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FUNERARY PORTRAIT RELIEFS OF THE IMPERIAL AGE
FROM THE REGION OF MELENIKITSI, SERRES

Among other monuments from the area of Melenikitsi, Serres, are seven funerary portrait reliefs from the imperial age, now in the storerooms of the Serres Museum. According to the Museum inventory they were all chance finds from Leginitsko, a site four kilometres northeast of Melenikitsi. Two of the reliefs are rectangular, three are round, and the last two are fragments of what may have been another two round ones. Only two of the seven are inscribed.

These virtually unknown funerary portrait reliefs constitute a very interesting group of monuments, primarily because they, together with some other chance finds from the same general area, attest to the existence of a Roman settlement on the road from Philippi to Heraclea Sintica. They are also important as examples of the sculptural production of this part of Macedonia in the imperial age.

Following a brief presentation of the reliefs and their dating, based on stylistic and typological features, the study focuses on the morphology of the monuments and on questions of imagery. All of them display portraits, while one of the rectangular reliefs also has a mounted hero beneath the busts, an example of the “Thracian horseman” motif that was widely used on funerary reliefs of the imperial era in Macedonia and Thrace. This suggests that the funerary reliefs from Melenikitsi were diverging from Classical and Hellenistic sculptural tradition, adopting types found on funerary reliefs from the Roman age. The study of similar monuments from many other parts of the district of Serres points to the same conclusion. The paper also examines the relation between the reliefs from Melenikitsi and examples from other parts of Macedonia and the rest of the Empire, and attempts to integrate these reliefs into their historical context.