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A BEARDED FACE-MASK HELMET FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN BELGRADE

AN EXAMPLE OF MUTUAL INFLUENCES OF ARMAMENT TRADITIONS
AT THE ROMAN FRONTIER

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF DISCOVERY

Among the corpus of Roman »parade« armour¹, we can highlight a helmet in the collection of the National Museum in Belgrade (Narodni muzej Beograd [NMB], inv. no. 2874/III; figs 1-2)². This exemplar is a unicum, usually considered to form its own class in the typology of Roman face-mask helmets. The earliest information available for the helmet comes from E. Engelhardt, the French consul in Belgrade, who in 1869 photographed the mask in the museum in Belgrade; he assumed that the item was a legionary helmet³. E. Engelhardt reports that the helmet was found in 1854 on the bank of the Danube in the vicinity of Semendria⁴. F. Kanitz attributes the same provenance to this exemplar⁵. Subsequent publications of the late 19th and early 20th centuries invariably indicated Semendria (modern Smederevo, Podunavski okrug/SRB) as



Fig. 1 Face-mask helmet from the collection of the National Museum in Belgrade (NMB, inv. no. 2874/III) before restoration. – (After Grbić 1958, pls XLV-XLVI).

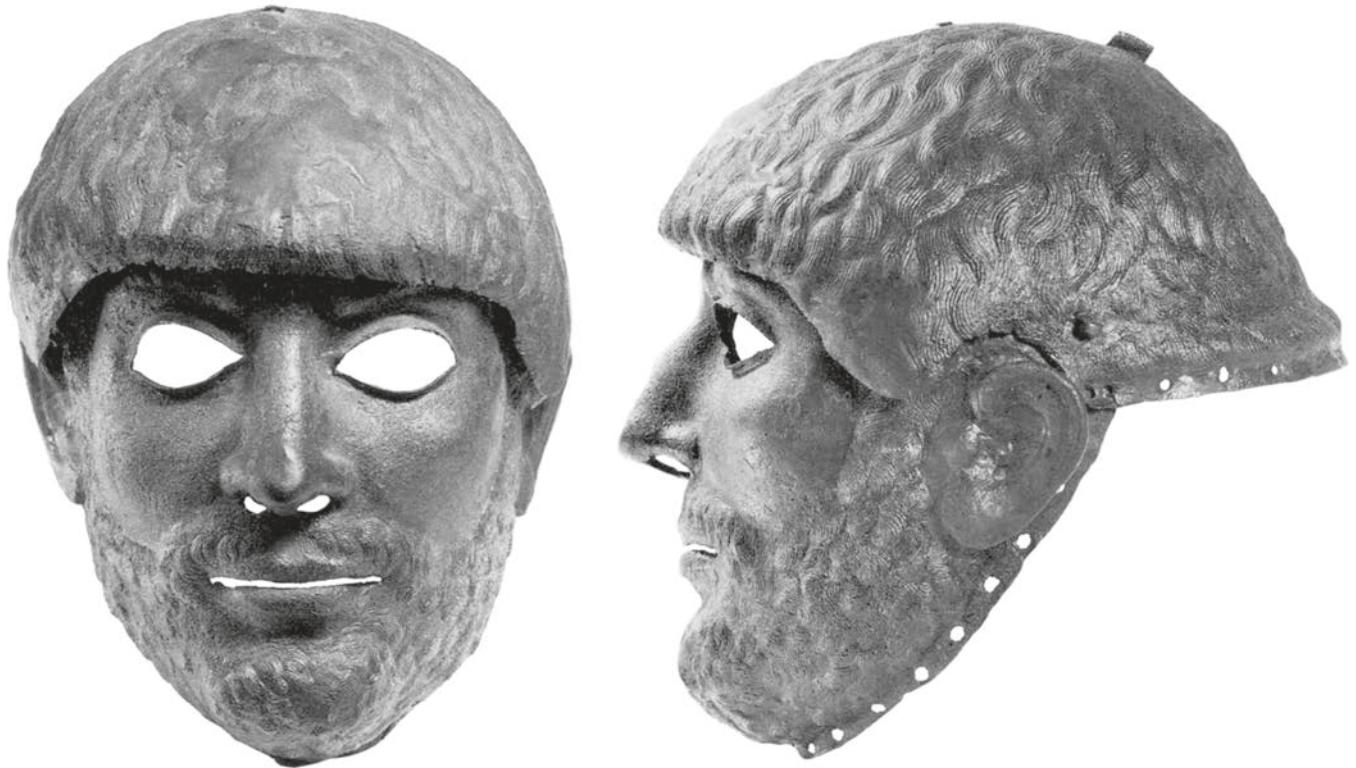


Fig. 2 Face-mask helmet from the collection of the National Museum in Belgrade (NMB, inv. no. 2874/III) after restoration. – (After Popović 1988, 107f.).

the findspot of the helmet⁶. It is only in the mid-20th century studies of M. Grbić that the helmet was reported to have been found in the village of Kostol in the municipality of Kladovo (Borski okrug/SRB; ancient Pontes), near the remains of Trajan's Bridge⁷. It should be noted that another mask in the collection of the Belgrade National Museum (inv. no. 2875/II) is currently associated with Smederevo⁸. That mask, however, was initially considered to have been found in Trstenik (Rasinski okrug/SRB), or, more precisely, in the vicinity of Goč and Tatarna⁹. The modern attribution of the findspots of these two helmets leaves room for doubt, then, since there exists no clear information about how they were discovered, and no satisfactory explanation as to why the bearded helmet was initially associated with Semendria (Smederevo) and the mask depicting a young face with Trstenik (**tab. 1**)¹⁰.

