

ROMAN PORTRAIT GRAVE STELES FROM NICOMEDIA AND BITHYNIA (NORTHWESTERN TURKEY)

Ergün LAFLI*

Cuvinte-cheie: *stele funerare cu portrete, bust, sculptură funerară, perioadă imperială romană, Nicomedia, Izmit-Kocaeli, Bithynia, nord-vestul Asiei Mici, nord-vestul Turciei.*

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Rezumat: *Pe unele dintre reliefurile funerare din Nicomedia (actual Izmit-Kocaeli) și în general din Bithynia (în nord-vestul Turciei), defuncții sunt reprezentați mai degrabă bust, decât integral. Această formă de portretistică a fost un mod apreciat de expunere a portretelor în spații interioare precum locuințele. Busturile redade pe aceste stele sunt mereu interpretate ca fiind „romane”, însă din examinarea atât a coafurii cât și a stilului putem stabili mai precis data la care au fost elaborate. Vom prezenta în detaliu în această scurtă notă stelele funerare din Nicomedia cunoscute din materialele arheologice publicate.*

Abstract: *On some Roman grave reliefs from Nicomedia in modern Izmit-Kocaeli and, more generally, from Bithynia in north-western Turkey, the dead persons are depicted only as busts rather than entire figures. The bust form of portraiture was an appreciated form of displaying a portrait in interiors, such as houses. The busts on these tombstones are always labelled as „Roman”, but by examining both the hair and bust styles, we can determine the dates for these tombstones more precisely. In this brief note, grave steles of this kind from Nicomedia and Bithynia, which are known from published archaeological sources, will be presented in detail.*

The most common kinds of grave steles found in Asia Minor from the Hellenistic period up until the Roman imperial period (**Fig. 1**) are the banquet-type grave steles, so-called „Totenmahlreliefs”, which represent a reclining hero

* Ergün LAFLI: Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Arkeoloji Bölümü, Oda No A-418, Tınaztepe/Kaynaklar Yerleşkesi, Buca, TR-35160 Izmir, Turkey; e-mail: elafli@yahoo.ca; website: <http://deu.academia.edu/ErgunLAFLI>.

and several persons around him participating in a feast, representations of riders, and standing single figures accompanied by small figures of servants. From the second century B.C. onwards, this repertoire is extended to include half-pictures and even quarter-pictures of persons. An example of such a half-picture is the grave *stele* of Olympia from Magnesia on the Maeander (**Fig. 2**), which was dated to the first half of the first century B.C.¹ Presumably due to the influence of the western Romans, who lived in many parts of Asia Minor during the Roman imperial period, the dead person was portrayed in the form of a portrait bust with increasing frequency. The same thing is observed in Phrygia, Macedonia, and Palmyra in Syria. A portrait bust is the intentional reproduction of a person's head and a section of their bust, which mainly encompasses the area around the neck and possibly parts of the chest, is encompassed by a clear border and usually sits on a plinth. The reproduction as a portrait bust clearly differs from the reproduction as a half portrait or quarter portrait. In a half-picture or quarter-picture, the upper body of a person is also depicted, but disappears where the edge of the picture begins and would theoretically continue if the lower edge of the picture did not exist.

The aim of this contribution, however, is to place a focus on some selected grave monuments from Nicomedia on Propontis (today Izmit-Kocaeli) and the wider Bithynian area in north-western Asia Minor (**Fig. 1**), upon which people are deliberately portrayed in the form of portrait busts. By taking a fresh look at these monuments, new suggestions for their interpretation, dating, and provenance were made.

From the first century onwards, portraits appeared as busts on grave monuments in Asia Minor. One of the early *stelae* of this type is the *stele* of Menelaos from the first century A.D.² The parents, who depicted the boy as a bust in the middle of the *stele*, were forced to erect a tomb on the occasion of the early death of their son. As was the common practice in antiquity, they prepared a tombstone during their own lifetimes: They themselves are represented as half-figures, and the son is depicted in the form of a bust, which explains the situation to the viewers.

