COLLEGIAS AND MORTUARY ARCHAEOLOGY: IDENTIFYING THE NON-ELITE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

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In many archaeological contexts, it can be incredibly difficult to identify the non-elite of a given population. Furthermore, even in cases where it may be possible to distinguish elite versus non-elite, it is rarely possible to understand anything about the social identity of these people in terms of social network, occupation, and so on. In the context of the pre-Christian Roman Empire (~27 BC – AD 476)\(^1\), this non-elite category includes the vast majority of the population, including a ‘middle class’ composed of a blend of non-elite Roman citizens and freedmen. Given the importance of social status and social memory in imperial Rome, this provides mortuary archaeologists with a very unique framework in which to investigate identity of the non-elite ‘middle class’, as revealed through funerary remains. In particular, this subgroup is known to have developed very unique social networks in the form of collegia, funerary and professional clubs of the non-elite. Consequently, I intend to investigate whether the existence of these collegia can be used to identify this sub-group of people in a mortuary context using archaeological, epigraphic, and literary evidence. Furthermore, it is worth investigating what knowledge can be gained about the identities of the so-called ‘middle-class’ of the Roman Empire from a mortuary context, using collegium membership as a means of investigating the social networks of these individuals.

### Problems with evidence

Archaeology is constantly plagued by a lack of evidence; in contrast, the study of the Roman Empire has a relative wealth of information, including archaeological, epigraphic, and literary data. Nonetheless, there remain a number of problems in the interpretation of this evidence. In particular, inscriptive and papyrological evidence provide only a snapshot in time of a very specific event, which can result in gross misinterpretation when these bits of information are pieced together. As a result, drawing conclusions from this type of evidence requires a relatively synchronic view, connecting these snapshots into a larger picture that may ignore time depths of hundreds of years. Moreover, the Roman Empire covered an incredibly large terrain over Europe, Asia Minor, and North Africa, yet the evidence is not evenly distributed, meaning that a certain amount of carefully applied geographic assimilation is required. Given the nature of the evidence, most of this research will focus roughly on the late 1\(^{st}\) c. BC to the early 3\(^{rd}\) c. AD, as the height of Roman epigraphy was in the first and second centuries AD (Meyer 1990:74).

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\(^1\) While many archaeologists would refrain from using BC/AD, in preference of using the BCE/CE format, the literature on Roman material still very much conforms to the old system.
In this study, much of the information comes from epitaphs, and other inscriptive evidence on *collegia* collected in the Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL) and the seminal work of Waltzing (1968 [1896]). Unfortunately, from an archaeologist’s perspective, most of these epitaphs are no longer *in situ*, making the context difficult to reconstruct, which serves to accentuate the importance of studying the tombstones and their epitaphs in great detail (Tupman 2004:125). Epitaphs are an important, and indeed are the predominant, source of information for the Roman provinces of this period (Meyer 1990:74). They are, furthermore, of particular importance in studying the non-elite of Roman society, since this group is generally not well-represented in the literary evidence, while epitaphs allowed these individuals (and/or their family, colleagues, etc.) to represent themselves, within the confines of the conventional format for funerary inscriptions (Joshel 1992:5,7). Importantly, Roman epitaphs are relatively unique in that they include not only the name of the deceased, but also tend to include the name of the commemorator, as well as additional information such as the age, occupation, and individual achievements of the deceased (Meyer 1990:75). Of particular importance here is that membership to a particular *collegia* is also sometimes included, either in reference to the commemorators erecting the tombstone/plaque or within the deceased individual’s accomplishments.