DESCRIPTION OF THE HELMET

The helmet consists of two parts: a mask and a calotte or bowl, firmly joined by a hook. The height, from the base of the chin to the peak of the bowl, measures 26 cm; its width is 21 cm. The mask represents a bearded male face with a low forehead. The eye, nose and mouth openings are cut out. In addition, there are small holes in the ears of the mask, presumably to aid the wearer's hearing. Short curls cascade down almost to the eyebrows and are elaborated very artfully, both on the helmet bowl and in the beard on the mask. The entirety of the curly hair of the head and beard is scrupulously elaborated and carefully engraved. The nose is long and of a regular shape. The top of the helmet has traces of a fastening for a longitudinal crest, no longer preserved. On the bowl above the ears there are also loops to attach a feathered plume.

publication	provenance	material	date
Engelhardt 1870, 76	Semendria	iron	early 1 st century AD
Bennendorf 1878, 18	Semendria	bronze	1 st century BC
von Lipperheide 1896, 328	Semendria	iron	1 st century AD
Hoffiller 1910/1911, 208	Semendria	bronze	–
Garašanin/Garašanin 1951, pl. XVIII	unknown provenance	–	–
Mano-Zisi 1954, 16	Semendria	iron	early 2 nd century AD
Post 1954, 117f.	Semendria	bronze	–
Grbić 1952/1953, 200; 1958, 72	Kostol	bronze	early 2 nd century AD
Pjatysheva 1964, 27	Semendria	iron	early 2 nd century AD
Garašanin/Kovačević 1961, pl. LII	unknown provenance	–	–
Robinson 1975, 108. 112f.	Semendria	bronze	1 st century BC
Garbsch 1978, 68	Kostol	iron with bronze	early 2 nd century AD
Haalebos 1982, 721	Kostol	–	early 2 nd century AD
Mano-Zisi 1982, 151	Semendria	bronze	2 nd century AD
Marjanović-Vujović/Krstić/Velickovic 1983, 78	Kostol	iron with bronze	1 st century AD
Popović 1984, 48	Kostol	iron with bronze	1 st century AD
Popović 1987, 177	Kostol	iron with bronze	early 2 nd century AD
Popović 1988, 107f.	Kostol	iron with bronze	1 st -early 2 nd century AD
Feugère 1994, 122	Kostol	–	–
Junkelmann 1996, 23	Kostol	–	1 st -early 2 nd century AD
D'Amato/Sumner 2009, 187	Kostol	iron with silver	1 st -2 nd century AD
Negin 2010, 138	Kostol	iron with bronze	early 2 nd century AD
Narloch 2012a, 61	Kostol	iron with bronze	first half of the 1 st -first half of the 2 nd century AD
Fischer 2012, 222	Semendria	non-ferrous	1 st -early 2 nd century AD

Tab. 1 Comparative information from different publications about the bearded face-mask helmet from the collection of the National Museum in Belgrade (NMB, inv. no. 2874/III).

The lower edges of the bowl and mask have a row of holes designed for sewing in an organic lining. The horizontal cut-off at the cheekbones and behind the ears creates a wide neck opening, allowing for easy donning. The helmet is a wonderful item depicting extremely naturalistic male traits with individualised details. Taken in its entirety the helmet is unique, but the decorative design of its mask finds comparison in the bearded mask from Stockstadt am Main (Lkr. Aschaffenburg/D)¹¹. Fragments of the latter mask, representing the left half of a face with hair on the forehead, a beard, moustache and whiskers, were found in the *vicus* south of the Roman fortress during excavations in 1962 (fig. 3). The curly hair on the Stockstadt helmet is not as naturalistic as that of



Fig. 3 Bearded face-mask helmet from Stockstadt am Main (Lkr. Aschaffenburg/D). – (Photo Stiftsmuseum der Stadt Aschaffenburg).



Fig. 4 Face-mask helmet from Plovdiv/BG. – (After Venedikov 1960, figs 9-10).

the helmet in Belgrade; the curls on the former are rather stylised and simplified, but they can be compared with contemporary Roman male, especially imperial, portraiture of the mid-2nd century AD.

The bearded mask fastened to a helmet, then, is not unique in and of itself. The helmet bowl is a different story, however, as it does not have any close parallels. The helmet from Plovdiv/BG¹² is the closest comparison in design and shape (**fig. 4**). Its iron bowl is made in a very similar style, representing a hairstyle of small curls crowned with a silver wreath. This example includes a neck-guard and hence is closer to the usual Hellenistic-Roman armament tradition than the helmet in Belgrade. Its mask, however, is made in an extremely realistic style, apparently reflecting the helmet owner's individual traits.

