



# INTRODUCTION

Of all the building projects undertaken by Roman emperors during the course of their individual reigns, none elicited more personal interest than their own funerary monuments. In the later Roman Empire, as it had been earlier, these were buildings destined to provide a secure resting place for their mortal remains and a site of cult practices. The monuments were meant to project an image of majesty and importance for all others to see, for these were, in fact, *sepulcra divorum*, tombs of the *divi*, or demigods, an honor reserved for emperors. The mausolea of the emperors and members of their families thus constitute one of the most conspicuous groups of buildings in late Roman and Early Christian architecture, some of which are well-preserved, whereas others are now in ruins or known solely from literary sources. These monuments are among the period’s most important examples of funerary architecture, a form that was as innovative and varied as it was ubiquitous in the empire.

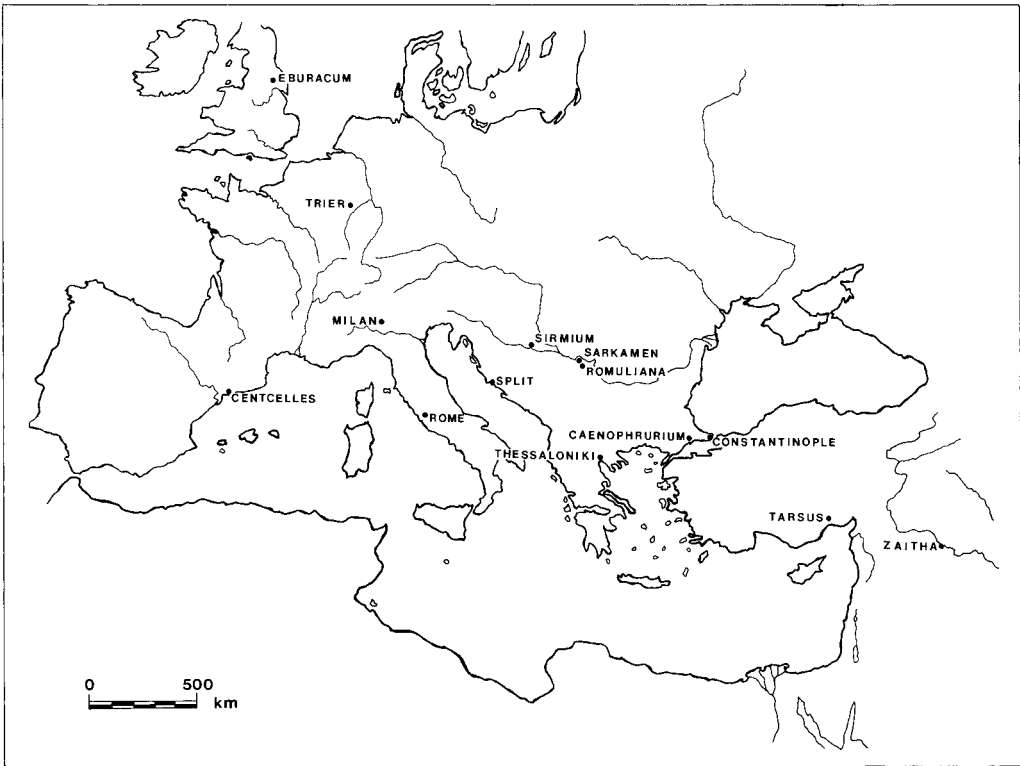
Previous to the present study, these buildings have never been examined as a group, with two exceptions – a brief article that consisted of little more than an annotated list of monuments, and a slim volume that provides an overview of Roman imperial funerals and monuments.<sup>1</sup> Some of the individual mausolea have been the subjects of comprehensive monographs, especially in recent years, though others have been treated only in short articles or as parts of larger works. Little has been done in studying the iconography of the mausolea.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this book is to provide a basic study of this group of buildings, a study that includes an introduction to each monument, summarizes the current state of knowledge, and reviews controversial issues to offer new insights. Although there is an important element of synthesis involved in this work, new observations and interpretations are offered for each building and for the problems concerning the mausolea as a group.

