

DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE

ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



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Bronze head with Suebian nodus from Aquincum

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Abstract

In 2012 a small head with Suebian nodus was uncovered in Aquincum, the first one ever from this site. Despite filling a gap on the map and thus bringing us somewhat closer to understanding these interesting representations, it still leaves a number of questions unanswered.

In 2012 preventive archaeological works began due to the construction of a baseball field at Keled way in Budapest, located just 300 meters from the western wall of Aquincum.¹ With the use of metal detectors numerous, primarily Roman finds were uncovered. Amongst them was a small bronze object that only following restoration turned out to be a head with a typical Suebian *nodus*, i. e. the hairstyle worn by some Germanic men (*Fig. 1*).² This piece was not known to me, when writing my previous article on the bronze and terracotta objects with *nodus*.³ I am greatly indebted to Gábor Lassányi, the leader of the excavations, for bringing the object's existence to my attention and for the opportunity of publishing it.

The head from Aquincum, measuring 4,5 × 1,6 × 1,3 cm, is oblong, which together with the elongated pointy beard are usual traits of the Germanic representations in Roman art.⁴ The eyes are almond shaped, the lips narrow and sealed, the nose long and narrow, the hair is sharply separated from the forehead. The *nodus* itself is only a small convex protrusion at the right temple and ends abruptly with the rest of the hairline, thus lacking the hanging part visible on most of the Suebian representations. The conic neck, decorated with two grooves, terminates in a broken iron pin. The object's entire surface is worn and has numerous small depressions. Most significantly affected are the ears that have almost completely disappeared. The face, especially its left side, the nose and the *nodus* also show considerable traces of abrasion. These marks make it probable that the head was substantially worn before it was buried.

1 LASSÁNYI 2013, 19–31.

2 For the Suebian *nodus* see Tacitus, *Germania* 38; KRIERER 2004, 100–111.

3 JUHÁSZ 2014, 333–349.

4 Aquincum Museum Inv. Nr. 2012.7.165. For the grouping of the Germanic heads and busts with *nodus* and for further literature see JUHÁSZ 2014, 335–344.

Unfortunately the bronze head was found in the surface layer, so despite the documented find circumstances, they do not provide any information on its dating.⁵ However, based on the historical events and the parallels a production time during the Marcomannic wars or shortly afterwards seems most likely.⁶



Fig. 1. Bronze head with *nodus* from Aquincum (Photo: P. Komjáthy).

The closest parallels for the head from Aquincum are the one from Intercisa (Dunapentele)⁷ (Fig. 2) and one in the Hungarian National Museum⁸ (Fig. 3). Common traits are the roughly same size,⁹ the oblong head, the small *nodus*, the narrow mouth, the almond shaped eyes, the pointy beard and the two grooves on the neck.¹⁰ The find from Aquincum is in the worst condition of them all. Unfortunately even this new piece does not bring us closer to what these Germanic heads were originally decorating.¹¹ This is furthermore complicated by that they could easily have been reused on various other objects, if the original one was ruined or damaged.

5 LASSÁNYI 2013, 21.

6 JÁRDÁNYI-PAULOVICS 1945, 249–250, 258; KRIERER 2004, 83–84, 119, 124–125; JUHÁSZ 2014, 344–345; cf. ARDEVAN 1999, 880, who dates the only silver statuette with *nodus* to the first half of the 2nd century AD and connects it with the conquering of Dacia by Trajan, although it is only a stray find.

7 SCHUMACHER 1935, Nr. 111; JÁRDÁNYI-PAULOVICS 1945, 252; KRIERER 2004, Kat. 281; JUHÁSZ 2014, 340.

8 JUHÁSZ 2014, 339.

9 Hungarian National Museum: 4,5 × 2,5 × 1,5 cm; Intercisa: 4,2 cm.

10 The find from Intercisa also terminates in an iron pin, just like the head found in 2014 in Brigetio as well as the busts from Eisenstadt and Mannersdorf. JÁRDÁNYI-PAULOVICS 1945, 252; JUHÁSZ 2014, 334; NOWAK 1997, 72, Abb. 126; KRIERER 2004, Kat. 285, 297; SCHUMACHER 1935, Nr. 110; UBL 1976, 267–268.

