

CELTIC* FOOT(LESS) SOLDIERS? AN ICONOGRAPHIC NOTE

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ABSTRACT - RESUMEN

A short survey of a number of incomplete stone statues, several with warlike attributes and dating between the sixth and second centuries BC, forms the basis of a speculative identification of their representing local heroes. The intentional destruction of the statues, in part or whole, is related to the well-known Iron Age custom of 'killing' of swords and other weapons.

Un breve repaso de una serie de estatuas incompletas de piedra, varias de ellas con atributos guerreros, y datadas entre los siglos VI y II a. C. forma la base de una identificación especulativa de las mismas como representaciones de héroes locales. La destrucción intencional de las estatuas, en parte o por completo, se pone en relación con la costumbre bien conocida en la Edad de Hierro de 'matar' las espadas y otras armas.

KEY WORDS - PALABRAS CLAVE

Celtic Iron Age. Stone statues. Warrior figures. Ritual destruction ('killing').

Edad del Hierro celta. Estatuas de piedra. Imágenes de guerrero. Destrucción ('muerte') ritual.

The symposium on 'Die lusitanisch-galläkischen Kriegerstatuen' held in Lisbon in 2002 (recently published in *Madri der Mitteilungen* 44, 2003: 1-307) ranged much further in time and space than its title might imply. While the more than thirty *guerreros Galaicos* of the north-western Iberian peninsula undoubtedly represent the largest and stylistically most cohesive group of stone knights in the European Iron Age, the even larger number of statuary from other parts of the region is often poorly dated (Jacobsthal 1944: no. 4-15; Kimmig 1987; Bonenfant and Guillaumet 1998; Megaw and Megaw 2001: 74, 258 and ill. 82-84, 427; Rieckhoff and Biel 2001: esp. 189-193; Baitinger and Pinsker 2002: no. 117-146; Frey 2002). Further, with the exception of those specific areas examined in the Lisbon symposium, it is only statuary of southern France which has been recently subjected to anything like a rigorous stylistic analysis (Arcelin and Rapin 2003).

* In recent years the term 'Celt' or 'Celtic' has been regarded with disfavour by those who deny —with some reason— the existence in later prehistory of a pan-European culture (compare for example Ruiz Zapatero 2001 and various articles reprinted in Carr and Stoddart 2002). Notwithstanding, it continues to be a handy if conventional label applicable to much of the European Iron Age of Central and Western Europe and no less if no more accurate as such terms as 'Scythian' and 'Egyptians' or, indeed 'Roman'. As such, the 'C' word is retained here in the sense that Sims-William (1998, 33) refers to 'uses of «Celtic» [which] have some historic validity and are far too useful to abandon'.

In the present writer's contribution to the Lisbon symposium (Megaw 2003) attention was drawn to an apparent absence, an absence all the more surprising in view of the military-like element which has been long regarded as central to European Iron Age society, or at least the upper echelons thereof (as implied for example by Brunaux and Lambot 1987; Rapin 1991; Ritchie and Ritchie 1995; Rieckhoff and Biel 2001: 203 ff.). With the exception of the Iberian warrior figures, relatively few Iron Age statues have clearly military attributes. And one can raise related questions —what do the statues represent, why do so few seemingly represent warriors, how were they disposed of after use— and why? Four comparatively well-dated examples may be cited:

1. Dietzingen-Hirschlanden, Kr. Ludwigsburg:

sandstone statue of naked and ithyphallic warrior complete save for feet found on the perimeter of a barrow first constructed in Ha D1. Ht. 1.50m. Zürn 1970: esp. 67-72; Rieckhoff and Biel 2000: 289-290; Baitinger and Pinsker 2002: cat. no.130. (Fig. 1)

2. Glauberg bei Glauburg-Glauberg, Wetteraukreis:

sandstone statue of warrior complete save for feet found with fragments of three other statues in terminal ring ditch of barrow at end of 'processional way'. LT A. Ht. 1.86m. Herrmann 1998: esp. 20-31; Bonenfant and Guillaumet 1998: 52-54; Rieckhoff and Biel 2001: 348-349; Baitinger and Pinsker 2002: cat. no.3.1-4. (Fig. 2)

