

ROMAN BRONZE PARADE MASK

Roman, 1st century A.D.

Bronze

H: 17.0 cm

Reference: 30960



This face mask is part of a particular type of parade helmet that would have been worn by soldiers in the Roman cavalry for special ceremonies and occasions. It portrays the face of a youthful and clean-shaven male. The mask was attached to the headpiece of the helmet by means of a hinge, and the place of attachment is visible in center of the mask's forehead. The image on the mask is similar to those found on a number of complete Roman cavalry helmets. Examples have been found throughout the Roman Empire from Britain to Syria. Such helmets were used for hippika gymnasia, the cavalry tournaments that were performed in front of emperors and senior commanders. Horses and riders wore lavishly decorated clothes, armor and plumes while performing feats of horsemanship and re-enacting historical or legendary battles, such as the wars of the Greeks and Trojans. According to the Roman writer Arrian (*Ars Tactics* 34):

"Those of high rank or superior in horsemanship wear gilded helmets of iron or bronze to draw the attention of the spectators. Unlike the helmets made for active service, these do not cover the head and cheeks only but are made to fit all round the faces of the riders with apertures for the eyes . . . From the helmets hang yellow plumes, a matter of décor as much as utility. As the horses move forward, the slightest breeze adds to the beauty of these plumes."

While the combat gear issued by the Roman army had to be returned at the end of the wearer's service, cavalry equipment appears to have been treated differently. Soldiers may have privately commissioned and purchased it for their own use, and evidently they retained it after completing their service. Helmets and face masks were found in graves and other contexts away from military sites, as well as deposited in military forts and their vicinity. In some cases they were carefully folded up and buried. It is likely that some Roman military equipment was taken home by ex-soldiers as a reminder of their service and must have occasionally been disposed of away from garrison sites as grave

goods or votive offerings.

PROVENANCE

Ex- private collection, Neuchâtel, Switzerland, ca. 1980.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

On the Roman army, exercises and parade arms in general, see: FEUGERE M., *Les armes des Romains de la République à l'Antiquité tardive*, Paris, 2002, pp. 187 ff. FEUGERE M., *Casques antiques: Les visages de la guerre de Mycènes à la fin de l'Empire romain*, Paris, 2011, pp. 123-140. GARBSCH J., *Römische Paraderüstungen*, Munich, 1978, p. 20; p. 63, no. 07, pl. 18.2.