

Iphigenia Leventi

THE THESSALIAN STELES WITH RELIEF BUSTS FROM THE ROMAN  
PERIOD  
THEIR ICONOGRAPHIC MODELS AND EVOLUTION

The majority of the grave steles from Thessaly from the late 1st century BC to the 3rd century AD are decorated with relief busts. Their apsidal ogival frame goes back to a local tradition of the Classical period, while the tall rectangular shape incorporating Hellenistic examples is also the usual one. The depiction of the deceased in bust form, however, has no antecedents in monumental funerary reliefs in Thessaly or elsewhere in continental Greece. The first question that arises, therefore, concerns the origin and influences of this iconographic form, which is known especially in Asia Minor from the Late Hellenistic era and in Italy and Rome from the late Republican period. One particularly interesting aspect of these relief busts from Thessaly is how they relate to certain examples of free-standing funerary portrait statues from the same region. This paper also examines the evolution of the iconographic features peculiar to this group of relief steles in relation to examples of various other parts of the Roman Empire, with particular emphasis on the Balkan region, once this pictorial type had become well established.