Frozen in Slumber: Preservation of Life & Gender Roles in *Conclamatio* Scenes on Roman Child Sarcophagi

This paper analyzes surviving examples of the *conclamatio* pictured on Roman child sarcophagi as expressions of grief depicting the liminal space between life and death, teasing out the gendered dimensions of this iconography. I center my analysis on sarcophagi identified by Huskinson (1996) as depicting scenes of the *conclamatio*, the calling of the dead (Toynbee 1971). Using this evidence, I explore how the imagery encapsulates the fine line of sleep and death: the subject pictured at the center often looks as if they are alive, sleeping peacefully, despite being near death or already having passed. Moreover, I attend to the ways in which these sarcophagi vary across gender—for girls, it is a standalone scene while for boys, the scene is often just one panel of a biographical sarcophagus with other carvings that include a range of moments representing the life, or aspired life, of the child. The sarcophagi available to me for analysis are limited; I choose only to apply my argument to iconography featuring children which are clearly identifiable as boys or girls via inscription, context, etc. Due to the small sample size, I do not claim that my argument is making wide generalizations about grief or gender in the Roman world. Rather, by doing a close reading of the reliefs paired with scholarship on concepts of grief, images of sleep in art, and gender in the ancient world, this paper works out intended purposes of the *conclamatio* within this context.

Sarcophagi offer a window into understanding Roman ideas about death and grief. The vast array of iconography has been studied and interpreted by scholars for decades (e.g. Amedick 1993, Huskinson 1996, and Birk 2013). My argument builds on that work; for example, I understand child sarcophagi as representations of cultural values from the perspective of adults, based on Birk (2013). Thus, what we learn about children and childhood from this type of

material culture must be understood not from a child's perspective, but from the adults who raised them and mourn what they lost in their premature death. Within the context of Roman writings on grief and proper mourning (e.g. Plutarch, *Consolatio ad Uxorem*), sarcophagi became an appropriate medium through which parents could mourn and demonstrate their loss to others. Studies on the display of Roman sarcophagi (e.g. Meinecke 2013) give strong evidence that they were meant to be viewed publicly. For example, the survival of benches in tombs leads us to believe that one reason sarcophagi could be elaborately decorated was so mourners could visit and look upon them as works of art. I argue that a parent chose certain iconography to celebrate the life of their child knowing they could return to it in their grief, and that others might look upon it as well.

Given the public facing nature of sarcophagi and the values they represent, this paper traces the *conclamatio* scene, based on the description of the practice by Toynbee (1971), as it appears on child sarcophagi. To do this, I explore the space between sleep and death in the images of several sarcophagi. I compare the children on their deathbed to common images of sleep in ancient art (McNally 1985) which I use to argue why a parent might choose to decorate their child's sarcophagus with a *conclamatio*. Furthermore, the sarcophagi studied in this paper are separated into two categories: the *conclamatio* as it appears alone and as it appears among other scenes on a sarcophagus. The children in the first grouping are identifiable as girls while those in the second are all boys. I argue that we can read the differences in the commemoration of each to understand the differences represented in their loss, and that these differences connect to the varying roles which girls and boys played in Roman society. Through the image of the *conclamatio*, Roman parents expressed grief and loss which reflected the loss of a future head of household or future mother.

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