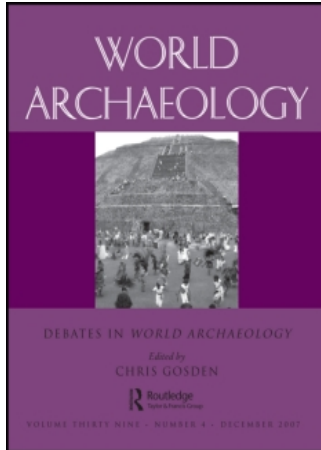


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### Trophies and tombstones: commemorating the Roman soldier

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# Trophies and tombstones: commemorating the Roman soldier

Valerie M. Hope

## Abstract

This paper explores the commemoration of the Roman soldier both in peacetime and in war. Hundreds of tombstones and funerary monuments record the life and death of Roman military personnel, but the vast majority of these monuments appear to commemorate soldiers who died in camp rather than on the battlefield. How were the victims of warfare disposed of and in what ways were the graves marked and the loss of life recorded? In comparison with the Greek world there seems to have been little desire to record the individual sacrifices made in Roman warfare. Triumphs and trophy monuments were methods of recording victories but not the true carnage of battle. Here this public, cleaned-up image of warfare is placed alongside the practicalities of disposing of the dead and the sense of public loss. The paper also evaluates the extent to which individual identity (as celebrated by peacetime military tombstones) was subsumed to the state in times of conflict and then explores the few exceptional occasions when 'war memorials' that commemorated and named the dead were constructed.

## Keywords

Roman; soldiers; tombstones; triumphs; trophies; war.

## Introduction

Roman warfare was gruesome and the death toll high. Bodies littered the battlefield – offending the eye and the sensibilities (Polybius XV, 14; Livy XXII, 51, 5–8; Tacitus *Histories* II, 70; Ammianus Marcellinus XVIII, 8, 12). In literary accounts the aftermath of a bloody battle could be employed for dramatic effect: the horrors of the scene emphasized the destructive forces of war in contrast to the benefits of peace (Pagán 2000: 446). In this paper I want to move beyond such politically motivated rhetoric and to consider the actual fate of the victims of war. How were the corpses disposed of and to what extent were these men commemorated and remembered? The intention of this paper is to unite the diverse relevant evidence for the first time and to argue that, although displays of public loss and mourning were often muted, the sacrifices of some soldiers did receive public acknowledgement.

At the outset it is worth recalling that war cemeteries, with individually marked graves, are a fairly recent introduction to Western Europe (Laqueur 1994; King 1998: 184–7). The ultimate fate of a soldier killed at Waterloo in 1815 was little different from that of a Roman soldier: both shared anonymous interment in a mass grave. Similarly, the tendency to name the dead individually on communal war memorials at battle sites or in the hometown is a feature of the modern age (McIntyre 1990; King 1998). Such monuments seek to honour the victims of conflict and to acknowledge the sacrifices of both the dead and the bereaved. Many of these memorials draw on ancient prototypes, such as arches and columns adorned with classical imagery (Borg 1991: 59–67), and thus appear to unite the ancient and modern world. Indeed, Rome and its empire were littered with reminders of battles, but it needs to be emphasized that these ‘war memorials’ celebrated conquest, victory, and power, rather than death, grief, and individuality. In general, communal expressions of military loss, sacrifice, and mourning were not a feature of the Roman landscape. So a central question here is: in a society that focused on the successes of the Republican generals, and later the emperors, was there any acknowledgement of the deaths of ordinary soldiers?

Reconstructing Roman attitudes to war and commemoration is a complex process. Much of the surviving literature reflects an élite male perspective and we gain few insights into the impact of military death upon the rank-and-file soldier and his family. Archaeological evidence, whether mortuary, monumental, or epigraphic, is often incomplete and frequently de-contextualized. In addition the geographic and chronological breadth of the empire create problems of interpretation. What might have been the norm in Rome of the second century BC might not have been characteristic of Roman Britain in the second century AD. Nevertheless, allowing for these difficulties, it still remains possible to explore ways in which war, victory, and loss were marked. I have tried to avoid creating a composite picture by focusing on evidence from the late Republic and the first two centuries AD and placing this in context as far as is possible. I stop short of the Christian era for such a fundamental change in religious belief encompassed differing attitudes to both the body and the soul (Giorcelli 1995: 242). The paper begins by exploring the public side of battle and victory commemoration before moving on to consider how individual soldiers were buried and commemorated. Finally, I shall look at the few exceptional cases where the two forms of commemoration met, where the sacrifices of war were, at least in part, publicly acknowledged.