3. Mšecké Žehrovice, okr. Rakovník:

Fragmentary ragstone head found in pit outside south-east corner of LTB2-C1 *Vie-
reckschanze*. ?Third-century BC. Ht. 224mm. Megaw and Megaw 1998; Wieland 1999a: 202-205; Baitinger and Pinsker 2002: cat. no.138. (Fig. 3a-b)

4. Vix 'Les Herbues', Côte-d'Or:

Fragmentary seated limestone figure with shield found in ditch of square enclosure. ?Early fifth century BC. Ht. 620mm. Bonenfant and Guillaumet 1998: esp. 25-28; Chaume 2001: 254-270; Baitinger and Pinsker 2002: cat. no. 139.2 (Fig. 4)

There is a clear stylistic relationship between no.1 and 2 which, despite their differing ages and the fact that details of their accoutrements indicate for Hirschlanden and Glauberg respectively, a late Hallstatt short sword or dagger and a sword with characteristic early La Tène chape, seem to share a common Etruscan origin as Frey (1998; id.2002) has made clear; the cuirass worn by the stone figure has echoes in that worn by the tiny cross-legged figure on the rim of the bronze *Schnabelkanne* from Grave 1 (Herrmann 1997: 64-67 and Abb.48, 50-51; Frey 1998: 10-12; Baitinger and Pinsker 2002: cat. no.1.1). Apart from this, however, there might at first be little reason to associate these fragmentary pieces —but this is exactly the point. Each of the four Glauberg pieces or rather groups of pieces is to a greater or lesser degree incomplete. There is no sign of what may have happened to the base of the —almost— complete Hirschlanden and Glauberg figures while the other fragments of statues from Glauberg as well as the torc-wearing Mšecké Žehrovice head which was found in four fragments but with a fifth missing, clearly indicate intentional destruction. This is a point made clear by a series of photographs taken shortly after the Bohemian head's discovery in 1943. Though the negatives were destroyed in the disastrous Prague floods of August 2002 (Drda and Rybová 1998: 124-126, esp. ill. on p.125) surviving prints confirm that the original was intentionally broken (Fig. 3b). There is another common factor in that the find spots of all four was peripheral, no.1-2 and 4 in ditches and no.3 in a pit with some sherds belonging to the site's latest period of occupation as well as bones of horse, cattle and pig and fragments of sapropolite, by-products of the on-site manufacture of bracelets.

Indeed, though not representing warriors as such, the second/first century BC and also torc-wearing lyre-player and one of his three stone companions from St Symphorien-en-Paule, Côtes-d'Armor were also found not in a position of significance but rather one of the ditches of what was clearly a multi-phase settlement (Ménez 1999; Megaw and Megaw 268-269 and ill. 39). While we must assume that no.1 and 2 may well have originally topped the barrows on the edge of which they were found it is less easy to suggest with confidence an original location for no. 3 and 4; in both cases, particularly since the Vix figure and a companion and presumably female figure are depicted seated, a location in some precinct, sanctuary or temple is certainly a possibility. Indeed, though it has been suggested that the Mšec-ké Žehrovice head may well be older than anything else on the site (Megaw and Megaw 1998), the two-phase rectangular *temenos* within the main *Viereckschanze* might well be a candidate for such a location. This not the place for further discussion as to the sacred or secular purpose —or various purposes— which *Viereckschanzen* served (Buchsenschutz and Olivier 1989; Wieland 1999a). There has also been debate as to the nature of the pit outside the Mšec-ké Žehrovice enclosure and whether its contents —apart from the head— represents anything more than domestic rubbish (Venclová 1998: 235-236). Nor can one be certain as to whether the Bohemian head was originally part of a complete figure.

If, then, there seems to be evidence for the intentional breaking of objects clearly of deep significance can such ritual deposition find a parallel elsewhere in the archaeological record of the Celtic Iron Age? As to statuary, later than the rest of the material cited here are the three late second-century BC wooden animal supporters, supporters perhaps for a seated human figure from a well within the *Viereckschanze* at Fellbach-Schmiden, Rems-Murr-Kreis (Wieland 1999b: esp. 36-49) — surely a sobering indication of what a quantity of Iron Age wooden sculpture must be lost to us.

