

Celtic Anthropoid Sword Hilt

Illustration

Trying to find out more about the Celtic swords with anthropoid iron hilts offered for sale by "[Hermann Historica](#)", I ran across so much material that a special module became necessary.

- Pleiner, in his "[Celtic Sword](#)" book, notes that there are about 40 known Celtic swords with anthropoid hilts. Only about 13 of these swords can be assigned to a grave assemblage and thus dated with some precision. He gives a table of these 13 swords but the dates are imprecise and cover all of La Tène, i.e. about 500 BC to 0. Pleiner mentions that there are anthropoid hilts made from iron but doesn't give examples.
- Nobody, it appears, has mentioned that there is a big difference in making a bronze head for the pommel or an iron head. This is best appreciated by looking at one particular bronze head, similar to one on the [British Museum sword](#):



- Here is another head. Quite different from the artistic point of view but with the same problems concerning the making:



- It's not so easy to cast a hollow bronze object like that. To make it just with a hammer, as needs to be done with iron, is well-nigh impossible. And I also cannot see how that could be done by swaging.

So how many swords with iron heads do we have? I don't know. Beyond the two "[Hermann Historica](#)" ones, I have not yet found others. Here is the page from the auction catalogue; further down are details of the figures:

Antiken

Artikel / Informationen

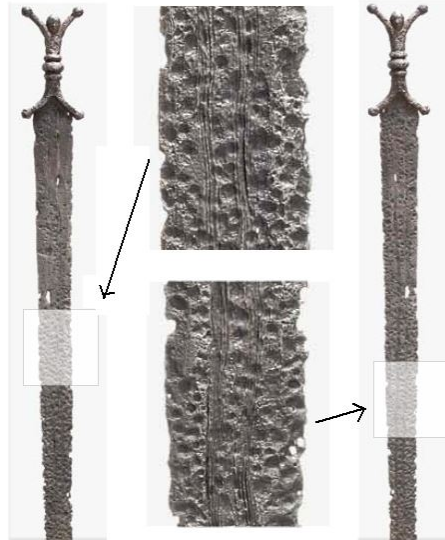
Kelten, Germanen und europäische Eisenzeit

Eisenschwert mit anthropomorphem Griff, keltisch, 3. Jhdt. v. Chr.
Damazierte Klinge mit sich leicht zur Spitze hin verjüngenden Schneiden.
Die Griffangel von einem schmiedeeisernen Griff mit stilisierter
Menschengestalt eingefasst. Mittig mit drei Wülsten profiliert,
oben und unten zwei Antennen mit kugeligen Enden, zwischen den
oberen beidseitig menschliches Antlitz. Gute Eisensubstanz mit
Kleinere Scharten entlang der Schneiden. Fachmännisch elektrolytisch
behandelt und restauriert. Länge 62,3 cm.

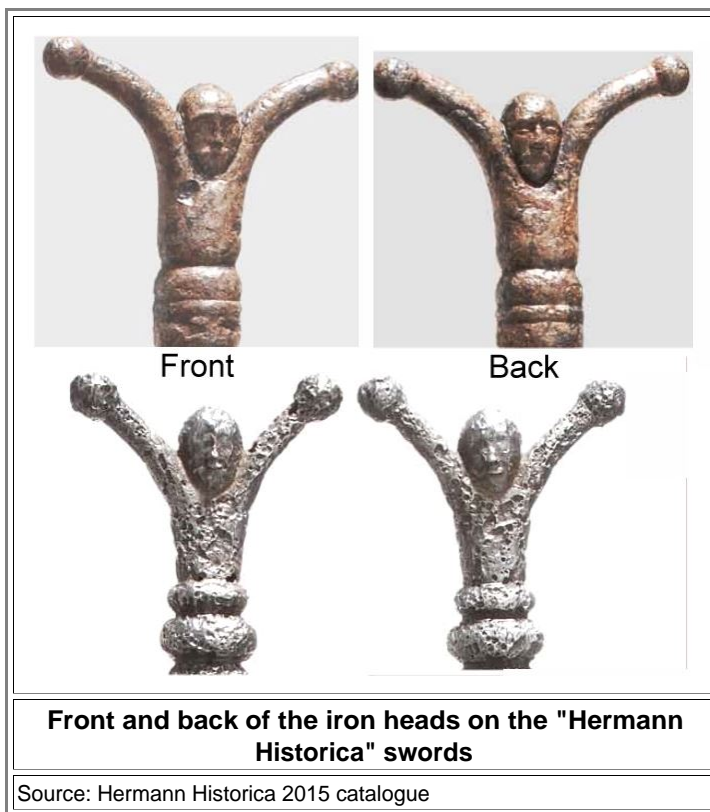
Süddeutsche Privatsammlung, erworben in den 1980er Jahren im Kunsthandel.

