A Cult of the Horseman Hero in Boiotia*

For many years when one entered the garden of the museum at Thívai one was struck by a series of relief tombstones of a particular type which is exceedingly rare in Greece as a whole, particularly South of Makedonia (and the neighbouring Northerly parts of Thessalia), but which is well known to archaeologists working in Bulgaria and Romania; following recent reorganization of the museum this group appearance has been lost but the group itself remains a striking and isolated phenomenon. This Boiotian group was first studied by Koerte (1878 & 1879); the inscribed ones were given in *Inscriptiones Graecae* vii, at which point (i.e. in 1892) were added a few new ones, unknown to Koerte but observed by Lolling in his field investigations on behalf of Dittenberger.

Some examples of this series will serve to illustrate the group and its variations that are summed up in the schematic typology (Fig. 13).

Type I may be exemplified by an example (Pl. 1) which is actually not among those now located in the Theban Museum, for it is still built into the South wall of the church of the Panayia at Topólia in the North East Kopaís (*IG* vii 2807); another (Pl. 33) is built into the South East corner of the church of Áyioi Pávlos kai Pétros in the village of Parapoúnya to the South West of Thívai (Koerte # 118; *IG* vii 2153–2154 [*IThesp* 1193A&B]; *EB* ii 37–38). The stone shows a rider on a horse galloping towards the viewer’s right, set in a shallow, rectangular panel, with the border above carrying an inscription recording the deceased’s name, Νεικαρίας, and calling him a “hero”; this particular stone also commemorates, in an inscription subsequently inserted into the top of the relief panel itself, a

* Since some of these stones are discussed in another section of this volume and the Plates are grouped under that article, this text contains an unusual mixture of plate references. Some other aspects of this group and its significance were discussed in my paper given to the First International Pontic Conference in Varna, Bulgaria (September 1997), which was to be published in the Proceedings of that conference (in fact not realised). I am particularly indebted to colleagues and friends who discussed the material with me during the conference and in some cases made other publications of Black Sea *comparanda* available to me: Prof. Sergei Sapykin of Moscow, Dr. Zara Gočeva of Sofia, Dr. Lyudmila Davidova of Leningrad (now, of course, St. Petersburg), and Dr. Manfred Oppermann of Sofia. I had had previous occasions to discuss the material also with Dr. Varbinka Naydenova in Sofia.
second person by the name of Σώταρος equally called a “hero”. By and large this first type seems to be represented by the best work in the whole series which might also be the earliest pieces of the group; the monumental and neat style of the inscriptions’ lettering in many cases might suggest a date in the earlier 2nd century CE, while the reuse in this case may date later in that same century.

An example of Type II (Pl. 25) is built into the South wall of the church of Áyios Dhimitrios in Thívai (Koerte # 94; IG vii 2628; EB ii 35); it shows again a horseman, this time facing to the viewer’s left, with the horse in what may be termed the “prancing” position, for want of a better word, with one foreleg (that further from the viewer) lifted above an altar. Many of this second type are also good quality pieces and show similar lettering style in the inscriptions; they too may date in the earlier 2nd century CE.

There is also a couple of hybrids (Type I/II) lying between these two types, where both the horse’s font legs are lifted above the altar in a similar arrangement to that seen in the horses of type I galloping across an empty field; this hybrid type is exemplified by a piece from Xeronomí (Pl. 2) now in the museum at Thívai (Koerte # 116; IG vii 2175 [IThesp 1199]); although the scene still has some liveliness and some of the rounded contours remain, overall the stylisation of the cloak, for example, and the flatter nature of the carving itself are harbingers of the deterioration to be seen in the following types, while the letter shapes in the badly worn inscription suggest a date, appropriately enough, in the later 2nd or even the earlier 3rd century CE.