There is, of course, one other major group of material which has survived and this is the considerable quantity of weapons deliberately bent or broken before deposition, especially but not exclusively swords and spears. While the 'killing' of swords occurs notably in Middle La Tène graves (Pleiner with Scott 1993: 59 f.) amongst other clearly cultic and ditched sites Gournay-sur-Aronde, Oise stands out with its association of a massive slaughtering of cattle together with several hundred iron weapons, shield bosses and belt-chains, not to mention human remains suggestive of dismemberment of the dead (Brunaux et al. 1985; Rapin and Brunaux 1988; Lejars 1994). There is a long prehistory for the intentional deposition of a range of material not limited to weapons (Kurz 1995; Bradley 1998: esp. chap. 4) but our examples of statuary go beyond intentional destruction; they are not only 'killed' but slighted, found in contexts which suggest an act of debasement from the obvious high status they must once have held.

As has been noted at the outset, the picture commonly painted particularly of earlier Iron Age society — HaC-LTA — is that of a stratified society, perhaps even a military oligarchy whose burial rites include a relatively large number of male warrior graves marked particularly by the association with swords, often with decorated iron scabbards (see here for example Krämer 1985 : esp. 45-57; Lorenz 1978: esp. 114-143 and for an English language summary Lorenz 1985: 112-113; Wait 1995: esp. 500-506; Stöllner 1998: esp. 126-132 and 141-145). In total, the 'warrior' graves are not so common; thus of some 400 graves excavated to date at the salt mining complex of the Dürrnberg bei Hallein, Ld. Salzburg only some twenty actually contain La Tène swords ranging from LTA to LTC (Stöllner 1998: 127, Tab. 1). This comparative paucity plus the lack of any evidence of use in many La Tène swords may indeed support the theory of an oligarchy but perhaps one where the sword had as much a symbolic as a practical rôle.

