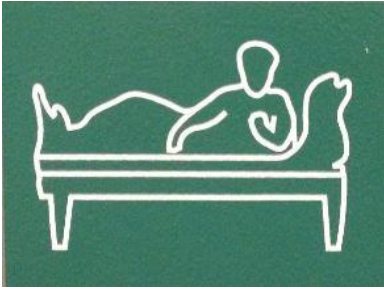


Memorials to the Roman Dead



The funerary objects in this gallery, especially the marble cinerary urn shown here to the right, reflect the lives and times of the Roman people they commemorate. These

objects show the diverse traditions associated with death across the Roman Empire.

Until the mid-2nd century A.D., many Romans chose to be cremated. Their ashes were gathered into a range of containers, including cinerary urns. The urns were placed in underground tombs called *columbaria*, which allowed for group burials. After roughly 150 A.D., Romans preferred to be buried in life-sized carved marble coffins called *sarcophagi*.



Funerary rituals did not end at burial. Gifts were offered to the dead, and tombs were the site of the funerary banquets where the living shared their meals with the deceased. Cemeteries were usually located outside the city walls where the tombs of prominent families lined the main road leading out of town.



Did the Romans believe in an afterlife? Belief in immortality was not well defined in Roman religion, but Romans wanted to live on in the memories of their families and communities. With the hope that they would not be forgotten after death, Romans commissioned permanent memorials like the ones in this gallery.

Portraits preserved a likeness of the deceased. Esteemed individuals were honored by their families with a life-sized portrait placed in the tomb. Mummy paintings, like the one shown at left, were rare color portraits of Roman citizens. Portraits of all varieties were used throughout the Roman world as constant reminders of the deceased.