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In: *Interdisciplinarité et nouvelles approches dans les recherches sur l'âge du Fer*. Wilczek, Josef (editor); Cannot, Anna (editor); Le Cozanet, Thibault (editor); Remy, Julie (editor); Macháček, Jiří (editor); Klápště, Jan (editor). 1. vydání Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2017, pp. 171-174

ISBN 978-80-210-8802-3; ISBN 978-80-210-8822-1 (online : pdf)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/CZ.MUNI.P210-8822-2017-29>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/137980>

Access Date: 17. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

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AN IRON AGE STONE HEAD FROM LANDAU-ARZHEIM (RHINELAND-PALATINATE)

Wolfram Ney

Abstract:

This article deals with the stone head from Landau-Arzheim, its style and its dating. In addition to comparisons with other stone sculptures in a wider environment, we have to include also small finds made of metal to prove the dating. It appears that the characteristic hairstyle of the head is an important factor for its dating, because it is widely used between the LT C2 and LT D periods. Therefore the head of Arzheim and the head of Freinsheim, which are similar to each other, are the only sculptures of this period in Germany.

Keywords:

Pre-Roman stone sculpture, La Tène Period art, anthropomorphic steles, iconography

Résumé :

Une tête sculptée en pierre de l'âge du Fer provenant de Landau-Arzheim (Rhineland-Palatinat)

Cet article traite de la tête sculptée en pierre découverte à Landau-Arzheim, de son style et de la question de la datation. En plus de la comparaison avec d'autres sculptures en pierre dans un environnement plus vaste, l'étude inclut également le petit mobilier métallique. Il semble que la coiffure caractéristique de la tête est un facteur important pour la datation, parce qu'elle est utilisée largement entre les périodes LT C2 et LT D. De plus, la tête de Arzheim et la tête de Freinsheim, qui lui ressemble, sont les deux seules sculptures anthropomorphes de cette période découvertes en Allemagne.

Mots-clés :

sculpture de pierre pré-romaine, art laténien, stèles anthropomorphes, iconographie

The stone head (Fig. 1) was found in 1988 in the interior back wall of a barn in Landau-Arzheim (Dist. Landau in der Pfalz) during renovations. It is made of red fine-grained sandstone with rusty stains and measures 29.5 × 25.5 × 7 cm. These stains are probably limonite and are the result of natural sedimentation. The stone comes most likely from the immediate neighbourhood of Arzheim, because a very similar stone can be found on the surface only 5 km away near Annweiler am Trifels. It belongs to the so-called Annweiler layers, which can only be found west of the Rhine and Landau. The front of the head is very straight and flat, while the back side is slightly rounded. The face is oval and ends with a thin triangular part with an unknown meaning in the chin area, which is broken on the lower end. The neck is very thick and oval in cross-section. The round eyes and the mouth, pulled-down at the corners, are carved precisely in the rock, while the eyebrows are slightly elevated. The ears are created as a D-shaped bulge without inner structures. Of particular interest is the hairstyle, because

elaborate hair is not common with stone sculptures of the Iron Age, especially not of the Early Iron Age. The only sculpture with an elaborate hairstyle in the wider surroundings is the stone head of Freinsheim (Dist. Bad Dürkheim, Fig. 2), which already was subject of several studies (Jorns 1961, p. 577-580; Kaiser 1970, p. 58; Engels 1974, p. 40; Kimmig 1987, p. 86; Megaw, Megaw 1998, p. 288-289). The head of Arzheim has a coiffure that consists of grooves which are run in a half-circle above the forehead, not entirely reaching the ears on both sides. On the back a fine line goes down from the ears and finishes on the neck with a straight line. One could think of a representation of headgear, but more probably it is the ending of the hair on the neck. The whole head is in a good condition. Just the area of the nose and one side of the neck are damaged. The head's bottom is flat, but partly destroyed by a tool, like a pickaxe, but it's not clear if it was done in ancient or modern times, for example while it was built into the wall of the barn. The original place where the head was found cannot be exactly located, but must be in the immediate neighbourhood, maybe in the vineyards of Arzheim. The head from Freinsheim shows close similarities. It was found fortuitously in 1952 during the planting of vines, and was damaged in the facial area during this process. It was said that there were two crude stone walls to the left and right of the head, but any documentation of that doesn't exist and there also were no small finds, not even during a later survey made by K. Kaiser. But there were shards of pottery from the Late La Tène Period at the site called "An der Bahn" which is not far from the location of the head (Engels 1974, p. 39-40).

