

Harriet I. FLOWER **Traitors in Context: the Epitaphs of the Licinii from the Via Salaria**

In late 1884 and early 1885 three underground chambers were discovered by accident near the intersection of the Via Salaria and the Via Nomentana in Rome, on an estate that had belonged to the villa of Paolina, the sister of Napoleon Bonaparte. They contained rich burial goods and inscriptions referring to the prestigious family of the Licinii Crassi from the first and second centuries AD. These sensational finds included one of the finest series of Roman marble portraits (now in Copenhagen), 7 or more altars with inscriptions commemorating deceased Licinii (now in Rome), and ten elaborately carved sarcophagi of the Antonine period (now in Baltimore). Recent reevaluation of the evidence for their hasty excavation, including the publication in 2003 of a series of rediscovered nineteenth century documents, has led to a heated debate over the nature of this “tomb” and the political significance of its magnificent contents.

In the context of the APA seminar, the relationship of this famous series of epitaphs of the Licinii, republished by Géza Alföldy in CIL 6.8.3 (2000), to their archaeological setting will be reexamined. The newly published documents of the 1880s lay to rest earlier accusations (M. Guarducci) that the whole ensemble of material was fraudulently assembled in order to fetch a high price on the art market. If anything, the finds were even richer than is generally supposed.

The following factors will be taken into consideration in this paper: the striking contrast between the small, undecorated chamber 1 and its rich, crowded contents of altars, ash urns, and portraits: the fine state of original preservation in what must have been a protected environment: the fact that the texts mention many disgraced individuals and their close relatives, all in the family of Crassus Frugi (cos. 27) and his wife Scribonia: the wealth of the family in the second century AD, as attested by the sarcophagi: and the many inscriptions of the Licinii found in the whole surrounding area.

Consequently, four principal conclusions emerge from the interplay of the material evidence with epigraphy:

- Chamber 1 cannot be the original tomb designed to contain these rich finds, but is a storage chamber for objects that have been moved from elsewhere.
- This is not a special tomb built for traitors in order to allow private burials for the disgraced.
- Not all these finds, especially the portraits, need originally have been made for a funerary context.
- There is no compelling reason to associate the move with a hypothetical “*damnatio memoriae*” imposed on the last datable family members, Piso Frugi (cos. 87) and his wife Agedia Quintina.

The role of the family in creating and reshaping commemoration during the Antonine period is essential, particularly in the context of this family estate.