11 For the possible utilization of the bronzes with *nodus* see JUHÁSZ 2014, 345–347. The heads and busts with *nodus* from Mušov and Czarnówko are decorating cauldrons, and are the only ones, where their original function is secure. PEŠKA 2002, 3–9, 33–62; KÜNZL – KÜNZL 2002, 569. F 2; KRIERER 2002, 374, 384–385; KRIERER 2004, 113–118, 127–128; MAĆZYŃSKA – RUDNICKA 2004, 397–400; SCHUSTER 2014, 72–73.



Fig. 2. Bronze head with *nodus* from Intercisa (KRIERER 2004, 144. Abb. 142).

Previously the only known representations with *nodus* from Pannonia Inferior was the bronze head from Intercisa and a terracotta lamp from Osijek.¹² Even with the new head from Aquincum this is quite scarce compared to the ten in Pannonia Superior with findspot (Fig. 4).¹³ Interestingly enough this is the only one found in Aquincum, although as an important border city, it was constantly exposed to barbarian attacks. The stark contrast between the two provinces is explained by their geographical location; while Pannonia Superior faced Germanic tribes on the other side of the Danube, Pannonia Inferior was mostly threatened by the Sarmatians. So because of the different endangering tribes the Germanic representations were more common in Upper Pannonia.



Fig. 3. Bronze head with *nodus* in the Hungarian National Museum (Photo: D. Bartus).

Interestingly enough the head from Aquincum came from a civilian environment.¹⁴ This is also true of the two newer bronzes from the municipal town of Brigetio found in 2009 and 2014.¹⁵ One can also add the negative terracotta mould from the pottery workshops of Brigetio (Szöny-Kurucdomb) that was probably used to produce wax models for the bronze casting.¹⁶ This means that most of the bronze heads or busts with *nodus* coming from documented excavations in the Roman Empire are found in non-military context. Furthermore from the *canabae* of Brigetio came a head and a seated Germanic prisoner.¹⁷ From a military context there are considerably less Germanic

12 SCHUMACHER 1935, Nr. 94; JÁRDÁNYI-PAULOVICS 1945, 241; KRIERER 2004, Kat. 48; JUHÁSZ 2014, 341.

13 At the most likely production time of these representations with *nodus*, i.e. around the time of the Marcomannic wars, Brigetio was still part of Pannonia Superior. The statuette of the kneeling Suebian and the head in the Hungarian National Museum were also probably found in Pannonia, but without a confirmed findspot. GSCHWANTLER 1986, Kat. 315; KRIERER 2004, Kat. 295; JUHÁSZ 2014, 339, 343–345. The one in the Museum Carnuntinum was probably discovered in Carnuntum itself (FLEISCHER 1967, Nr. 204).

14 LASSÁNYI 2013, 21–30.

15 JUHÁSZ 2014, 333–334.

16 JÁRDÁNYI-PAULOVICS 1945, 244; KRIERER 2004, Kat. 308. BÓNIS 1977, 132; JUHÁSZ 2014, 340.

17 PETÉNYI 1993, 57; JUHÁSZ 2014, 340, 342. KRIERER 2004, Kat. 276, 278.

depictions with *nodus*. The only securely identified object is an application from the legionary camp of Vindobona.¹⁸ The silver statuette of the kneeling Suebian prisoner supposedly comes from the territory of the auxiliary camp of Gherla, Romania, but is a stray find.¹⁹ In barbarian territory the Mušov and Czarnówko cauldrons, decorated with Germanic heads and busts, were discovered in a sepulchral context, but they were surely used previously for profane purposes.²⁰

