

ADDENDUM: THE RELIGIOUS ROLES OF CHILDREN IN THE PROVINCES

In my previous article, 'The Roles of Children in Roman Religion',¹ it was shown, from literary and visual evidence, that children of both sexes played a part in religious cult in choirs and groups, as assistants to priests and other sacrificants, at weddings and in private rites. Most of the evidence cited came from Rome and Italy, as indeed the title implies. Since writing it, however, I have been collecting Latin epitaphs to children throughout the provinces of the Roman empire, and in the course of this study I have come across a small amount of evidence for children in religious roles. It is worth considering whether such children, along with those represented visually, were participating in what might be called official Roman religion or whether they were to some extent involved in their own local cults.

Children and the emperor abroad

First of all it has to be said that there is no provincial evidence for the participation of children's choirs or other groups in any major public ceremonies, such as dedications of temples or expiations in times of crisis to the state. The only evident religious role was that of *camillus*, assistant to the emperor when performing a sacrifice away from Rome. The seven scenes of sacrifice by the emperor when on campaign in Dacia at the centre of which is a *camillus*, and which appear at times on Trajan's column, have already been discussed. Two further instances that can be compared with these are illustrated in Scott Ryberg.² On a relief from the theatre at Sabratha in Tripolitania, which I mentioned in my previous article,³ a *camillus* assists the emperor Septimius Severus as he offers a libation during the army's oath of loyalty to Rome. Secondly, on the arch of Galerius in Saloniki in Macedonia, two *camilli* holding sacred utensils appear on the scene depicting the *vota suscepta* before Galerius' departure to Parthia in

¹ I. C. Mantle, 'The Roles of Children in Roman Religion', *G&R* 49 (2002), 85–106.

² I. Scott Ryberg, *Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art*, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 22 (Rome, 1955).

³ Mantle (n. 1), 95; Scott Ryberg (n. 2), pl. xlvi, fig. 74.

AD 296, although here they are not central to the sacrificial scene but seem to have been added as traditional elements.⁴

Children and the imperial cult

In two further visual examples, children assist in the imperial cult. An early imperial *cippus* in the Museo Municipal at Antequera near Merida in Baetica shows two *camilli*, one with a towel, pitcher, and sacrificial dish, the other holding a tray.⁵ Likewise, and as I mentioned previously, two *camilli* with incense box and pitcher assist the priest of the imperial cult in his sacrifice to the Gens Augusta on the Hadrianic altar of Carthage in the Bardo Museum.⁶ In the second century, in Tarraconensis, the nineteen-year-old Postumia Aprulla was commemorated as *flaminica*, priestess of the imperial cult, at a small place probably between Valentia and Liria, by her father, who set up the memorial for his *piissima* daughter and himself.⁷ Lastly, from Mactar in Africa Proconsularis comes an epitaph to Q. Aviranus Rogatianus, who, at his death at the age of thirteen, was described as *sacerdos Nu.*, the suggested interpretation of which is *sacerdos Numinum Augustorum* ('priest of the divine powers of the Augusti').⁸ It is interesting that such a young boy could have been a priest in his own right, rather than merely an acolyte: this was perhaps an honorific priesthood, comparable to the civic posts, such as that of aedile, occasionally accorded to young boys of, we presume, good local family.

Children in local and private cult

Scenes of sacrifice more concerned with local cults – but still presumably conducted by Italians or very romanized, upper-class sacrificants – in Germania Inferior have been described already. The dedication to Vagdavercustis in the Römisch-Germanisches Museum, Cologne, in a scene complete with *camillus*, was made by T. Flavius

⁴ Scott Ryberg (n. 2), pl. xlix, fig. 76.

⁵ Ibid., pl. xxx, fig. 45c.

⁶ Mantle (n. 1), 95; Scott Ryberg (n. 2), pl. xxvii, fig. 41d.

⁷ *CIL* ii 3782 = II2 14, 110, from oppidum Agri Valentini. The fact that Aprulla was commemorated by her father almost certainly implies that she was unmarried and, as such, of child's status. Young married girls were normally commemorated by their husbands.

⁸ *CIL* viii 11823.