The tombstone of the two brothers, Alexandros und Artemidoros, is displayed in the archaeological museum of Bursa and is thought to date from the second century A.D.³ The two busts, which are slightly different in scale, show part of the breast and the upper arms, which was a form of bust that was becoming more popular in the Roman West during the early Hadrianic period⁴; this provides a *terminus post quem* for the dating of this tombstone. Both male portraits have short hair, combed toward the front. Due to the low relief and the

¹ Today in the museum of Efes, acc. no. 422: WAELEKENS 1986, no. 10, pl. 2.

² The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology in Oxford: PFUHL & MOEBIUS 1979, no. 1811, pl. 310; SCHWERTHEIM 1980, no. 317; CREMER 1991, p. 96-97, 99, 165, KB5, pl. 18; SCHMIDT 1991, fig. 77; and KORKUT 2000, p. 194, fig. 14.

³ The archaeological museum of Bursa, without acc. no.: PFUHL & MOEBIUS 1979, no. 2194, pl. 312; and CORSTEN 1993, p. 121-122, cat. no. 1027.

⁴ Cf. FEJFER 2008, p. 182 fig. 106 and 237, fig. 155a.

missing details, we can only date this special form of bust to the second century. The epigram tells us that the mother and the uncle cared for their tomb.

Two similar young men's portraits with sensitively modelled faces, looking full front and having short, curly hair, can be seen on a tombstone from Nicomedia, today being displayed in the garden of the archaeological and ethnographic museum of Kocaeli (Figs. 3a-c).⁵ They are given in high relief in a *naiskos*, most of which has not been preserved, but which was restored with modern concrete in left top as well as right bottom edges. The thin, fluted columns bore Corinthian capitals. The inscription is missing. The two heads of the young men look so similar to each other that it can be assumed that they were brothers who were only slightly removed from one another in age (Figs. 4a-b). Both young men have a lively, curly coiffure, which, in contrast to the head and bust, features deep drill grooves and bars. The individual curls are carefully defined by lines. This, together with the deep relief, shows high quality of the carving. The nude bust cut outs also include the arm stumps, which appear strangely stunted compared to a strictly realistic reproduction. The young men in the busts appear to be naked except for a garment around the neck which is held together on one side by a round *fibula*, a *chlamys*. Nudity and the *chlamys* are usually typical of mythological heroes and gods, such as Apollo or Hermes⁶. In the context of graves, this garment means that the young men have become heroes after death, *i.e.*, they assumed an existence similar to that of the gods. The special features, the curls that are separated from each other by drill grooves and their hook-like, bending shapes, may be indicative of the Flavian⁷ fashion. But the most probable dating is between A.D. 117-130, *i.e.*, during the Hadrianic period. The heads can be compared to the heads of two *herm* figures of youthful *satyrs* in the Curetes Street in Ephesus (Figs. 8a-b), which are dated to the Hadrianic or early Antonine period⁸, although the former seem to be dated slightly earlier. It is difficult to assign this tombstone to any sculptor or workshop, as Nicomedean or Bithynian funerary sculpture has not been characterised as of yet.

The tombstone of a married couple from the eastern *necropolis* of Nicomedia⁹ (Fig. 9) has a gabled pediment with a round *patena* in the gable and lateral

⁵ Acc. no. 1032. Measurements: H = 51 cm, w = 57 cm and th = 23 cm. crown. Missing minor chips from hair, forehead, face, a part of shoulder and niche. Surface weathered and yellowed with some encrustation. It is by a quality fine-grained white marble (probably Proconnesian?) with some gray veins and medium to large, sparkling, glassy crystals (w c. = 0.2 cm).

⁶ Cf. the statue of Hero Androclus, the mythical founder of the city of Ephesus, from the fountain of Trajan in Ephesus (Fig. 5), the famous statue of Apollo Belvedere, Musei Vaticani, Museo Pio-Clementino (Fig. 6) or the statue of Hermes/Mercury in Sevilla (Fig. 7).

⁷ Musei Capitolini in Rome, in the depot of the theatre of Marcellus, former acc. no. 1984, new acc. no. MT 888: FITTSCHEN & ZANKER 2014, p. 9, no. 9, pl. 12 (dated to the Flavian period).

