

HELMET OF THE ILLYRIAN TYPE

Greek, 6th - 5th century B.C.

Bronze

Height: 25.4 cm

Reference: 30182



This bronze helmet belongs to the Illyrian type which is distinguished from other types of helmets (Attic, Corinthian, Chalcidian) by the ridges on the cap marking the attachment place of the crest and the rectangular front opening for the face. The type designation is based on several finds in the regions of the Balkans that correspond to ancient Illyria.

The helmet was executed in the hammering technique from a single sheet of bronze which required a great skill of a craftsman. The semi-spherical cap is crossed lengthwise from the forehead to the nape by two parallel ridges. They shape the track which was used for the attachment of the crest, and at the same time, to reinforce the central portion of the headgear. A stud inserted in the helmet above the forehead was also part of the attachment system and probably helped to fasten and maintain the crest; there is a matching loop at the back of the helmet for the same purpose.

The paragnatides (pieces for the protection of the cheeks) are triangular and long enough to protect the chin. At the front of the headgear, they leave a rectangular opening for the face. Compared to the Corinthian helmet, whose shape leaves only the eyes and the mouth of the warrior uncovered; this wider opening affords a different balance between effective protection and a broad visual field.

The back of the helmet is flared outwards to protect the neck, while allowing the warrior to move his head freely. At ear level, the rim forms a vertical notch, which, while slightly uncovering the auricles, would have improved the ability to hear orders on the battlefield. The chin strap would probably pass through the two small holes pierced at the ends of the paragnatides.

Scholars introduced a developed typological classification of the Illyrian helmets including three major groups with sub-types and

variants. The present one belongs to type III A 3 (flat edge). There are very few helmets survived that have the entire initial decoration of the piece preserved. Two mirrored representations of lions are placed above the forehead; the incised lines mark both the outlines and the details, especially expressive is the rendering of the manes. The composition of the figures with their heads turned back and the paws raised aggressively refer to the powerful forces of the animals and suggest that these images would protect the owner of the helmet and supply him with the same qualities.

The Illyrian type helmets were found in different parts of the Greek states and non-Greek territory: the Peloponnesus, Macedonia, Sicily, and the western Balkans. It has been suggested that several workshops existed in these regions. Most probably the type originated from a Peloponnesian city where it was created in the late 8th century B.C. The first known examples of the type dated to around 700 B.C. were found in Olympia. At the beginning of the manufacturing there were two techniques, some helmets were still made of two separate halves riveted together between the ridges (a process that was later abandoned), while others were already hammered from a single sheet of bronze. This latter technique was a significant technological improvement that gave the warrior better protection from the blows of enemy.

Greek infantrymen, the hoplite warriors, wore a helmet, cuirass and greaves and carried a sword and shield, the hoplon, which gave the hoplite his name. The helmets were especially valued possessions, often handed down from father to son. Some items have been inscribed with the names of the owners, and some were dedicated to the sanctuaries. They usually accompanied the owner to the underworld and are found in the graves among other goods that indicate his status.

CONDITION

Complete, in excellent condition; minor cracks in the metal and small repairs. Brown-colored surface partially covered with green patina. Traces of the original golden color of the bronze still visible

PROVENANCE

Ex-US private collection, New York, acquired on July 8th, 1992.

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