Zustand: II - III

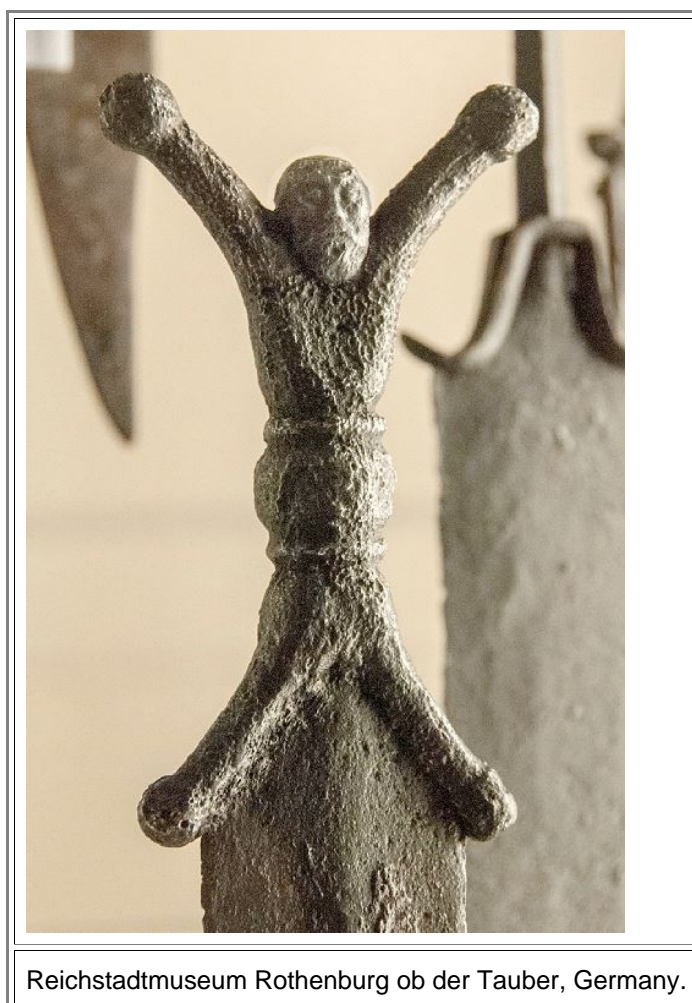
Limit: 2500 EURO



Hermann Historica catalogue page



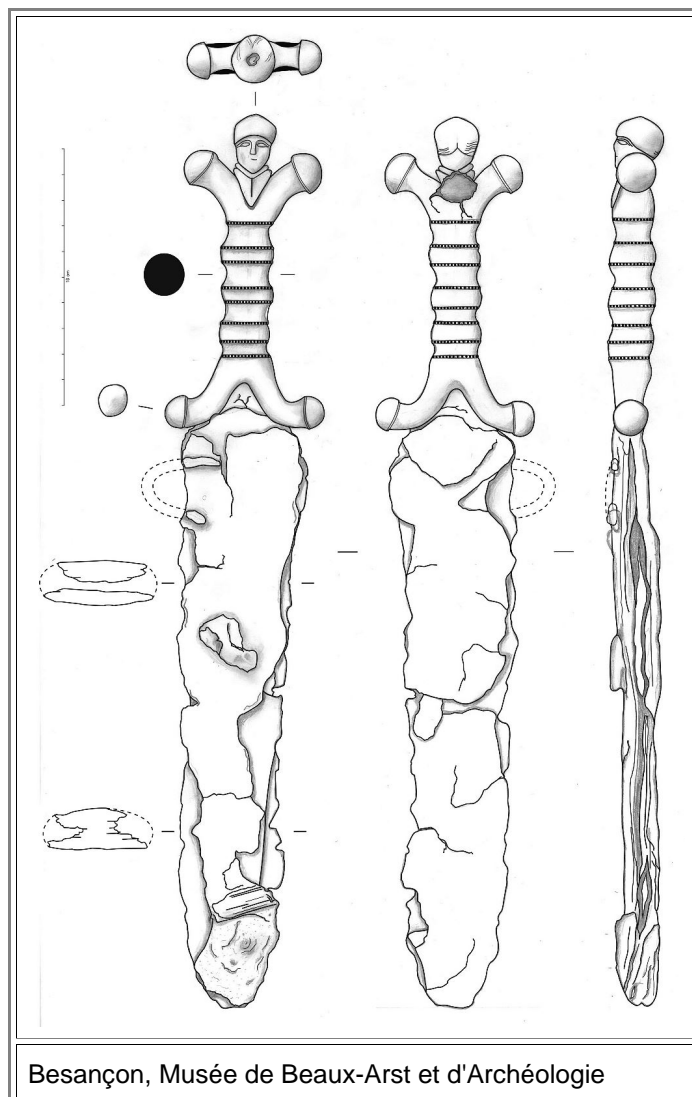
- Allright! Front and back are rather similar for these heads. Most likely they aren't hollow either, just drilled through for fitting the end of the tang. These heads thus could have been made by swaging. Here is the only other hilt that might have been made