⁸ HANSLMAYR 2016, p. 157-158, cat. no. „B7a.b“, pls. 35-36 (dated to the Hadrianic-early Antonine period).

⁹ The archaeological and ethnographic museum of Kocaeli, acc. no. 603: ŞAHİN 1974, p. 47, no. 22, pl. 5. Measurements as given by Şahin: H = 69 cm, w = 57 cm and th = 10 cm.

palmettos. The busts of a woman and a man are depicted next to each other within the main field of the picture. The inscription on the gable bar is a single line and says: ἡδὸν βίωσαν [ἐβίωσαν] μοίρας τύχης ἔθανον, translated as „they have already lived; they died because of fate“. Since one would expect an inscription with the names of the represented persons on the gable bar, and some letters of the existing inscription are unclear as well as difficult to read, the question arises of whether this inscription might not have been created during the course of a second use. It has already been recognised that this tomb *stele* dates to the third century¹⁰ on the basis of the portraits. The suggestion made by Margarete Cremer, who dated the *stele* to „A.D. 260-270“¹¹, appears to be definitely too late. The woman wears her hair shoulder-length, and her hair falls down to both sides in straight lines from a central part, then is securely bound in the back. This hairstyle is characteristic of those that appeared during the late Severan period, *i.e.*, between A.D. 222 and 235¹². The woman is wearing a robe with broad borders. These broad borders have been compared to those seen on robes worn by women belonging to the upper class during the third century and later, which were based on the *toga contabulata* of men¹³, although there are few comparative examples. The border was probably decorated with a painted pattern. They are rarely depicted and seem to have been reserved for women who belonged to the upper class, *cf.* a gold glass medallion from Brescia from the late Severan period from Brescia¹⁴ (Fig. 10) and a portrait bust of an aristocratic woman, as one of the so-called female Cleveland busts¹⁵ (Fig. 11). The extra wide borders are decorated with a pattern or spirals. It is to be expected that the whole tombstone was painted, and that the wide borders were decorated with a special pattern. Since the draping of the broad borders does not exactly match those in with the comparative examples mentioned, another, even more convincing explanation is proposed: The broad borders could also be identified as an additional—perhaps only temporarily worn—fillet of a follower or priestess of Isis¹⁶. The way such a fillet is worn is known from several statues of Isis as early as the Hadrianic

Also DÖRNER & VON STRITZKY 1978, IV, 1, no. 161; CREMER 1992, p. 46-48, 136, NKP 3, pl. 13; and MAREK 2003, p. 142 and 147, fig. 226.

¹⁰ MAREK 2003, p. 142.

¹¹ CREMER 1992, p. 46-48, 136, NKP 3, pl. 13.

¹² DATSOULE-STRAURIDE 1998, pls. 42-43.

¹³ *Cf.* Fig. 12. FEJFER 2008, 251-252.

¹⁴ Today in the Museo di Santa Giulia, Brescia. For its photo in colour: ROTLOFF 2006, p. 59, fig. 27 (dated to the third-fourth centuries A.D.); and for its photo in black and white: KOVACS 2014, p. 237, pl. 145, 1 (dated to the late Severan period). Stylistically, its painting is closely related to the third-century A.D. Roman-Egyptian mummy portraits found in the Faiyum Oasis: BRECK 1927, p. 353.

¹⁵ The Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund, acc. no. 1965.246: İNAN & ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1979, p. 325-327 (by E. Alföldi-Rosenbaum), no. 325, pl. 228; and FEJFER 2008, p. 251, fig. 171f.