### **Trophies and triumphs**

The use of physical structures to commemorate battle sites, specifically victorious battles, was a long-held Roman tradition, influenced by Greek prototypes. In its original form, a trophy was a lopped tree adorned with captured weapons and to which prisoners were chained (Picard 1957). With time such structures took on a more monumental and permanent form. Mounds of earth might provide a locus for the display of the trophy. In AD 16 the troops of Germanicus, the emperor’s nephew, erected a mound on which they set up arms with the names of defeated German tribes (Tacitus *Annals* II, 18). Shortly afterwards, following a second victory, Germanicus piled up a heap of arms and dedicated

them to both Mars and the emperor (Tacitus *Annals* II, 20). Such structures were statements of victory in the face of enemy defeat, but they were also thank offerings to the gods. It was this religious element which helped to justify some of the more grandiose trophies that were set up from the Augustan period onwards, and which imprinted the Roman presence into the landscape of defeated territories. Following the defining naval victory at Actium in 31 BC Octavian dedicated a religious enclosure on the site of his military camp. This was decorated with naval spoils, including large ships' prows (Murray and Petsas 1989). High on a mountainside this was an eye-catching and enduring statement of the first emperor's right to rule through military might. The trophy at La Turbie (near Monte Carlo), set up to celebrate the subjugation of the Alpine tribes (7–6 BC), and the trophy at Adamklissi (Romania), built by Trajan following the Dacian campaigns (AD 107–8), are the other most striking surviving examples (Formigé 1949; Florescu 1965; Davies 2000: 51–66). These monumental stone structures, built a century apart, celebrated the reigning emperor's military power and symbolized Roman dominance (Plate 1).

However, it was in urban centres, especially Rome, that reminders of military supremacy attracted the greatest audience. Rome was the centre of the empire, and



*Plate 1* Model showing proposed reconstruction of the trophy monument at La Turbie (near Monte Carlo) set up during the reign of the emperor Augustus to celebrate the subjugation of the Alpine tribes (7–6 BC). The model is held at Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome.

benefited from the victories and conquests that expanded and protected that empire. Therefore successful generals brought their victories to the urban populace. Triumphal processions were opportunities to display booty, defeated enemies, and military might. A triumph was one of the few occasions when soldiers marched through the streets of Rome *en masse*; generally they were expected to remain outside the *pomerium* or sacred boundary of the city. For the generals of the Republic, a triumph was a vote-catching exercise and a show of family power; for the troops, it was a display of prowess and loyalty; and, for the people, it provided spectacle and entertainment (Versnel 1970; Richardson 1975; Favro 1994). The elaborate parade placed the soldiers before the gaze of civilians, emphasizing the differences between and the interdependence of the two, but also, by marking the end of military conflict, the re-integration of the soldiers into the civilian citizen body. A triumph was a celebration of and for the living rather than the dead. The themes of celebration, power, and victory continued into the Imperial period when a triumph became the prerogative of the emperor. The army was now a more professional body and, although the presence of the legions in Rome was still restricted, armed men who protected both emperor and city were a common presence on the streets



*Plate 2* Reliefs showing scenes from Trajan's Dacian campaigns, Trajan's Column, Rome.

(Coulston 2000). Nevertheless these processions continued to promote the benefits of military life, and its corollary war, and were not concerned with death, loss, sacrifice, and mourning.

Similar themes characterize the triumphal monuments that were erected as more lasting reminders of both the victory and the triumph, and which were often positioned along the triumphal route. The earliest examples of such monuments were temples, thank offerings to the gods, which also provided a locus for the display of booty (Pietilä-Castrén 1987), but increasingly purpose-designed arches and columns were set up, and these were adorned with reliefs of defeated enemies, spoils, winged victories, and campaign scenes. The column of Trajan, for example, was decorated with spiralling reliefs depicting scenes from the Dacian campaign (Plate 2). It was raised on a base sculpted with images of captured weapons and arms in a design reminiscent of the traditional battlefield trophy (Plate 3), and atop the column was a statue of the emperor that gazed over Rome and the Trajanic improvements to the city (Rossi 1971; Lepper and Frere 1988; Claridge 1993; Packer 1994). Overall, this monument emphasized that military might, and its financial rewards, underpinned both Trajan's position and the embellishment of the city. Indeed,



*Plate 3* Detail of the base of Trajan's Column, Rome.

any sense of the realism of battle in such monuments was muted by the intention to celebrate the military prowess of the commander. Triumphal monuments were not intended to capture the life, times, and deaths of the rank and file but the fortunes of one man. The monument summarized the achievements of the individual, verbally and pictorially, and, in the case of Trajan's column, even contained his final remains; trophy and tomb were thus combined in one structure (Davies 2000: 61–74).

