



“THE HORSE UPLIFTS HIS HEAD EAGERLY AS IF TO BREAK INTO FULL CAREER”

(STATIUS, SILVAE)



A life-size, 59 cm long, gilded horse head from an equestrian statue is the most prominent find from Waldgirmes. At first glance, the viewer is captivated by the great liveliness and plasticity with which the sculptor has captured the structure and appearance of the head. The reproduction of the individual details of the muscles, nostrils and eyes testifies to superior craftsmanship and artistic perceptiveness.

Various medallions at the intersections of the straps and on the noseband decorate the bridle. Of the original four lateral decorative discs, one is missing. The other three discs display in low relief busts of the goddess of victory, Victoria, identified by the wings on her back. A round medallion with a bust whose head has been lost adorns the browband. Additional decorative elements were mortised in the holes to the right and left of the disc. In the centre of the horse's face is a larger oval medallion showing the god of war, Mars, sitting naked on a rock, with a cloak thrown over his left shoulder. On his head, he wears a helmet with a high crest. His left arm rests on a standing shield, while he grips a sword in his right hand. The alignment of the decorative discs shows that the horse's

head originally was drawn downwards by tightened reins. The equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius on the Capitol in Rome provides an approximate idea of the position of horse and rider.

While the design of the Waldgirmes horse head and its bridle show great skill, the depictions in the medallions are comparatively clumsy. It is therefore probable that the head itself was made in one of the centres of bronze casting. The best comparisons to the find from Waldgirmes are the horse heads from Pergola di Cartoceto in northern Italy, which for stylistic reasons date to the period between 50 and 30 BC.

For the dating of the head from Waldgirmes, the precise data for the settlement's existence provide clear evidence.

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THE EMPEROR AT THE FORUM

The layout of the Forum in Waldgirmes belongs to a later expansion phase of the settlement. Its architectural design with the columned halls on three sides and the transverse basilica is seen in many similar Augustan-era complexes in Gaul, Italy and Spain. These were monumental edifices whose models may be found in the imperial architecture of Rome. The arrangement of the five statue pedestals in front of the Basilica in the Forum's courtyard corresponds to the axisymmetric placement of statues typical of such places.

There is no concrete evidence identifying the depicted persons. Based on comparable statuary programs and the Forum of Augustus in Rome, dedicated in 2 BC, we can reckon with a representation of Augustus and members of his imperial household. In the centre may have stood an equestrian statue of Augustus wearing armour, flanked by militarily accomplished relatives like Drusus Major, Germanicus or Tiberius, and the sons of Agrippa, Gaius and Lucius. Such a group of horsemen would have publicly displayed Augustus' claim to power and succession plan. The military virtues of the depicted persons are also reflected in the decorative medallions on the harness of the only pre-

served horse's head. The combination of the images of Mars and Victoria points up the martial aspect.

The evocative arrangement of the dynastic statuary group of Augustus and his male relatives on the Forum marks the ideational centre of the newly founded settlement of Waldgirmes. Cities usually donated such commemorative statues as a sign of their loyalty to the reigning emperor and in recognition of the Roman system of rule.

The statues probably stood for only a few years between AD 7 and 9. According to dendrochronological data, their destruction – combined with a fire that devastated the surrounding buildings – occurred at the end of the year 9 or early in 10 AD. This timing suggests a connection between the destruction of the entire complex and the catastrophic defeat of the Romans in the Varian Disaster of AD 9. **CA**



THE PUZZLE



During the excavations in Waldgirmes, a total of 160 fragments of gilded bronze were found, with a total weight of about 22 kg. These would make up only a small portion of a complete bronze statue. The fragments were scattered all over the site, but the majority came from the roadside ditches along the main street, the Forum, the well and a hoard found just outside the western gate. Only four of the fragments fit together.

The left foot of a rider, clad in a senator's boot (*calceus*), comes from the well in which the horse head was discovered. This fragment shows no traces of gilding, and therefore it is doubtful that the horse's head and the shoe belonged to the same statue. The smaller gilded fragments with curls of hair could come from the head of a rider. Remnants of the folds of a garment may be a rider's clothing. In addition to the horse's head, a horse's foot, as well as larger fragments of breast-harness with vegetal ornamentation, are preserved. A notable fragment is thought to be the penile sheath or foreskin of a horse.

The distribution of the statue fragments and the provenience of the finds permit us to hypothesise about the events that led to the destruction of the forum's statues. The statues were probably broken down on the spot, the better to melt them down for reuse of the metal. This explains the many splinters of bronze found in the Forum, above all around the site of the statues. The reuse of the bronze as a raw material for casting also explains the discovery of a gold-plated fragment in Wetzlar-Dalheim, 5 km distant.

The large fragments of the horse's head, foot, penile sheath and harness seem to have been deliberately deposited. Such depositions are known in antiquity from many different cultures. Wells, moors or other places with a relationship to water are often used to deposit statues or parts of statues. A consistent interpretation of these various depositions has yet to be found.

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NOT FROM THE SAME HORSE

Among the gilded fragments of bronze are three pieces from the breast-strap of the harness. The most sizeable piece, weighing 3,5 kg, came to light in the ditch in front of the Forum; the two smaller ones lay in the defensive ditch in front of the west gate.

Although the three pieces do not fit together, they do show a similar decorative principle: the curling tendrils of an acanthus plant fills a narrow area between flanking borders. From the expanding tendrils, two tiny leaves emerge at regular intervals. Alternating above and below the tendrils, small, four-petalled flowers appear between the leaflets.

Two lateral terminals have survived, whose corners are decorated with sculpted buttons. Remains of the harness breast band, which was usually figuratively decorated, are not among the fragments found.

A comparison shows that the fragments were not cast in the same mould and therefore probably were not associated with a single horse. The two smaller ones seem to have been cast together with the horse's body. The larger piece, on the other hand, could have been



made separately and then attached to the statue of the horse. These dissimilarities in the manufacturing process and the different designs of the decorative acanthus tendril rule out the association of these three fragments with a single statue. CA

THE WALDGIRMES SETTLEMENT

- Sites, Augustan-Tiberian period, military
- Sites, Augustan-Tiberian period, civil
- ◆ Sites, Augustan-Tiberian period, unproven
- ★ Site of the Varian Disaster