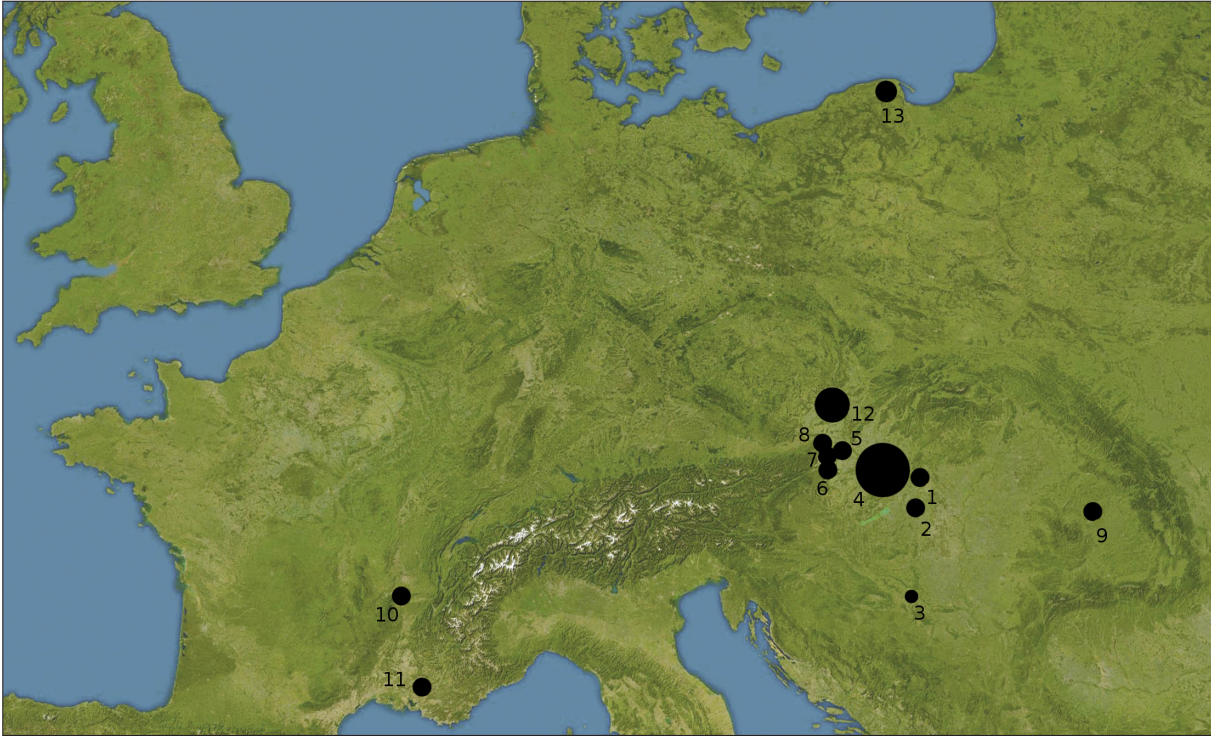


Fig. 4. Map of the Germanic bronze and terracotta representations with *nodus* if findspot is available. 1. Aquincum (1); 2. Intercisa (1); 3. Siscia (1); 4. Brigetio (6); 5. Carnuntum (1); 6. Eisenstadt (1); 7. Mannersdorf (1); 8. Vienna (1); 9. Gherla (1); 10. Vienne (1); 11. Apt (1); 12. Mušov (4 bust on 1 cauldron); 13. Czarnówko (3 heads on 1 cauldron).

This may indicate that the small finds with *nodus* were in fact not primarily used by the soldiers, but rather by civilians as decoration in their everyday life. Nevertheless they are most likely in connection with the Marcomannic wars, but maybe not with the fighting troops themselves, rather with the average inhabitants, whose lives were endangered by the Germanic invaders. Of course one must be cautious when drawing these kinds of conclusions, since most depictions with *nodus* lack find circumstances.

The discovery of the head from Aquincum fills a gap on the map of bronze statues with *nodus*. Although the primary threat to Pannonia Inferior was posed by the Sarmatians, the Germanic tribes were also endangering it. The object came from a civilian environment, which is also true of most of the other items with find circumstances. Unfortunately this head from Aquincum leaves many questions unanswered that hopefully similar new archaeological discoveries will shed more light upon.

18 BIEŃKOWSKI 1928, 50–51; SCHUMACHER 1935, Nr. 137; JÁRDÁNYI-PAULOVICS 1945, 247–248; FLEISCHER 1967, Nr. 200; KREILINGER 1996, Kat. 168; KRIERER 2004, Kat. 274.

19 ARDEVAN 1999, 879.

20 PEŠKA 2002, 3–9, 33–62; KÜNZL – KÜNZL 2002, 569. F 2; KRIERER 2002, 374, 384–385; KRIERER 2004, 113–118, 127–128; MĄCZYŃSKA – RUDNICKA 2004, 397–400; SCHUSTER 2014, 72–73.

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