

## PORTRAITS OF CHILDREN ON ROMAN FUNERARY MONUMENTS

Drawing on hundreds of tombstones from Rome, Italy and the western provinces, this study assesses how parents visualised childhood. By considering the most popular funerary themes and iconographic models, it emphasises both the emotional and the social investment placed in children, bringing to the fore many little-known examples. From Britannia to Dacia, Aquitania to Pannonia, it highlights the rich artistic diversity of the provinces and shows that not all trends were borrowed from the capital. With a wide range of social groups in evidence, including freedmen, soldiers and *peregrini*, it also considers the varying reasons which underlay child commemoration and demonstrates the importance of studying the material in context. Amply supported by a catalogue of examples and over a hundred images, it will be essential reading for anyone working on Roman childhood or family studies.

Jason Mander is a former junior research fellow at Worcester College, Oxford.

PORTRAITS *of* CHILDREN  
ON  
ROMAN FUNERARY  
MONUMENTS



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*Dedicated to the memory of my father,  
John Mander (1939–2012)*

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## PREFACE

During the hundred or so museum visits undertaken for the purposes of this book, there was one question I encountered more frequently than any other: *why* was I going to such effort to catalogue these tombstones, especially when – as was more often the case than not – they were poorly preserved, they had attracted relatively little previous interest and, as so many of my hosts were keen to stress, the museums had much *better* pieces of sculpture on general display. All too soon it became clear that the tombstones seemed to ‘lose out’ in most comparisons: they were for children not adults; they were ‘private’ pieces rather than ‘public’; they were often fragmentary or extremely weathered; and, almost universally, they lacked any archaeological context. And so the great majority of the monuments included in this catalogue were to be found either in out-of-town deposits or at the back of museum storerooms; in a handful of cases, they had been mislaid altogether or, perhaps worse still, had suffered significant (and utterly avoidable) damage since their last publication. At times, the tombstones were in fact to be found lying face-down on the ground or else covered by standing water, bird excrement and/or moss.

There were, of course, many exceptions to this situation: some better-preserved or more well-known examples had come to enjoy pride of place in (albeit largely regional) collections while several curators were pleased that the monuments were finally receiving some attention. But, in general, the requests I made to examine Roman tombstones bearing child portraits were met with a blend of surprise, intrigue and, at times, realisation that pieces of sculpture not seen for several years needed to be retrieved from their relatively inaccessible storage places. Happily, though, the need to justify this research on multiple occasions only served to convince me further of its value. While the stones certainly do not offer ‘snapshots’ of Roman family life, they do give glimpses of how children from right across the western empire were contextualised and commemorated at the time of their death. The portraits show us how those of each sex, various ages and an array of social backgrounds were presented to posterity and allow an unusually detailed study of how the same event – the early loss of a child – was marked in the capital as compared to the provinces.

For all of the recent advances made in the subject – and since the 1990s in particular they have been

considerable – works on visual material are still vastly outnumbered by those concerned with legal, epigraphic and literary sources. Provincial examples have been particularly neglected. Practicalities no doubt play a large role in this: organising the appointments and permits needed to conduct first-hand examination can be time consuming and bureaucratically complex; just reaching the various regional museums in which the stones are held is not always easy, quite apart from the expense it involves. But in part, iconographic studies on this particular genre may also remain relatively few in number because making cross-cultural comparisons about such an emotive subject – and attempting to reconstruct motivations in a society where child death was so frequent – can be extremely difficult (a topic to which we shall return in the Introduction).