One of the major hurdles of a study such as this is that the various streams of evidence have not been brought together to address this particular research problem. Consequently, this study will serve as a call to action for archaeologists and classicists alike to realize the immense potential for *collegia* and the study of identity. This is not to say that the evidence does not exist, but only that there has not been any attention given to how the institution of the *collegium* may aid in the identification of non-elite burials. Much of the difficulty lies in the multiple roles that the *collegium* played in Roman society; it acted as a professional collective, a socioeconomic equalizer, a communal society, and more (Ascough 2008, Kloppenborg 1996, Liu 2009, Van Nijf 1997). Despite this array of roles, the vast majority of the *collegia* seem to have been involved in the funerary rites of their members, as they helped these members and their families pay for their burial rites (Patterson 1995:19). Thus, many *collegia* had *columbaria* (tombs with collections of cinerary urns) or distinct graveyards, which had relatively uniform grave markers that may be, identified archaeologically (Pitts 2007:708). This archaeological and epigraphic evidence must be examined in conjunction with documentary and literary evidence of the social structure and law of imperial Rome, as well as with evidence of the importance of a proper burial and social memory to Roman society, in order to gain an understanding of how proper funerary rites were important to various segments of the Roman population, and how *collegia* were involved in these rites. Upon identifying *collegia* in the archaeological record, it becomes necessary to understand the identity of their members, using membership as a
means of investigating social networks, status, and so on.

**The importance of memory and proper burial for Roman society**

Despite the wealth of mortuary information from the Roman period, there is a problem with the evidence insofar as there is no existing general description of average Roman funerary practices (Hopkins 1983:203). Nevertheless, a quick evaluation of the ancient sources of the Roman Empire reveals an overarching concern about the fate of an individual’s body after death. For instance, the Twelve Tables is a collection of early Roman law, dating to c.450 BC (Hope 2007). One section discusses Roman burial law, and there is no evidence suggesting that these laws changed much over the centuries. In this collection, both inhumation and cremation are listed as acceptable funerary rites. That said, Hope acknowledges that, “by the 1st c. BC cremation appears to have been the most commonly practiced rite in Rome, although inhumation was retained by some of the older families,” (Hope 2007:109). This trend shifted again towards inhumation in the second century AD, beginning in Rome and spreading to the provinces (Hope 2007:110).

Overall, what emerges from Roman burial law and practice is not a particular concern with to whether cremation or inhumation was done, as both were practiced, but rather just that it was disposed of properly (Hope 2007:107). Indeed, annual festivals including the *Lemuria* and *Parentalia* “were held in order to appease the shades of individuals who had not received proper burial,” (Graham 2005:63). In both the Republican and Imperial Roman periods, anonymous burials were regarded with abhorrence (Patterson 1995:16). At its most minimal, a proper burial required a symbolic covering of the remains with earth (Graham 2005:63). The intention behind this symbolic covering is to house and protect the dead; even modest graves were generally designed to minimize any disturbance to the body, with materials such as tiles, stone, or amphorae used to create a protective structure around the remains (Graham 2005:64).

In conjunction with a proper burial, the dead were to be remembered. “Foundations, benefactions, tombs and epitaphs all sought to promote the memory of the deceased, to confer some sort of immortality,” (Hope 2007:71). Funerary monuments served as a medium for displaying status and identity, while funerary activities acted as a means of commemoration so the dead would remain among the world of the living (Graham 2005:66). Ritual banquets were held at various times of year, events which were of, “not only religious significance but also played a crucial role in processes of competition and negotiation, as well as identity display, creation and legitimacy and provided an opportunity for social interaction with a diverse range of people,” (Graham 2005:64). Overall, proper burial and commemoration were of the utmost importance to the Roman people, and many *collegia* provided an

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2 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 7.54.187

