



MORION

for the leader of a lansquenet squad, circa 1580, Germany (probably Nuremberg).

Height: 26 cm.

Depth: 22,7 cm.

Length: 34 cm.

Weight: 1,17 kg.

Signed LW by the etcher.

This morion is formed in one piece, with a hemispherical skull rising to a high medial comb roped along its apex, and an integral brim turned down at the sides, rising to an obtuse point at the front and rear, its edge decorated with a file-roped inward turn. Sixteen round-headed lining rivets with brass washers encircle the base of the crown. There are etchings all over the surface. Seven vertical bands, each separated by two narrow and one wide stripe left blank, show alternating arabesque interlace on a blackened ground and scrolling foliage inhabited by birds on a blackened and stippled ground. On one side, the vertical band in the middle shows a double eagle.

In the center there is a large cartouche depicting a mounted warrior in contemporary dress on the right side. The opposite one shows a male figure kneeling before a vase of fire with his hands uplifted for a prayer. A bearded male stands behind him, rising his sword to decapitate the kneeling man, while an angel appears above the flames grasping the blade in order to detain him from his deed. It is the binding of Isaac illustrated in this scene (Hebrew Bible, Genesis 22,1–19). In the biblical narrative, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on Moriah. Abraham begins to comply, when a messenger from God interrupts him. Abraham then sees a ram and sacrifices it instead. Abraham's faith in God is tested.

What might be the reason for applying this particular scene on a morion helmet that probably belonged to a high ranking officer? It seems plausible assuming that the wearer of this piece was expected to serve his duty for the regent with the absolute willingness of sacrifice, even with regard to his own life and this scene was meant to remind him of this. During the sixteenth century it was common practice to employ lansquenets as armed forces. Usually this led to severe problems of pillaging and plundering troops whenever these mercenaries were unemployed. In order to control lansquenets somehow, the sovereign used both money and attractive pieces of arms and armour like the present helmet as awards for the officers of these

combatants. To this context the depiction on the comb might be associated. It repeats the scrolling foliage of the vertical bands while in the center there is an oval cartouche surrounded by birds, which encloses soldiers in contemporary dress, a standard-bearer on one side and a drummer on the other.

Similar scrolling foliage can be observed on the brim, which is struck with a mark that had been etched over making it indistinct. It is probably the blazon of the city of Nuremberg since this center manufactured large numbers of armour for military purposes. Interestingly the etcher signed his work within one vertical band of arabesque interlace with his initials LW. The manufacture of armour in the 16th century was a complex process with several crafts involved. While the armourer would take care for forging a piece like the present morion he would hand it over for sophisticated decorations to specialised artisans like etchers. However their signatures are rare since the armourer normally was in charge of delivering the final product to his client, so it was up to him to struck a piece with his mark.



Condition

Corresponding to its age there are spots of patination on the blank parts of the surface. On the comb you can observe old traces of mechanical cleaning that were presumably caused by a wire brush in the 19th or early 20th century, when using suchlike devices was not uncommon. Several short cracks are in the brim. Partly the blackening within the etchings faded due to abrasion or cleaning. However compared to other objects of this period the condition is decidedly well. On the backside there are two holes for the attachment of a plume holder; the brim shows some later ones for wiring.

Comparative Examples

- I. An almost identical morion is exhibited in the Musée de l'Armée in Paris, Inv. No. H2091.
- II. Wartburg, Inv. No. W. G. I. 4335.¹ The collection was confiscated by the Red Army in 1946 and shipped to Russia. Its current location is unknown.

Background

The morion helmet developed from the 15th century war hat, in particular the Spanish type that was called *cabacete*. As a very popular helmet the morion came into use all over Europe and was found on the battle fields until the first half of the 17th century. Especially among the infantrymen like those wearing the pike, the emperors personal guards and town or city defenders it formed an integral part of their equipment.



Lansquenets equipped with muskets.²

¹ Diener-Schönberg, A. (1912): Die Waffensammlung der Wartburg, no. 157 and fig. 50.

² Woodcut by Jost Amman, 1560, Source: Quaas, G. (1997): Das Handwerk der Landsknechte. Waffen und Bewaffnung zwischen 1500 und 1600, fig. 46.













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