¹⁶ The *stele* of Galatea from Rome today in the Musei Vaticani, Museo Pio-Clementino, Loggia Scoperta, acc. no. 840: EINGARTNER 1991, p. 76-77 “*palla contabulata*”, 163-164, cat. no. 135, pl. 83; MERKELBACH 1995, p. 631, fig. 164; and KREIKENBOM 2010, fig. 348c (dated to the late Hadrianic-early Antonine period).

period. Although Jörg Eingartner called the garment „*palla contabulata*”¹⁷ in his seminal work on Isis, Reinhold Merkelbach said that this must be an additional, extra fillet, clearly differentiated from the garment¹⁸, and a close look at the statues affirms this. The man is dressed in a traditional *himation*. His right elbow and whole right forearm are visible underneath the *himation*. The hand reaches into the noose of the *himation*. This iconography was customarily used and commonly seen in honourable representations of men during the time of Hellenism¹⁹ and still appeared during the Roman imperial period²⁰. The chubby, thick facial features, the man’s hairstyle, and beard that appear on the *stèle* in Nicomedia correspond most closely to features appearing on the portrait of Emperor Balbinus (**Fig. 13**) reigned in A.D. 238, which is dated from the first half of the third century. Thus, we are concerned with the final years of the Severan rule and the period shortly afterwards, *i.e.*, with a time span between A.D. 220-240.

Other comparative material and their dating

A *sarcophagus*’ lid in Nicomedia²¹ shows busts of a woman and a man on its edges (**Fig. 14**). The man’s characteristic features can be compared to those appearing on a larger-than-life-sized, high-quality portrait from the Civil Basilica of Aphrodisias in northeastern Caria (**Fig. 15**)²², and this helps us date the *sarcophagus*’ lid in Nicomedia from to a period between A.D. 160 and 200.

The grave *stèle* of Ammiatē, also called Roupē (**Figs. 16a-b**), which is made of white marble and is held in the archaeological museum of Bursa, was found in Kütahya in Phrygia in 2012²³. The Greek inscription has nine lines; engraved

¹⁷ Cf. for examples from Hermoupolis in Egypt, formerly in the *Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung (today in the Neues Museum) in Berlin*, acc. no. 19581, dated to A.D. 130-140: EINGARTNER 1991, p. 138-140, no. 85, pl. 55; and MERKELBACH 1995, p. 570, fig. 91; from Hermoupolis, today in the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, Egypt, acc. no. 22404, dated to A.D. 130-140: EINGARTNER 1991, no. 86, pl. 56; in the *Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli*, without acc. no., dated to A.D. 170: EINGARTNER 1991, no. 87, pl. 56; and from Tralles in Caria, formerly in the archaeological museum of Izmir in the Greek church of Agia Voukla in Basmane, today lost: EINGARTNER 1991, no. 88, pl. 56.

¹⁸ MERKELBACH 1995, p. 227.

¹⁹ For an early example, cf. the grave *stèle* of Menander from Smyrna, dated to the third-second century B.C., today in the Musée du Louvre, acc. no. MND 1777, holding the inscription „The people honour Menandros, son of Menandros, son of Andronikos”: HASSELIN ROUS 2009, p. 68 no. 23 (by L. Laugier; with its photo); SZEWCZYK 2013, p. 57, fig. 4; and LEWERENTZ 1993, table at the end of the book, entitled „Chronologie und typologische Ordnung der hellenistischen männlichen Gewandstatuen”.

²⁰ Cf. the honorific portrait statue erected for the priest L. Antoninus Claudius Dometeinos Diogenes in Aphrodisias (**Fig. 17**): SMITH 2006, p. 170-176, cat. no. 48, pls. 40-42, figs. 19 and 24; İNAN & ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1979, p. 210-213, cat. no. 186, pl. 138.1, 139, 140.3, 274; as well as SMITH & RATTÉ 1998, p. 66-68, pl. 6.1-2, figs. 1-2.

²¹ MAREK 2003, p. 134-135, fig. 199.

²² SMITH 2006, p. 297-299, no. 221, pls. 161-163.

