



## RONDACHE

north Italy, last quarter of 16<sup>th</sup> century.

56 cm diameter.

*“With central spike, the surface divided by radiating bands, etched and gilt with figures and trophies of arms into panels etched and gilt with cartouches enclosing figure subjects, including Perseus and Andromeda and Victory, the outer border decorated with animals, monsters and human figures, roped outer border.*

*From the Arsenal of Turin. The shield is stamped with the arms of Savoy, the mark of the city of Turin, the date 1719 and a fourth mark, probably referring to the Arsenal of Turin.”<sup>i</sup>*

The rich etchings and fire gilding of the present piece argues for a use by a high ranking commander.

### Provenance

Arsenal of Turin, Italy.

The Hever Castle Collection, circa 1903 – 1983.



*Fig. 1 Use of Sword and Rotella<sup>ii</sup>*

## **Condition**

Surface Corrosion, a crack to the border.

## **Comparative Pieces**

Cleveland Museum of Art, Inv. No. Severance 1916.1504.<sup>iii</sup>

## **Background**

The Rondache (Italian: Rotella) was very popular in Italy in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and spread to many other regions in Europe, its use lasting into the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Mainly made of steel, it measured between 50 cm and 75 cm in diameter and was attached to the forearm by a strap handle. This way of grabbing it distinguishes the rondache from the smaller buckler (Italian: brocchiere) that was held with the free hand on a grip only. While fencing with the latter allowed for more dynamic movements, with the rondache you could still exert active shield attacks like hits towards the armed hand. Rondaches were mostly carried by infantry men together with the sword, both in the field and in the civilian context of dueling.

Infantry equipped with sword and rondache played an important role in the Spanish orderly, the so called Tercio. It was introduced by emperor Karl V. of Hapsburg in 1536 and readily adopted by other European powers due to its success. It consisted mainly of a large group of pikemen, positioned in a square, that was accompanied by smaller groupings of riflemen at its edges. In this context swordsmen allowed for a certain flexibility. They could undermine the opponent's pikes during a fire pause in order to attack their musketeers and massacre them in close combat. Whenever the large square groupings of pikemen became wedged, these units quickly crouched below the first line of

opponents and stabbed them in large numbers. In a defensive situation the fighters could move around and support the flanks of riflemen under attack. Of course these flexible units attracted fire whenever they tried to initiate suchlike actions. Therefore, a special type of heavy rondache was developed in bullet proof thickness, appearing in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Besides Spain it is known that the archduchy of Austria, the Electorate of Bavaria and the Kingdom of Poland recruited mercenaries equipped with shield and sword.

Rondaches used in the manner described above were not decorated in an elaborate manner, with the exception of those, which belonged to military leaders. In this context we do know several Italian garnitures of armour decorated en suite that also encompass this type of shield.<sup>iv</sup> These might have served in parades for representative purposes or could have been used by their owners for dueling.

The latter purpose is a rather civilian one. Several Italian fencing masters travelled through Europe teaching noble men and the aristocracy the use of sword and rotella in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Some of their beautifully illustrated books still exist today and open a window for us, to learn more about the complex art of fencing in Renaissance Italy.



*Fig. 2 Spear and Rotella.<sup>v</sup>*



*Fig. 3 Parrying a Pikeattack.<sup>vi</sup>*



Fig. 4 Duel.<sup>vii</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> Sotheby Parke Bernet & Co (1983): The Hever Castle Collection, p. 24.

<sup>ii</sup> Marozzo, A. (1536): Opera Nova de Achille Marozzo, fig. 13.

<sup>iii</sup> Fliegel, S. N. (2007): Arms & Armor. The Cleveland Museum of Art, p. 116, 186.

<sup>iv</sup> Bertolotto, C. et al. (1982): L'Armeria Reale di Torino, No. 18-18a; Mann, J. (1962): Wallace Collection Catalogues, European Arms and Armour, No. A 57.

<sup>v</sup> Marozzo, A. (1536): Opera Nova de Achille Marozzo, fig. 53.

<sup>vi</sup> Marozzo, A. (1536): Opera Nova de Achille Marozzo, fig. 29.

<sup>vii</sup> Lovino, G. A. (1580), Modo di cacciare mano all spada, fig. 46.



Richard-Wagner-Str. 17 · 28209 Bremen · Germany  
T+49 (0)421 4093 6994 · [info@lennartviebahn.com](mailto:info@lennartviebahn.com)  
[www.lennartviebahn.com](http://www.lennartviebahn.com)

## INSTITUTIONAL CLIENTS

In the last years, we have welcomed several museums of international significance among the circle of our valued clients. We are grateful for the confidence these institutions have placed in our services.

**2019**

The *European Hansemuseum* in Lübeck loaned our 15<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> century. We were able to trace back its provenance to the collection of Rutherford Stuyvesant.

