emphasized the role of near relations in honoring the memory of dead kinfolk. The final day of the *Parentalia* was called the *Caristia* or *Cara Cognati* and featured another meal at the tomb held in honor of the "dear kin".

Eating and drinking at the burial site, a tradition whose beginnings in the Roman world dates to between the twelfth and ninth centuries B.C.E., was integral to funerary cult practice (Torelli 1987: 27). Words relating to visits to the tomb included refreshment (*refigeratio* or *refrigerium*) and in numerous examples of tomb decoration the theme of *refrigerium* is represented by one of the most ubiquitous motifs in Roman funerary art, two birds flanking a vessel. There are also representations of banqueting painted on the walls of tombs, and although some of these scenes may refer to the hoped-for pleasures of the afterlife, others seem to represent a meal enjoyed by the living. Funerary inscriptions encouraging the visitors to eat and drink are not uncommon, and the act of communal dining included consideration of the dead as well as the living. Pouring wine, honey, milk or blood into the container holding the remains of the deceased, often by means of a lead or terracotta tube inserted into the cinerary receptacle or sarcophagus, was a ritual act that reconnected the dead to the living in the context of the shared act of feasting. There are examples of chairs in the tomb for the deceased, inscriptions inviting the dead to share the refreshment, and in least one example the deceased is referred to as the host of the banquet who has invited guests to dine at his tomb.[5] Visually, this idea of the ancestral spirit extending an invitation to visitors is charmingly embodied at Tomb 43 at Isola Sacra, which features an inlaid terracotta image of the deceased standing at the open door of his tomb, his hand extended in a gesture of welcome (Fig 5.).

A consideration of the tomb furnishings and the nature of the refreshment consumed helps give a sense of the experience of banqueting as funerary cult practice. Within the cemeteries flanking Rome, examples of tombs with *biclinia*, masonry dining couches, survive at Isola Sacra (tombs 15, 86). Some evidence for dining facilities comes from inscriptions, such as two found near Rome which describe tombs with kitchens, wells and dining benches (*CIL* 6.8860, 6.29958). For those tombs that did not have benches built as part of the structure, another possibility is portable furniture brought to the tomb site, and in these instances the visitors may have forgone the more aristocratic and festive reclining dining position in favor of sitting at a table on chairs or benches (Hermansen 1989:44). A third-century funerary inscription dedicated to a woman named Secundula is useful for its discussion of the arrangement of a suitable space for dining and conversation. The dedicant, her son, describes creating a place for "passing the evening in pleasant talk" by covering the altar that marks Secundula's tomb with a stone tabletop to hold food and drink and piling cushions around it (*ILCV* 1570).

Although several ancient sources propose simple food as suitable offerings to the deceased, the living participants of the banquet did not limit themselves to the salted corn or lentils considered sufficient for the shades, and Lucian writes with a certain bemusement of the costly picnics carried to the grave, and questions whether the shades ever get their portion (*Charon* 22). Petronius lists expensive delicacies prepared for a fictional *Cena Novendialis*, and like any good satirist, must have drawn his observations from the foibles of contemporaries (*Satyricon* 65). Besides this literary evidence for fine dining, we have the physical remains of afore-mentioned cooking and preparation areas in or near tombs. The illumination of the site with torches and ceramic lamps is also documented. Practical considerations accepted – banquets typically occurred at night – there is evidence for the importance of lights within the cult of the dead, and candelabra as part of the typical furniture of the tomb.[6] To this environment created for comfortable, torch-lit dining alfresco one must add flowers. Although primarily intended as offerings to the dead, the garlands attached to altars and scatterings of the traditional funerary flowers of roses and violets no doubt gave sensory pleasure to the visitors as well.

This consideration of amenities for the living did not alter the essential concerns with ancestral worship and propriation during the graveside visits. Rather, when

[3] Festus Paulus describes the *Silicernium* as a kind of sausage, *quo fletu familia purgabatur*. See H. Lindsay, "Eating with the Dead: the Roman Funerary Banquet," in *Meals in a Social Context: Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and the Roman World*, eds. I. Nielsen and H. Nielsen, (Aarhus, 1998), 72.

[4] *die natalis sui et rosationis et violai et parentalib* (*ILS* 8366).

[5] For the deceased as the host of the banquet, R. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to the Eighth Centuries* (New Haven, 1997) 195; A.D. Nock, "Sarcophagi and Symbolism," *AJA* 50 (1946), 156. On stone chairs for the deceased in the tomb, see T. Klauser, *Die Cathedra im Totenkult der heidnischen und christlichen Antike* (Münster in Westfalen, 1927)13ff. An inscription found within a necropolis now within the grounds of the Villa Doria Pamphili in Rome expresses frank skepticism that the dead truly participated in the drinking *(ILS* 8156).

[6] Ovid's *Fasti,* 2.562, describes the torches that light up the grave (*habent alias maesta sepulcra faces*). There is also a funerary inscription mentioning the importance of light, *ut semper viglet lucerna nardo* (*CIL* 6.30102).