²³ LAFLI & BRU 2016, p. 109-110, no. 8, figs. 8a-b. Measurements: H = 114,7 cm, w = 64,7 cm, th = 21 cm and h of letters = 2-2,5 cm.

auxiliary lines are indicated. It is dated to A.D. 160-180, *i.e.* to the late Antonine period. Transcription of its inscription is follows:

- ἔτους ροε μ(ήνος)
 Γορπιαίου Παπίας καὶ Μητροφάνους τρόφιμος
 Ἀμμιάτη καὶ Ῥοῦφα
 4 γυναῖκι συν τοῖς υἱοῖς
 Μητροφάνη καὶ Μηνόφιλος καὶ Ἀλέξανδρος
 καὶ Ζεύξις οἱ υἱοὶ αὐτῶν
 τῇ μήτρῃ μνήμης χαρὶν

Its translation is as follows:

- In the year 175²⁴, in the month of
 Gorpiaion (August), Papias, trophimos (adopted son)²⁵ of Metrophanes,
 for Ammiate, also (called) Roupha,
 4 his wife, together with his children,
 Metrophane, Menophilos, Alexandros
 and Zeuxis – their children
 for their mother, for memory.*

The first line of the inscription contains the date 175. According to the era of Amaseia this would be equivalent to A.D. 172/173²⁶.

There is a portrait of a woman in the centre of the *stele*, which intentionally has the form of a bust, as the groin at the base of the upper part of the torso makes clear. Besides the bust, a mirror with a handle, a symbol of female beauty as well as weddings²⁷ and an *unguentarium*, a perfume flask, are depicted²⁸.

According to the inscription, the *stele* was erected for the woman by her husband and their four children. The head, which looks to the front, is veiled. The veil was a common article of clothing worn by women in many parts of Asia Minor. The right, open hand emerges from the sling of the cloak. The hand is also commonly emphasized on Phrygia's grave *steles* from the Roman imperial period, because it symbolizes the work that one carries out with one's hands²⁹.

The most striking features of the physiognomy are the elongated, oval face, the strongly edged eyelids, the wavy hair divided by a central part, and the

²⁴ For a table explaining Greek alphabetic numerals, see: McLEAN 2002, p. 62, table 6.

²⁵ Definition and meaning of the word τρόφιμος: MAREK 2010, p. 576-578.

²⁶ LESCHHORN 1993, p. 467, no. 37: According to the era of Amaseia (Paphlagonia-Pontus).

²⁷ Cf. the use of a grip mirror in the scene of Hippodamia preparing for her wedding on an Athenian two handled *amphora* attributed to the Kadmos painter, today in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and dated to c. 425 B.C.: KONDOLEON & SEGAL 2011, p. 75 (colour photo), 195, cat. no. 54.

²⁸ Cf. some glass *unguentaria* in the archaeological museum of Afyonkarahisar: UÇANKUŞ 2002, p. 454 (bottom).

²⁹ MASSEGLIÀ 2013, p. 107.

unnaturally highly positioned ears. This latter feature can also be seen in other grave portraits from Phrygia³⁰. The undergarment has a wavy upper seam.

The pilaster decoration with wavy tendrils and ivy leaves strongly resembles the *stele* of a young man that is displayed in the garden of the archaeological museum of Uşak (Fig. 18), dated by the year specified in the inscription (A.D. 176/177) to the Sullan era³¹. This *stele* was attributed by Tomas Lochman to the so-called central Phrygian workshop („Zentrumwerkstatt der Tembris-Ebene“). The pilaster decoration is also similar to that appearing on a door stone in Dascylium³² and a *stele* in the Sadberk Hanım Museum in Istanbul, which is dated to A.D. 160³³. Considering all these comparative materials, we can be sure that the *stele* of Ammiate/Roupha dates to the time of the reign of Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 161-180 and was manufactured in a marble workshop in the upper Tembris valley in northern Phrygia.

Conclusion

In summary, the Roman portrait busts that appear on grave monuments and are presented here show how difficult it is to apply our knowledge of Roman portraiture styles and use this knowledge to assess the portraits on the grave *steles* from the Roman imperial period that were found in Nicomedia and Bithynia. We consider that there is still an enormous *demand* for and necessity to improve the documentation about all aspects of tombstones, describe their general forms, and perform detailed inspections, in order to enlarge the insights into this rich and amazing Graeco-Roman heritage in Propontis*.