COMPARANDA

In looking for comparanda for the helmet in the collection of the National Museum in Belgrade, we should first pay attention to one of its unique features: as preserved, it lacks any protection for the back of the head and neck. As already noted, the lower edge of the mask and helmet bowl has a row of round holes intended for fastening a leather or cloth lining inside. In the rear, however, the helmet ends at the top edge of the ear and does not protect the back of the head or neck. It is possible, then, that this exemplar originally had a further protective element such as a scale aventail, now missing¹³. Such an element can be seen in a number of helmets from the Roman Danube region (in the territories of modern Bulgaria and Romania) and in Croatia¹⁴ (**figs 5-6**). For example, a similar row of holes can be seen on the helmet from a burial in the village of Karaagach, modern Bryastovets (obl. Burgas/BG; **fig. 5, 1**)¹⁵. In this case, the remains of a scale aventail were discovered together with the helmet. Other examples of the sphero-conical helmet type¹⁶ found on Roman sites or in the surrounding area (Đakovo [Osječko-baranjska županija/HR; **fig. 5, 2**]¹⁷, Bumbești [jud. Gorj/RO; **fig. 5, 3**]¹⁸, Intercisa [Dunaújváros; Kom. Fejér/H; **fig. 5, 4**]¹⁹) have exactly the same holes along the bottom edge of the bowl. In the archaeological literature these helmets are usually associated with either Sarmatian warriors from auxiliary units²⁰ or Levantine archers²¹ (a Syrian from *cohors I Hamiorum Sagittaria* is depicted wearing a similar helmet on his tombstone²², and similar examples are worn by archers in the reliefs on Trajan's Column²³).

There is also an unadorned bronze helmet, found at the Roman camp in Bumbești, where *cohors IV Cypria civium Romanorum* was stationed from AD 106 to 180. This exemplar has a number of peculiarities, namely,

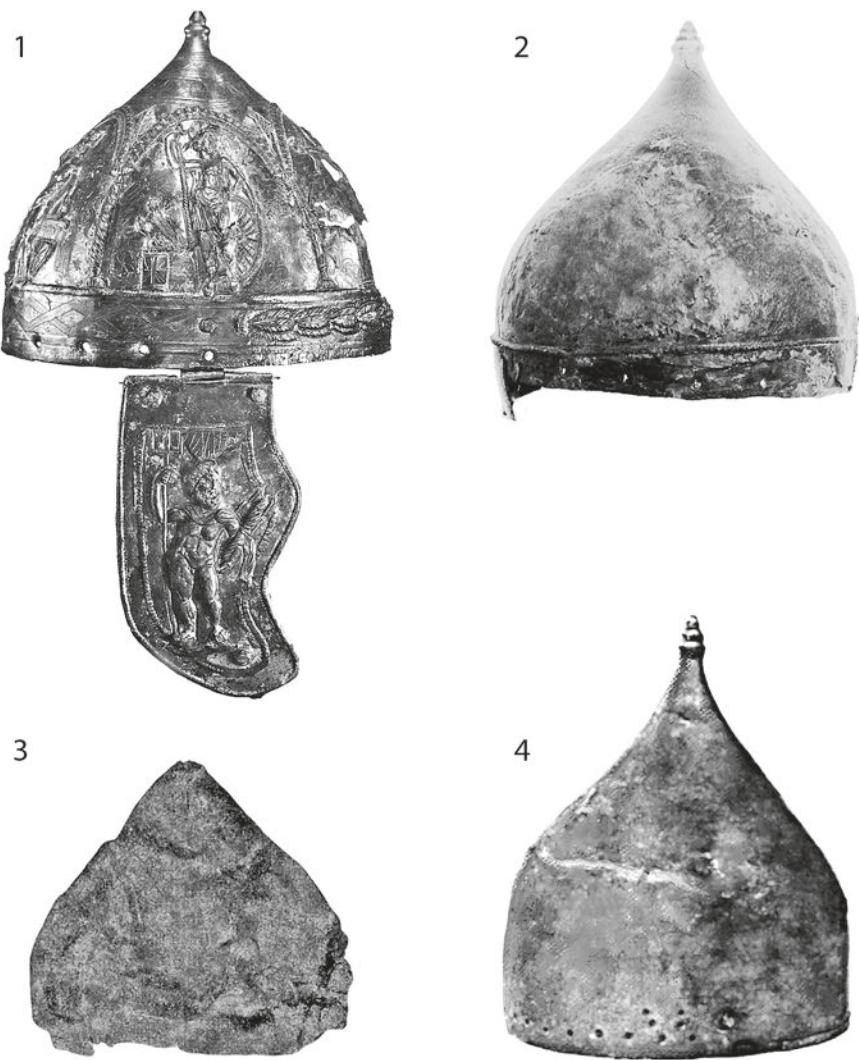


Fig. 5 Spherico-conical helmets from the Roman Danube region: **1** Bryastovets/Karaagach, obl. Bourgas/BG. – **2** Đakovo, Osječko-baranjska županija/HR. – **3** Bumbești, jud. Gorj/RO. – **4** Intercisa/Dunaújváros, Kom. Fejér/H. – (1 after Cat. New York 1977, pl. 15; 2 photo R. D'Amato; 3 after Petculescu/Gheorghe 1979, 606; 4 after Szabó 1986, fig. 3).