Many of the monuments are in need of a more detailed study than can be provided here but there are compelling reasons to pursue an investigation of the group as a whole. Many fundamental questions exist that must be articulated before each individual mausoleum can be studied profitably. An examination of the entire series of imperial mausolea of late antiquity leads to the understanding of how each individual building relates to the others yet has its own unique design features.

The limits of the present study are defined clearly by the buildings themselves, which share not only a similar patronage, but in most cases also a conventional, circular form – a domed rotunda. The tumulus tomb, employed in early imperial tombs, had a long history prior to its adoption by the Romans, whereas the domed rotunda, as a mausoleum type, was their invention and made its first appearance in an imperial monument during the third century. All subsequent imperial monuments were constructed in this form. The chronological boundaries of the study are defined also by the buildings and parallel the later life of the empire. The series of later imperial mausolea began in the third century after the Mausoleum of Hadrian ceased receiving new burials. The last imperial mausoleum erected in the empire was that of Honorius, completed in the early part of the fifth century. In geographical terms, the monuments were widespread, built in locations from one end of the empire to the other (Fig. 1), with several located in Italy (Fig. 2). A number were constructed in or near the capital city of Rome (Figs. 3–4), whereas two were erected in Milan, which functioned as a capital city from the late third to the early fifth century (Fig. 5). The other mausolea were built near various imperial residences or at the site of the ruler's death and not necessarily in one of the capitals.

Of the many issues that need to be addressed in a study of these buildings, a basic one is to determine which monuments, properly speaking, actually served as imperial tombs. The corpus of imperial mausolea given here has been established on the basis of the following criteria: first, the monuments that are unequivocally linked to imperial burials by archaeological, epigraphical, and literary evidence. This group includes the earlier mausolea of Augustus, the Flavians, Trajan, and Hadrian, and for the period under discussion here, those of Gallienus, Diocletian, Galerius, Maxentius, Constantine, Helena, Constantina, Julian, and Honorius. The second criterion comprises monuments that are linked to imperial burials by the ancient sources, and by the character and evidence provided by the buildings themselves. In this group are included the probable imperial mausolea at San Vittore and Sant'Aquilino in Milan, and that at Centcelles. The third criterion includes monuments that, owing to their location and character, may have been built as imperial tombs, although the actual builder