3 Martial, *Epigrams*, viii, 75
important service by their involvement in the funerary rites of their members.

**What is a collegium?**

The Latin term *collegium/collegia* can be roughly translated as association or collective (Gibbs 2011). Given this broad translation, it is unsurprising that the term has been applied to a variety of organizations. For instance, it is often used to describe the four Roman priestly colleges: the *augures, pontifices, quindecimviri sacris faciundis*, and *septemviri epulones* (Gibbs 2011, Kloppenborg 1996:16). Consequently, Kloppenborg (1996:16) distinguishes between two large types of *collegia*: the first type, including the priestly colleges, is comprised of sacerdotal colleges and sacred sodalities, while the second type includes all other private associations, which are the topic of this study. These private associations were organized based on occupation, religious cult, or neighborhood, among others (Patterson 1995:18, Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo 2003:237). Though the sources do not articulate what defines a *collegium*, it has been uncovered that many required a minimum of three members, an administrative organization, a name, bylaws and membership requirements, and a common treasury (Liu 2009:10). By and large, these organizations seem to have been used by the non-elite of Roman society, and *collegia* are never mentioned in relation to elite burials (Van Nijf 1997:66). To understand how these associations were regarded by the elite and society at large, it is useful to examine how they have been treated in Roman law.

**Collegia and Roman law**

Voluntary associations including *collegia* proliferated after the Hellenistic period and continued well into the imperial Roman period (Kloppenborg 1996:17). Indeed, it has been estimated that, at their height, one third of the urban Roman population may have belonged to *collegia*, though it is difficult to say how many of these had a funerary component (Patterson 1995:21). *Collegia* were not novel to the Imperial Roman period, and a timeline of Roman laws concerning *collegia* is useful to understanding how attitudes towards these associations changed, which may be reflected in the prevalence of mortuary evidence of *collegia* over time.

*Collegia* became prominent in the mid-60s BC, but were abolished in 64 BC due to concerns that they were counter to the Roman constitution, politically dangerous and could be used as a revolutionary tool (Arnaoutoglou 2002:30, Patterson 1995:19). Ironically, they were then reinstated in 58 BC by Publius Clodius as a political move to gain public support, but once again prohibited by Julius Caesar and Augustus in the late first century BC (Patterson 1995:19, Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo 2003:236). This last prohibition excluded those *collegia* which were religious or which were of historical importance. During the imperial period, attitudes towards these organizations continued to be suspicious, as bans were imposed and reimposed in AD 41-54, c. AD 54-68, and AD 98-117.

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It is important to note, however, that these laws do not seem to have been applied indiscriminately across the Empire (Arnaoutoglou 2002:28). For instance, a decree from AD 32-37 banned associations, but was applied only to Roman Egypt, as this province was particularly suspect for revolt. Even in this instance, there is evidence of associations in Alexandria from around this time period (Arnaoutoglou 2002:33). Overall, the changing attitudes towards *collegia* over time may be reflected in their prevalence in the archaeological and epigraphic record.

**Collegia and identity**

*Collegia and legal status*

Modern scholars have often equated social identity with legal status, namely citizenship (Joshel 1992, Laurence 1998:2). Indeed this extrapolation is not entirely unwarranted, given its paramount importance in Roman society; an individual’s legal status had implications for all aspects of their daily life. The non-elite of Rome includes individuals of a range of legal statuses, namely freedmen, slaves, and plebeians or *humiliores*, while in the provinces this category includes all of the indigenous non-Romans (except perhaps those in administrative positions, at least after the rule of Hadrian in 117 AD), making it an exceptionally large category of inhabitants in the Roman Empire (Van Nijf 1997:3, Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo 2003:49-50, 342). This study focuses on neither the elite nor the poorest of the non-elite, but a sort of ‘middle class’. Unfortunately, this term crosses both social and economic boundaries, since members of this group can also include very wealthy, non-elite individuals (Liu 2009:162). It is also important to note that the term ‘middle class’ is one with many modern connotations that make it difficult, if not inappropriate, to apply in the context of the Roman Empire. For the purposes of this study, however, it will be used to encompass the sub-group of the population that includes any of the non-elite that could afford the membership fees of a *collegium* (Patterson 1995:21).

Lastly, it is important to note that females remain poorly represented in this type of study; this may be primarily due to the fact that *collegia* membership was usually limited to men (Kloppenborg 1996:25).