traces of primitive repair and a lack of cheekpieces, neck-guard and finial, which were removed in antiquity. On the basis of these features, the archaeologists who published the Bumbești helmet have suggested that the Romans had prepared it for disposal in the armoury of the military camp²⁴. Judging by a number of holes along the edge of the bowl, the helmets from Bryastovets and Đakovo had neck protection that was not typical of the Roman armament tradition, in the form of an aeventail, a clear sign of eastern influence²⁵. Exactly this kind of aeventail can be seen in images of captured Sarmatian or Parthian segmented conical helmets in Roman reliefs (fig. 7, 1)²⁶. Indeed, the exemplar from Bryastovets was fitted with an aeventail made of small bronze scales. But since the group of helmets in question is characterised by a solid-forged bowl, one can speak of a merger of two armament traditions, Roman and Eastern. To judge by the magnificent and highly artistic decoration depicting gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon that can be found on some of those helmets, they were manufactured by Roman armourers for soldiers of auxiliary units (infantry and possibly cavalry). The bearded exemplar in Belgrade might be compared with this group of spherico-conical helmets, since it is obvious that they were all provided with a scale aeventail protecting the back of the

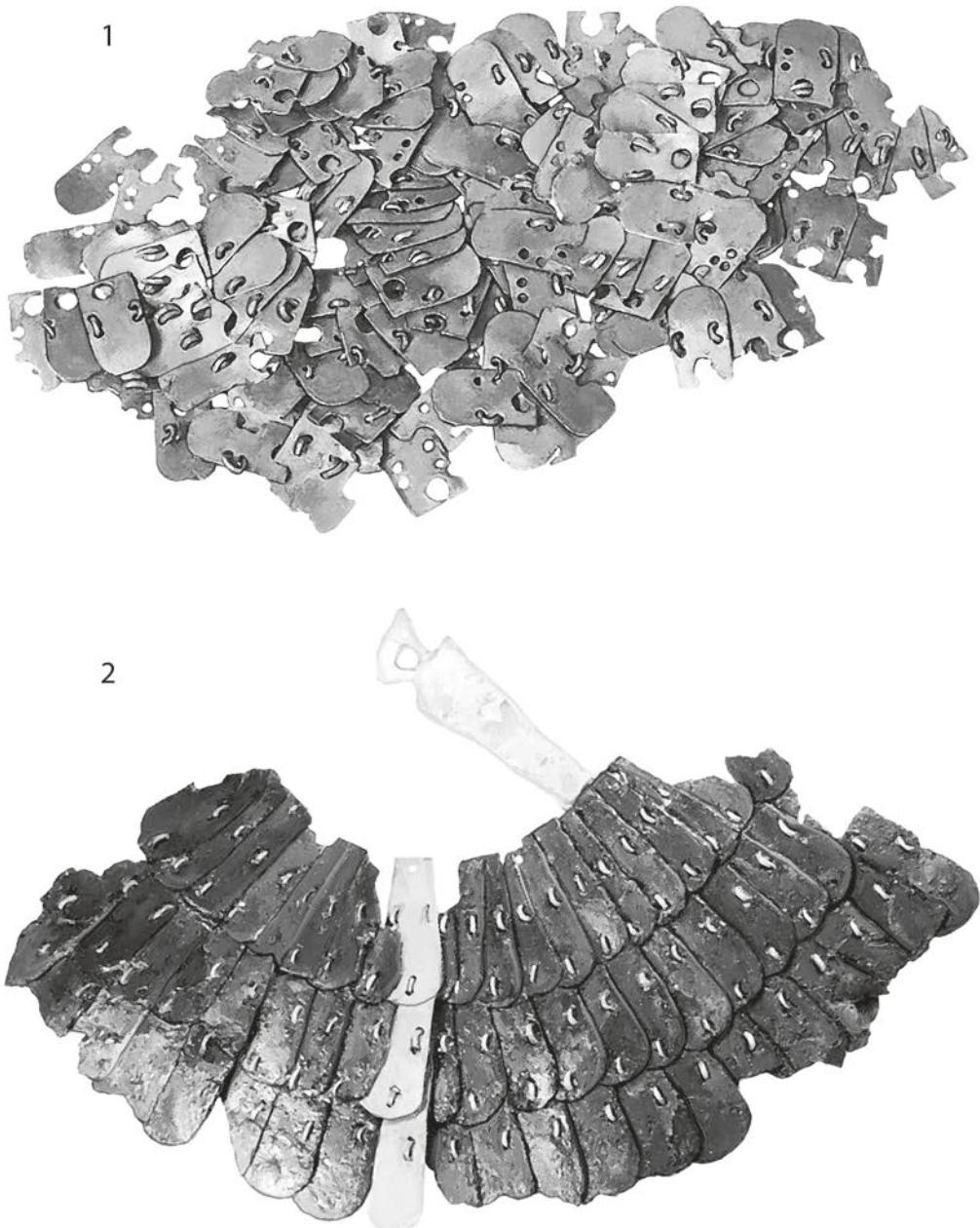


Fig. 6 Scale aventail: **1** Bryastovets/Karaagach, obl. Bourgas/BG. – **2** Carlisle, Cumbria/GB. – (Photos A. E. Negin).

head. This element, otherwise quite rare in Roman helmets, presumably allows the localisation of the manufacture of this type of helmet in the Danube region, and the same would then hold true for the bearded helmet in Belgrade.