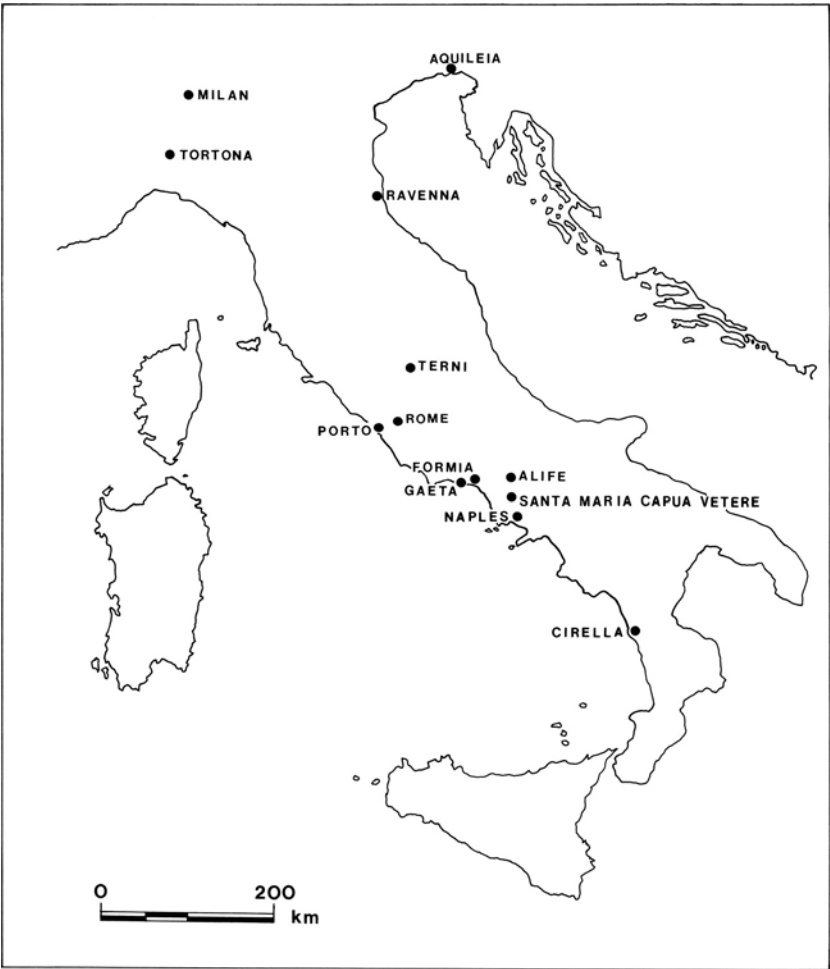


of these tombs is uncertain. The possibly imperial building that falls into this category is the so-called “Tor de’ Schiavi” near Rome.

Many other fundamental questions will be addressed. What are the basic characteristics of the mausolea, their settings, decoration, and furnishings? What distinctions can be drawn between pagan and Christian imperial mausolea? What place do these monuments hold in the general development of Roman funerary architecture? What was the symbolic meaning of these buildings? What was their significance and function in Roman society? A key question that has received little attention is how the mausolea were connected to the imperial cult and the commemoration of the deceased emperors. The emperors were considered divine in life and following their deaths were proclaimed *divi*, or divine heavenly beings, but not quite gods; their tombs were therefore distinct. As *sepulcra divorum* – tombs of the *divi* – they were places of burial and shrines of the cult of the emperors.

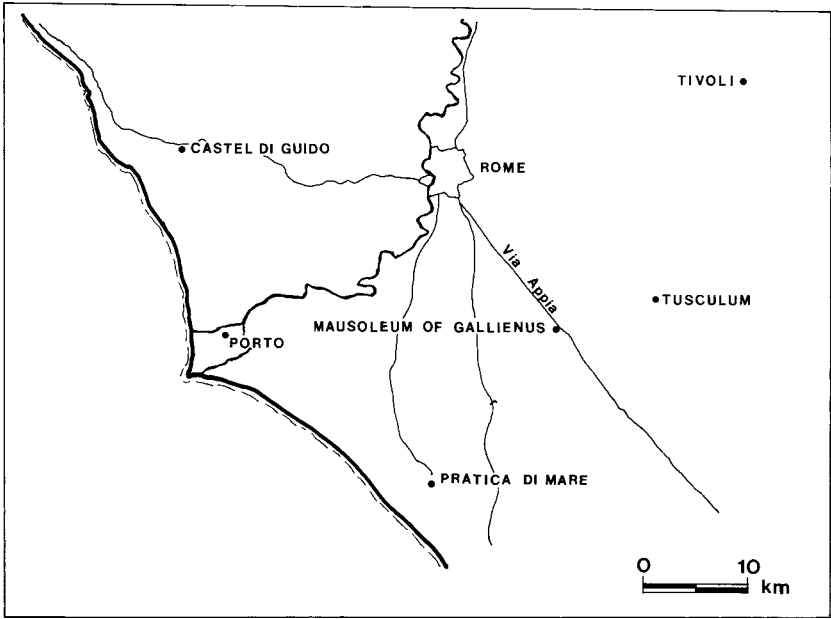
This study is organized into five chapters. As a preface to the examination of the mausolea themselves, the first chapter examines the issues

