

EUROPEAN IRON HELMET WITH SILVER HEAD APPLIQUES

European, 1st century A.D.

Iron and silver

H: 19 cm

Reference: 8008



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The helmet is in the shape of a high, almost conical skullcap (front view), with a rectangular opening at the front to better leave the soldier's forehead free and to thus improve his view. Despite the thick layer of rust, the helmet appears to have been composed of three elements, namely two side shells and a median strip, whose straight joints run next to the two central rows of animal heads (some such traces are still partially visible, for instance over the forehead). The protomes probably represent the heads of quadrupeds, which cannot be identified confidently because of the formal simplicity and the absence of accurate details; on the one hand, the long ears and the shape of the muzzle suggest that they may be horses (or possibly mules); on the other hand, the bulge at the front of the muzzle (a snout?), the round eyes and the long hollow ears recall wild boar. A definite identification seems difficult to establish.

The heads are all similar in size and appearance, but they also differ considerably, for example in the shape of the snout and in the size and the arrangement of the ears. The heads placed in the central rows – separated from one another by rivets – are directed upwards or downwards, but in a regular manner and in the same arrangement of horizontal pairs; other protomes and rivets are affixed to the side shells, generally in groups of three. In the framework of ancient defensive weapons, this helmet appears rather isolated and cannot be classified with certainty. The shape, the use of iron and the manufacturing technique prefigure some Imperial and eastern Roman helmets (Parthian or Sassanid), but the presence of the animal protomes and the style probably exclude this origin. Although they cannot be related to a specific example, these protomes reveal close parallels with Celtic art during the first centuries A.D. They can be linked to the heads of horses, dogs and wild boar depicted on the silver Gundestrup cauldron (National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen) and to bronze statuettes of wild boar and deer like those of the Balzers group (National Museum of Liechtenstein, Vaduz).

CONDITION

Complete helmet, but greatly rusted metal; surface covered with thick granulations. Appliqués alternating with semispherical knobs (rivet heads?) and piercing the iron, probably to attach the leather lining of the headgear. Ornaments arranged in a precise and symmetrical manner on both sides of the helmet; no clearly visible traces of a crest.

PROVENANCE

Ex-German private collection, before 1960; ex-H. Mol Collection, Switzerland, acquired in Germany in the 1960's; Galerie Numaga, Switzerland, acquired from the former owner in 1978; private collection, acquired in 1999.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

On Celtic art, see:

DUVAL P.-M., *Les Celtes*, Paris, 1977, pp. 184 ff. (Gundestrup cauldron).
MÜLLER F. (ed.), *L'art des Celtes, 700 avant J.-C.-700 après J.-C.*, Bern, 2009.
RAFTERY B. (ed.), *Celtic Art*, Paris, 1990, pp. 92-93 (Balzers group).
On related Near Eastern helmets, see: Hofkunst van de Sassaniden: *Het Perzische rijk tussen Rome en China (224-642)*, Brussels, 1993, pp. 172-176. *Les Perses sassanides: Fastes d'un empire oublié (224-642)*, Paris, 2006, pp. 188ss.