Triumphs and trophy monuments were about celebrating victories, and, in Rome, placing these victories before the urban populace. The dead soldiers were not brought home, either physically or emotionally, and the bereaved were not re-connected with those they had lost. If triumphs were about marking death, it was the death of the enemy, since a triumph could be celebrated only if 5,000 foes had been killed (Aulus Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 5, 6, 21; Valerius Maximus 2, 8, 1), while presumably the number of dead Roman soldiers was comparatively small. Besides, by the first century AD, few soldiers would have been recruited from Rome or Italy, and victories were regarded as all the greater if only the blood of a few non-citizen auxiliaries was spilled (Tacitus *Agricola* 35). This is not to say that defeats and military disasters were completely obliterated from public memory. Some of the black or inauspicious days (*dies nefasti*) of the Roman calendar included the anniversaries of military calamities, most notably 17 July, which marked a defeat by the Gauls in 391 BC and the subsequent sacking of Rome (Livy VI, 1, 11; Scullard 1981: 46). Defeats by Rome's traditional enemies and fear of the invasion of Italy could play heavily on the Roman mind (Williams 2001). Following the Varian disaster which saw the loss of three legions (see below), the emperor Augustus was said to be a broken man, keeping the anniversary of the defeat as a personal day of mourning and genuinely fearing the invasion of Italy (Suetonius *Augustus* 23; Cassius Dio LVI, 23–4). Whether those directly bereaved kept such anniversaries and how they squared personal loss with public anxiety is less clear. But it remains apparent that, in terms of visual spectacle and the monumental, victories and glories were brought to the streets of Rome not loss, defeat, and bereavement. Trophies and triumphs were about forgetting the dead rather than remembering them.

### **Military tombstones**

Some Roman soldiers *were* commemorated. Tombstones, which record the service and the deaths of military personnel, are commonplace discoveries across most of what was the Roman Empire (Plates 4 and 5). These funerary memorials were set up outside the forts where the soldiers served and were particularly characteristic of the early empire. Few foot soldiers of the Republic had their graves marked in this fashion since, in general, these men were recruited for specific campaigns and, if not killed in action, hoped to return to civilian life. Besides, at this time, few people beyond the élite received lasting funerary memorials, since these became popular only during the early empire (von Hesberg 1992). One estimate suggests that at least 250,000 epitaphs survive from the Roman world and most of these probably date to the first and second centuries AD (Saller and Shaw 1984: 124; MacMullen 1982). Substantial concentrations of epitaphs and tombstones are found at military bases, especially in the western provinces. In short, during the

early empire funerary monuments became more widely used and often had a special significance to members of the army. The military was now populated by professional soldiers, men who were frequently recruited from diverse regions and who often died far removed from their natal homes. However, by the mid-second century AD, when many military bases had become permanent and the soldiers were often locally recruited, the relevance of military tombstones appears to have declined (Hope 2000, 2001: 70–1). That is to say, such monuments were display items, the use and value of which fluctuated across time (Parker-Pearson 1982; Cannon 1989; Meyer 1990; Woolf 1996; Coulston 2000: 94–5). Tombstones were one method of expressing military identity, status, personal success, and also a sense of difference, or perceived superiority to others. But, as circumstances changed, so did the relevance of these messages and thus the relevance of the communicative medium.

It also needs to be emphasized that the thousands of surviving military tombstones did not mark the graves of soldiers who died in battle. Putting up a tombstone was a camp-based activity, characteristic of peacetime. Causes of death are rarely specified and some of these men may have died from battle wounds or the arduous effects of service, but many others would have succumbed to natural causes. The men commemorated probably had relatively peaceful deaths and were buried in individual graves. This



*Plate 4* Tombstone of Dannicus, Cirencester, first century AD. The relief depicts a cavalryman about to spear a fallen enemy. The epitaph reads: ‘Dannicus cavalryman of the *ala Indiana*, from the troop of Albanus, served 16 years, a tribesman of the Raurici [from Augst in Switzerland]. Fulvius Natalis and Flavius Bitucus set this up according to the will’ (Collingwood and Wright 1995 [1965]: n. 108).