³⁰ For the central division of the hair, the high-sitting ears and the strongly accentuated eye-lids, cf. PFUHL & MOEBIUS 1977, no. 478, pl. 78, as well as the *stele* of Thalassia from Altıntaş in Kütahya, today in the archaeological museums of Istanbul, acc. no. 4087, dated to the third century A.D.

³¹ Acc. no. 13.1.1971: LOCHMAN 2003, p. 66, 69, 268, cat. II, 192, fig. 42, pl. 12.

³² PFUHL & MOEBIUS 1979, no. 2206, pl. 315.

³³ LOCHMAN 2003, p. 257, no. II, 39, fig. 86; and WAELEKENS 1986, p. 223, pl. 32 (with a later dating).

* Abbreviations used in this article are as follows (in alphabetical order): acc. no.: accession number, h: height, th: thickness, vol.: volume and w: width.

The tombstone from Nicomedia in the Archaeological and Ethnographic Museum of Kocaeli was studied with an authorisation granted by the Directorship of this museum to Dr. Gülseren Kan Şahin (Sinop) on March 15, 2018 and enumerated as 62901608-155.01/E. 228521. The necessary documentation was assembled on October 22, 2018 by Dr. Kan Şahin to whom I would like to thank for providing figs. 2-3 and for her allowance to publish her photos in this article.

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Fig. 1 - Places in western Asia Minor referred to in the text (by S. Pataci, 2018).



Fig. 2 - The *stele* of Olympia from Magnesia on the Maeander, the museum of Efes, acc. no. 422 (by G. Kan Şahin, 2018).



Fig. 3 a-c - A marble tombstone from Nicomedia, the archaeological and ethnographic museum of Kocaeli, acc. no. 1032 (by G. Kan Şahin, 2018).

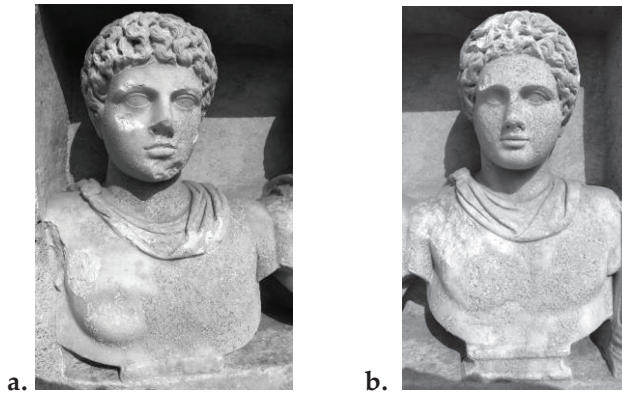


Fig. 4 a, b - Two busts on this tombstone from Nicomedia (by G. Kan Şahin, 2018).



Fig. 5 - The statue of Androclus, the mythical founder of the city of Ephesus, from the fountain of Trajan in Ephesus, second century A.D., the museum of Efes (by G. Kan Şahin, 2018)



Fig. 7 - The statue of Hermes/ Mercury in Sevilla in marble of Paros, mid-second century A.D., Museo Arqueológico de Sevilla (by G. Kan Şahin, 2018).



Fig. 6 - Upper part of Apollo Belvedere, A.D. 120-140, Musei Vaticani, Museo Pio-Clementino, acc. no. 1015 (after AMELUNG 1908, p. 256, no. 92, pl. 12).