1. Map of the Roman Empire showing location of imperial and other mausolea. Drawing: Mark J. Johnson.



2. Map of Italy showing location of imperial and other mausolea. Drawing: Mark J. Johnson.

surrounding the death of an emperor, including the selection of a burial site, the imperial funeral, and burial practices. Chapter 2 contains a brief history and description of the monuments of the early imperial period, from Augustus to Hadrian, as a prelude to the later mausolea. It also examines the transition from tumulus to domed rotunda evident in the third-century funerary monument of Gallienus. Chapter 3 examines the mausolea of the early fourth century built by the Tetrarchs, whereas the tombs of the Christian rulers are presented in Chapter 4. Although the main focus in these chapters is archaeological and architectural, mausolea known only from literary sources are also included. To provide both an introduction to the buildings and a body of evidence



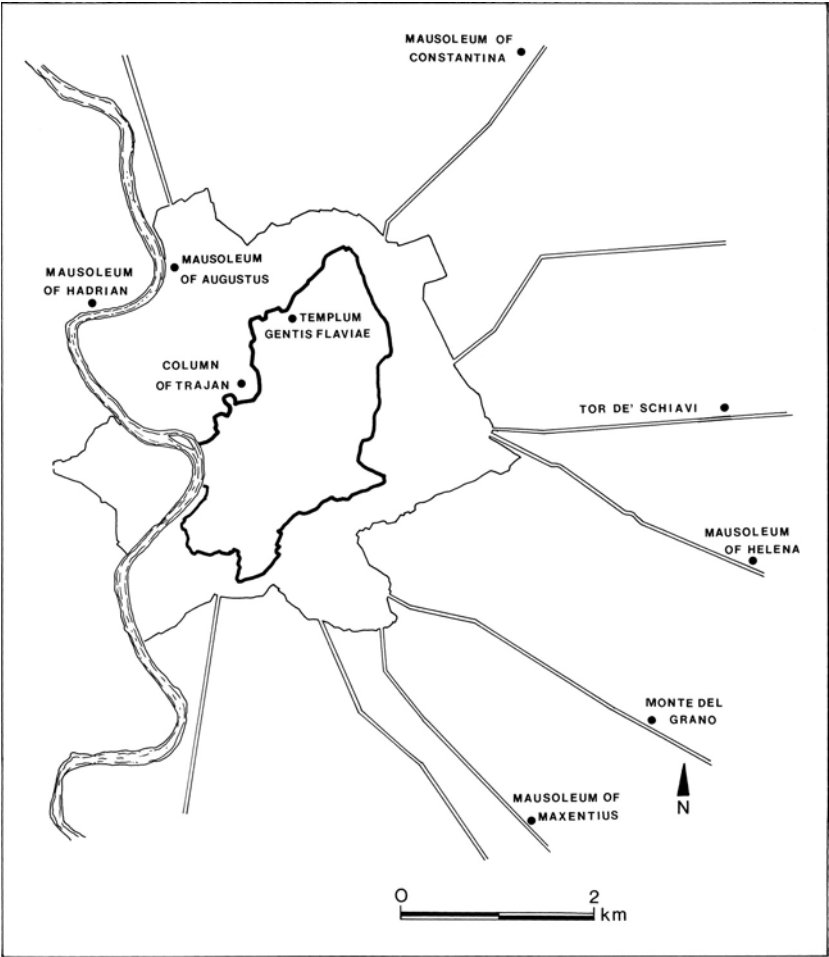
3. Map of the Roman Campagna showing location of imperial and other mausolea near Rome. Drawing: Mark J. Johnson.

necessary for subsequent analysis, the monuments are briefly analyzed under the following topics: history, setting, plans, exterior, interior, and decoration.