DATING

Dating the Belgrade helmet is rather difficult. Since it was an accidental find and almost nothing is known about the circumstances of its discovery, an exact dating of the item's deposition is impossible. Only style offers some indication of its date of manufacture, though this remains necessarily imprecise.

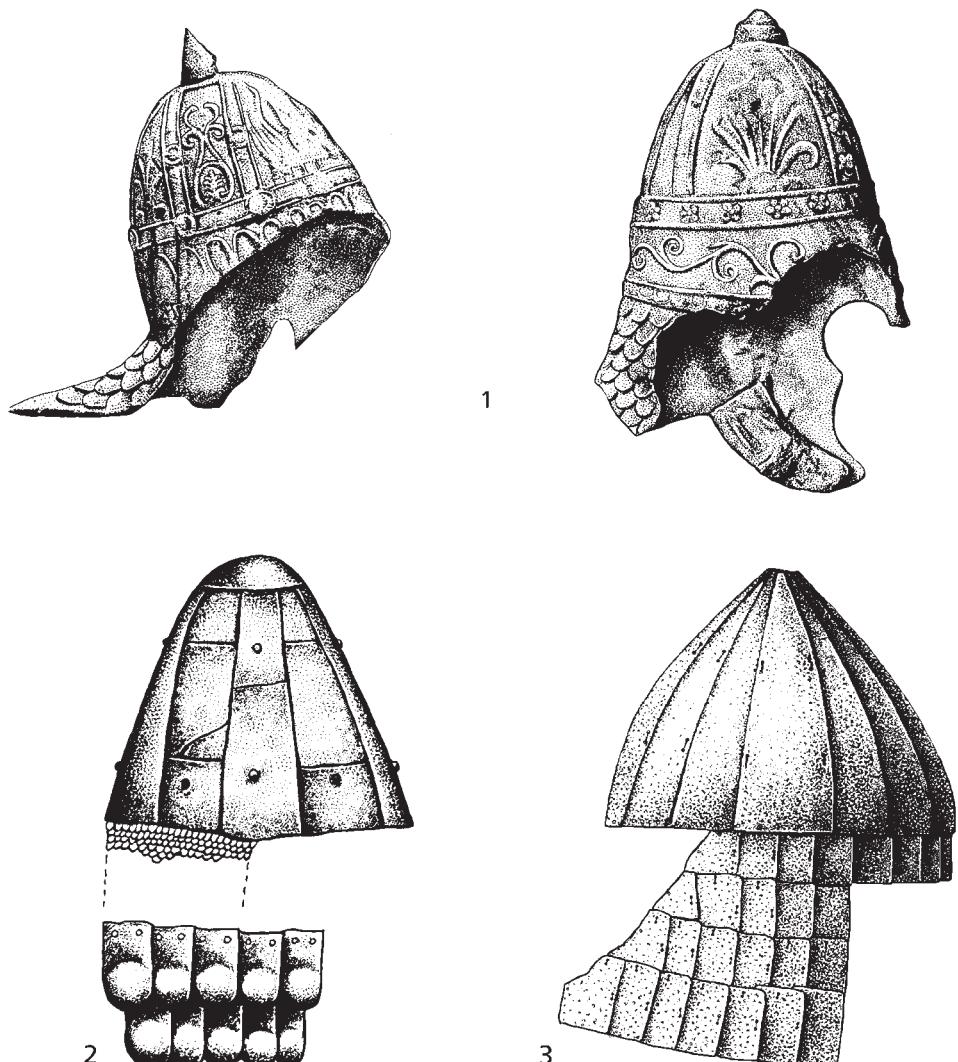


Fig. 7 Sarmatian helmets with scale aventail on Trajan's Column and from burials from the territory of the Russian Federation: **1** Trajan's Column reliefs. – **2** Gorodskoy, grave 6 (Rep. Adygea/RUS). – **3** Isakovskij burial ground, burial mound 6 (obl. Omsk/RUS). – (Drawings A. E. Negin).

