

Bodicacia's Tombstone – window to the past – abstract

Commercially popular major motion pictures and television series depicting Rome and Romans, such as *Quo Vadis* (1951), *Ben Hur* (1959), *Spartacus* (1960), *Cleopatra* (1963), *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), *Fellini Satyricon* (1969), *I Claudius* (1976 miniseries), *Masada* (1981 miniseries), *Gladiator* (2000) and *The Passion of Christ* (2004) have provided us with certain popular images of ancient Rome: a sprawling empire led by pretentious mercenaries masquerading as agents of civilization (ripped off from the Greeks) who went everywhere throughout the known world imposing Roman “law,” i.e., power, at the point of a sword, that is, when they weren't indulging themselves in the bathes, plotting to murder each other, or entertaining themselves at the arena by watching helpless captives, convicts and Christians (at least until the reign of Constantine) being butchered in staged shows. In short, it is an image of a society that was corrupt and oppressive, utterly depraved, totally merciless, sexually perverse, completely materialistic, spiritually hollow, and detested, with cause, by the rest of the world.

Yet there had to a socially redeemable side to Rome. There is no way that such a thoroughly rotten society could have survived a thousand minutes, much less a thousand years. Roman culture had to be richer, more nuanced and more substantive than what is depicted in the popular mass media. Hence, through careful analysis of one ancient Roman tombstone memorializing the death of a woman named Bodicacia, this paper will provide a fairer, more balanced and more accurate depiction of Roman culture. That the ancient Romans left behind

elaborate tombstones is in itself evidence that they had attained a certain level of cultural sophistication.

My paper will first discuss the materials used to construct the tombstone. That will be followed by a discussion into the tombstone's style and what that style meant. It will conclude with a discussion about the inscriptions – the purpose they served, what they said and what they revealed, not only about the interred, but about Roman culture and the Roman people in general.