DEATH IN ROMAN MARCHE, ITALY:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BURIAL RITUALS

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ABSTRACT

Graves have been an important source of information for the social and religious landscape of the Romans. The assortment of items, from coins and lamps to a variety of ceramic bowls and plates, have been used at different times as evidence of the relative wealth of the dead and as a means of recreating the social structure of the burying community. Over the last two decades, however, the classical archaeologists have begun to seek methods of recording objects within graves in order to better recreate the ritual actions behind their placement.

While new methods are being developed to better excavate and report Roman graves, very few studies have successfully constructed burial rituals from older reports of excavated cemeteries. The result is a large corpus of unmined data. The intent of this thesis is to examine the funerary rituals practiced from the end of the first century B.C.E. to the end of the third century C.E. at a series of cemeteries in Marche, Italy. These cemeteries were published by the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici delle Marche in the 1970’s and 1980’s. The primary research questions that guide this study are how to distinguish different funerary rituals from the excavated material and whether any regional trends in burial rituals are evident. By developing and applying a method of reconstructing the rituals from the grave objects, this study concludes that, although a variety of burial rituals were practiced within each cemetery, certain larger regional trends are in fact evident.