from iron, judging from the way it looks. Unfortunately I could not find any data for this hilt.



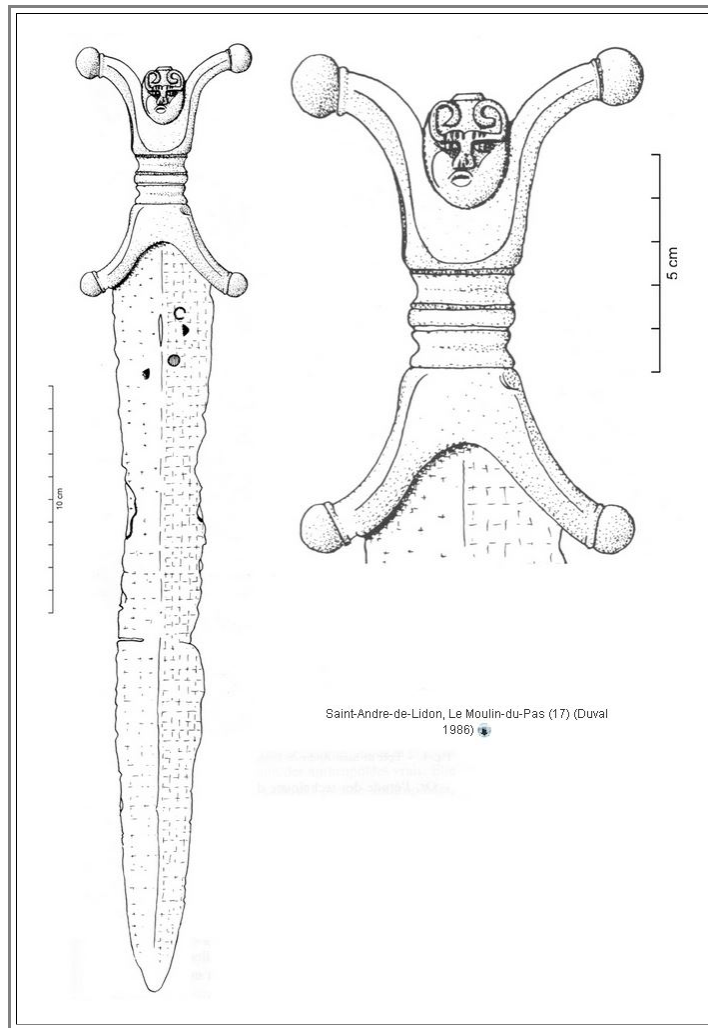
Here are a few more anthropoid hilts, mostly from "d'Artefacts©, Encyclopédie en ligne des petits objets archéologiques" and from the book by Miklos Szabo, Eva F. Petres: "Decorated weapons of the La Tène iron age in the Carpathian basin"; Inventaria Praehistorica Hungaria V.



