

A Roman Gravestone from Balgarski Izvor, Lovech region

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The paper aims at studying a Roman gravestone (stele), which was found in the 19th century in the Vit river near the village of Balgarski Izvor. The find was brought to the Museum of History in the town of Teteven where it has been kept until the present. The Latin inscription on the stele was commented upon many times from an epigraphic point of view. Due to its stay in the river it is highly damaged and provides scarce information.

The gravestone (Fig. 1) is made of limestone and has the following dimensions: height - 2,22 m, width - 0,72 m and thickness - 0,20 m. Its face is framed by floral ornaments and is divided into three parts. The upper part (Fig. 2) has almost quadrangular shape and *coena funebris* depicted on it. Three lying man and a female bust are depicted on a bed. A woman is sitting in front of the bed to the left, and at her right side there are three servants (not equal in size) around a trivet table. The highly damaged inscription consisting of 13 lines is situated in the middle part of the stele. There are two panthers and a vessel with two handles between them depicted on the lower part of the stele (Fig. 3).

The stele from Balgarski Izvor does not fully fit any of the existing typologies. It most resembles the stelai with quadrangular or rectangular upper part, without a pediment.

Different methods have been used to define the date of the monument. Several gravestone found in the region are similar to the one from Balgarski Izvor. The observations on the iconography of *coena funebris* as well as the stylistic peculiarities of the relieves also contribute for solving the problem with the date. The monument could be dated to the first half of the 3rd century.

The analysis of the relief images reveals their symbolic value. The wish for heroization expressed through the scene of the funeral feast is replaced to a greater extent by pure rational motives. The ritual of the feast while lying on the bed, the depicted rich furniture and vessels, the presence of many servants and members of the family are meant to reveal the socio-economic status of the stele's owner. The iconography of *coena funebris* gradually acquired new meaning - to show the social status of the deceased person.

The gravestone from Balgarski Izvor is a product of a local stone-carving atelier. Its style is a mixture of Greek and Roman elements. This is a result not only from the marginal position of the site at Balgarski Izvor, which was situated between the provinces of Thracia and Moesia Inferior but also from the characteristics of the provincial Roman culture in the 3rd century.