Due to the heterogeneity in the style of the Iron Age sculptures in the wider surroundings (Fig. 3), a dating of these two stone heads, which are contemporary for sure, is based on stylistic comparisons. A sculpture which has some similarities with them is the well-known head of Mšecké Žehrovice (Dist. Rakovník; Megaw, Megaw 1998, Fig. 1), despite being a long way off. It is only the coiffure and the general shape of it that can be compared, because the whole style and the quality of the head from the Czech Republic is more elaborate. One could think that the occiput is bald, but in comparison with the other two sculptures, there also can be seen a clear line on the neck. Above this line are cross-shaped hatches and the area below the neck is very smooth and plain. According to N. Venclová it could be shaved short, but nevertheless visible hair (Venclová 2002, p. 461-462), as it is also to assume for the two pieces of the Palatinat. It seems to be a specific hairstyle of a certain group of people, N. Venclová even thinks a coiffure of a druid (Venclová 2002, p. 466-470), a proposal which cannot be proved. For the dating of the head from Mšecké Žehrovice we have good evidence from the find context and its detailed style. The small finds of the pit where the head was

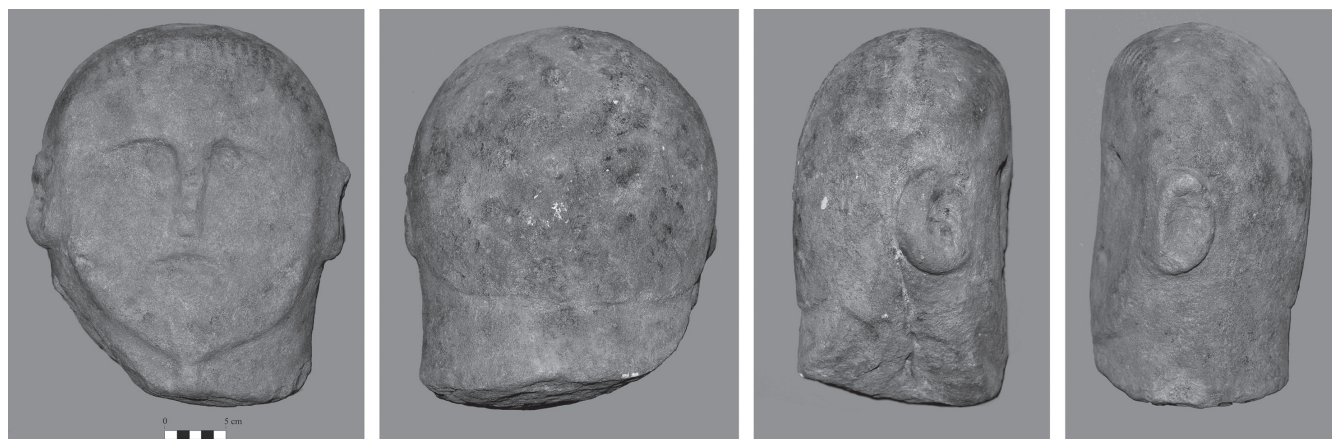


Figure 1: The stone head from Arzheim (Photo W. Ney).

