

Representations of Writing Materials on
Roman Funerary Monuments



REPRESENTATIONS OF
WRITING MATERIALS
ON ROMAN FUNERARY
MONUMENTS

TEXT, IMAGE, MESSAGE

EDITED BY
TIBOR GRÜLL

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Cover image: Stele depicting a family of four adults and five children, ca. AD 250–300.
© Janus Pannonius Múzeum, Pécs, Hungary, inv-no. 1254.
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Foreword by the editor

There is a motif in the iconography of Roman funeral monuments that occurs frequently in both East and West. This is the “Scroll in hand” motif, which most often means a rolled-up papyrus scroll held in the left hand of the person depicted. In Pannonia, where this motif is found perhaps the most frequently among the western provinces, it is supplemented by a gesture in which the index finger of the right hand or the index and middle fingers together point(s) to the scroll and sometimes even touch(es) it. Many researchers have attempted to explain the meaning of the scroll and the gesture in many different ways, and clearly, the depictions could have more than one meaning. A few committed Hungarian epigraphists therefore decided to investigate this motif, but first, they had to broaden their scope of interest and investigate where and for what reasons writing instruments and materials were depicted in a funerary context in the Roman Empire.

In order to unravel these questions, the “Scroll in Hand” Research Project was established at the Department of Ancient History at the University of Pécs (Hungary) in 2020. In 2021, the project was granted funding by the National Research, Development, and Innovation Office (NKFI K 135317) for three years. The research team is under the guidance of Tibor Grüll (Ph.D. habil. D.Sc.), full professor and head of department; and its members are János Jusztinger (Ph.D.), assistant professor and head of the Department of Roman Law (University of Pécs); Nándor Agócs (Ph.D.) assistant professor in the Department of History, at Eötvös Loránd University, Savaria University Centre (Szombathely) and vice-director of the Szent István Király Museum (Székesfehérvár); and Ernő Szabó, doctoral candidate and research assistant (Interdisciplinary Doctoral School, University of Pécs).

The aim of our research is to compile an exhaustive database of all known depictions of scrolls and other writing materials on Roman funerary monuments and analyze these depictions with the help of computer technology according to a unified set of criteria. By comparing the inscriptions and the iconographic contents of the tombstones, we examine the interpretations raised so far in the secondary literature—which is replete with contradictions due to the lack of basic research—while also looking for new solutions. Our work is based on the use of online databases (e.g. *Ubi Erat Lupa*) and corpora collections of the carved stone monuments from individual areas (e.g. *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani*). Our basic research is the first undertaking to analyze the published material based on a multidisciplinary approach involving social, legal, and artistic perspectives. The bilingual database (English and Hungarian), which is now available to the public online (scrollinhand.com), enriches the fields of classical antiquities, Roman archeology, and Roman jurisprudence.

In addition to building the database, the members of our research group went on study trips to deepen their knowledge of the epigraphic material in certain areas. In September 2020, a new stone monument with an inscription and “scroll-in-hand” depiction was discovered at Dunavecse (Hungary) and examined using 3D photogrammetry. In August 2021, we visited and photographed the epigraphic collections in Šempeter, Metlika, and Celje (Slovenia). In the same month, the leader of the research project was given permission to pursue research at the Museo Nazionale delle Terme di Diocleziano in one of the richest and finest epigraphic collections in the world. In June 2022, he organized a study trip to the Republic of Türkiye

for a closer examination of Phrygian stone monuments. We presented our findings at several conferences, including the 14th Conference of Young Roman Age Researchers (FIROKONE, Pécs, November 2020), the 14th Conference of Hungarian Studies of Antiquity (MÓK, Pécs, May 2022), and the 17th International Colloquium on Roman Provincial Art (ICRP, Vienna/Carnuntum, May 2022). In addition, our publications have already appeared in Hungarian and English in the scientific journals *Magyar Tudomány* (Hungarian Science), *Antik Tanulmányok* (Studies on Antiquity), *Ókor* (Antiquity), and the prestigious journals *Chiron*, *Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt*, and *Religion in Roman Empire*.

On October 28, 2021, due to the COVID-pandemic, our research group conducted the “Representations of writing materials on Roman funerary monuments. Text, image, message” workshop fully on-line. Ten speakers from eight countries (Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, and the United States) held presentations. The keynote lecture was given by Professor Elizabeth A. Meyer (University of Virginia, Charlottesville), and we were pleased that internationally well-known researchers such as Benjamin Hartmann (the author of *The Scribes of Rome*, published in 2020, and an expert on writing tablets) and Łukasz Sokołowski, an expert on Palmyra portraits, were also present, along with many promising young talents. As is usually the case with scientific workshops, unfortunately, not everyone prepared a written version of his or her presentation, but the papers published in this volume will hopefully reflect the high quality of the conference.

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who supported the research group and made the publication of this volume possible. First and foremost, we would like to thank the National Research, Development, and Innovation Office for the financial support it provided. We would also like to thank the University of Pécs for hosting our research project. We are also very grateful to the editors at Archaeopress, as well as the proofreaders and anonymous reviewers of the articles, whose contributions were invaluable.

Tibor Grüll
Editor