Gaius, a Roman jurist, concisely provides the distinctions of legal status recognized in Roman society:

The primary distinction in the law of persons is this, that all men are either free or slaves. Next, free men are either *ingenui* (freeborn) or *libertini* (freedmen). *Ingenui* are those born free, *libertini* those manumitted from lawful slavery. [Gaius, *Institutes*, I.9-11 from Joshel 1992:25]
These distinctions had repercussions for all aspects of an individual’s life in terms of rights, obligations, and power (Joshel 1992:26). The *lex Julia* of 90 BC granted full citizenship to all Latins and Italians, in addition to those inhabitants of Rome who already held citizenship (Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo 2003:174). Citizenship was consequently based mainly on birth, being born free in the Italian provinces. Within the category of *ingenui*, there was a further hierarchy based on prestige and wealth (Joshel 1992:28). Most notable is the division between the patricians, the elite or (in the later imperial period) *honestiores*, and the plebeians, the ordinary citizens or *humiliores* (Momigliano and Lintott 2009). Though the legal distinctions between these two groups changed over the course of the Roman Republic and Empire, the social differences remained distinct.

Less prestigious still were slaves and freedmen. Slaves were drawn from among war captives and provincials, as well as from the poorest of the populace (Joshel 1992:29). Unsurprisingly, these individuals were treated with varying degrees of kindness and cruelty from their masters. Nonetheless, manumission was frequent in imperial Rome, though the Emperor Augustus taxed masters for this service, as well as limiting the number of slaves that could be freed (Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo 2003:268,374). The legal status of ‘freedman’ was recognized in the time of the late Republic, and attitudes changed towards them over the development of the Roman Republic and Empire (Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo 2003:50). Freedmen, like citizens, could carry varying amounts of wealth, but unlike citizens, had limited rights and were often regarded as second class, even after they were given nominal citizenship in AD 212 (Honoré 2009, Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo 2003:374). Hence, like the distinction between plebeian and patrician, while legally freedmen may have eventually been granted similar rights, the social stigma attached to their status remained (Joshel 1992:32).

While legal status had important implications for non-elite individuals in the imperial period, it has been argued that formal citizenship became less important as a means of identification at this time. Instead, what is important in this period is this distinction between elite and non-elite, a hierarchy that is related to, and which ran parallel to, legal status. It can be said that the non-elite were continually striving to emulate the elite by creating an internal social hierarchy. Indeed, “the funeral epigraphy of the social commemorators was used not as a forum for protest against the social hierarchy, but as a demonstration of adherence to elite principles of classification,” (Van Nijf 1997:59). Both legal status and the elite/non-elite division had important implications in *collegia*, as these associations were generally confined to the non-elite, while often maintaining an internal social hierarchy, based on both legal and economic status.
What role did collegia serve for the non-elite?

As illustrated above, these collegia were clearly prominent in Roman society and served a number of roles for their members, providing a link between work, family life, and the rest of society (Van Nijf 1997:5). To a large degree, they may have just acted as a social venue for the Roman middle class (Potts 2009:66). For instance, communal dining seems to have been an important social function of collegia (Ascough 2008:34). On the other hand, one major function for many collegia was to act as a professional association, serving a more economic purpose (Liu 2009:83). Moreover, collegia allowed the non-elite to enforce a group identity, while simultaneously creating their own social hierarchy. For instance, collegia often celebrated their own holidays in addition to the civic holidays, creating a distinct group identity, while also imposing an internal administrative hierarchy (Verboven 2007:869-870). Given this echoing of civic order within the structure of the collegium, it is unsurprising that they could serve as a political tool and were often regarded with suspicion, as outlined above.

Most importantly here, however, is the funerary involvement of these associations. Whether all collegia had a funerary aspect is debatable (Kloppenborg 1996:18), but is more or less irrelevant in this discussion for the simple reason that we are mainly looking at funerary remains, and therefore, de facto, those collegia that had some funerary involvement, or at can at least be discerned through these material remains.