In response to this, I have attempted to adopt a cautious but open outlook about what the material shows us in relation to emotion. Inferences are noted, suggestions are made but, compared to some previous studies, I have placed a stronger emphasis on the role of tombstones as items of social advertisement (not that affection and promotion have to be opposed: the two concepts can and do work in tandem). As part of this, the first and second chapters concern themselves with the many conceptual and methodological issues which surround the study of Roman children, especially in terms of definition and identification. In Chapter 3 the stones themselves take centre stage, the most popular themes and models being discussed to give some understanding of how adults viewed their children, at least in the sepulchral sphere. The focus of Chapter 4 shifts to the relatives and other adults who regularly appear alongside children, asking whether commemorative patterns reflect demographic reality. By placing a spotlight on the nuclear family, it also considers why certain social groups may have felt a particular need to purchase these tombstones. Chapter 5 looks beyond the immediate family to examine surrogate and extended relationships, ones which – in light of the grim mortality rates – probably had far greater importance than commemoration patterns would suggest. The final chapter attempts to reconstruct something of the archaeological context in which the tombstones were set up as well as what commissioners hoped to achieve through the use of a portrait; this is of crucial importance even if the lack of evidence is more than a little frustrating.

My aim has been to root the discussions in first-hand analysis of the monuments themselves. When an example is mentioned in the main text, it is identified by a unique code which corresponds to its entry in the catalogue (where more complete details can be found). The great number of pieces under consideration – nearly 900 – means that data tables are also employed to help assess wider trends. I have provided as many photographs as possible under very tight constraints of copyright and expense; I hope the selection includes several which have rarely been seen before and I am extremely grateful to the very many museums which offered assistance – especially where fees were lowered or even waived altogether. For those not pictured in this book, the catalogue includes references to other publications in which illustrations can be located (hundreds of images are also available online, particularly on the *Ubi Erat Lupa Datenbank*).

All that remains is for me to offer thanks to the many individuals who have enriched this book considerably. With the material and ideas on which it is based stemming ultimately from my Oxford PhD, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my supervisor Janet DeLaine; her patience and guidance were of immense help. So too was the encouragement offered by my examiners Peter Stewart and Josephine Quinn; the questions they raised and avenues they suggested for further exploration have developed this research immeasurably. More recently, Michael Sharp and his wonderful team at Cambridge University Press have been ever ready to help. Further thanks are due to my undergraduate tutor Andrew Lintott for providing the original inspiration; to Bert Smith for assuming the role of co-supervisor; to Susan Walker and Simon Price for their useful comments on transfer papers; to the anonymous reviewers whose advice and suggested improvements were invaluable; and to Martin Henig for his continued enthusiasm towards my work. There are many others besides with whom I have discussed ideas, from whom I have sought information or who have very kindly supplied copies of their work; I thank all of them, especially Christian Laes, Janet Huskinson, Beryl Rawson, Ursula Rothe, Alison Cooley and Diana Kleiner. For advice on various inscriptions, Peter Dover has given his time and expertise with considerable kindness. Daniel Hogg and Glenn Lacki also deserve credit in this regard, as do Jenni Eatough, Claudio Castelnovo, Julietta Steinhauer and Claire Wright for translating letters into a variety of languages. It

goes without saying that all views, and any mistakes, remain my own.

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Lastly, I thank my friends and family for their support; I am sure they will be relieved to hear that I can finally lay these tombstones to rest.

## ABBREVIATIONS

For abbreviations used in the Catalogue, see pp. 156–8.