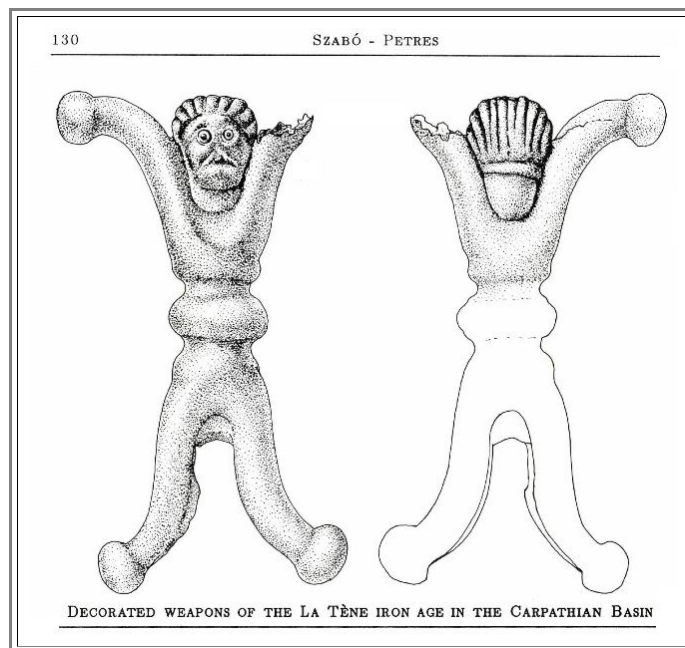
Obviously cast bronze with the head being an integral part of the cast and the tang riveted on top of the head.



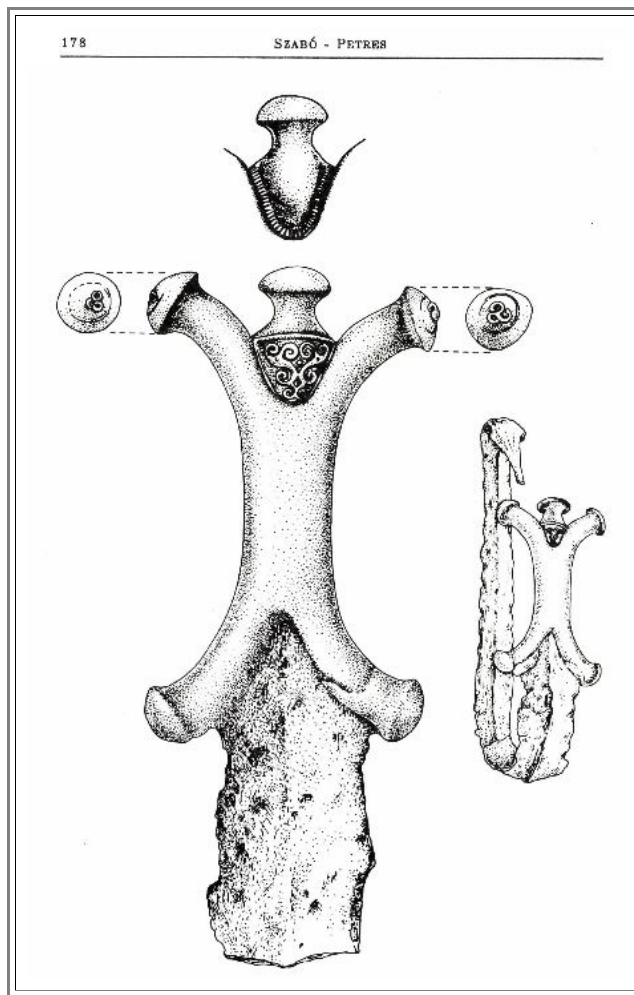
● A complex bronze head like the one on the top of the page



● Hard to tell, but most likely not iron



● Quite likely of the cast "hollow head" variety. A photograph is shown below.



● Is the head missing or is this the minimalist / abstract version? Judge for yourself, here are the real things:



Source: Photographed 2015 in the National Museum, Budapest, Hungary.

- One of the faces is indeed an abstract ornament. The other one is relatively primitive (the inset is from the museum booklet).
The explanation given is: "Daggers with anthropomorphic bronze pommel from Dinnyés, Györszemere and Szendrő".