Figure 5. Isola Sacra, Tomb 56. Photo Regina Gee

Romans traveled to the tomb to banquet they brought with them the same social framework of convivial activity that shaped dining within the Roman house.

Inscriptional evidence together with early Christian writings on the subject of "inappropriate" behavior sheds light on the more ephemeral qualities of mood or atmosphere during these graveside visits.[7] The spirit of these graveside gatherings seems to have been cheerful, even somewhat boisterous, fueled perhaps by wine and good food.[8] The possibility of overindulgence is addressed as early as the republican period. Cicero in his discussion of Roman law notes with disapproval Romans moving away from the funerary laws of the Twelve Tables, with their prohibition of sumptuous display and drinking to excess (*De Legibus* 2.24). The fifth-century writings of early Christian leaders such as Augustine and Zeno, while not objective records of behavior, are nevertheless valuable sources of information.

Their writings reveal a struggle between absorption and rejection of the pagan burial customs that flowed almost seamlessly into Christian funerary ritual in particular activities surrounding martyr cults. Augustine writes of the practice of "banquets and carousing" on saints' feast days as a continuation of pagan graveside cult practice (*Contra Faustis* 20.21). Another commentary on the pagan tradition comes in the form of an admonition by Zeno, who found the customary heavy eating and drinking at graveside banquets inappropriate behavior for Christians (*Sermones* 1.16). After the banquet, some form of entertainment may have prolonged the convivial occasion, indicated by evidence of playing musical instruments, dancing and singing at the tomb (Quasten 1983: 153-60pp).

The Tomb as a Site for Spectacle

Although family, friends, and dependents were responsible for serving the memory of the deceased, it is a simplification to characterize the cult of the dead as private ritual. To do so does not consider Roman social

[7] The examination of early Christian funerary cult practice is useful given the continuity in the forms of ritual activity from pagan to early Christian. On the stability of these burial customs, see MacMullen, 110-120; P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago, 1981), 24-25.

[8] On the atmosphere of *hilaritas* as opposed to silence and sadness, see P. Testini, *Archeologia Christiana, Nozioni Generali dalle Origini alla Fine del Sec. VI* (Rome, 1958), 141.

constructions of performer and spectator, and more specifically those events that blurred distinctions between the roles. Recent scholarship examines the fluidity between the positions of viewer and viewed in the Roman world in a number of contexts, including public banquets, gladiatorial games, and funeral processions that carried the remains from house to tomb. One can add the series of post-burial visits dictated by custom and calendar to this list of publicly interactive performances. The public aspect of the cult of the dead arose due to the placement of the tombs along major thoroughfares and usually among other monuments, a location that increased the likelihood of an audience for the presence of visitors to the tomb.

The form and location of the chamber tombs of the Vatican Necropolis and Isola Sacra reveal their owners' desire for an audience. Tituli and external embellishments on facades oriented to the road signaled a desire to be looked at and commented upon. Utilization of the structure as a frame or backdrop against which visitors set up dining equipment and banqueted suggests this wish to draw the gaze was also present during the enactment of ritual. Under these circumstances, the tomb facade became a sort of *scaenae frons*, an architectural backdrop that enhanced the dignity and the theatricality of the banquet much like wall paintings of architectural "stage sets" in the Roman house. Even when the actual rites were not visible to non-participants, visitors arriving with flowers, food, libations and lamps, as well as the open door of the tomb itself, gave notice to anyone within the vicinity of the activity occurring at the site. Moreover, this observation was reciprocal in that during communal festivals individuals gathered at one monument could observe other families visiting nearby tombs and have their own presence witnessed in return. In some cases visual and verbal intercourse may have been heightened by relationships between families who had tombs near each other, as was probably the case for the Tombs F and L of the Vatican Necropolis, which both belonged to different members of the Caetennii family.

A particularly clear example of the public aspect of funerary ritual can be found at Tomb 15 of Isola Sacra. A *biclinium* is attached to the facade, one masonry bench for reclining on each side of the door, approximately eight meters east of the original Roman road (Fig. 6). From their position on the benches, the diners, framed by the monument behind them, would have been visible to travelers on the road as well as those Romans visiting the contiguous tombs to the north and south.[9] In addition, assuming the conventional position with the left arm supporting the body would give the diners on the northern bench a view of the contiguous tombs extending southward and vice-versa. A slight turn towards the west enabled the diners on both sides to view the road directly in front of them and complete the exchange of gazes between those at and those near the tomb.