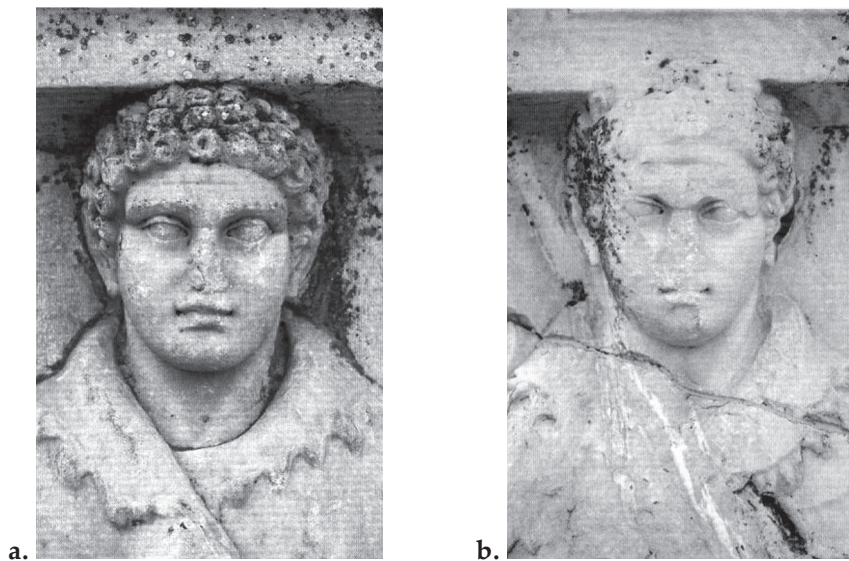


Fig. 8 a, b - Heads of two *herm* figures of youthful *satyrs* in the Curetes street in Ephesus, Hadrianic-early Antonine period (by G. Kan Şahin, 2018).



Fig. 9 - A *stèle* with two portrait busts of a couple from the eastern *necropolis* of Nicomedia, the archaeological and ethnographic museum of Kocaeli, acc. no. 603 (after ŞAHİN 1974, p. 47, no. 22, pl. 5).



Fig. 10: The Brescia medallion, *i.e.* a miniature painting on gilded glass medallion from Alexandria mounted on King Desiderius's Cross, Museo di Santa Giulia, Brescia (after ROTTLOFF 2006, p. 59, fig. 27).



Fig. 11: A portrait bust of an aristocratic woman, the Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund, acc. no. 1965.246 (after İNAN & ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1979, no. 325, pl. 228).



Fig. 12: A toga contabulata bust of Alexander Severus, Musei Vaticani (after FEJFER 2008, p. 251-252).

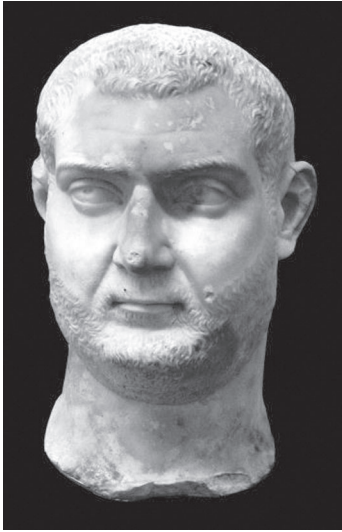


Fig. 13 - The bust of the Roman emperor Balbinus from Ephesus, the museum of Efes (by G. Kan Şahin, 2018).

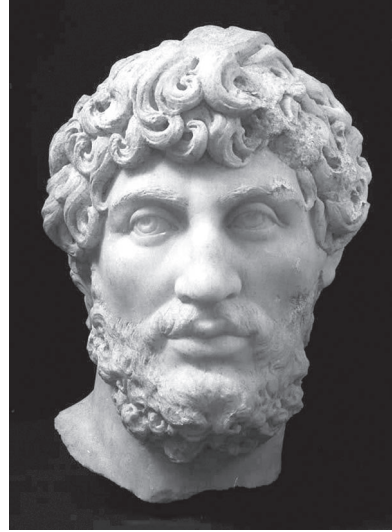


Fig. 15 - An over-lifesize, high-quality portrait head from the Civil Basilica of Aphrodisias, A.D. 160-200, the museum of Aphrodisias (by G. Kan Şahin, 2018).



Fig. 14: A lid of a *sarcophagus* from Nicomedia, A.D. 160-200 (after MAREK 2003, 135, fig. 199).



Fig. 17 - The honorific portrait statue of the priest L. Antoninus Claudius Dometeinos Diogenes from Aphrodisias, A.D. c. 200, the museum of Aphrodisias, acc. nos. 64-221 (head), 64-222 (body) and 64-277 (base) (by G. Kan Şahin, 2018).



Fig. 18 - A funerary *stèle* of in the archaeological museum of Uşak, acc. no. 13.1.1971 (by G. Kan Şahin, 2018).