By far the most numerous depictions of soldiers in Roman art are to be found sculpted on the state ‘propaganda’ monuments of the 1st to 4th centuries AD, whether still standing, as in the cases of the Column of Trajan and the Arch of Severus in Rome, or represented by disiecta membra, as with the fragments of the Columns of Theodosius and Arcadius in Istanbul.\(^1\) However, these works were the products of metropolitan workshops and of sculptors whose first priority might not necessarily have been to accurately reproduce the contemporary appearance of soldiers.\(^2\) At the very least, the sheer scale of these sculptural projects enforced some degree of stylisation and simplification going beyond the

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\(^1\) Trajan’s Column involved the sculpting of 2,640 human figures on its helical frieze, 1,732 of which are Roman soldiers. See J.C.N. Coulston, *All the Emperor’s Men: Roman Soldiers and Barbarians on Trajan’s Column* (Oxford forthcoming). Later columns eschewed the same numbers, simplifying detail and scenery in favour of visibility from a distance. The frieze of the Column of Marcus Aurelius bore approximately 1,766 figures (E. Petersen, A. von Domaszewski and G. Calderini, *Die Marcus-Säule auf der Piazza Colonna in Rom* (Munich 1896)). The Arch of Severus in the Forum Romanum has figural representations on its ‘siege’ panels (485), its triumphal friezes (124) and on its pedestals (65) of which a total of 461 are soldiers (R. Brilliant, *The Arch of Septimius Severus in the Forum Romanum*, Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome 29 (Roma 1967); G.M. Koeppel, ‘Die historischen Reliefs der römischen Kaiserzeit VII. Der Bogen des Septimius Severus, die Decennalienbasis und der Konstantinsbogen’, *Bonner Jahrbücher* 190 (1990), 12–31).

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\(^2\) Although it is important to be aware that Trajan’s Column did represent a new concern to reproduce contemporary military figures, albeit with a range of Hellenizing elements. See J.C.N. Coulston, ‘The value of Trajan’s Column as a source for Roman military equipment’, in C. van Driel-Murray, ed., *Roman Military Equipment: the Sources of Evidence, Proceedings of the Fifth Roman Military Equipment Conference* (Oxford 1989), 31–44; Coulston forthcoming, op. cit. (n. 1).
long-established artistic conventions of depicting battle and triumph.

Fortunately, there is another Roman iconographic source in the form of the very numerous figural funerary monuments privately erected in honour of individual soldiers. These cover a wide chronological range from the later 1st century BC to the later 4th century AD. They were erected in Rome, Italy and the wider provinces, especially along the imperial frontiers. They depict almost all branches of military service, citizen and non-citizen, infantry and cavalry, praetoriani and legionarii, auxiliarii and classiarii, milites and veterani. The vast majority commemorate ranks from centurio downwards. By their nature as private dedications, and despite their own elements of stylisation and genericisation, these depictions do allow the modern observer to move closer to Roman soldiers, both as a distinct body within or on the fringes of Roman society, and as individuals proudly advertising service and achievement.

Within this chronologically and geographically widespread genre, there is one class which stands out as particularly rich and informative. These are the 3rd century monuments, sometimes referred to as ‘ring-buckle gravestones’. Not all display the characteristic belt-buckle form, and not all comprise gravestones, strictly speaking, but include standing stelae, funerary altars, sarcophagi and painted ‘mummy’ portraits. To these may be added non-funerary soldiers on other 3rd century sculptures, floor mosaics, wall paintings, dipinti and graffiti. However, together

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3 For example, a figure with a ring-buckle belt and broad baldric appears on the well known ship relief from Palmyra, Syria. See M.A.R. Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra* (London 1976), Pl. 103; K. Tanabe, *Sculptures of Palmyra* I (Tokyo 1986), No. 430. Various frescoes found at Dura-Europos (Syria) and Castellum Dimmidi (Algeria) depict auxiliary soldiers in full colour. See S. James, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters, 1928 to 1937. Final Report VII, The Arms and Armour and other Military Equipment* (London 2004), Pl. 1–4; C. Picard, *Castellum Dimmidi* (Paris 1949), Fig. 15–6. A graffito depicting a soldier with a long-sword, a large round chape and a broad baldric was found at Bu Ngem, Libya. See R. Rebullat, ‘Note sur le camp romain de Gholaïa (Bu Ngem)’, *Libyan Studies* 20 (1989), Fig. 5. To these may be added the ‘seepage’ of 3rd century military equipment into divine iconography, mainly belt and sword details, but sometimes also helmet and shield features. See for example E.J. Phillips, *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani, Great Britain I.1, Corbridge. Hadrian's Wall East of the North Tyne* (Oxford 1977), No. 194; J.C.N. Coulston, ‘A fragmentary altar to Jupiter from Wällsend’, *Archaeologia Aeliana* ser. 5, 11 (1983), 309–313; S.R. Tufi, *CSIR, Great Britain I.3, Yorkshire* (Oxford 1983), No. 10; R.P. Wright and E.J. Phillips, *Roman Inscribed and Sculptured Stones in Carlisle Museum* (Carlisle 1975), No. 238; M. Henig, *CSIR, Great Britain I.7, Roman Sculpture from the Cotswold Region, with Devcon and Cornwall* (Oxford 1993), No. 60; E. Espérandieu, *Receuil général des bas-reliefs, statues et bustes de la Gaule romaine* (Paris 1907–1981), No. 4541, 5564, 7641; P. Filtzinger, *Limesmuseum Aalen* (Stuttgart 1971), Fig. 5; G. Piccottini, *CSIR, Österreich II.1, Die Rundskulpturen von Vindonissa*