

Kids Say the Darndest Things: Inscribed First-Person Speech of Commemorated Children in Imperial Rome

This paper addresses the purpose of imperial Roman funerary monuments which speak in the voices of children. A more traditional epigraphic reading would take the child's first-person statements as accurate depictions of events since their death and address family members and readers of the stone. However, this view fails to address the likelihood that these children, especially the very young, wouldn't have been involved in the planning of their own monuments. It also overlooks the complexities of public presentation. I read these inscriptions as representative of the types of commemoration that were available to Roman parents, rather than windows to the truth of a child's persona. In doing so, I follow some recent studies which nuance the way scholarship views the archaeological and philological marriage of epigraphy. In this paper, I read Roman imperial inscriptions which portray the first-person subjectivity of dead children (CIL 6.19007, 6.16913) as a way to access community and family expectations of young children. By considering the family dedicators and their choices as impacted by tradition, finance, and emotion, these public memorials can shed light on the way relatives intended communities to engage with monuments of their offspring.

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