

An overwhelmingly large majority of the 500+ epitaphs that have been discovered at the Roman colony of Augusta Emerita (modern Mérida, Spain) in the province of Lusitania lack any clear archaeological context. Those epitaphs that have come to light in private collections of antiquities or in secondary archaeological contexts of reuse have lost much of the meaning that their original funerary setting invested in them. Dislocated from their burials and from the cemeteries in which those burials were carried out, these texts have become disembodied and, as a result, are much less eloquent witnesses to the social context in which they were set up and to the cultural importance that they played in the construction of identity in a Roman colony such as Emerita. The tombs of the Voconii and the Iulii of the mid-first century A.D., excavated in the 1930s, are exceptional in allowing us to consider inscribed funerary texts in direct connection with the mausolea they once graced, which in the case of the tomb of the Voconii was also decorated in its interior with full-length painted portraits of the deceased family members (M. Bendala Galán, *Habis*, 3, 1972, 223-53). The discovery in 2002 of a granite funerary stele from the late first century B.C. *in situ* with its associated burial allows us to confirm some details about the physical setting of this funerary monument, which was clearly set up with its epitaph facing out towards the side-road of the necropolis in which the burial plot was located.

In the case of those epitaphs that lack a clear context, the paper argues that we need to pay much closer attention than has been customary to various physical features of the monuments themselves, to allow us to restore to these dislocated texts some precious clues about their original context. Was the monument designed to be seen from all sides or just from the front? What function do the holes in the various surfaces of the monument reveal about its original placement and appearance? Occasionally the epitaphs themselves include references that are helpful for reconstructing context: for instance, those that record the area of the funerary plots that they marked or those that mention the funerary *horti* in which they were erected. Furthermore, variations in the size and artistic quality of the funerary monuments are revealing of the relative costs of the monuments and of the social and cultural aspirations of those who set them up. To illustrate these points, this paper will discuss various types of funerary monument from Emerita ranging in date from the late-first century B.C. to the mid-third century A.D.: plaques to be set into mausolea or *columbaria*; free-standing funerary altars and stelae; monuments in the form of *aediculae* that incorporated portrait-busts; as well as more exceptional forms of funerary monument. In general, the paper explores how archaeological and epigraphic approaches need to be combined to gain a more nuanced sense of commemorative practices at a provincial Roman colony such as Emerita.