*Plate 5* Tombstone of Caius Donius Suavis, Mainz, first century AD. The tombstone is decorated with a single rosette, and illustrates that not all soldiers' memorials were adorned with military symbols. The epitaph reads: 'Caius Donius Suavis, of the Claudian voting tribe from Virunum, aged 40, of the *legio XIV Gemina*, served 15 years. Lucius Donius Albanus his brother set this up' (*CIL XIII* 6892).

treatment contrasts sharply with that received by those cut down in battle (see below). Tombstones represented a certain level of stability and permanency, the soldiers were settled and had time to celebrate both military identity and a sense of military community. Compared with other elements in the population, the soldier was probably well placed socially and financially to receive commemoration (Hope 2001: 39). The soldier was surrounded by a supportive network of military comrades who acted as pseudo-family (MacMullen 1984; Lee 1996); in addition, he was in receipt of a regular income and was encouraged to make payments into a burial fund (Vegetius II, 20; for burial clubs, see Patterson 1992; Van Nijf 1997). Burial and commemoration of serving soldiers remained a private affair and was not paid for or organized by the military authorities. The soldier saved money to cover his burial expenses and may have left directions in his will dictating his wishes, including the construction of a funerary memorial (for soldiers' wills, see Champlin 1991: 56–8). If the soldier failed to save sufficient money his final rites were presumably organized and funded by his comrades. Many tombstones suggest that fellow soldiers, men who had often been designated as heirs in the will, commemorated the dead. However, although marriage was forbidden to rank-and-file soldiers before the end of the

second century AD, some men formed unofficial liaisons with local women and created family connections and these could also have played a role in burial and commemoration.

Whoever oversaw the soldier's burial, the army benefited since the men were encouraged to save money, to foster links with comrades (and others), and thus spared the army the responsibility of disposing of their bodies, even when they were serving miles from home and natal family. Soldiers who died in peacetime stood a good chance of receiving a decent burial and, during the early empire, these graves were often marked by stone monuments. These tombstones were standardized in design and content and promoted military symbolism, verbally as well as pictorially (Plates 4 and 5). Many depicted military dress, weapons, and equipment (Plate 4) and the epitaphs were filled with military titles and abbreviated information on the career of the deceased (Franzoni 1987; Hope 2001: 37–49). This information was perhaps only fully deciphered and understood by fellow members of the military community, but the impact of such memorials both individually and collectively on the wider indigenous audience should not be underestimated. The military cemetery, like the trophy monument, could serve as a symbol of Roman power, dominance, and permanence. Nevertheless, simultaneously each tombstone stood as an expression of individual identity, social mobility, and personal success.

### War graves

The fate of the battlefield dead was very different. The dignity of an individual grave accompanied by any form of commemoration was not the destiny of those killed in warfare. The bodies would have been stripped, cremated, and then interred in mass graves (Giorcelli 1995: 237–8). Disposal was probably rapid and unceremonious. For practical reasons this had to be the case. Rotting bodies were unhygienic and unsightly, individual identification of bodies would have been difficult, and, if left, exposed corpses could be looted and interfered with by enemies. Bodies were generally cremated, according to Pliny, because this removed the risk of remains being dug up in the future and the graves desecrated (Pliny *Naturalis historia* VII, 54). For similar reasons, the graves were probably left unmarked. Mounds of earth and heaps of spoils may have indicated some mass graves (Virgil *Aeneid* XI, 210; Tacitus *Annals* I, 62). But there was little sense of permanency and certainly no individuality in such markers. An army on the march needed to look forward rather than backwards; it moved on and left no one to tend or protect graves.

War could lead to the abandonment of the rules that usually governed the burial of the dead. Roman law, religion, and sentiment dictated proper and decent burial. The most basic requirement was that the corpse should be covered with earth or, in the case of cremation, that a fraction of it was removed, prior to incineration, for later burial (Cicero *de Legibus* II, 22, 57). Non-burial condemned the deceased to a life in limbo; the spirits of the unburied wandered the earth unable to rest peacefully (Virgil *Aeneid* VI, 320–85; Pliny *Epistles* VII, 27; Suetonius *Caligula* 59; Felton 1999: 9–12). It is difficult to gauge if people actively believed in this and views on the afterlife and the soul were varied. In essence, Roman religious beliefs and practices were often derived from those of the Greeks. However, in the Greek world, there was in general a greater emphasis on providing the war dead with a decent burial and also some form of commemoration,

although this probably had more to do with issues of identity than with religious sentiment. In Athens, throughout the Classical period, those killed in battle were returned to the city, given a public funeral, and their graves marked and names recorded (Thucydides II, 34, 1–8; Pausanias I, 29, 4–15; Loraux 1986: 17–23). Warfare created a greater sense of pragmatism in the Roman world. The dead were not returned home. Appian suggests that during the Social War (90 BC) the Senate ruled that the dead, including generals and the élite, should be interred on the battlefield to spare the civilians of Rome from distress. There was a fear that the gruesome sight of so many dead bodies would deter people from future service (Appian *Bella civilia* I, 43; Valvo 1990: 153–5). Indeed, as the army became more widely recruited and served in various regions of the empire, such a repatriation of remains would have been impractical and impossible.