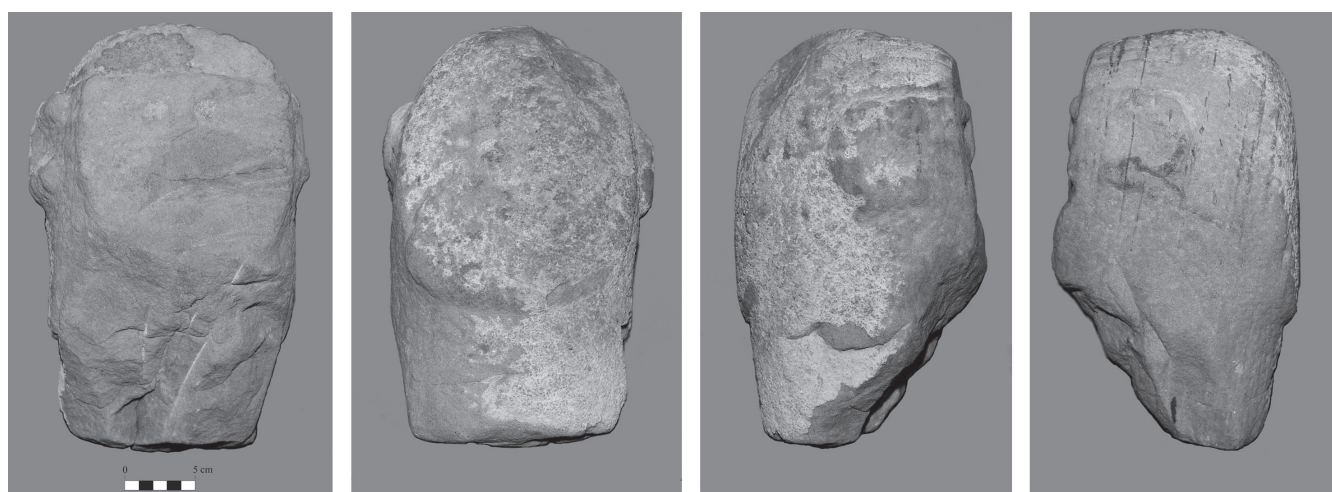


Figure 2: The stone head from Freinsheim (Photo W. Ney).

found are giving us a *terminus ante quem* of LT C2-D1 for its deposition (Megaw, Megaw 1998, p. 284).

A larger-than-life stone head from Mont-Saint-Vincent (dép. Saône-et-Loire; Bonenfant, Guillaumet 1998, Fig. 15) has some similarities with the pieces mentioned above, concerning the shape of eyes and ears. At 44 cm high, the head is very uncommon, because sculptures are getting smaller and smaller up to the Late Iron Age. Although the occiput is veiled by a hood, a part of the hairstyle is visible in the form of triangular grooves above the left and the right bulged ear, which could be the characteristic coiffure of the three sculptures mentioned above and it appears that it was desired to be seen. Concerning the style, it was dated around 150 BC (Bonenfant, Guillaumet 1998, p. 32-34). A band of hair above the forehead and bulging C-shaped ears can also be seen on the bust from Mauron (dép. Morbihan; Ménez 1999, Fig. 42.2) and the head from Salles-la-Source (dép. Aveyron; Gruat 2004, Fig. 7), which can be dated by style to the 2nd – 1st centuries BC or to the 3rd – 2nd centuries BC respectively. A certain similarity between the heads from Arzheim and Pauillac (dép. Gironde; Boudet, Gruat 1992, Fig. 3) can be stated, but the latter cannot be dated owing to the lack of a find context.

Further examples of anthropomorphic stone sculpture are limited, so we have to include other find categories to get new evidence for dating. It is assumed that the stone sculpture was derived from woodcarvings (Frey 2000, p. 403), but wooden statues are even rarer than those made of stone. So we have to include the category of small finds made of metal, where the sources are better. In particular the specific hairstyle can help with the dating, because the facial features are mostly crude and schematically differentiated. The slicked back hairstyle is said to be typical “Celtic” and was already mentioned by Diodorus (Diod. *bibliotheca historica* 5, 28, 2). The first indications of this hairstyle can be found in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, but the influence of the Early La Tène Period art style led to a strong alienation of human heads, which are mostly hidden in floral ornaments. As representative for a large number of objects we can mention the phalera of Hořovičky (Dist. Rakovník; Duval 1978, Fig. 42), the gold disc of Weiskirchen (Dist. Sankt-Wendel; Duval 1978, Fig. 8) or the sheath of the sword from Grave 994 of the Hallstatt necropolis (Dist. Gmunden; Egg, Schönfelder 2009, Fig. 2). In this period we only have representations of hair slicked back over the whole occiput, so far as it is visible, and not only a band of hair on