Constans, an *eminentissimus uir* ('most eminent man', man of exalted rank), who had probably been procurator of the province before becoming praetorian prefect.⁹ *Camilli* also appear on a series of altars to Celtic goddesses in the Provincial Museum, Bonn, two of which are illustrated in Scott Ryberg.¹⁰

Images of children as *camilli* or *camillae* on private funerary reliefs provide less certain evidence. Whether these children belonged to a more-or-less romanized elite or to humbler families is impossible to tell; moreover, the divine recipient of their offerings is left unclear. On the funerary relief of Nebnicca from Toul in Belgica, a man (her father?) is shown wearing a long garment and with fillets on his head, holding a sacrificial knife, while beside him stands a girl, presumably Nebnicca, holding an open box.¹¹ In Caesarea in Mauretania Caesariensis, Crisa dedicated a memorial to her son depicting a boy holding a sacred object (*sacrum*).¹² Again, we may have a possible *camilla* on the tombstone put up by Cintugena to her daughter Aveta, now in the Musée d'Aquitaine, Bordeaux, in Aquitania:¹³ the girl standing beside Aveta is holding a basket of fruit and an object difficult to decipher, perhaps a flower or a leaf. Aninia Laeta, shown as a *camilla* on her monument in the Bardo Museum, has already been described.¹⁴ Also in the Bardo are two reliefs featuring a family sacrifice carried out by a man and his wife with two *camillae* carrying baskets on their heads, presumably their daughters. The first, a late second-century stele dedicated to Saturn, the African agricultural god, shows in the second panel the family round an altar with a bull and a ram, the typical victims for Saturn (see Fig. 1).¹⁵ This was dedicated by Cuttinus, an evidently prosperous farmer. The second, from Mactar in the same province, similarly shows a family sacrifice with two girls carrying baskets.¹⁶

The boy who stands by with incense as Ovid celebrates his wife's birthday a long way from home certainly represents Roman private

⁹ *CIL* xiii 12057; Mantle, (n. 1), 95, 97, and 98, fig. 5.

¹⁰ Scott Ryberg (n. 2), pl. lxii, figs. 102a and b.

¹¹ *CIL* xiii 4673.

¹² *CIL* viii 9540.

¹³ *CIL* xiii 664.

¹⁴ Mantle (n. 1), 92 and 93, fig. 3.

¹⁵ Bardo Museum, inv. 3119; M. Yacoub, *Le Musée du Bardo* (Tunis, 1996), 67–8; illustrated in J. Huskinson (ed.), *Experiencing Rome. Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire* (London, 2000), fig. 9.2 and p. 249.

¹⁶ Bardo Museum, inv. 650; Yacoub (n. 15), 64.



Figure 1. Second panel of a stele dedicated to Saturn in the Bardo Museum. Drawing taken from the illustration in Huskinson (n. 15), p. 249.

cult transported by the poet into exile¹⁷ rather than any manifestation of local cult, but the reference is included here for the sake of completeness.

There is some slight evidence for children holding specific office in local cults. From Africa comes an epitaph for Extricata, who, at her death at the age of four, was entitled *IMR ser*, slave-girl of a goddess taken to be Juno Magna Regina.¹⁸ At Cirta in Numidia, Julia Sidonia died, it seems, on her wedding day at the age of 18 years 4 months 14 days; she was priestess of Isis, *Memphidae...diuae sistratae sacerdos* ('priestess of the goddess with the sistrum from Memphis').¹⁹ Lastly, at Termini in Sicily an epitaph was found to Nikarion, a girl of fairly humble origin, who, when she died at the age of eighteen, was a leader of singing, *ὑμνήτρια*, presumably in a Greek cult, as her name and title seem to suggest:

¹⁷ *Ov. Tr.* 5.5.11–12.

¹⁸ *AE* 1904, 55, from near Le Kef.

¹⁹ *AE* 1905, 107: an extended verse epitaph in hexameters.

NICARIN.MVNATIAE.L.L.ZOSI
MAE.FILIA.HYMNETRIA.A.S [a sacris?]
TERRA.PRECOR.QVAECVMQVE
IACES.NICARIO.SVPER.OSSA
SIS.LEVIS.IN.TENERO.CORPORE.DEPOSITA
VIXIT.ANNOS.XVIII *CIL X 7426*²⁰

The prayer in lines 3–5 is in verse.

This constitutes little enough evidence from the western Roman empire for children as assistants or as religious figures in their own right in local cult, in imperial cult, or at the emperor's side. However, Nebnicca's funerary relief, for example, or the epitaph to Julia Sidonia tantalizingly suggest that, although much must have been lost and although many children were no doubt not recorded as participating in religious rites, there may well be more to find.

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²⁰ 'Nikarion, daughter of Munatia Zosima, freedwoman of Lucius, a leader of sacred singing. Earth, I pray, whatever (earth) / You lie, upon Nikarion's bones / Laid, may you be light on her tender body. She lived 18 years.' As in the case above, the lack of a husband's name as commemorator probably means that she was unmarried.