



BROADSWORD

of the Saxon Janissary Corps, 1729.

Overall Length: 82 cm.

Blade Length: 67 cm.

Weight: 1,025 kg.

Provenance: Turkish Chamber of the Saxon Electoral Court. Swords of this group had been sold in the 19th century and at the sale of Lepke, Oct. 7th, 1919, lots 598-602, pl. 44.

Single edged blade with broad fullers on both sides, double-edged for its last third, the cipher "AR" under a crown (King August II. 1697-1755), etched on both sides. Cast brass hilt with more raised ciphers on the languets on each side, closely resembling a Turkish Karabela sword.

The present sword should not be seen as a pure representative one forming part of the Janissary dress, but indeed as a functional weapon that was designed to deliver cuts.

According to Hilbert, Johann Caspar Clauberg ordered 770 blades for the manufacture of the whole group in Solingen. These were mounted in Dresden by the cutler Gottfried Schmidt with cast brass hilts, made by Lindenwenz, also Dresden.¹ Holger Schuckelt indicates that at least a number of blades probably were manufactured in Suhl. An inventory entry from 1731 clearly mentions a sample being sent to Suhl for the

¹ Hilbert, K. (1994): *Trag diese Wehr zu Sachsens Ehr!*, pp. 16-17.



purpose of producing further blades there.² Currently, it is not possible to trace back the information of Hilbert and clarify this contradiction. Normally, it would have been reasonable assuming Solingen as the origin, since it was the most important center for the production of blades in these days with numerous examples existing in the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, today. Suhl on the other hand is famous for the manufacture of firearms. Was it a mistake, made in the inventory of 1731? This might be possible. Another explanation could be, that some pieces were made in Suhl, the remaining ones in Solingen.

Background

Two times in history the Ottoman Empire almost managed to conquer Vienna and defeat the Holy Roman Empire and their allies. Both in 1529 and 1683 the city was sieged. European history would have taken a completely different road if the Ottomans had been successful. However, the Holy Roman Empire survived, while the rigors of war and plundering troops initially let to an in-depth fear of the Turks.

Notwithstanding, the wars also initiated a civilian exchange process that encompassed trading relations and originated a fascination in Europe for the exotic Ottoman culture. After the battles of Vienna an interesting war booty was taken from the tent camp of the besieger. People became acquainted with the previously unknown coffee, for example, and exotic clothing, tents, weapons and other equipment, that was shared among the military leaders. For celebrating their victories in the Turkish wars, it became common practice at the European courts to

² Schuckelt, H. (2010): Die Türckische Cammer, p. 312.

arrange feasts, parades and tournaments, whose participants dressed in Ottoman cloths. Collections with Ottoman artefacts were gathered and the Turkish fashion spread into the arts world. As long as a substantial military threat prevailed, the main motif for celebrating feasts in the Turkish fashion remained real or hypothetical victories, fear dominating the emotions. The more the Ottomans were pushed back east, the more the fear faded and was substituted by an ever growing fascination.

Saxony had played a special role in this regard. Due to its geographical position it had not been threatened directly by the Turks, while it still supported the Holy Roman Empire with troops. So, fascination for the exotic was the main force for the Turkish fashion right from the beginnings. At the courtly festivities in Dresden, the Turks had not necessarily represented the evil and the enemy in parades and tournaments. Instead even Elector Friedrich August of Saxony, King II. of Poland, called the Strong (1670 – 1733), dressed himself in elaborate turkish clothing and played the role of the Sultan! He was accompanied by members of the high aristocracy on horseback, also in Ottoman dress. This is a clear indication for the fascination and adoration August the Strong felt for the Ottoman culture.³

³ Schuckelt, H. (2010): Die Türckische Cammer, p. 228.



August the Strong.⁴

The Janissary Corps and the Zeithainer Camp

Within the Ottoman military the Janissaries formed an elite troop and provided the members of the Sultan's personal guard. August the Strong's admiration for the Turkish fashion not only let him celebrate courtly feasts with members dressed like Janissaries, he also went a step further by establishing a personal Janissary Corp, dressed like he imagined a Janissary to look like and equipped with the present sword.

The inducement for this was a huge military reform. August had recognized during the Nordic wars, how inefficient the Saxon army had been. So, for over a decade he implemented improvements resulting in a well-trained, organized and equipped troop of about 30000 men. August intended to present his new army to the international public in

⁴ Louis de Silvestre (1670-1733): August II the Strong, Elector of Saxony, King of Poland. Circa 1700-1760.

a huge maneuver, encompassing an elaborate feast, that was supposed to take place near Zeihain, circa 40 km northwest of Dresden back in 1730. As early as 1728 preparations for this event started under the responsibility of Matthäus Daniel Pöppelmann, in order to construct a camp that was large and attractive enough to accommodate all the international guests. The total need for tents numbered 825, so these were brought there from all over the country, overhauled or newly constructed.



Zeithainer Camp.⁵

August the Strong did not spare any effort and founded a Janissary corps, who were responsible to guard the Zeithainer camp. In June 1729 he ordered his officers to recruit soldiers for this unit in Saxony, Poland and Lithuania. Prospective Janissaries had to be in the optimal

⁵ Thiele, Johann Alexander (1685-1752), circa 1730/31.

age and were not allowed to be married. Of special importance to him was their size, so August paid a bonus for the recruitment of large soldiers. Not enough, he personally drew a Janissary as he imagined these to look like⁶, and ordered the prospective members being dressed this way. As a weapon they carried the present sword.



Broadswords of the Janissary Corps.⁷

There existed four companies under the command of colonel von Unruh with a total of 603 men, including officers and 42 musicians. A costly undertaking, summing up to 1415 Taler per month. This was the

⁶ SHStA Dresden, Loc. 2097, No. 33, p. 7.

⁷ On View in the Turkish Chamber at the *Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden*.

reason, why August the Strong soon scaled down the unit. For some time after the Zeithainer camp the Janissaries served as a personal guard, until the unit was dissolved, their members transferred to a grenadier battalion on August 31st of 1731.⁸

Since August the Strong was also King of Poland, some Janissaries served at his residence in Poland. Today there exist comparative examples of the sword in the National Museum Krakow.⁹

Literature, Comparative Pieces and further Reading

Chodynski, A. R. (1978): Zbrojownie Malborskie, Muzeum Zamkowe, p. 64, no. 30, fig. 18.

Diener-Schönberg, A. (1912): Die Waffen der Wartburg, no. 416, pl. 57.

Dziewulsi, M. (2015): 100 Rarities from the Military Collection at the National Museum in Krakow, p. 188, fig. 72a

Kessler, H. J., Schulze, D. (1979): Historische Blankwaffen, p. 12.

Müller, K., Kölling, H. (1990): Europäische Hieb- und Stichwaffen, item no. 351, image p. 298.

⁸ Schuckelt, H. (2010): Die Türckische Cammer, pp. 248-251.

⁹ Dziewulsi, M. (2015): 100 Rarities from the Military Collection at the National Museum in Krakow, p. 188, fig. 72a.

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Schuckelt, H. (2010): Die Türckische Cammer, no. 313.

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Wagner, E.(1975): Hieb- und Stichwaffen, p. 234, no. 219.



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