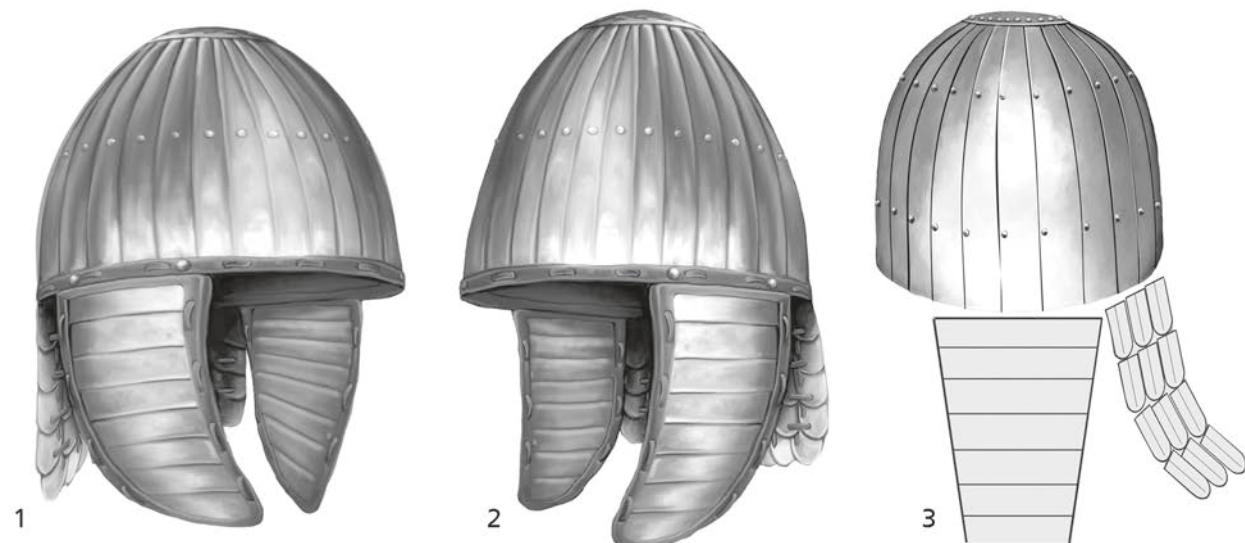


Fig. 8 Barbarian helmets with scale aventail, dated to the 2nd century AD: **1** Andreevskij burial mound, grave 50 (Mordoviya/RUS). – **2** Kipchakovskij I Kurgan-ground burial, grave 56 (Bashkiria/RUS). – **3** Pil'ninskij I burial ground (obl. Nizhny Novgorod/RUS). – (Reconstruction A. E. Negin / O. A. Radjush; drawing A. E. Negin).



Fig. 9 Author's hypothetical reconstruction of the bearded face-mask helmet from the collection of the National Museum in Belgrade. – (Drawing A. E. Negin).

Different researchers have offered different dates for the helmet (**tab. 1**). Following O. Benndorf, H. R. Robinson thought that this exemplar belonged to the 1st century BC²⁷. Most publications, though, attribute this face-mask helmet representing a bearded man to the 1st to 2nd centuries AD, and sometimes more precisely to the classicising portraiture of the Hadrianic period, with reference to the widespread popularity of the beard and the appearance of the bearded emperor's images²⁸. Such arguments, however, are not decisive, since there exist many sculptural portraits dating to the very end of the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD that represent bearded men and are made in a very similar fashion²⁹. More important for the stylistic dating is the unusual shape of the helmet with imitation of short curly hair coming down in larger curls and its elaborated quite elegantly, not resembling stylised little curly locks. The only stylistically similar helmet, the already noted example from Plovdiv, dates to the mid-1st century AD³⁰. The bowls of both helmets are quite similar in shape and decorative design. As with the Belgrade exemplar, the top of the Plovdiv helmet bears the remains of a crest fastening³¹, but its bowl is also furnished with a laurel wreath in silver. Despite the fact that the mask from Plovdiv is ostensibly similar to the well-dated face-mask helmet from Homs (Emesa/SYR)³², I. Venedikov dated the former not to the first quarter of the 1st century AD³³, but

rather to the period following the integration of Thrace into the Roman Empire (AD 45-46)³⁴. Further, according to I. Venedikov, the masks from Moesia should be dated still later, following his theory of an eastern – and more precisely a Thracian – genesis for face-mask helmets³⁵.

It can be supposed that the helmet in Belgrade was initially identical to the exemplar from Plovdiv, but at the customer's request, the helmet's neck-guard was removed and its lower edge bent outward, pierced and fitted with a scale aventail (fig. 8). Its bearded mask, however, is unique and it is difficult to answer definitively whether it was intended to be a portrait of the helmet's owner. The realism of the piece, which represents particular and individual facial traits (an elderly face with nasolabial folds, brow creases and thick eyebrows), suggests that it is not simply a generic Trajanic-era portrait. It seems impossible, though, to offer a more exact date for the bearded helmet in Belgrade than the middle of the 1st to the beginning of the 2nd century AD.

CONCLUSION

The Romans' constant clashes with their powerful neighbours across the Danube, the Dacians and Sarmatians, in the second half of the 1st century AD could not but influence the armament traditions of both sides. It is well-known that the Romans willingly adopted useful innovations in armament, which could be dictated by the need to counter a new enemy armed with specific and dangerous arms. One can observe, for example, the spread of laminar arm protection (*manica lamminata*) among the Romans after clashes with Dacians who used the falx, a broad crescent-shaped sword fixed on a long handle (about 1 m long)³⁶. Neck protection in the form of the aventail came into use for different reasons, but was also the result of mutual influences on armament tradition. These helmets must have been worn by soldiers who had come from areas where such armour was in wide use. Though serving in the Roman army, they brought their own tastes and styles to the creation of armament systems in their auxiliary units. Judging by the reliefs on Trajan's Column and by archaeological finds (figs 7, 9)³⁷, elements of scale neck protection commonly used by the Sarmatians were adopted by Roman auxiliary forces. However, the reverse also occurred. Either under the influence of trends in fashion, or on being awarded with Roman armament for their service, such soldiers could wittingly or unwittingly employ a »mixed« armour ensemble, combining intertwined elements of different armament traditions. This is excellently demonstrated by the bearded helmet in the collection of the National Museum in Belgrade. As with the Thracian aristocrats whose helmets were adorned with Roman award wreaths, the owner of the Belgrade helmet perceived himself among the Romanised aristocracy, whose ranks he had joined thanks to his loyalty and military exploits.

