





HALBERD

South Germany, 17th Century.

Overall length: 241 cm.

Length of head without langets: 62 cm.

Maximum width: 27,5 cm.



Large axe head and blade of hollow diamond section decorated with etchings against a blackened ground in typical 17th century style, depicting foliate scrollwork and the electoral coat of arms of Bavaria, the latter against a fire gilt ground, and a later etched dating 1762 with the inscription MICHIB (Maximilian III Ioseph Churfürst Herzog in Bayern); weapon number 11 on the base, wooden haft preserved in full length with ferrule; head attached to the pole by its four langets with brass covered nails.

This halberd was commissioned by Elector Ferdinand Maria of Bavaria (1636 – 1679), called the piece - loving, for his life guard. He became elector in 1651 only shortly after the thirty years war (1618-48). This conflict had devastated Bavaria like no other war had done before - and since then till our days! For the sake of his state Ferdinand Maria implemented a very intelligent policy, meaning on the one hand a strategy of neutrality against both France and the Holy Roman Empire let by the Hapsburg family. On the other hand, his economic policies were very successful which encompassed the consolidation of the courtly finances.

Against this background it becomes clear, why the original dating of this halberd had been replaced by the year 1762 and the inscription MICHIB added. Elector Maximilian III Joseph of Bavaria carried on with the politics of Ferdinand Maria, facing severe economic constraints. While a certain representation was indispensable for an Elector – that is the reason why the present halberd is so fine and elaborately decorated- he had to save money. So, he simply reused the halberds of his predecessors Ferdinand Maria and Maximilian I by adding his initials and the dating 1762, a both highly unusual and interesting measure.

Besides the monetary background he might also have taken it to signal continuity in his geopolitics. In the year 1762 Maximilian III declared neutrality against Prussia, an important step and precondition to ending the seven years war between Austria, Saxony and Prussia in 1763.

Provenance

Residence Munich, later Bavarian Army Museum.

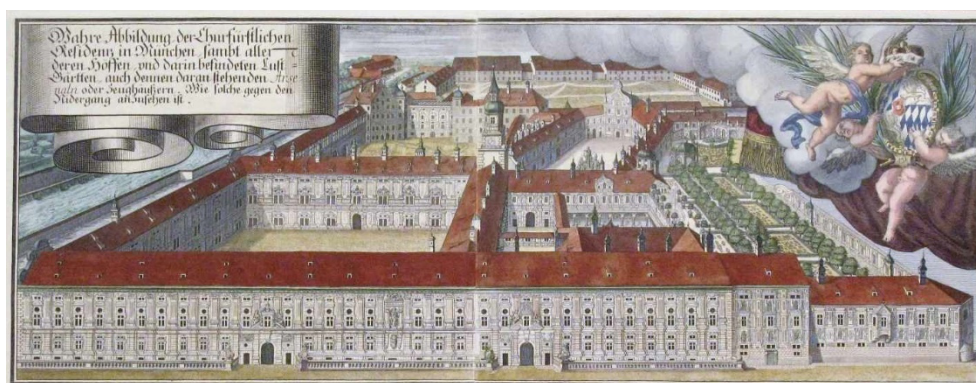


Fig. 1 Residence Munich.¹



Fig. 2 Ferdinand Maria of Bavaria.



Fig. 3 Maximilian II of Bavaria.

Condition

Very fine. Patina on the surface, etchings very well preserved with intact blackening. Original wooden haft in full length with ferrule. Two nails missing.

Comparative Pieces

Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich. Inv. No. W2775.

Bayerisches Armeemuseum, Ingolstadt. Inv. No. A2136, 2138, 1049, 2145, 2165, 2171, 2142, 2163.