Proper burial was of utmost important to Roman society, and joining a collegium helped to ensure that the proper rites were carried out (Hope 2007:87). An inscription from Lanuvium, Italy in AD 136 illustrates the regulations of one collegium: members were required to pay into the treasury to cover their burial costs, which would be withheld if they were to default on their payments or if they committed suicide. Other inscriptions have indicated that, as part of their proper burial, other members of the collegium would be involved in other funerary activities, as well as commemoration after burial. For instance, papyrological evidence of an association of salt-dealers from Tebtunis, Egypt in the first century AD outlines regulations for involvement in funerary banquets for deceased colleagues (Van Nijf 1997), while other inscriptions indicate how in certain cases, a member could pay for his fellow collegium members to dine at his tomb once a year (Hopkins 1983:233). This evidence is indicative of the wish to present a group identity of solidarity, an identity which was displayed to the public (Van Nijf 1997:53).

From a strictly functionalist perspective, collegia served to help

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6 CIL XIV 2112, 20-41. See Appendix 1 for the entirety of the inscription.
7 P. Mich 5,243: “May health prevail, [but] if one of the members dies, let all be shaved and let them hold a banquet (HESTIATOSON) for one day, each bringing at once 1 drachma and 2 loaves, and in the case of other bereavements, let them hold a banquet for one day. Let him who is not shaven in case of a death be fined 4 drachmas. Whoever has taken no part in the funeral and has not placed a wreath on the tomb shall be fined 4 drachmas,” (Van Nijf 1997:52).
8 CIL XI 5047
provide individuals with funerary expenses. Funerals were expensive, and *collegia* allowed members to gradually pay into a centralized burial fund (Hope 2009:31). *Collegia* worked with any heir or family members to ensure a proper burial:

If a member died without leaving a family, he would be buried by the club and saved from the ignominy and anonymity of a pauper’s burial. If on the other hand an heir did exist at the time of his death, the club would provide a sum of money for the heir to pay for the funeral […] or perhaps in some cases a niche in the club’s *columbarium*. [Patterson 1995:23]

In addition to an economic explanation, it has also been suggested that *collegia* helped to address the problem of land availability, as these associations often used collective burial chambers (*columbaria*) (Hopkins 1983:211-212). Unfortunately, this functionalist approach is unsatisfactory, as it is well-attested that the average member of a *collegium* was likely able to accommodate their own funerary expenses, while *columbaria* were not used exclusively by *collegia* for member burials (Van Nijf 1997:32). It is therefore more likely that burial by a *collegium* was a choice rather than always a necessity. Van Nijf (1997:34-35) suggests that burial by a *collegium* was used as a means of expressing social relationships; a standard necropolis had to be passed through to enter the city, providing a very visual expression, and conveying messages of socioeconomic status and identity.

Previous studies of Roman funerary monuments have demonstrated how these memorials can give particular social groups a prominence which may not have been reflected in life (Hope 2000:156). Indeed, the very institution of the *collegium* “offered wealthy merchants the change to exchange economic assets for symbolic assets and participate in a system where wealth could be linked to honor,” (Potts 2009:67). This may have been of particular importance for freedmen who may have joined a *collegium* at least partially in an attempt of attaining some degree of increased social status (Liu 2009:171). Unfortunately, this is difficult to prove since these individuals rarely advertised their legal status; this fact, however, may serve to strengthen the possibility that they were attempting to increase their status, since it is known that many freedmen were *collegia* members (Liu 2009:171).

