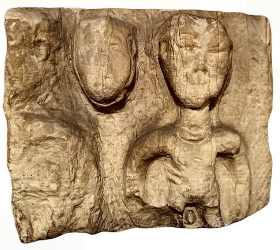
A PROTO-*SHEELA-NA-GIG* ?

Unprovenanced, likely ancient Celtic, broken bas-relief from Burgundy, France :

most of a broken limestone carving, 32 centimetres high, weighing 73 kg,
from the *département* of the Saône-et-Loire.

The top is quite flat.



click to enlarge original gallery photo

Limestone, 31 cm high x 37 cm wide x 29 cm deep.

« An important bas-relief depicting three figures, carved from a reworked block
possibly re-used in a Merovingian or pre-Romanesque building.
The figure on the right is thus a precursor to the Sheela-na- Gig
and the two-tailed mermaids of the Romanesque period.
Her arms and legs are joined, and a vulva is visible in the crotch, suggesting a fertility cult.

« Its attribution to the Second Iron Age is confirmed by the presence of a torque,
the modelling of the torso and the hairstyle of the main figure (resembling the figures on the Gundestrup cauldron).
The three figures are also reminiscent of the Celtic Matronae, often depicted in triads. »

`– Galerie Ekinium, Paris`

This remarkable sculpture, bought in public auction *(Hôtel des Ventes)* in Beaune (Côte d'Or) and now in my care,
is an apparently a vulva-pulling 'proto-sheela'
though the lower arms and hands are badly-damaged.
The vulva is well-defined, mainly because, being almost on the underside, it is not particularly obvious.
Depending on its position in a wall, it might have been very hard to identify
or even to see clearly.

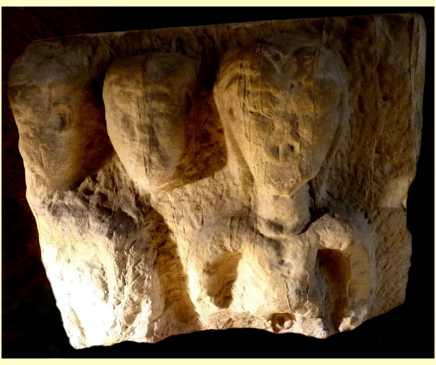
Importantly, she is also a 'tongue-sticker'.
The tongue is slightly concave, though it may look forked in some photos.

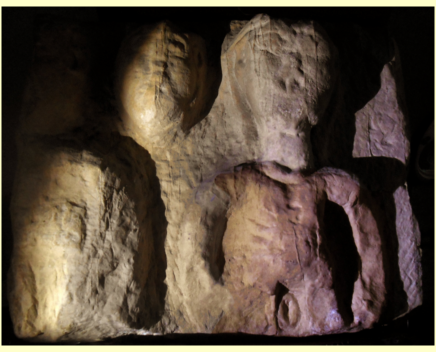
Her hair, parted in middle, reaches back to a neck-torque (or slave collar ?)
There is a tiny pin-hole in the middle of the vagina.

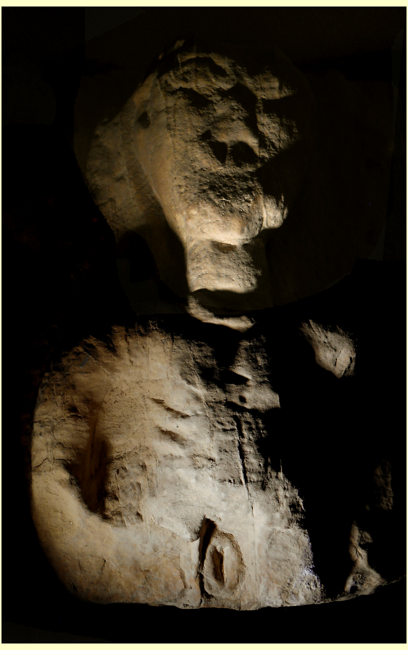
Like many exhibitionists and sculptures of Luxuria, she is emaciated,
with prominent ribs on one side.