Notes

- 1) Benndorf 1878. – Drexel 1924. – Robinson 1975, 107-135. – Garbsch 1978. – Cat. Saint-Germain-en-Laye 1991. – Junkelmann 1996. – Born/Junkelmann 1997. – Negin 2010. – Narloch 2012a.
- 2) Benndorf 1878, 17f. pl. 1, 1-2. – von Lipperheide 1896, 328 fig. 259. – Kanitz 1904, 151. – Hoffiller 1910/1911, 208 fig. 35. – Garašanin/Garašanin 1951, pl. XVIII. – Mano-Zisi 1954, 16. – Grbić 1952/1953, 200 fig. 4; 1958, 72 pls XLIII-XLVI. – Garašanin/Kovačević 1961, pl. LII. – Pjatysheva 1964,

- 27 fig. 19a. – Cat. Petronell 1973, no. 1. – Robinson 1975, 112 pl. 309. – Garbsch 1978, 68 cat. O 32 pl. 23, 3. – Haalebos 1982. – Mano-Zisi 1982, 116f. fig. 74. – Marjanović-Vujović/Krstić/Velicković 1983, 78f. cat. 58. – Popović 1984, 48 fig. 81; 1987, 177. – Popović 1988, 107f. – Feugère 1994, 122. – Junkelmann 1996, 23 fig. 33. – D'Amato/Sumner 2009, 187 fig. 271. – Negin 2010, 138 fig. 186. – Narloch 2012a, 61 fig. 8. – Fischer 2012, 222 fig. 325.

- 3) Longpérier 1869.

- 4) Engelhardt 1870.
- 5) Kanitz 1904, 151.
- 6) Benndorf 1878, 17f. pl. 1, 1-2. – von Lipperheide 1896, 328 fig. 259. – Hoffiller 1910/1911, 208.
- 7) Grbić 1952/1953, 201; 1958, 75.
- 8) Grbić 1952/1953, 199-201; 1958, 74f. – Robinson 1975, 115 pls 326-327.
- 9) Kanitz 1909, 92.
- 10) Unfortunately, there are as yet no published data clarifying the circumstances of the discovery that could directly link the bearded helmet to Trajan's Bridge. We can only hope that the National Museum in Belgrade will eventually publish documents relating to the transfer of the helmet to the museum in 1854, which could resolve all doubts related to the circumstances of the find.
- 11) Garbsch 1978, 66 pl. 20, 3.
- 12) Djaković 1906/1907. – Filov 1923. – Venedikov 1960, 145f. figs 9-10. – Garbsch 1978, 62 pl. 17, 1-2. – Junkelmann 1996, 49 fig. 50.
- 13) It is obvious that this helmet is unique in having clear evidence of use for military purposes: its additional protective element, the scale aventail. It is thus unnecessary to speak of either a tournament or a parade and ceremonial use. I refrain here from reopening the long discussion over whether face-mask helmets could be used in combat conditions, but refer interested readers to the following publications: Benndorf 1878; Lindenschmit 1881; Junkelmann 1996, 51-53; Bartman 2005; Narloch 2012a, 35-44; 2012b; Negin/Kyrychenko 2013; Vannesse/Clerbois 2013, 391-393; Negin 2014.
- 14) The shape of these pieces resembles at the same time ancient »bell-shaped« helmets from the territory of the Danube, Assyrian-era sphero-conical helmets of the eastern Mediterranean world, Celtic helmets of Berru type, and even Montefortino type helmets. Half of the known helmets have a rich »parade« style decoration.
- 15) Velkov 1928/1929, 15-26 pls III-V.
- 16) Negin 2012.
- 17) Ljubić 1870, 214. – Hoffiller 1910/1911, 191f. fig. 27. – Mano-Zisi 1954, 16. – Popović et al. 1969, no. 206. – Robinson 1975, 85 pl. 237. – D'Amato/Sumner 2009, 165 fig. 230.
- 18) Petculescu/Gheorghe 1979.
- 19) Szabó 1986.
- 20) Negin 2012, 55.
- 21) Robinson 1975, 85.
- 22) Coulston 1985, 341 fig. 26.
- 23) Trajan's Column Scenes: LXX, CXV. See: Vulpe 2002, 160. 187.
- 24) Petculescu/Gheorghe 1979, 605f.
- 25) Gorelik 1993, 164f.
- 26) Gamber 1964, 14 fig. e-3: Trajan's Column Scenes: LXXVIII, LXX.
- 27) Benndorf 1878, 18. – Robinson 1975, 112.
- 28) Grbić 1952/1953, 201f. fig. 6; 1958, 76. – Popović 1987, 177; 1988, 108.
- 29) See, for example, a marble head of Nero in the collection of The J. Paul Getty Museum: Frel/Knudsen Morgan 1981, 45. 124 no. 30.
- 30) Filov 1923, 150.
- 31) Djaković 1906/1907, 53.
- 32) Seyrig 1952, 210-227 pls 21-24. – Klengel 1971, 102f. – Robinson 1975, 121 pls 349-351. – Garbsch 1978, pl. 17, 3-4.
- 33) Kohlert 1976, 511. – Garbsch 1978, 62 pl. 17, 1-2. – Junkelmann 1996, 49 fig. 50.
- 34) Venedikov 1960, 148.
- 35) Ibidem 149f.
- 36) Richmond 1982, 49. – Bishop 2002, 68. – Bishop/Coulston 2006, 98.
- 37) Sazonov 1992, 248 fig. 7, 3. – Kozuhov 1999, 160f. – Pogodin 1998, 64. – Zubov/Radjush 2014, 95.

