



AN EXCEPTIONAL INLAID CARTRIDGE BOX

(Patron) with Etched Iron Mounts, Circa 1580-90, Height: 12,7 cm (5 in),

the fruitwood body of arched plano-convex section and strongly flanged at the base, the interior with five cavities, the base veneered in staghorn engraved with five acanthus rondels framed by acanthus strapwork, the outer face inlaid with panels of interlaced engraved staghorn spirals, pierced and centered on flower-heads enriched with enclosed florets, all within cabled staghorn borders, domed iron lid and frontal plate for a spring-catch, finely etched with a delicate pattern of spiralling scrolled foliage on a stippled blackened ground, fitted with three loops for suspension, with old attached collection label.¹

Boxes like the present one held a couple of paper cartridges filled with a premeasured powder charge and a bullet. In order to load the rifleman tore the paper open and poured the powder into the barrel. Then he rammed down the bullet with the paper wrapped around it as wadding. This was to ensure a tight fit, preventing explosion fumes from escaping the gun without transferring their energy to the shot. The principle of preloaded paper cartridges favoured the effectiveness of loading.

Suchlike cartridge boxes belonged to the standard equipment of the *Trabantenleibgarde* at the Saxon Electoral Court. Various types of these do exist. The most common is the so called *schwarzgepickte* that survived the centuries in large numbers and can be found in many collections today.² It is made of carved and stained walnut mounted with steel, decorated with etched ornaments on a blackened ground. The typical firearm used together with these was a pair of wheel-lock pistols in a similar design.

Our example resembles the preceding regarding its form, size and the type of etching used on the steel mounts. However the decoration is much more elaborate and corresponds to a relatively small group of exclusive wheel-lock pistols, preserved at the *Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden*. There are only eight to ten cartridge boxes in existence at the SKD, which can be compared to ours. They differ slightly regarding their decoration and some are mounted with silver.^{3 4}

¹ Sale Catalogue Sotheby's (07/03/1990): The Visser Collection, p. 144.

² For instance: Philadelphia Museum of Art, Accession Number: 1977-167-945.
<http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/211442.html?mulR=798936769|6>.

³ Many thanks to Gernot Klatte of the SKD for his friendly information.

⁴ One example is published in Haenel, E. (1923): *Kostbare Waffen aus der Dresdner Rüstammer*, p. 150, pl. 74 b.

On the grounds of the sumptuous manufacture of the present cartridge box and the small number of existing comparative pieces, it can be assumed that this object was used by a high-ranking individual at the court. Today it can not be determined however, whether it was intended for a military context or for hunting.

Provenance

- I. The Saxon Electoral Armouries, Dresden, probably sold prior to 1899.
- II. Private collection, Inventory No. 54.
- III. The Henk Visser Collection.
- IV. Private Collection.

Condition

The inventories of the Saxon Electoral Armouries had been stored with utmost care over a time range of several centuries. This explains why so many items of this collection remain in such an outstanding condition. Deterioration almost exclusively has affected disposed items, which had been sold between the late nineteenth century until the end of the rule of the German Democratic Republik.

Our cartridge box is nearly flawless, besides some minor age cracks in the veneer and some plaques.



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