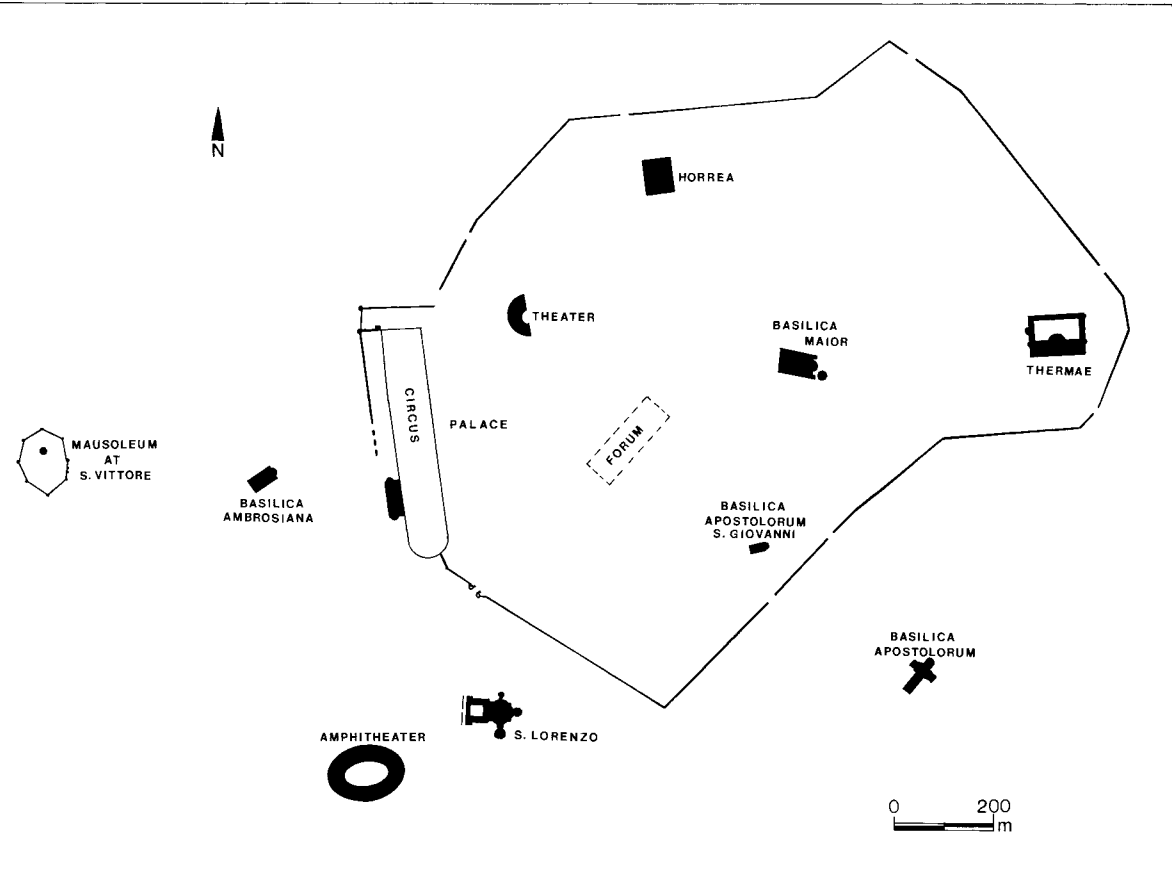
The final chapter seeks to understand the significance of these funerary structures to Roman society. It contains an analysis of the symbolic and iconographic connotations of the mausolea as expressed in their location and form, and in the terminology applied to the buildings in contemporary and medieval sources. Furthermore, the significance of the mausolea in contemporary society is also examined by presenting a short overview of the emperor’s position in death as expressed in the practice of *consecratio*, and by gathering and analyzing the evidence for cultic functions of imperial tombs.

Two appendices are included. Appendix A consists of a brief checklist of the mausolea with the persons known to have been buried, or thought to have been buried, in each. Appendix B contains an examination of the literary evidence for each imperial burial and comprises the most complete list of imperial burials published to date.<sup>3</sup> This investigation of the literary evidence allows for several new observations on the burial places of the emperors and represents the foundation for the establishment of a corpus of imperial mausolea. It also provides the background to the discussion of patterns of imperial burials that constitutes part of Chapter 1.

