

LENNART
ARMS



VIEBAHN
ARMOUR



FIELD ARMOUR IN THE GERMAN HIGH GOTHIC STYLE

Of bright steel, exceptionally well-proportioned and constructed in superior craftsmanship.

By Lorenz Kilian, before 1919, sold at atelier Ernst Schmidt, Munich, in 1929.

Provenance: John Woodman Higgins Armory Museum. Inv. No. JWHA 1127.

Height: 205 cm including stand.

Gothic Style and its Revival

The Gothic fashion that reached its zenith during the 15th century in Northern Europe is famous for architectural masterpieces like impressive cathedrals. However, this style also influenced the design of sculpture, furniture, arts and crafts and armour. Since the armourer's artisanry fully developed during this era, the quality of products was only limited by the financial power of the client and not by the manufacturing process. Armour did not only serve to protect in the field or at a tournament in a functional way. At the same time its elegant Gothic appearance that paid particular attention to perfect proportions and accurate appointed alignments intended to communicate the status of its wearer, who spent enormous funds for the most splendid pieces.

During the 18th century in England people started to pick up the Gothic fashion again. This movement soon spread all over Europe. Romanticism felt particularly attracted to the neo-Gothic during the 19th century. Historic novels became very popular and people considered the ideas of knighthood as an ideal. Of course this phenomenon influenced the collecting of art and a passion for antique arms and armour aroused. Since the number of original items was very small, prices began to rise heavily and only few individuals could afford these. In order to meet the demand, craftsmen started to produce copies mainly for decorative purposes, but also for equipping theatres and for romantic tournament use.

Ernst Schmidt

One of the few workshops for neo-Gothic arms and armour that can be identified today is the one of Ernst Schmidt, who was active in Munich from the late 1870's to about 1930. Schmidt dealt also in original pieces and soon recognized that the high demand could not be satisfied due to the scarcity of supply. So he founded this workshop for replicas and employed Lorenz Kilian, one of the few individuals who still knew the armourer's craft, which had not completely died out. Any collection of original arms and armour requires a lot of attention in the course of time, compared to other antiques. For example, the leathering of an armour that holds together the numerous plates deteriorates and has to be restored occasionally. Without the necessary discipline, components get lost over time and have to be replaced later. That is the reason why there is almost no preserved homogeneous suit of armour without any replacements today. Consequently, a couple of individuals like Lorenz Kilian had worked as restorers for the mayor collections and passed down their abilities to the succeeding generations.

Lorenz Kilian and his co-workers manufactured armour in various levels of quality. While the assistants produced the simpler objects in large amounts and for reasonable prices, Kilian himself took care for the fine pieces, like our present one. These high quality products were ordered by wealthy individuals like William Randolph Hearst from the United States and even by members of the German aristocracy, among them His Royal Highness Prince Ludwig of Bavaria, the Grand Duke Friedrich of Baden and Duke Friedrich of Anhalt. Prices ranged from 100 \$ for a simple armour to 3000 \$ for the finest.

Another wealthy individual from the USA buying arms and armour in Munich was John Woodman Higgins, owner of the Worcester Pressed Steel Company. Besides his passion for metalworking, Higgins was also enchanted by the chivalric tales of knights, like many of his contemporaries. Therefore, he started to collect. Due to the shortage of originals he visited Ernst Schmidt to order several suits of armour, among others our present example. These items formed the initial stock of the John Woodman Higgins Armory Museum, founded in 1931.

Literature

Mowbray, E. A. (1967): Arms and Armor from the Atelier of Ernst Schmidt Munich.



John Woodman Higgins















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