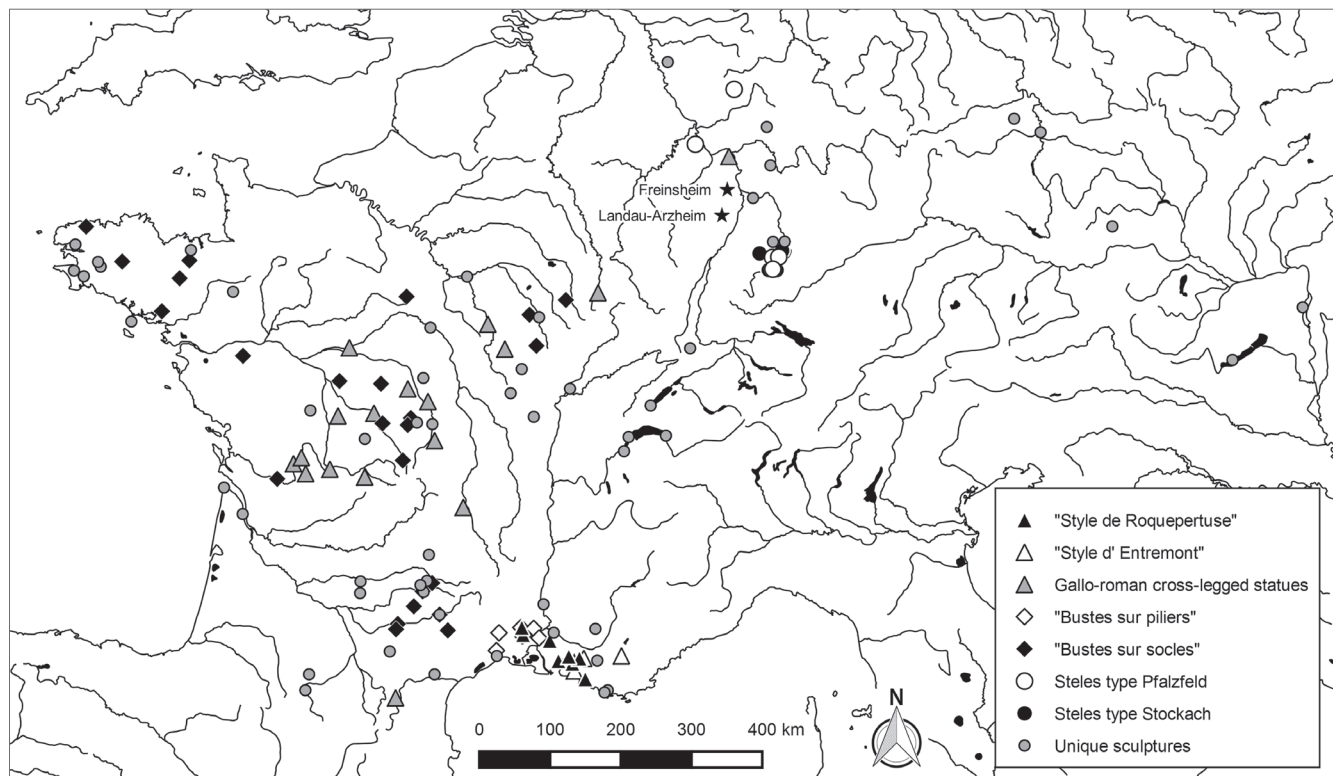


Figure 3: Distribution map of anthropomorphic Iron Age sculpture (DAO W. Ney).

the forehead. During the Middle La Tène Period the number of objects with more specific hairstyles increases, for example on scabbards with anthropomorphic handles, as the one from North Grimston (Stead 2006, Fig. 105:215). Finally in the end of the Iron Age, we have a lot of objects with the band coiffure in Western and Central Europe, for example on a bronze figurine from Levroux (départ. Indre; Vuillat 1989, p. 36), a tarnish from Křivoklát (Dist. Rakovník; Duval 1978, p. 183) or a knife handle from Alzey (Dist. Alzey-Worms; Losleben 2008, Fig. 8). On the famous Gundestrup cauldron there are a lot of different presentations of hairstyles including some bands of hair on the forehead (plates XII/2, VIII-B, XIII/I-II, XIII/2, XIV/I at Hachmann 1991, Fig. 20). It was said that the coiffure with slicked back hair is not chronologically significant (Megaw, Megaw 1998, p. 288), but the band hairstyle from the two sculptures from Palatinate seems to be typical for LT C2 and LT D, as we can see from the small finds comparisons. Round incised eyes are common in the Hallstatt Period in South Germany, but the coiffure and the advanced stone work are speaking against such assumptions. If we assume a LT C2-D dating for them, they are the only two sculptures of this period in Germany so far. Only the two wooden animals with a supposed person in the middle (only the human hands on their sides have remained) from Fellbach-Schmiden are an exception, which confirms the existence of anthropomorphic sculpture in this region in the Late Iron Age. The two stone heads cannot be classified in any class of Iron Age sculpture, which were worked out in the author's thesis, after the collection of all Iron Age sculptures in Western and Central Europe

(summary may be found in Ney 2015). It is possible that they were intended as head sculptures or else as a part of bigger statues or pillars.

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