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Zusammenfassung / Summary / Résumé

Ein bärtiger Maskenhelm in der Sammlung des Nationalmuseums in Belgrad.

Ein Beispiel für gegenseitige Einflüsse auf die Bewaffnung an den römischen Grenzen

Dieser Aufsatz behandelt einen einzigartigen Maskenhelm, der 1854 gefunden wurde und im Nationalmuseum in Belgrad verwahrt wird. Er zeigt Einflüsse aus verschiedenen Kulturen: Einerseits war das Stück mit hoher Kunstfertigkeit im römischen Stil hergestellt, andererseits ist der bärtige Helm aus dem Nationalmuseum in Belgrad ungewöhnlich, aufgrund seiner Gestaltung und der Tatsache, dass die Verwendung unterschiedlicher Bewaffnungstraditionen nachzuweisen ist. Die Unterkante ist ein gebogener Saum mit vielen Löchern für ein Futter oder einen angehängten Nackenschutz aus Lamellen oder Schuppen. Dies ist untypisch für römische Helme und war bei der römischen Armee nur von Angehörigen östlicher Auxiliareinheiten verwendet worden. Eine ähnliche Lochreihe am Rand kann man bei einem anderen, ungewöhnlichen Stück aus Bryastovets/BG beobachten. Der Nachweis dieser Konstruktionsdetails an römischen Paradehelmen ist ein direkter Beleg dafür, dass der Besitzer des Helmes ein östlicher Auxiliar gewesen sein könnte, da ein geschuppter Nackenschutz Bestandteil einiger sarmatischer Helme des 1. und 2. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. war.

A Bearded Face-Mask Helmet from the Collection of the National Museum in Belgrade.

An Example of Mutual Influences of Armament Traditions at the Roman Frontier

The paper deals with a unique face-mask helmet, found in 1854 and stored in the National Museum in Belgrade, showing cultural exchange. On the one hand, this exemplar was made with great skill in the Roman style. But on the other hand, the bearded helmet from the National Museum in Belgrade is unusual due to the fact that its design and appearance enable us to recognise a combination of several armament traditions: The bottom edge is bent in the form of a hem and has a lot of holes intended either for attaching a lining or suspending a neck protection in the form of a lamellar or scale aventail, which is not typical of Roman helmets and applied in the Roman army only by soldiers of the eastern auxiliary units. A similar line of holes on the edge can be observed on another unusual helmet, found in Bryastovets/BG. The existence of these elements on Roman parade helmets is direct evidence that the owner of the helmet could be an eastern auxiliary warrior, because scale aventails had been part of some Sarmatian helmets of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.

Un casque à visage barbu de la collection du Musée national de Belgrade.

Un exemple d'influences mutuelles sur les traditions d'armement aux frontières romaines

Cet article traite d'un casque à visage unique, découvert en 1984 et conservé au Musée national de Belgrade, qui montre un échange d'influences culturelles. D'une part, cet exemplaire a été réalisé dans le style romain avec une grande compétence. Mais d'autre part, ce casque barbu du Musée de Belgrade est inhabituel du fait de son style et de l'apparence qu'il donne, attestant d'une combinaison de traditions d'armement. La partie inférieure du casque est repliée en forme d'ourlet et de nombreux trous permettaient d'accrocher soit une doublure soit de suspendre une protection de nuque en écailles. Ceci n'est absolument pas typique pour les casques romains et n'était employé dans l'armée romaine que par les auxiliaires orientaux. Une ligne de trous comparables est connue sur un autre casque atypique découvert à Bryastovets/BG. La présence de ces éléments sur des casques de parade romains est une preuve directe que le possesseur de ce casque était peut-être un auxiliaire, dans la mesure où les armures d'écaille sont connues pour les casques sarmates des 1^{er} et 2^e siècles apr. J.-C.

Traduction: L. Bernard

Schlüsselwörter / Keywords / Mots clés

Römische Paraderüstungen / Gesichtshelme / Sarmaten-Helme / römische Grenze

Roman parade armour / face-mask helmets / Sarmatian helmets / Roman frontier

Armures romaines de parade / casques à visage / casques sarmates / frontière romaine

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