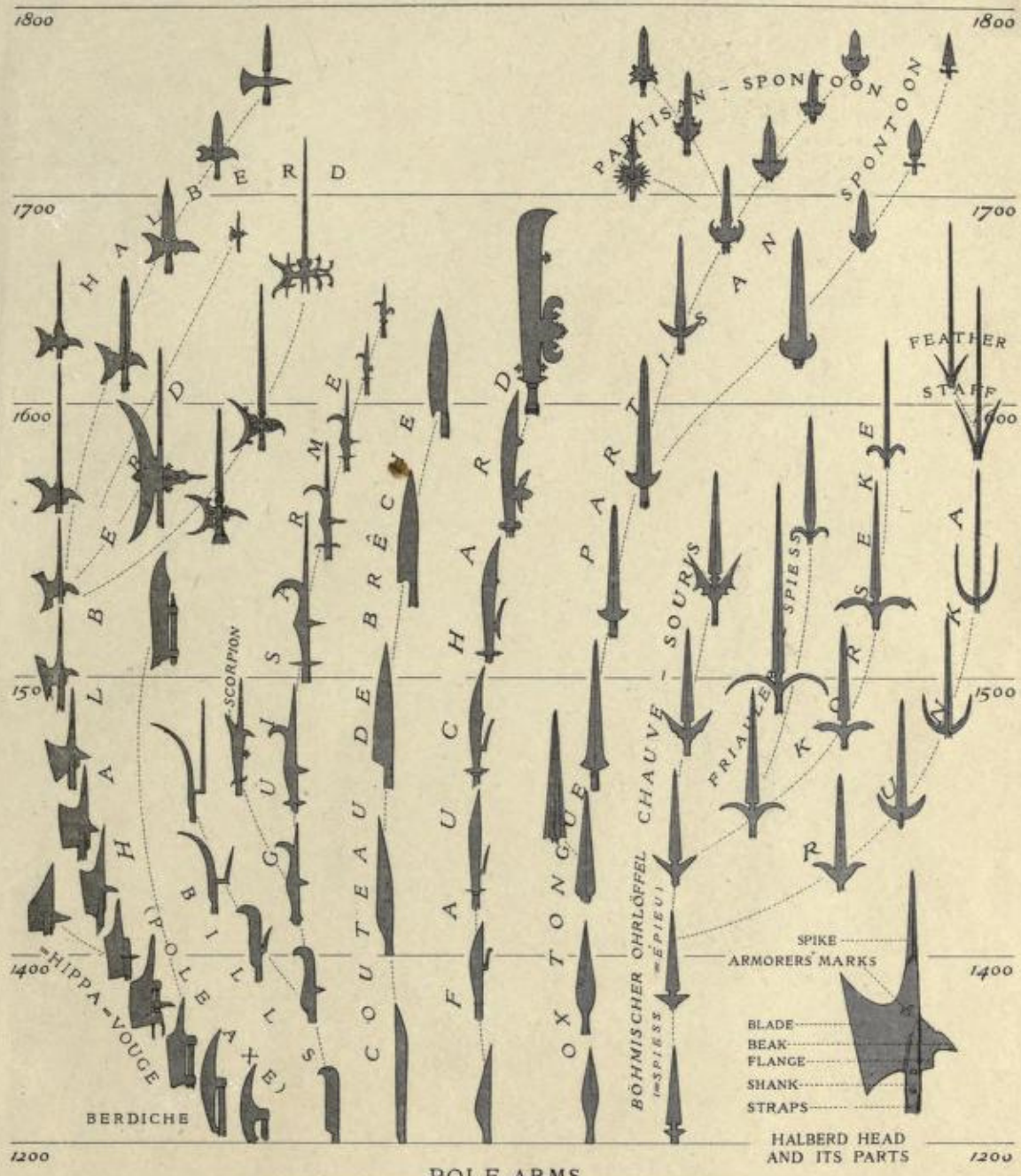
Background

The term halberd, in German called Helmbarte, developed from the word Halm (staff) and Barta, meaning a broad axe blade. At the beginning this staff weapon could be considered a combination of a spear and axe.