The potential demoralizing effect of excessive mourning may also have influenced the basic treatment received by the war dead. During the war against Carthage, civilians were urged to restrain their lamentations and mourning was limited to thirty days (Livy XXII, 55, 3–8). In public, at least, the emphasis fell on victory and success (or the down-playing of defeat) not on elevating the victims of that success (or failure). As individuals, soldiers were not remembered or praised, unless they were members of the aristocratic élite and then the emphasis fell on the achievements of their life not just on the tragedy of their death (Polybius VI, 53–4; Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Antiquitates Romanae* V, 17, 5–6; Loraux 1986: 98–9). For the majority, mourning was a private family affair (Giorcelli 1995: 240–1; Sordi 1990: 178–9; although note *dies nefasti* as remarked above). However, to acknowledge this is not to claim that the Roman war dead were completely disregarded and not afforded the essential rites. Where practical, bodies were collected and buried, albeit in a basic fashion. The battlefield was not the place for individuality or elaborate commemoration, but the requirements of common decency were generally met.

However, there were times when the retrieval and burial of bodies was not possible. Cicero notes that the non-burial of soldiers was ‘deemed no piteous lot when met for the sake of the fatherland’ (Cicero *Philippics* XV, 13, 34). Rotting bodies were a poignant sight, especially during times of civil conflict when distinctions between ‘Roman’ and ‘enemy’ became blurred (Propertius I, 21, 22; Tacitus *Histories* II, 45, II, 70; Suetonius *Vitellius* 10; see also Henderson 1998). The ideal, and this was compromised in civil war whether bodies were buried or not, was that death in battle brought glory to Rome and to the anonymous individual. This glory to some degree exempted the soldier from the full spiritual, practical, and familial requirements usually associated with burial (Polybius VI, 54; Cicero *Philippics* XV, 13, 34; Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* VI, 46–9; Harris 1992 [1979]: 9–53). The soldier lost not only his life, but also any guarantee of a dignified burial; at best his remains were lightly covered with earth, at worst his bones were left to whiten upon the ground.

### **Cenotaphs and exceptions**

Between the anonymity of the battlefield graves, on the one hand, and the individuality of the fortress cemeteries, on the other, compromises were sometimes found. In some civil and military cemeteries cenotaphs were erected. These often resemble the surrounding

headstones in design and décor, but mark the empty graves of those who died elsewhere. A famous example, now held in Bonn, records a centurion who was killed in the Varian disaster (Plate 6). The stele incorporated his portrait, and those of two freed slaves, and was set up by the centurion's brother (Lehner 1918: n. 622; *CIL* XIII 8648). Presumably the bodies of these men were never found. Another example from Caerleon in south Wales records a soldier killed in a German expedition during the second or third century AD. His name was given with those of other members of his family; he was the boy who did not come home but had not been forgotten (Collingwood and Wright 1995 [1965]: n. 369). Cenotaphs involve heirs and family honouring their commitment to commemorate the dead and doing so as if the body had been recovered and buried individually. But, for the majority of the war dead, those who would have commemorated them were killed alongside them or the task of commemorating all individually was just too great for the survivors. What happened to any money that these soldiers may have saved in the burial fund is uncertain, but it was most probably swallowed up in the military coffers.

There is little evidence that soldiers' remains were returned to their loved ones, although in the case of men of rank this may have sometimes been possible. Drusus, the stepson of the emperor Augustus, was killed in 9 BC while serving on the German frontier and, after cremation, his ashes were returned to Rome for burial in the Imperial mausoleum, although a commemorative memorial was also erected in Mainz (Tacitus *Annals* III, 5; Suetonius *Tiberius* 7; Cassius Dio LV, 52). This treatment was probably exceptional and,



Plate 6 Cenotaph of Marcus Caelius, Bonn, first century AD. This stone found at Xanten commemorates a legionary centurion who met his death in the Varian disaster of AD 9. The cenotaph was erected by his brother Publius Caelius. The two busts to either side of the main figure were the dead man's freedmen who presumably died with him (*CIL* XIII 8684).

if remains were repatriated regularly, this may have been restricted to men who died in peacetime service rather than in full-scale battle. In other words, peacetime burial and commemoration were a private matter and, if a family wished to transport the remains home and could afford to do so, it was their choice. After battle, it was probably more appropriate for dead generals and officers to remain with their dead men, although their remains may have received special treatment and separate burial (Appian *Bella civilia* I, 43; Livy X, 29, 19–20; Tacitus *Histories* II, 45). After all, these bodies were probably more easily identified and fellow officers and men had the resources to make them the exception. Such a burial might be earned through exceptional conduct regardless of rank. Appian tells us that after the Battle of Pharsalus in 43 BC Caesar honoured a courageous centurion with individual burial and a special tomb (Appian *Bella civilia* II, 82).

