

**EMOTIONS CARVED IN
STONE?**
**THE SOCIAL HANDLING OF DEATH
AS EXPRESSED ON HELLENISTIC
GRAVE STELAI FROM SMYRNA & KYZIKOS**

by

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ABSTRACT

Karlsson, S., Emotions carved in stone? The social handling of death as expressed on Hellenistic grave stelai from Smyrna and Kyzikos. 400 pp. 48 pls. Written in English.

This study deals with expressions of emotions in Hellenistic funerary art. The material for this study consists of 245 grave reliefs from the Greek cities of Smyrna and Kyzikos in Western Asia Minor; mostly dated to the second century BCE. The aim of this thesis is to examine emotional responses as expressed in Hellenistic funerary art and epigraphy. More specifically it is my purpose to extract emotional responses and study them as a means of social and cultural communication. I argue that we cannot understand subjective emotional experiences of people in past societies, but that we might be able to look at the social and cultural expectations that dictated how people were to behave in emotional terms and how this manifested itself in material expressions.

The results of this study suggest that it is possible to detect personal expressions of grief, affection, and longing in the source material. Combined images and epitaphs of individuals named and portrayed determined the emotional content they possessed. By examining the whole context of the tombstones, its setting and the experience of the intended viewer(s) it is possible to determine its consoling function. The social handling of death, especially untimely deaths, together with the mere confrontation of death and our own mortality in general, is a recurrent theme. All this is expressed within the confines of acceptable societal behaviour. The emotional semiotics that confronts us ranges in content from solemn expressions of introspective mourning in the case of Smyrna to more explicit outpourings of grief in the case of Kyzikos.

Keywords: Study of emotions, funerary reliefs, Hellenistic age, funerary epitaphs, Smyrna, Kyzikos, iconography, semiotics, epigraphical studies, social conventions, visual therapy, emotional communities

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