









## TOURNAMENT HELMET

Probably Dresden or Annaberg, circa 1580.

Height: circa 30 cm (11.81 in.).

Weight: 3750 g.

Provenance: Lange, Berlin, 1940: Die Waffensammlung Blell, Zeulenroda.

Catalogue by Hans Schedelmann.

*One piece skull with a high comb; bevor, upper bevor and visor; original visor pivots consisting of screws with hexagonal nuts, rivets for the securing of a lining, some with remains of brass caps, abraded on the edge of the skull; sprung and peg at the right side of the neck to close bevor and skull, the same at the chin to attach the upper bevor, being kept from accidentally opening by a pivoting hook; upper bevor with numerous ventilation holes on both sides, an enforcing and decorative plate riveted in the centre; visor with lateral sight, skull and bevor with a boxed and file roped turn, designed to fit over the rim of a gorget; several old repairs of the time of use on skull, visor and upper bevor by riveted plates and copper casts applied to small damages; on the right side there was a lifting peg, which is missing.*

### **Background**

The knightly classes of medieval times had to constantly practice and further develop their martial and riding skills to be prepared for any case of emergency. At the tournament the diverse techniques could be put to test under realistic conditions as in early times both armour and weapons were exactly the same as in the field of battle. It is evident that these exercises were dangerous and many knights were seriously injured or even died. Hence the authorities tried to reduce the number of accidents by strict regulations. In the course of time there occurred far reaching changes in the way of

tournamenting. It can be observed that the different variations of combat and the weapons involved became more and more diverse. Some types were more comparable to sports than to training martial skills. Accordingly armour and weapons were developed and optimized for these specific purposes that protected the opponents better against injuries. This sort of arming would have been fairly useless for the field of combat and can be seen as pure pieces of sports equipment.

The practical function of honing martial skills became gradually less important, when the power of knighthood started to diminish at about 1300. Soldiers equipped with the longbow, the halberd and finally the introduction of firearms reduced the dominance of heavily armoured knights fighting on horseback. In the course of these developments the character and meaning of tournaments changed. At Renaissance times their purpose shifted gradually to proving skills and courage and last but not least the pure entertainment. As such they had always belonged to the most important society events of aristocracy and this still prevailed well until about 1600. Tournaments were often organised as centrepieces of great festivities like the monarch's wedding or celebrations of victory. Feasts, spectacles, music and dance formed part of these prestigious debaucheries.



*Fig. 1.*

Especially at the court of the Saxon Electors in Dresden tourneys were an important part of the aristocratic culture. The image above shows the tournament on foot at the barriers. This type appeared in the second half of the 16th century and was very popular in Dresden throughout the 17th century. Even in 1709 such an event was celebrated in honour of the Danish King, a time when the weapons involved in this event had completely disappeared from the battlefield.

### **Discussion**

The almost vertical upper bevor and the high comb of the present helmet argue for a dating about 1580. Numerous ventilation holes on both sides of the upper bevor would normally be associated with a helmet for a tournament on foot. A large number of sword cuts at the edge of upper bevor and visor

on the left side and some on the skull show that indeed it was intensively used in this arrangement, where the opponents fought with lances and swords making hits at these areas most probable. This aspect makes our example particularly attractive as do the old repairs. After breaking apart the upper bevor was fixed by riveting. Similar patches appear on the visor and bowl respectively. There is a helmet at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York dating from 1640 – 50 attributed to the foot tournaments of the Dresden court. This piece allows for interesting comparisons since it shows similar traces of combat impact and a riveted patch at the bowl.

While the latter helmet is designed exclusively for the tourney on foot the present one can be adapted to various types of tournament and thus presumably formed part of a garniture. You can observe two threaded holes on the visor that serve to attach a brow reinforce by screws. Another plate covering the whole left side and the front end of the right side of the upper bevor would be screwed to a hole on the right part of the upper bevor, the so called volant piece.<sup>1</sup> Transformed in this manner this helmet could be used for the joust, for instance. Since the majority of existing tournament helmets is intended for a single purpose only, comparative examples are rare, especially in private ownership.

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<sup>1</sup> For a comparative plate see La Rocca , D. J. (2017): How to read European Armour, fig. 79.



*Fig. 2a.*



*Fig. 2b.*

## Attribution

In German speaking lands tournament armour was mainly produced in cities like Augsburg and Landshut or at court workshops like the one in Innsbruck or Dresden/Annaberg. Whenever pieces do not show any mark, which is usually the case, an answer to the question of origin can only be worked out on the grounds of stylistic comparisons.

One of the features which would help to attribute a place of origin or use to our helmet is its plume holder. Normally a 16th century plume holder should be decorated somehow, with engraved lines or etched ornaments for example. So one could easily consider this being a later addition. However, the present type of plume holder appears to be a feature typical to the workshop of Dresden/Annaberg. The image below shows a shaffron in the Metropolitan Museum of Art that is equipped with a strikingly similar plume holder and is said to originate from Dresden, being dated to 1580-90. Further exhibits with this feature are on view at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

So this aspect might allow for two alternative hypotheses. The first would be to conclude that our helmet was manufactured at the workshop at Dresden or Annaberg. The second is to assume a different place of production like Augsburg. In that case the plumeholder might have been attached by the court armourers of Dresden during its time of use. If one bears in mind that tournaments using armour occurred at Dresden even in the 18th and 19th century it seems plausible, that the plumeholder might even be added at a significantly later date there.



*Fig. 3.*



*Fig. 4.*

## Figures

1. Tournament on foot at the barriers. Image taken at the Riesensaal, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

2a, b. Close-Helmet for the Tournament on Foot, ca. 1640–50, probably Dresden, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/21919>

3. Half-Shaffron of a Jousting Armor, circa 1580-90, Dresden or Annaberg. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/22908>

4. Back view of our tournament helmet. The plume holder is very similar to the one of the shaffron in the Metropolitan Museum, which suggests a manufacture in the same workshop.



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