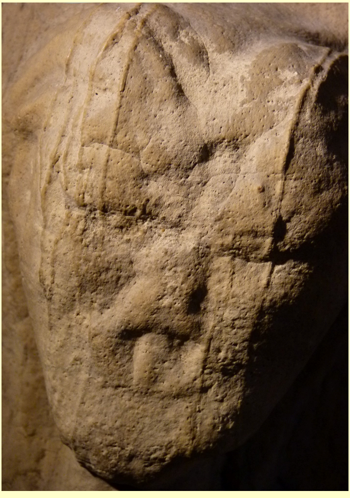
The broken figure on the left of the bas-relief might have been male,
whether exhibitionist or not.

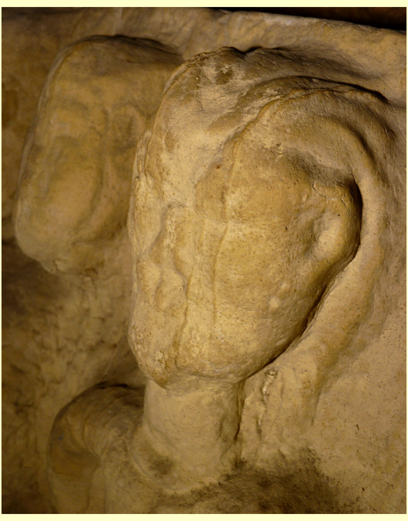
The 'floating head' might represent a spirit or 'soul' *(anima)*
as angels do in Christian art.

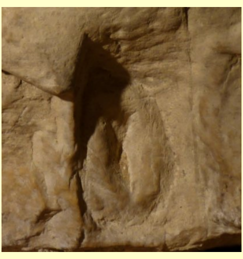












It was likely made to be inserted
into the wall of a building, possibly in pre-Roman Gaul.

The survival of the vulva is something of a miracle,
perhaps because the figure was high up, or otherwise not obvious,
or, in recent times, stored out of harm's way.

As for provenance, it almost certainly comes from Burgundy
in modern east-central France,
and in 2022 at any rate, had been in the possession of the owner of a castle:
a château or château-fort (tower-house) in the Saône-et-Loire.

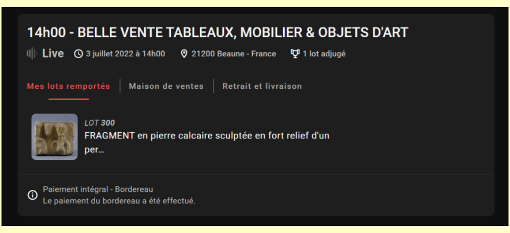
There are hundreds of buildings termed *Châteaux* in that département.
The word in French means little more than the home of a war-lord, later an aristocrat or wealthy gentleman.

In the north of the *département* is the ancient town of Autun, a Gaulish *oppidum* which became an important Roman settlement,
and ultimately the site of a fine and important Benedictine abbey.

In the south of the Saône-et-Loire is Cluny,
an even more famous and influential Benedictine abbey which was successively destroyed
by Protestants in the Wars of Religion, and by Republicans during the Revolution.
It then turned into a quarry, as remaining masonry was sold or taken for re-use.

But, of course, the bas-relief could have come by cart (and, in modern times, by train) from anywhere.

Over 2,000 years old, it has nonetheless been looked after well since a quarter of it was broken off at some point,
probably when it was removed or fell from a wall during its second thousand years –
most likely during the Wars of Religion or the Revolution.

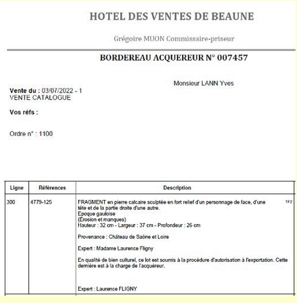


14h00 - BELLE VENTE TABLEAUX, MOBILIER & OBJETS D'ART

Live · 3 juillet 2022 à 14h00 · 21200 Beaune - France · 1 lot adjugé

LOT 300
FRAGMENT en pierre calcaire sculptée en fort relief d'un per...

Paiement intégral - Bordereau
Le paiement du bordereau a été effectué.



