

## All Dogs Go to Hades: Dog Iconography on Funerary Monuments of Roman Youths

Today, we think of the dog as man's best friend. Yet, to the ancient Greeks and Romans, the dog's role was more compounded and gruesome, especially in healing and mortuary contexts. We know, primarily from Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*, that dogs were used in magico-medicinal practices, as sacrificial animals to chthonic deities such as Hecate, Diana, Isis, Asclepius, etc. or in aversion rites, and as pet protectors from mystical evils and witches in both the worlds of the living and dead. Much of Pliny the Elder's accounts are supported by material evidence of dog remains (whole or partial) that are found interred in or near human graves (Toynbee 1971).

Yet, in analyses of funerary imagery where dogs accompany the deceased, especially of Roman infants and children, this complex, mystical dynamic between dog and deceased is often lost in scholarship. Several scholars (Rüfel, Grossman, etc.) posit that canine iconography on Roman funerary markers are a means to represent part of the joys of life as pets and the wealthy status of the deceased's family- the infant will never experience joy, the girl domestic life with the household pet, and the boy a hunt (Neils and Oakley 2003).

This view, however, leads one to consider why the dog and certain breeds would be used exclusively to convey status and gender roles- could dog imagery really be the most versatile means in which to achieve this message? In this paper, I will argue that despite the breed of dog represented on funerary markers this current interpretation of canine iconography is an oversimplification that divorces the multivalent relationship of dogs as pet protectors from illness and evil magic in life and during the passage to the Underworld. I will (1) examine a select number of Roman *stelai*, funerary altars, and *kline* sarcophagi by parsing and comparing their iconography- including the gender and age of the deceased, the typology of dog, and symbolisms

of any other small objects or animals, (2) use ancient textual sources (i.e. Pliny *Nat. Hist.*, Plutarch *Quaest. Roman.*, Ovid *Fausti*) and (3) archaeological evidence (i.e. individual graves and mass infant grave at Lungano, Italy) to reveal not only the extent of how dogs were used in magico-medicinal healing processes, aversion rituals, or sacrifices to certain mystical/chthonic cults (primarily to Hecate and Isis) in the ancient world, but also the likelihood of these aspects being represented on funerary reliefs of Roman youths. Furthermore, expounding upon the relationship between funerary ceremonies (Toynbee 1971), cult practices (Merrifield 1987), and ancient views towards pollution and infant/childhood death (Lennon 2013) will enhance my argument for upholding a mystical, apotropaic, and chthonic interpretation.

This paper will not only enliven our understanding about the *populus'* fears of illness, death, and the supernatural and their responsive superstitious ways of aversion that is often overshadowed by state religion, but also encourage scholarship to embrace composite interpretations when construing funerary art.

### Bibliography

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