4. Map of Rome showing location of imperial mausolea.  
Drawing: Mark J. Johnson.



A few words of explanation about the terminology employed in the text are in order. In some cases, I have avoided referring to the buildings by their present names, as these often reflect a later usage that has nothing to do with their original function. Therefore, I have used “Mausoleum of Hadrian” instead of “Castel Sant’Angelo,” “Mausoleum at San Vittore” in place of “San Gregorio,” “Mausoleum of Constantina” for “Santa Costanza,” and “Mausoleum of Honorius” instead of “Santa Petronilla.” The exceptions are “Tor de’ Schiavi” and “Sant’Aquilino.” In the case of the Tor de’ Schiavi, the other title associated with it, “Mausoleum of the Gordians,” is certainly a misnomer that only creates confusion, as would the designation “Mausoleum at the Gordian Villa.” As for “Sant’Aquilino,”



I am inclined to believe that its correct title is “Mausoleum of the Valentinian Dynasty,” but the evidence is not so unequivocal as to warrant this usage. The name “Mausoleum at San Lorenzo” also has been avoided to preclude any possible confusion with the other subsidiary buildings at the same site.

5. Milan, plan of the Late Antique city. Drawing: Mark J. Johnson, after R. Mirabelli Roberti, *Milano romana*, fig. 2.



CHAPTER ONE

THE EMPEROR IN DEATH

The death of an emperor in Roman society evoked a number of responses dependent on the feelings of his successors and the populace. Elaborate funerals and public mourning following the loss of beloved or at least respected emperors such as Augustus or Constantine contrasted with public scorn and a desire to wipe out even the record of the very existence of a despised and hated ruler through the evocation of *damnatio memoriae*, the damning of the memory. No state funeral was granted, the name of the offending emperor was obliterated from inscriptions, and his statues were defaced or destroyed.<sup>1</sup> At times, circumstances did not allow for the traditional rites, even for “good” emperors. During the unsettled third century, and to a lesser degree in the following centuries, when many emperors were killed while away from Rome, funerals and burials often took place at the site of death, obviously with much less pomp and ceremony.

Even in optimal circumstances obsequies and honors varied from one individual to another, especially from the third century on. An examination of the evidence reveals that, in terms of social status and ceremony, there were several distinct types of funerals given the emperors. The kind of funeral and burial an emperor received was dependent on various considerations with no set rules. Factors including the place of death, the nature of death, the political aspirations of his successor, and the successor’s attitude toward the deceased could all have a role in determining the type of burial and funeral for the deceased.

The types of imperial burials may be grouped into four basic categories.<sup>2</sup> The first is no formal burial at all, a circumstance that occurred infrequently. Three emperors, Gordian II, Decius, and Valens, were killed in battle with no trace of their bodies ever found. Valerian was captured by the Persians and died in their hands, his body tanned, stuffed, and displayed as a trophy in a temple. Six other emperors, including four from the period under



consideration, earned the wrath of their assassins or successors and were not buried but were cast into water, an act believed to cause eternal unhappiness for the soul.<sup>3</sup> Elagabalus in the third century and Petronius Maximus in the fifth century had earned the enmity of the populace by their actions preceding their deaths. The hatred and rage of the crowds toward these men was expressed by the mutilation and abuse of their corpses, which were eventually cast into the Tiber. Another spontaneous decision to dispose of the corpse in water seems to have been made in the case of Constantine II by the officers and troops who had defeated him in battle. There is record of only one case in which such a treatment of the corpse of an emperor was formally decreed by a governing authority. The Roman Senate, who in opposition to Maximus had chosen two of their own as emperors, decreed in 238 that the bodies of the hated ruler and his son be cast into running water and should not be buried.<sup>4</sup> Such an insult was given also to the bodies of the wives of Diocletian, Galerius, and Maximin Daia, put to death by Licinius during the tumult of the early fourth century.