|               |  |         |   |
|---------------|--|---------|---|
| AA            | <i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i>  | CPh     | <i>Classical Philology</i>  |
| AAAD          | <i>Antichità Altoadriatiche</i>  | CQ      | <i>Classical Quarterly</i>  |
| AAPat         | <i>Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia Patavina di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Classe di Sc. mor., Lett. ed Arti</i> | CSIR    | <i>Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani</i>   |
| AArchHung     | <i>Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i>   | DAI     | Deutsches Archäologisches Institut  |
| ABull         | <i>The Art Bulletin</i>  | EDCS    | <i>Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss-Slaby</i>  |
| AC            | <i>L'Antiquité Classique</i>   | EDH     | <i>Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg</i>   |
| AClass        | <i>Acta Classica: Proceedings of the Classical Association of South Africa</i>                               | EE      | <i>Ephemeris Epigraphica</i>  |
| AEA           | <i>Archivo Español de Arqueología</i>  | EMC     | <i>Échos du Monde Classique (Classical Views)</i>   |
| AHB           | <i>The Ancient History Bulletin</i>  | FBSM    | <i>Forschungen und Berichte, hrsg. von den Staatlichen Museen</i>                             |
| AIV           | <i>Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Classe di Scienze morali e Lettere</i>             | G&R     | <i>Greece and Rome</i>  |
| AJ            | <i>Archaeological Journal</i>  | GMusJ   | <i>J. Paul Getty Museum Journal</i>   |
| AJA           | <i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>   | HEOD    | <i>Hispania Epigraphica Online Database</i>   |
| AJPh          | <i>American Journal of Philology</i>   | IDR     | <i>Inscriptiile Daciae Romanae</i>  |
| AK            | <i>Antike Kunst</i>  | IG      | <i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i>  |
| AMN           | <i>Acta Musei Napocensis</i>   | ILS     | <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i>   |
| AN            | <i>Aquileia Nostra: Bolletino dell'Associazione Nazionale per Aquileia</i>                                   | JD      | <i>Joconde Database</i>   |
| AncSoc        | <i>Ancient Society</i>   | JDAI    | <i>Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts</i>                                       |
| Annales (HSS) | <i>Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales</i>  | JÖAI    | <i>Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts</i>                             |
| AnnEpigr      | <i>L'Année Épigraphique</i>  | JRA     | <i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>   |
| ArchS         | <i>Archäologie der Schweiz: Mitteilungsblatt der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Ur- und Frühgeschichte</i> | JRGZ    | <i>Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums</i>                                       |
| ArD           | <i>Arachne Datenbank</i>   | JRS     | <i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>   |
| ARID          | <i>Analecta Romana Instituti Danici</i>  | KJ      | <i>Kölner Jahrbuch für Vor- und Frühgeschichte</i>  |
| AW            | <i>Antike Welt</i>   | MDAI(R) | <i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts (Röm. Abt.)</i>                       |
| BAGB          | <i>Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé</i>  | MEFRM   | <i>Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome.</i>   |
| BCAR          | <i>Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma</i>  | MPAA    | <i>Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia</i>                                  |
| BJ            | <i>Bonner Jahrbücher des Rheinischen Landesmuseums in Bonn</i>   | NSA     | <i>Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità</i>   |
| BSEAA         | <i>Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología</i>   | ORom    | <i>Opuscula Romana: Acta Inst. Rom. Regni Sueciae</i>   |
| C&M           | <i>Classica et Mediaevalia</i>   | PBSR    | <i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>   |
| CAG           | <i>Carte archéologique de la Gaule</i>   | QIASA   | <i>Quaderni dell'Istituto di Archeologia e Storia Antica dell'Univ. G. d'Annunzio, Chieti</i> |
| CIL           | <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>  | RA      | <i>Revue Archéologique</i>  |

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|-------------|--|-----------------|---|
| <i>REA</i>  | <i>Revue des Études Anciennes</i>  | <i>RQA</i>      | <i>Römische Quartalschrift für Christliche<br/>Altertumskunde und für Kirchengeschichte</i> |
| <i>RhM</i>  | <i>Rheinisches Museum für Philologie</i>   | <i>StudClas</i> | <i>Studii Clasice</i>   |
| <i>RIB</i>  | <i>Roman Inscriptions of Britain</i>   | <i>TAPhS</i>    | <i>Transactions of the American<br/>Philosophical Society</i>                               |
| <i>RIU</i>  | <i>Die Römischen Inschriften Ungarns</i>   | <i>UEL</i>      | <i>Ubi Erat Lupa Datenbank</i>  |
| <i>RLAC</i> | <i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>  | <i>ZAnt</i>     | <i>Ziva Antika (Antiquité Vivante)</i>  |
| <i>RÖ</i>   | <i>Römisches Österreich: Jahresschrift<br/>der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für<br/>Archäologie</i> | <i>ZPE</i>      | <i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>   |