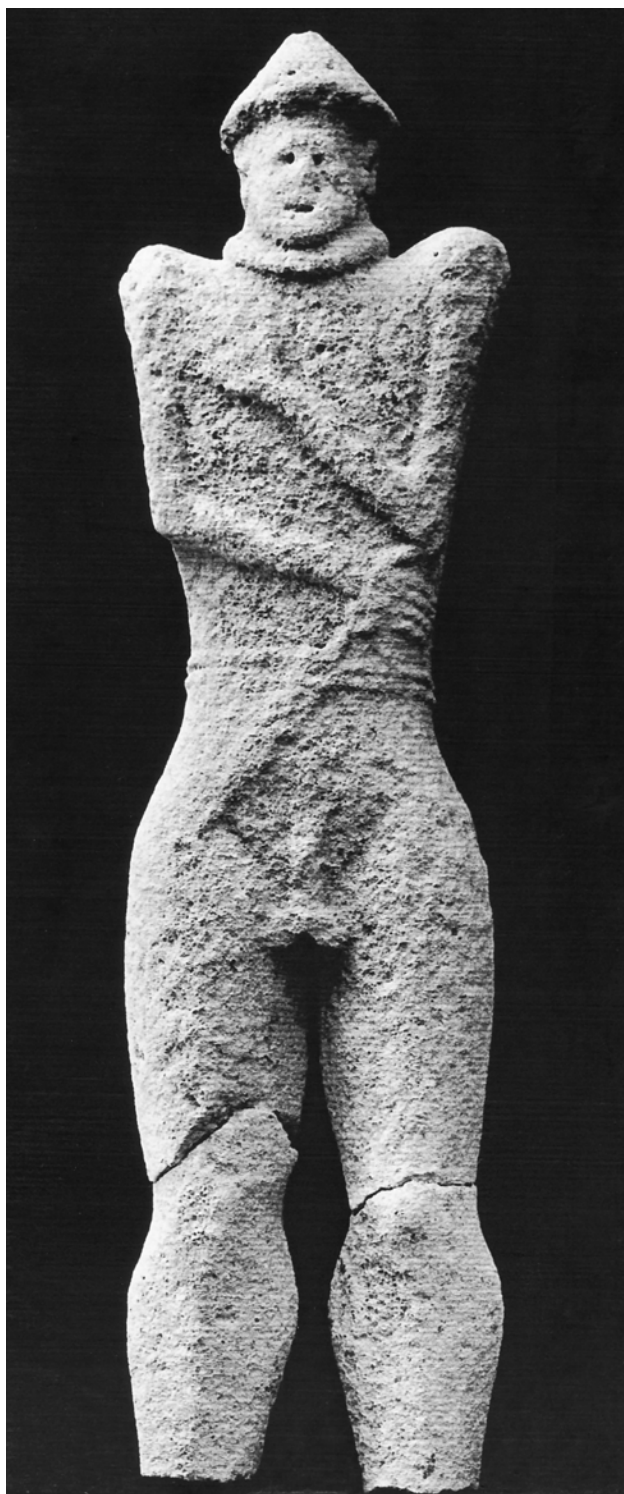


Fig. 1. Dietzingen-Hirschlanden, Kr. Ludwigsburg. Sandstone statue of naked and ithyphallic warrior. Ha D1. Ht. 1.50m. Photo: Landesdenkmalamt Baden-Württemberg.

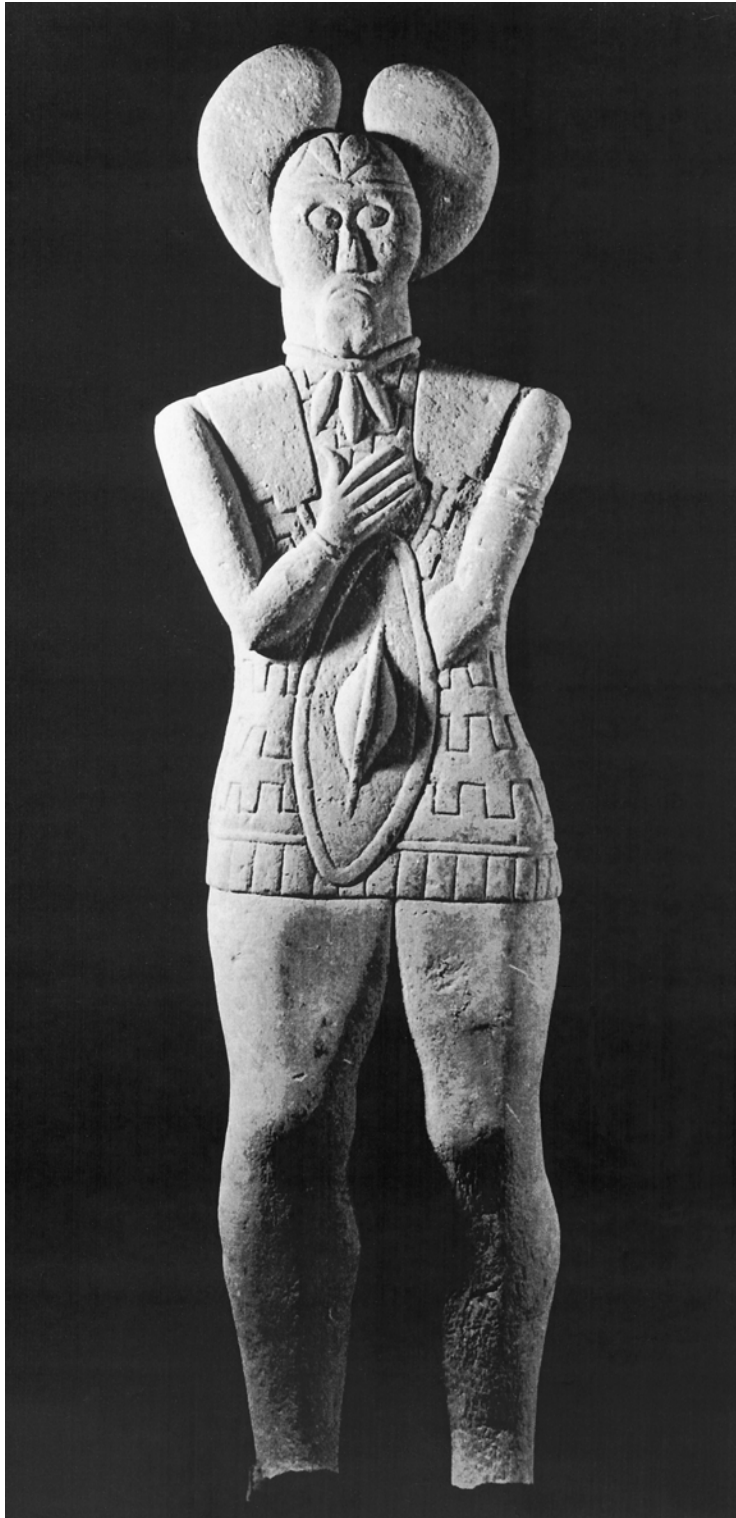
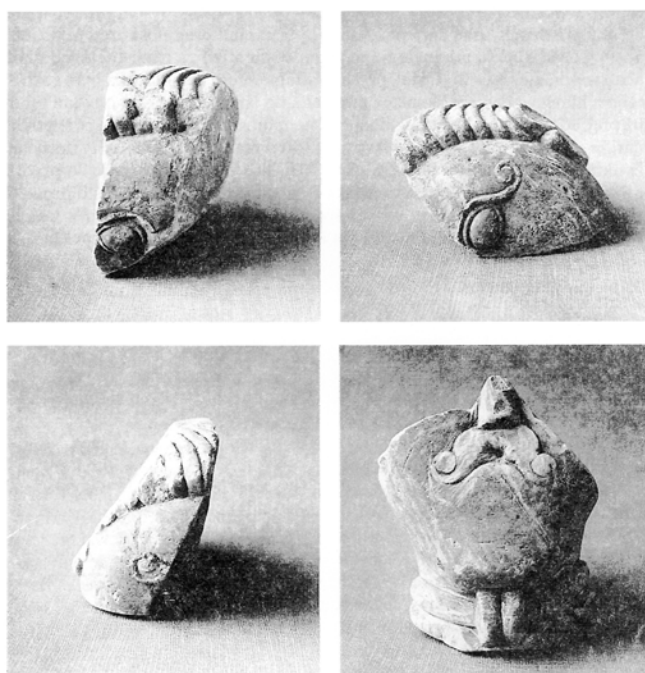


