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FEMALE PORTRAIT STATUES IN ROMAN CRETE.

ICONOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL PROJECTIONS

Crete preserves a considerable wealth of female portrait statues. They first appear in the early imperial period, multiply with the Flavians, and remain widespread until roughly the end of the second century, when their number drops sharply. In general feature and hairstyle they clearly betray an attempt to follow the prevailing mode of the day, whether this is influenced by the portraiture of the women of the reigning imperial family or by other preferences of the Roman elite. As regards the choice of statue types and the way the subjects are presented, there appears to be a greater variety than in other parts of Greece.

These statues were as a rule honorific works, judging by a series of inscriptions on plinths. None of them has been shown to be a funerary monument, although there is nothing to exclude such a use. In any case, these portrait sculptures are unshakeable evidence of the special place women occupied in Crete in the Roman period, a finding that is confirmed by their participation in the general life of that society.