This enactment of funeral ritual within public view defines the performance of some actions surrounding the cult of the dead in these exterior spaces as a type of *spectaculum*, in its original sense of something exposed to public view. Our contemporary perception of spectacle is both more scopophilic and pejorative than it was for Romans, for whom the experience of spectacle had a much stronger interactive element (Bergmann 1999: 10). The most commonly cited text concerning Roman funerary practice, the account by the Greek historian Polybius of the public funeral of a great man during the republican period, underscores the performative nature and high drama of the rites of this period, as the writer recounts with obvious admiration his witnessing of the *pompa*, the *laudatio*, and the animation of the ancestral *imagines* by actors (*Historiae.* 6.53). The Greek historian actually uses the word *theama*, spectacle, in his admiring description of the public funerary procession. Over time a shift occurred from this type of aristocratic funeral in the central civic space of the Forum to rites enacted within the private sphere of the house and the burial site. Written and visual evidence supports the contention that by the second century, the procession and oration as described by Polybius seem to exist no longer and the emphasis was on the *collocatio*, the laying-out ceremony in the atrium of the Roman house (Bodel 1999: 266). While the location and the primary audience change, continuity from the earlier public procession to the later private *collocatio* existed in the ties between mortuary rites, performance, and audience. Within funerary ritual taking place in the house, a sense of self-awareness concerning the performative aspects of mourning seems to have been present. Lucian criticized the extreme lamentations of the family at a *collocatio* because he believed their "over the top" performance was a calculated attempt to impress others present (*De Lucto* 10-15). The early second-century reliefs found on the tomb of the Haterii, often cited for the information they offer concerning funerary ritual, remind us of the presence of professional mourners and musicians, performers whose presence enhanced the *collocatio* through music and a hired display of grief.

This idea of spectacle is not limited to activity surrounding the *collocatio*, but extends to those repeated visitations to the tomb site throughout the year. The *Parentalia, Rosaria and Violaria*, were festival days that brought the populace en masse to the necropoleis surrounding the city at the same time every year in a repeated expression of collective identity. The rhythmic repetition of the festivals of the *Fasti* orchestrated individuals over vast areas to follow an annually recurring cycle of ceremonies as the establishment of shared experiences among various audiences (Bergmann 1999:22). One can imagine that on these days the cities of

[9] L. Bek proposes an imperial model for performative or self-conscious dining in her discussion of the octagonal hall of the Domus Flavius as a *triclinium* whose arrangement facilitated "people watching from the wings", see "*Questiones Convivales*, The Idea of the Triclinium and the Staging of Convivial Ceremony from Rome to Byzantium," *ARID* 12 (1998): 90.

Figure 6. Isola Sacra, Tomb 15. Photo Regina Gee.

the dead would be filled with the living, as Romans spread out from the city into the suburbs to perform the required rituals at the site of the tomb. On festival days, the sheer numbers of Romans in the necropoleis heightened the synchronism between performer and audience, as visitors simultaneously held the positions of viewer and viewed.

It is not necessary to leave out those more individual visits to the tomb, those on the *Silicernium*, and *Cena Novendialis*. These occasions place the family and friends again at the charged locus of the tomb, but in these instances the most likely audience was the passer-by on the road rather than other families engaged in the same activity. In the case of those tombs within the field of vision of someone moving along the thoroughfare, the traveler's attention might be pulled or heightened by the contrast presented between the tomb that was a lively and lit space, full of movement and the sound of voices, and the quiet "unanimated" monuments surrounding it.

As an architectural setting for the performance of ritual activity, the chamber tomb is notable for the extent to which it blurred the distinctions between passive monument and active space, public performance and private duty, spectator and audience, and finally communal and individual. A question remains regarding the reason for this desire to pull the public gaze onto what was essentially a private ritual. Why was there a desire to watch and to be watched in return?

One possible answer lies within an expansion of the idea of the transformative role of memory mentioned in the introduction. On the individual level, the presence of witnesses created a memory of the event simply by viewing it and the larger the audience the greater the potential for the creation of an event memory. Considering the idea of collective memory, the enactment of funerary rites within public view, especially when synchronized by festivals, had the power to display the overall stability and wellbeing of the community. A temporal system – in the example of funerary ritual fixed formally by the *Fasti* and informally by personal anniversaries – has the power to co-ordinate experience and creates a communal identity (Kondoleon 1999: 321). Of all of the rituals enacted within Roman society, those revolving around the treatment of the dead were the most deeply engrained, as the Fathers of the Early Christian Church could attest, continually frustrated in their attempts to move people away from pagan funerary practice.

To consider the chamber tomb in the context of ritual visitation, the expense of the monument expressed hope in the continued appearance of those with the charge of tending the memory of the deceased. Even when inactive, silent with the doors closed, the form of the house tomb with its provision of space for multiple interments and an attractive staging area for ritual communicated the idea that visitors had come and gone, and would come and go again in the future. The performative aspects of the funerary ritual enacted at the tomb site had resonance beyond individual families, if one understands ritual as ceremonial performances that aid in holding a large and

ethnically diverse society together. An important function of bringing private or domestic ritual into the public sphere was to "calibrate the concerns of the community as a whole onto those of the family and vice-versa" (Beard, North and Price 1998: 51). Witnessing and being witnessed in return was a way of participating in communal identity while at the same time, through acts of *pietas*, contributing to the stability of the community itself.

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