Fig. 2. Glauberg bei Glauburg-Glauberg, Wetteraukreis. Sandstone statue of warrior. LT A. Ht. 1.86m. Photo: U. Seitz-Gray (courtesy Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Hesse)



(a) as reconstructed;



(b) four fragments as originally found.

Fig. 3. Mšecké Žehrovice, okr. Rakovník. Fragmentary ragstone head. ?Third-century BC. Ht. 224mm. (a) as reconstructed; (b) four fragments as originally found. Photos: Au ČR AV Praha ; (b) courtesy Dr Petr Drda.



Fig. 4. Vix 'Les Herbues', Côte-d'Or. Fragmentary seated limestone figure. ?Early fifth century BC. Ht. 620mm. Photo: Archäologische Staatssammlung München.

The remains one final question concerning our footless soldiers — who do they represent? The data available for analysis are far too small to attempt that for example recently presented for the intentionally destroyed fifth-century BC warrior statues of Porcuna (Jaén) where the figures are closely related to the history of the ruling aristocratic group of the region (Olmos 2002). In the case of Mšecké Žehrovice, Venclová (2002) has recently advanced an ingenious interpretation based particularly on the 'band' style of tonsure of Irish monks and, before them, of druids, that priestly caste of scholars and law-givers. Thus, one may consider the being represented by the Bohemian head as that of a local and much venerated individual. Be that as it may, the rarity of representations of warriors in early La Tène iconography must again be emphasised, whether in two- or three-dimensions which leads one to the possibility that there was a veritable taboo on such representations (Megaw 2003: 270-272, 283). If there is merit in this theory, it may well be not a question of identifying deities but, in Frey's (2002) phrase, a matter of whether such figures depict mortal or hero. From the Celto-Ligurian province the cross-legged, breast-plate wearing figures from Roquepertuse, Bouches-du-Rhône now to be dated perhaps as early as the fifth century BC seem once again to represent local heroes rather than gods (Arcelin and Rapin 2003: 204-206 and fig.27-29) and here one should recall the connection with the Glauberg warrior figures, both little and large.