### War memorials

The commemoration of dead soldiers, whether they were killed in combat or died at peace, was in general a private matter. The army might oversee the disposal of corpses after a battle, and trophies and triumphs might celebrate the victory, but as individuals the dead men were little remembered, publicly at least. For the vast majority of Roman soldiers killed in action there was no roll of honour or special memorial where their names and individuality were preserved. However, this is not to suggest that war memorials that could fulfil this function were completely unknown in the Roman world. Three striking examples illustrate that forgetting those killed in battle was not always so automatic.

In 43 BC Rome was gripped by civil war. The consul Pansa had been killed in defeating Mark Antony at Forum Gallorum (Modena). To mark this victory, Cicero delivered a speech in Rome proposing honours for the generals, including a public funeral and burial, and even more unusually honours for the dead soldiers (Cicero *Philippics* XI–XIV). Cicero suggested the construction of a public and collective tomb for the dead men. This would be an ‘immortal monument’, an honour not previously bestowed upon a Roman army, that would bear witness to their valour and the gratitude of the Republic (Cicero *Philippics* XIV, 12, 33). Cicero did not describe his plans in detail; the monument was to be magnificent and cut with an inscription, but he does not specify scale, design, décor, or the epitaph content. There is some uncertainty as to whether he envisaged a battlefield tomb or an honorary memorial in Rome itself (Frischer 1983: 69). But, whatever the details, his plan was never realized. The dead generals were buried on the Campus Martius at Rome where evidence of their tombs has been found (Richardson 1992: 356, 358; Coarelli 1999: 290; Macciocca 1999: 302), but there is no trace of the monument to the rank-and-file soldiers. Dio, writing much later, says that the dead soldiers were honoured with a public funeral, although the location and exact form of this remain unknown. Dio makes no mention of a monument (Cassius Dio XLVI, 38). In the volatile political times Cicero’s plans were always unlikely to be accepted or acted upon. In many ways the monument was a rhetorical rather than a physical construct. It served as a vehicle within the speech that allowed Cicero to honour and praise the dead while powerfully condemning the enemy. The proposal sprang from the context of civil conflict, when loyalty to either side was rewarded and honoured as if to compensate for the horror of

killing fellow citizens (Sordi 1990: 172). Cicero was undoubtedly drawing on Greek precedents with which he would have been familiar (Sordi 1990: 173–4), but the precedent he set for the Roman world was not widely adopted and, in literature, is not discussed in these terms again. Remembering the war dead remained exceptional.

More than sixty years later, in AD 15, Germanicus, the nephew of the emperor Tiberius, was in the Teutoburgian Forest, the site of the Varian disaster which had seen the destruction of three Roman legions six years earlier. Germanicus visited the site of the defeat and gathered up and buried the remains of the Roman soldiers (Tacitus *Annals* I, 61–2; Suetonius *Gaius* 3, 1–3; Cassius Dio LVII, 18). Recent excavations have established the general location of the disaster and among the finds were several pits containing human and animal skeletal remains. The human bones were male and exhibited not only signs of injuries from sharp weapons, but also that they had lain on the ground surface for some time before interment (Schlüter 1999: 135–6). However, it is impossible to be certain whether these remains were among those interred by Germanicus and thus we are still largely dependent on the literary accounts of the burial of these war dead. The historian Tacitus describes Germanicus' actions in greatest detail and highlights the pathos of the scene and the natural emotional response of Germanicus to the carnage. Tacitus contrasts this with the reaction of the emperor Tiberius, who was apparently displeased with his nephew's behaviour. Tiberius is made to appear lacking in compassion, even if his disappointment in Germanicus was justified; as a senior priest Germanicus should not have handled the remains of the dead. Tacitus interprets the incident for his own literary ends since he wishes to paint a damning picture of Tiberius. In reality, Germanicus' behaviour may not have been so controversial. Like Cicero before him, he was probably influenced both by Greek culture and by the public sensibilities to the shedding of Roman blood (Clementoni 1990: 204–5). In associating himself with these dead soldiers, in honouring their sacrifice, he was manipulating the dead to gain popularity with the army and the general public. But we may question the extent to which the treatment of these dead soldiers was actually that unusual. If this had been a victory rather than a defeat, or even if the terrain had been less hostile, the dead Roman soldiers would have been buried in a similar basic fashion (see above). It was the lapse of time since the massacre and the direct involvement in the burial of a senior official that added significance to the scene. Tacitus describes Germanicus as raising a mound over the remains and this has been interpreted as a war memorial to the dead (Clementoni 1990). The construction of such a mound to mark a communal war grave may have been unusual and mounds had associations with victory trophies not well suited to this context (see above). But this mound was not a permanent war memorial. It was not adorned and bore no inscription; it gave no individuality to the dead. Indeed, it was soon destroyed by the enemy and not restored, emphasizing perhaps the futility of its construction (Tacitus *Annals* II, 7, 3–4).