**Collegia and mortuary archaeology**

Many mortuary studies of identity generalize across an entire cemetery, denying any heterogeneity or sub-groups within the cemetery population (Williams 1998:96). This is obviously an unrealistic representation. Indeed, cemeteries are often observed to be used as a forum for social negotiations, and often represent the sum of a complex network of relationships, which may obscure or highlight various aspects of a sub-group’s identity (Williams 1998:97,103). This is particularly true in the case of non-elite
collegia burials, which should be able to be recognized archaeologically. Unfortunately, however, there are as yet very few studies which examine collegia burials from the perspective of mortuary archaeology. Indeed, the archaeological context of these burials is rarely noted, an issue that should clearly be addressed, given the value of these burials for gaining insight into the identity of collegia members.

Columbaria and collegium graveyards

The whole of the evidence on collegia leads to the question of whether these organizations can be identified archaeologically through their funerary remains. Identifying burials of particular sub-groups of the non-elite using archaeological methods is of particular concern in the context of the Roman Empire, where other methods of mortuary archaeology may not be applied very fruitfully. Similar to the trend observed by Parker Pearson (1982:99) in relation to Victorian England, Imperial Rome saw a cap in ostentatious, elaborate burials among the elite (Van Nijf 1997:36). This trend makes it difficult to apply, for instance, Tainter’s (1978:125) method of energy expenditure to study status, which states that the amount of energy put into an individual’s burial is correlated to their social status in the group. This is not to say that status is not evident in Roman burials, only that differences between burials in terms of elaborateness may be relatively minimal, as the middle class began to emulate the funerary monuments of the elite (Van Nijf 1997:36-37).

Inscriptional evidence indicates that collegia often had their own place of burial, used only by members and sometimes their immediate family, especially sons and unmarried daughters (Pearce 1997:103, Van Nijf 1997:47). For instance, the association of Hercules Victor at Aquinum had a designated burial ground measuring 120 by 50 feet which could be recognized archaeologically (Patterson 1995:20-21).9 Other examples of identified burial areas of collegia include a set of inscribed member grave stelae from modern Hungary, dating to the late first century AD, from a collegium of quilt-makers and firemen (collegium fabrum et centonariorum)10 (Carroll 2006:47). Many collegia, particularly those in Rome itself, had columbaria (tombs with collections of cinerary urns) which would leave a very distinct archaeological signature, though other sub-groups of the population, such as slaves of a large household, are often associated with columbaria. Nonetheless, there is evidence which indicates how niches in these columbaria were assigned to collegia, as observed in one inscription where a man bequeaths 32 niches in one wall of a columbarium to a collegium of smiths and craftsmen.11 These specialized burial areas were

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9 CIL X 5386
10 While Carroll (2006) describes the collegium centonariorum as an association of firemen, see Liu (2009) for an analysis of how it is more likely to describe an association of textile workers who may be involved in firefighting.
11 CIL VI 9405. IK 23, 218 is another inscription indicating the assignment of columbarium space: “Epaphroditos, son of Hapalos, son of Perigones, has built for the association of flax-workers a vault situated at the right hand for those approaching the tomb. Anyone who has at any time been accepted shall be placed there by the association,” (Van Nijf 1997:43).
occasionally marked by horos, plaques indicating how these areas were maintained by particular collegia (Van Nijf 1997:43).

Once the burial area of a collegium is identified, an examination of the internal spatial arrangement could be indicative of hierarchies within the structure of the organization. This was observed in Roman Tyre, where a study of a collegium columbarium indicated that more elaborate and more prestigious locations were used by the more influential members of the organization (Van Nijf 1997:43). Analyzing the spatial distribution of these burials or niches within the larger context of the cemetery could also provide important clues to how these individual members or collegia were viewed by society. This is similar to studies in mortuary archaeology of the 1980s, which often examine how different burial areas express differences in rank and status (e.g. Brown 1981).

Another technique of mortuary archaeology which could be applied to the study of collegia is that of grave good analysis. Though the area is relatively uninvestigated, it is possible that the distribution of ceramic vessels in Roman British burials could be indicative of the presence of collegia. It is hypothesized that these societies would buy funerary ceramics in bulk, rather than on a per-burial basis, which could explain the relatively uniform distribution of these ceramics, not used for domestic purposes, in burials from Roman Britain (Biddulph 2005:37). Emerging from this survey of archaeological approaches is a sense that mortuary archaeology has not yet been consistently applied to the study of collegia, though this would be a fruitful avenue of research. Nevertheless, once collegia burials are identified, it may then be possible to study the identity of their members.