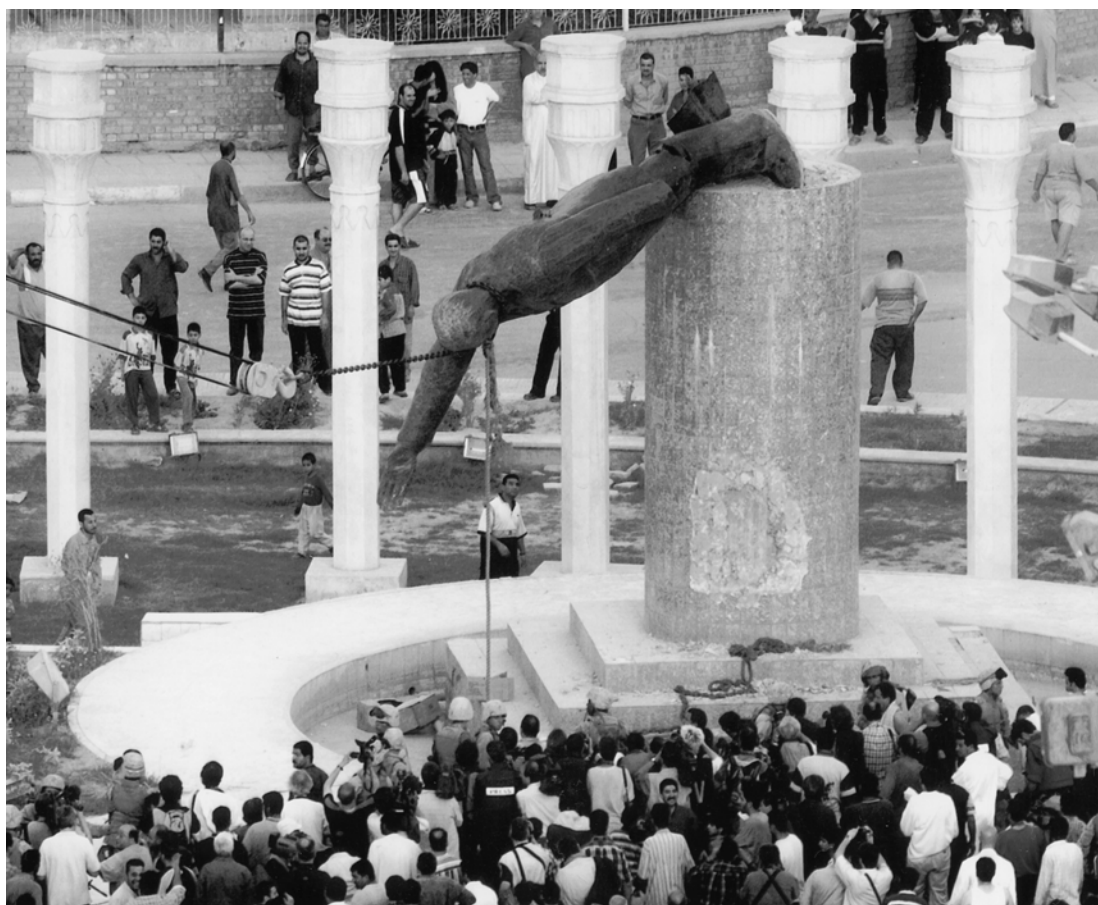


Fig. 5. Baghdad, Iraq. Destruction of bronze statue of Saddam Hossein by coalition forces, March 2003. Photo: © News Ltd.

There is no other indication of local destruction at any of the four main sites discussed here so the destruction of our hero figures cannot easily be referred to a local power shift or military conquest. On the other hand, we have become accustomed in recent world history as to the toppling of statues of former dictators as the first visible signs of a new order; there is an unbroken line of such events from the Classical world to the destruction of the Place de Vendôme column in Paris in 1871 and, in recent times, to the tearing down of countless statues of Lenin, Stalin and —most recently— of Saddam Hossein (Gamboni 1997: esp., chap.3) (Fig.5). But such an explanation would not seem to fit the Celtic situation. The presence at both Glaueberg and Paule of not one but at least four figures, several wearing the status symbol of the torc, may, as Ménez (1999: 402-405) suggests, point to the existence of local ancestral cults — recalling Olmos' interpretation of the Porcuna statues mentioned above. If representation of the human figure was virtually a taboo in the earlier La Tène phase then life size stone statues must have been held in very considerable awe. The 'killing' of a sword must be seen as a mark that this weapon is only for the use of the deceased in the Otherworld. Even as Brunaux (1987: 32) regards the deposits at Gournay as forming an 'unbroken apotropaic cordon all the way around the sacral area', our Celtic stone knights, each one a visible reference to a man of power in this world, were, after their death, through their very destruction and concealment from public gaze, preserved for all time.

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