The second category of imperial burial comprises those emperors whose remains were placed in common graves or humble tombs. This seems to have been the usual method of dealing with the corpse of a defeated and deposed emperor. The information about the tomb of Majorian given by Ennodius makes it clear that he was buried in a simple tomb at the site of his murder in the fifth century, and it is likely that deposed rulers such as Macrinus, Carinus, and Licinius received similar treatment. In the fifth century, Avitus and Glycerius were apparently given church burials. It is in this category that the attitudes of the victors toward vanquished foes and their burials are most clearly expressed in the sources. In the first century, Vitellius is said to have looked on the lowly tomb of Otho and in a derisive manner exclaimed, "Well he deserved this type of mausoleum."<sup>5</sup> The fifth-century emperor-maker Ricimer, a Goth, having ordered the execution of Anthemius, commented bluntly that he "did not think him worthy of royal burial."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, after Constantius II had ordered the execution of Gallus, he did not even allow the body to be buried in the tomb of Gallus' father.<sup>7</sup> There is also a revealing statement found in the *Historia Augusta* that informs the reader that after Claudius II had met and killed the usurper Aureolus in battle, "he bestowed upon him a tomb, but a lowly one as became a pretender."<sup>8</sup> The political significance of such burials for deposed rulers is obvious. By decreeing that burial take place in a lowly tomb, the successor made it clear that the deceased had been unworthy of his former position – he had not deserved to wear the purple in life and was not to be treated as emperor in death. These pretenders and their tombs were to be forgotten. In this the victors were largely successful, for not only

have none of these burials ever come to light, but also, with the exception of the references to the tombs of Otho and Majorian, they are not specifically mentioned in the sources.

The third category consists of those burials that, although not lowly, were not done with full imperial honors, either. The burials that can be assigned to this group are generally those of emperors who had short reigns, especially those of the third century. Often they were victims of their own troops or of political rivals who then permitted their honorable burials. Some, such as Probus and Maximin Daia, were interred in monuments erected at the site of their deaths. Others had become emperor at a later stage in life and had already made provisions for their burials. When they died following brief reigns, they may have been buried in their “pre-imperial” tombs. This, it seems, was the case with Balbinus. In short, this group is composed of the burials of men who probably had not had time to plan their own imperial burials and for whom little or no effort was made to provide them with burials worthy of their status. Few of their monuments are mentioned in the sources, and nothing is known about any of them in archaeological terms.

The fourth category comprises those burials done with full imperial honors. In these cases, the deceased was buried in accordance with his previously expressed wishes, either in a tomb he had built or in one of the existing imperial tombs. If the death occurred at some place other than where the tomb was located, the body was dutifully carried in procession, across great distances if necessary, to its designated resting place. A vast train of soldiers escorted the remains of Helena to her tomb outside of Rome. The body of Julian was moved from Persia to Tarsus and buried in the place he had ordered. Likewise, Valentinian I died at Brigetio, whereas Theodosius died in Milan, but both were taken to Constantinople for burial. If no place had been designated, then arrangements for an imperial funeral and burial were made and a tomb was built if necessary. It is important to underline the fact that these burials took place under optimal circumstances. The most significant of these is that their successors were agreeable to the imperial burial of the deceased. In some cases it was a son or some other relative performing this duty. In others, the imperial burial may have been the successor's expression of respect toward the imperial office or toward the individual, particularly if the predecessor had been considered a good ruler. At times there were political undertones to these burials, as a successor set about to strengthen his claim to the throne. Philip, by building a tomb for Gordian III and requesting that the Senate grant divine honors for him, hid his own involvement in Gordian's death and helped secure his own position. The same is probably true of Petronius Maximus, who hid his complicity in the