**Studying identity of collegia members from an archaeological context**

The study of identity from a mortuary context can often be fraught with difficulties and misconceptions: the identity of a deceased individual changes over the course of mortuary ritual, and the final portrayed identity may not reflected the lived identity (Pearce 1997:106). In the end, this final identity may reflect perceptions and opinions of the living mourners, rather than the any reality of the deceased individual. This is particularly pertinent in the context of collegia burials, where the collegium may have very particular motivations in terms of how they want to portray a member, as a representative of the larger group. Nonetheless, with this important caveat in mind, one can begin to draw inferences on the identity of collegium members from a mortuary setting, particularly in terms of how an individual’s social network can be reconstructed. Tombstones and their epitaphs are the “most permanent physical expression of an individual life,” and attitudes towards death (Tupman 2004:119). Moreover, in the context of the Roman Empire, tombstones were an important medium of commemoration for Romans of all statuses, though status may have limited memorial choice, as observed in the use of cupae monuments by the non-elite of Roman Iberia (Tupman 2004:119).
It is already well understood that certain subgroups of the Roman population can be recognized archaeologically through their funerary remains, with the aim of understanding identity. For instance, military burials are easily recognized by virtue of the funerary art and the military rank and unit inscribed on tombstones (Hope 2000:163). The identification of membership to a particular *collegium* is a rare instance where an archaeologist can identify, with some degree of certainty, one aspect of that individual’s social network, especially considering that, to the Roman population, “*collegium* membership could be seen as an acceptable source of social identity,” (Van Nijf 1997:28). Membership to an occupational *collegium* is obviously informative about that individual’s occupation, while a religious *collegium* would be indicative of religious beliefs. Once these individual aspects of a member’s identity are uncovered, one can begin to reconstruct aspects of the general non-elite identity, if such a thing could be said to exist. This study is of incredible importance in the context of the imperial Roman period. In fact, “it is rare to find actual declarations of status in the epitaphs after the first century AD, so we have to rely on other indicators, usually names and family relationships, to provide clues,” (Tupman 2004:127).

To a certain degree, the mere presence of a burial in a cemetery, rather than isolated in its own sarcophagus or villa, implies a more ‘middle-class’ individual (Biddulph 2005:27). If the individual is a member of a religious or professional association, the archaeologist then knows that individual’s cult activities or occupation, respectively. If the individual is buried by members of a *collegium*, without any indication of whether they were themselves a member, this could be indicative that that individual was a patron to that *collegium*, opening up entirely new avenues of investigating that person’s identity: what their socioeconomic status was, whether they too were part of the non-elite, why they chose that particular *collegium* to patronize, and what they got in return for their patronage.

As stated above, a *collegium* member’s placement within a graveyard or *columbarium* is associated with the internal social hierarchy of the *collegium*, providing another indicator of social identity (Van Nijf 1997:43). Placement in a conspicuous area, with a decorated niche, or the inclusion of a bust or portrait, can be interpreted as a higher status (Van Nijf 1997:45). Consequently, it can be said that “associations could use these monuments to assert a group identity in the face of others, but they could also use them as a vehicle for the negotiation of internal distinctions and hierarchies,” (Van Nijf 1997:49).