Germanicus sought to bury one group of dead soldiers and mark their grave; Cicero sought to commemorate another in monumental style; but neither of their intentions endured. Only once in the Roman world do we find a war memorial that monumentally and permanently expressed the individuality of soldiers killed in war. At the end of the nineteenth century the remains of an altar were found at Adamklissi in Romania. It had originally been raised on steps and each wall had a length of 11.67 metres and a height of 6 metres. These walls were inscribed with the names of legionary and auxiliary soldiers

who, according to the main inscription, were killed fighting for the Republic under an emperor whose name is now lost. The altar was built to the honour and memory of these men and it has been estimated that it may originally have listed 3,800 names (Dorutju 1961: 345–6; Amiotti 1990: 207–8; Borg 1991: 56–7). The location of the memorial indicates that these soldiers were killed in engagements with the Dacians, but whether these encounters occurred under the emperor Domitian or the emperor Trajan is debated. The altar's location close to the Trajanic trophy (see above) suggests that a date under Trajan is most likely (Amiotti 1990) and a summarized section of the history of Cassius Dio supports the idea that Trajan built such an altar: 'In honour of the soldiers who had died in battle he ordered an altar to be erected and funeral rites to be performed annually' (Cassius Dio *Epitome* LXVIII, 8, 2). However, the possibility that the altar predates the trophy and may commemorate those killed in an earlier campaign under Domitian has been championed by some (Dorutju 1961). The altar may have influenced the position of the trophy and the latter's dedication to Mars Ultor (Mars the Avenger), but more probably the two monuments were conceived together as complementary structures. But, whatever its exact date, and allowing for the vagaries of survival, this altar is a unique find – a war memorial that focused on and named the dead. The monument does not appear to have fulfilled a funerary function by housing the remains of the dead (Dorutju 1961: 346), but it did seek to give them individuality since it inscribed their memory into the landscape where, or close to where, they had been killed. However, its association with the more physically dominant trophy does mean that the altar is also a statement of victory; overall, the complex of buildings celebrates triumph more than sacrifice.

Why was the altar of Adamklissi constructed? Why in this context, and apparently only in this context, was such a memorial seen as appropriate? It will probably always remain impossible to reconstruct the full circumstances surrounding its creation, but it is worth noting that this area of the empire was one of repeated conflict and unrest and its subjugation, albeit temporarily, was a major achievement of Trajan's reign. The scenes carved on Trajan's column in Rome emphasize the nature of the conflict, the extent of the involvement of the men on the ground as well as the ultimate triumph of 'the soldier emperor' (Plate 2). It may also be relevant to link the three memorials – actual and not – from Adamklissi, the Teutoburgian forest, and Modena. All arose in troubled times and places: Dacia and the German frontier were problematic areas of the empire over which much Roman blood was spilled with ambiguous outcome; similarly the civil war brought Roman blood loss to the heart of Italy. These unhappy times and unhappy circumstances called perhaps for unusual solutions and actions to bolster the morale of both soldiers and civilians (Sordi 1990: 176). For Cicero, Germanicus (Tacitus), and Trajan there was a certain symbolism and political rhetoric in acknowledging the spilling of Roman blood in these contexts and claiming both to justify and to avenge these losses.

## Conclusion

How the Roman victims of war should be treated was not an object of exact codification (Giorcelli 1995: 241–2). Whether the dead were buried or left unburied, the rapidity of disposal and the marking (or not) of graves were all in part dictated by the circumstances

surrounding the individual battles in which the soldiers were killed. Potential differences created by time and space may also have been significant and certainly hinder any simple or universal assertions about how the war dead of Rome were disposed of. Nevertheless, we do gain insights into what was both acceptable and non-acceptable after battle and the practical dictates that could lead to the compromising of peacetime rituals and expectations. For the soldier, basic, anonymous, and communal burial must have been the common expectation during war. Peacetime could present a very differing scenario, with the soldier receiving individual burial, often in a marked grave. There was then a dichotomy between remembering and forgetting individual soldiers according to the circumstances of their death. Military tombstones were about celebrating individual identity, success, and social mobility, whereas the battlefield allowed little acknowledgement of such things. Individuality was subsumed to the needs of the State and sacrifice was in general not celebrated or held up to be remembered for all time. The grief of the survivors was also not acknowledged in public. Most individual soldiers killed in action were simply forgotten.

