

Ostotheks with portrait busts from the valley of Middle Struma (Abstract)

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Ostotheks are a special type of funerary urns that appeared in the Hellenistic Period in the Greek East. In the Roman Period, such funerary monuments were used only in the eastern parts of the Empire, mostly in Asia Minor. Outside Asia Minor, ostotheks are found mainly in the province of Macedonia, where some 45 were found. Nearly half of them are scattered and illustrate various types, while the other half form a relatively compact group in the valley of Middle and Lower Struma. The group is rather small, but interesting and significant, as it is the only one so far, discovered outside Asia Minor. All the more that there is no evidence of other sarcophaguslike monuments from the area of Middle Struma.

The present paper discusses three unpublished ostotheks (Figs. 1-6) from the valley of Middle Struma. They all share one feature – portrait busts, carved on their front sides.

On the first ostothek (Fig. 1-2) that is relatively well preserved, the bust of a young married couple occupies the entire panel on the front side of the box. On the

grounds of the stylistic analysis and the adduced parallels, the funerary monument could be dated to the middle Antonine period.

The second example, a fragment of an ostothek from Sandanski (Fig. 3-4), depicts a male bust and partially preserved figure of a muscular youth. The iconographic specifics identify the juvenile figure as depicting an ephebe of the so-called “Chlamystypus”. The monument comes to support the long-known epigraphic evidence about the presence of ephebes in the city; it is dated to the third quarter of the 2nd c.

The third ostothek is also fragmentary, with provenance from Sandanski (Fig. 5-6). It has partially preserved male portrait and dates from the middle Severan period.

Two main factors favoured the appearance and use of ostotheks in the valley of Struma: the existence of marble quarries and of active local workshops for funerary monuments, where, as it seems, there were immigrants from Asia Minor.