Bennett (2006) is one example of a study that identifies a *collegium veteranorum* (military veteran) burial, and uses the epitaph of that burial to study aspects of the individual’s identity (see Appendix 2). This individual, Marcus Julius Rufus, was a legionary centurion stationed in Anatolia. The inscription includes the emperor Vespasian’s name, indicating a date of at least AD 96, while the name ‘Julius’ indicates descent from a man granted citizenship for military service under Caesar or Augustus (Bennett 2006:96).
Of particular importance, however, is the inclusion of the *collegium* name, which is inscribed as commemorator; membership to the *collegium veteranorum* is indicative that the individual was retired from military service, while the location of the burial in the Ancyra area indicates that this was probably his place of origin, to which he returned upon retirement. Rufus was likely wifeless and childless, thus the importance of the *collegium* as commemorators (Bennett 2006:98). Overall, the inclusion of the *collegium* in the epitaph allows us to reconstruct aspects of an individual identity in terms of: status as a retired soldier, place of origin, family, and obviously, member of a community of veterans. When examined with the rest of the inscriptive evidence, particularly his name and military decorations, a considerable amount can be discerned from one tombstone. Unfortunately, the archaeological context is not recorded beyond a rough location, making it difficult to use other techniques of mortuary archaeology to further the information gathered from the epitaph.

Though this is only one example, it does indicate how identity can be studied from this evidence. Taken as a whole, the identification of *collegia* burials allows one to investigate very particular aspects of identity: status (in terms of Roman society and the internal structure of the *collegium* itself), occupation, religion, family, and perhaps most importantly, how that individual chose to portray themselves to society by their involvement with a *collegium*.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the current status of academic literature is one that seems on the verge of recognizing the potential of studying *collegia* from the perspective of mortuary archaeology and social identity. The evidence from the imperial Roman period indicates the importance that these associations had in terms of negotiating social status and advertising identity, while simultaneously providing proper burial and commemoration for its members. For future research in this area, it will be of utmost importance to gather more information on the archaeological context of these burials in terms of location, presence of grave goods, burial position, and so on, in conjunction with evidence of *collegium* membership to be able to better reconstruct the individual identity of these non-elite individuals. Eventually, it may be possible to follow the changing attitudes towards *collegia*, based on studies of Roman law, by examining the prevalence of *collegia* burials over time, as well as correlate individual member burials with what is known about their legal status in order to better understand the internal hierarchy of these associations.

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Appendix 1 – *CIL* XIV 2112, 20-41 (from Hope 2007:87-88)

AD 136, Lanuvium (Italy)

It was voted unanimously that anyone who wishes to enter this society shall pay an entry fee of 100 sesterces and an amphora of good wine and shall pay monthly fees of 5 asses. It was voted also that if anyone has not paid his fees for six months in a row and he then meets death, his claim to burial shall not be upheld even if he has provided for it in his will. It was voted further that upon the death of a member of the society who has regularly paid his fees, there will be due to him 300 sesterces from the treasury. From this amount 50 sesterces will be deducted as a funeral fee to be distributed at the pyre [among the mourners]; the funeral, furthermore, will be performed on foot. It was voted also that if any member dies more than 20 miles from this town and notice is received, three men chosen from the society will be required to go to that place and to arrange for his funeral. They will be required to render a true and honest account to the members, and if they are found guilty of any fraud they shall pay a fourfold fine. They will be given money for the funeral expenses for the deceased, and each in addition will be given 20 sesterces for travel expenses there and back… [the society will pay expenses to those who bury a member]… It was voted further that if any slave member of this society dies, and his master or mistress unfairly refuses to hand over his body for burial, and he has not left written instructions, a funeral ceremony will be held for an image of him. It was voted also that if any member takes his own life for whatever reason, his claim to burial shall not be considered. It was voted as well that if any member of this society becomes free, he is required to donate an amphora of good wine.

Appendix 2 – Ankora *collegium* burial (Bennett 2006:95-96)

To Marcus Julius Rufus, son of Marcus, of the Fabia (voting tribe), a centurion in the Fourth Scythia Legion, in command of the second century in the second cohort; awarded (military) decorations by the deified Vespasian, and (also awarded) the white parade uniform by the emperor Domitian. The college of veterans instituted at Ancyra (has set up this monument) in his honour.