This said, the apparently perfunctory treatment received by dead soldiers needs to be viewed in the broader context of death and burial in the Roman world. At certain periods, as the fortress tombstones attest, individual burial in a marked grave may have been the ideal, but we can question how many people actually achieved this. Mortality rates were high and poverty widespread. Many of the urban poor may have been buried in mass graves and disposed of with little ceremony. Even those who received more than the basic rites may not have received any lasting indication of their grave (Hopkins 1983: 208–9; Bodel 1994 [1986], 2000). In these circumstances, the treatment of soldiers killed in battle may have seemed normal rather than shocking. This is not to dispute that how people were buried and commemorated in the civil population could be dictated by many factors, such as wealth, status, religion, and the grief of the survivors, not to mention the chronological period in which the person died. But disposing of the dead was also a practical problem that needed practical solutions, and in times of conflict the latter became paramount.

The pragmatic nature of the burial of the war dead distances us from the survivors. How people coped with the loss of a loved one in war is difficult to reconstruct and largely beyond the scope of this paper (for some of the social and economic impacts of war on women and children, see Evans 1991). Ancient authors highlight for dramatic effect the grief of survivors; for example, in describing the major defeats of the war against Carthage, Livy has the women of Rome waiting anxiously for news, wailing despondently, and in some cases even dying from shock (Livy XXII, 7, 11–13, XXII, 54, 8). But beyond such rhetoric there is insufficient evidence to consider whether the actual physical treatment of the war dead hindered or helped or was even relevant to the grieving process. Nevertheless, the few exceptional cases where victims of war were honoured and commemorated provide some, albeit limited, insights. Cenotaphs gave some an opportunity to feel that they had performed their last duties for the absent dead. These were empty graves that kept names and relationships alive and could provide a focus for remembrance and grief. We can also explore the relevance to the survivors of the three identified war memorials. At Adamklissi we can pose only unanswerable questions about the memorial: would any of the survivors of the campaigns, or the families of the dead,



have seen it? What form and purpose did the annual funerary rituals, mentioned by Dio, take? And for whom were they intended? The rhetorical descriptions of Cicero and Tacitus make more of the emotional impact of the monuments involved. Cicero, in describing his planned memorial to the dead of Modena, speaks explicitly of alleviating the grief of the survivors (Cicero *Philippics* XIV, 11, 31) and states that the monument, in recording the valour of the dead, will be a consolation to the families (Cicero *Philippics* XIV, 13, 35). Tacitus makes no explicit reference to the families of those killed in the Varian disaster and many, if they had followed the legion, would have perished alongside the soldiers (Cassius Dio LVI, 20, 2–5); although note that skeletal remains from the battle site are male only (Schlüter 1999: 136). But Tacitus does evoke a sense of military community and family. Every soldier who was involved in the burial contemplated the hazards of war and his own family (Tacitus *Annals* I, 61) and, as they buried the remains, the soldiers thought of all the dead as ‘friends and blood-brothers’ (I, 62). The accounts of Cicero and Tacitus were politically motivated and the monuments they describe evoke issues of power centred on the ruling personalities more than genuine grief for the nameless soldiers. Yet underpinning the rhetoric, in fact what makes it so powerful, is the impact of death in battle and a general sense of loss.

How people reacted to Roman war memorials, whether the trophies of Rome, a military tombstone, or the altar of Adamklissi, is difficult to reconstruct and besides would not have been standard. The reaction of a serving soldier, a bereaved family member, or a defeated foe may have differed dramatically, as would the significance of these memorials a generation later. In essence, Roman war memorials may have differed substantially from their modern equivalents in the stress placed on the individual, but both may have shared the mixed response of their audience. Many memorials set up following the world wars of last century were read, and continue to be read, differently by differing viewers (Winter 1995: 93–8; King 1998: 7–8). Are these memorials symbols of victory, grief, or sacrifice? Do they celebrate war or peace? Were they intended originally for the dead, the bereaved, or military comrades (compare Gregory (1994) on the varied public reactions to and interpretations of Armistice Day)? To be sure, each memorial needs to be read within its own context, but how individual people perceived them and reacted to them was and could not be strictly prescribed. War memorials often represent a process of negotiation and have a plurality of meanings (King 1998). The same may have applied in the Roman world, an environment where, on the surface at least, only victory was monumentalized while the dead were largely ignored.

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