HOTEL DES VENTES DE BEAUNE

Grégoire MUON Commissaire-priseur

BORDEREAU ACQUEREUR N° 007457

Monsieur LANN Yves

Vente du : 03/07/2022 - 1
VENTE CATALOGUE

Vos réfs :

Ordre n° : 1100

Ligne	Références	Description
300	4779-125	FRAGMENT en pierre calcaire sculptée en fort relief d'un personnage de face, d'une tête et de la partie droite d'une autre. Epoque gauloise (Erosion et manques) Hauteur : 32 cm - Largeur : 37 cm - Profondeur : 26 cm Provenance : Château de Saône et Loire Expert : Madame Laurence Fligny En qualité de bien culturel, ce lot est soumis à la procédure d'autorisation à l'exportation. Cette dernière est à la charge de l'acquéreur. Expert : Laurence FLIGNY TF2

There are well-known remains of the late Merovingian priory of *Saint-Vivant-de-Vergy* at Curtil-Vergy, Côte-d'Or, not far from Dijon.

**Another famous Merovingian site in Burgundy is at *Luxeuil-les-Bains*,
which was founded by the Irish Saint *Columbanus* at the end of the sixth century...**

read article in French

Bas-relief celtique. Période gauloise.
Origine : France, Bourgogne

Matière : Pierre calcaire

Dimensions : H 32cm - L 37cm - P 26cm

Époque : 2ème-1er siècle avant JC.

*Important bas-relief représentant 3 personnages, bloc retaillé
et vraisemblablement utilisé en remploi dans un édifice mérovingien ou pré-roman.
Le personnage de droite est ainsi un précurseur des Sheela Na Gig et des sirènes bicaudales de l'époque romane.
Ses bras et ses jambes se rejoignent, et une vulve est visible dans l'entrejambe, évoquant un culte de la fertilité.*

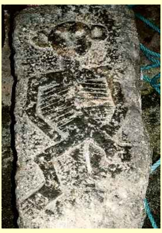
*L'attribution au deuxième age du fer est confirmée par la présence d'un torque,
le modelé du torse et la coiffure du personnage principal
(similarité avec les personnages du chaudron de Gundestrup).
Les trois personnages rappellent également les Matrones gauloises, souvent représentées en triades,
ce qui renforce la présomption du culte de fertilité.
Notre sculpture est un rare exemple antérieure à la conquête romaine,
ayant inspiré les représentations figurées du moyen-âge.*

– Galerie Ekinium, Paris

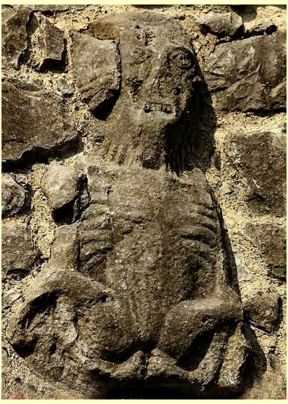
Killinaboy church, county Clare, Ireland:
the first exhibitionist that I ever saw,
in 1971, with my mother.
The figure stands above the doorway.

Its ribs are very evident, which is not common, especially not in Romanesque figures<
apart from some depictions of Luxuria, notably at Moissac.

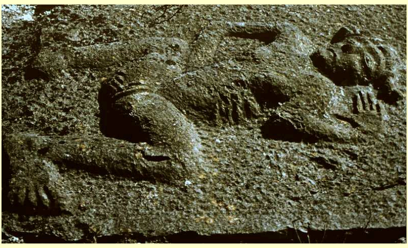
Other good Irish examples of emaciation are at Tullaroan,



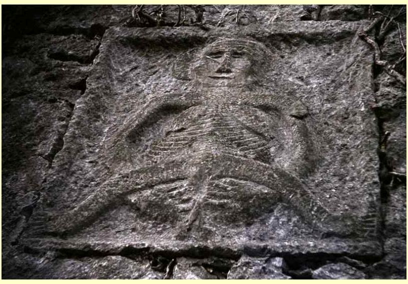
Fethard (town gate),



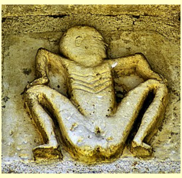
Tullavin,



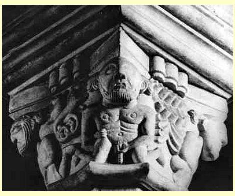
and Dunnaman.



This figure is at St-Vivien-de-Médoc, close to where boats sailed to and from Ireland.



Other exhibitionists displaying ribs are at *Balleen* in county Kilkenny and *Llandrindod Wells* in Wales,
plus the male at Cheb in western Bohemia, Czech Republic.



See also Cavan, Clomantagh and Cullahill

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