Early documents allow tracing back the origins of this arm to the last quarter of the 13th century, when it first appeared in Switzerland. It became a staff weapon typical for this region especially during the liberation wars of the 14th century but also for the following two centuries. It was the battle of Morgarten in 1315 where this deadly instrument proved its effectiveness against the armoured knights of Leopold I. of Austria. So it became the arm of first choice for the Swiss who succeeded both at Sempach in 1386 and Näfels 1388. Due to its success the halberd soon spread all over Europe.

Why was this staff weapon so effective? The construction of it allowed a combatant charging a blow with an enormous amount of energy, a sword could never compete with. Due to the length of the haft its blade attained both a velocity and impact by far greater and could penetrate plate armour. For example, it was an ordinary warrior equipped with a halberd, who deadly hit Charles the Bold of Burgundy by splitting his head albeit being protected by a helmet at the battle of Nancy in 1477.

Besides hacking the halberd could also deliver effective thrusts in order to fight the armoured knight and keep the enemy at a distance. A fluke on the back side of the blade was added at about 1400 and served to pull



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the opponent off his saddle. It was also useful for concentrating the energy of a blow in an acute point and pierce armour.

In order to provide this functionality a complex construction of the head was necessary that can already be observed at the earliest preserved examples dating from the 13th century. Several components were manufactured separately and joined. While the edges, the spike, the fluke and the nozzles that served to attach the head to the haft had to be forged of hardened steel, the axe blade was made of a softer iron. All components were welded together. By this construction it could be avoided that the hardened edges splintered when they hit plate armour. Like other weapons also the halberd underwent a development in the course of time in order to adjust to improvements of defensive arms and changing fighting techniques.

The earliest type had a long blade and was optimised for delivering strong blows. At the 15th century the smiths started to shape a socket at the lower end where the wooden haft was inserted from now on, instead of the two nozzles which had attached it on the back side of the blade before. Langets extended downward that were riveted to the haft. Their function was mainly to provide additional stability and were not intended to impede cutting off the head, as it is occasionally written in the literature. Until the 15th century the axe's outline was straight, sometimes a little bit convex or even shaped like a half moon. The spike was edged on two sides and followed the extension of the back line of the head. During the sixteenth century the shape of the head changed, since the halberd was increasingly used for thrusting. So the spike became longer and was of diamond or square section, while the axe

shrunked, its edge getting more and more concave. Also the beak got smaller. This development continued in the seventeenth century, when the blade often fulfilled pure decorative functions. Some examples showed skilfully open-worked designs, others, especially those manufactured for lifeguards like our present example, were etched with extensive ornaments. The haft often had passaments, was covered by silk and decorated with gilded brass capped rivets. These weapons served predominantly for representative purposes.ⁱⁱ



Fig. 4 Trabanten.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Copper engraving by Michael Wenning, 17th/18th century; *Wahre Abbildung der Churfürstlichen Residenz in München sambt allen deren Höffen und darin befindeten Lust-Gärten.*

ⁱⁱ Müller, H., Kölling, H. (1990): *Europäische Hieb- und Stichwaffen*, pp. 41 – 44.

Seitz, H. (1965): *Blankwaffen I*, pp. 221 - 228.

Seitz, H. (1965): *Blankwaffen II*, pp. 213 – 216.

ⁱⁱⁱ Life Guard of the Saxon Elector Johann Georg I. on their way to a tournament place in 1614.



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2019

The *European Hansemuseum* in Lübeck loaned our 15th century breech-loading swivel gun for their special exhibition *Störtebeker and Company*.

2017

Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna from Malta purchases a group of rare antiquarian books on artillery and fortification, dating from the 17th to 19th centuries.

2016

The *Bayerisches Nationalmuseum* in Munich enhances its collection with an important hunting hanger.

2015

Schloss Moritzburg near Dresden acquires from us a partizan of the lifeguard of Elector Friedrich August I., Saxony 1694 – 1697.

2015

We sold the drawing of an unknown bronze barrel by Albert Benningk to the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin.

2013

The *Cleveland Museum of Art* secures a savoyard helmet, dating from the early 17th century. We were able to trace back its provenance to the collection of Rutherford Stuyvesant.

