



AN EXCEPTIONALLY RARE CREST

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PROBABLY INTENDED FOR THE KOLBENTURNIER,
AUSTRIA, 15TH CENTURY.

Height: 53 cm.

Weight: 2028 g.

From the slightly dome-shaped base two curved buffalo horns rise, their ends widening like the mouthpiece of a trumpet. Each horn alternates the colour, one half in red and one in white, on its opposite side in the inverse succession. So the surface is divided into four areas, those of the same colour diagonally arranged. This principle probably reflects the shape of a corresponding hatchment, since crests formed part of the knight's coat of arms.

The opposite horn shows the positioning of red and white spaces in exactly the reciprocal way. Between the two horns there is a green pine-cone in the centre. On the base below of each horn you can see two holes which served to attach the crest to the helmet, probably by laces.¹

1

Composition and Manufacture

The present crest is assembled from pieces of first-rate processed rawhide. It is covered by a layer of gesso that is mixed with tow (probably linen or hemp fibers) and finally painted. You can observe the construction at the partially deeper fissures. It corresponds closely the way Cennino Cennini describes the manufacture of crests in his famous work *Libro dell'arte o trattato della pittura*, written about 1400:

CLXIX How to Model Crests or Helmets.²

“Whenever you have occasion to make a crest or helmet for a tourney, or for rulers who have to march in state, you must first get some white leather which is not

¹ For a discussion how crests might have been attached to the helmet see: Breiding, D. (2013): Some Notes on Great Helms, Crests and Early Tournament Reinforces, p. 21f.

² English translation by Daniel V. Thompson Jr. (1933): Cennino D' Andrea Cennini. The Craftsman's Handbook. The Italian "Il Libro dell' Arte.". It is based on a reprint published by Milanesi in 1859.

dressed except with myrtle or ciefalonia,³ stretch it, and draw your crest the way you want it made. And draw [p. 108] two of them, and sew them together; but leave it open enough on one side so that you can put sand into it; and press it with a little stick until it is all quite full. When you have done this, put it in the sun for several days. When it is quite dry, take the sand out of it. Then take some of the regular size for gessoing, and size it two or three times. Then take some gesso grosso ground with size, and mix in some beaten tow, and get it stiff, like a batter; and put on this gesso, and rough it in, giving it any shape of man, or beast, or bird, which you may have to make, getting it as like as you can. This done, take some gesso grosso ground with size, liquid and flowing, on a brush, and you lay it three or four times over this crest with a brush. Then, when it is quite dry, scrape it and smooth it down, just as you do when you work on panel. Then, in the same way, as I showed you how to gesso with gesso sottile on panel, in that same way gesso this crest. When it is dry, scrape it and smooth it down; and then if it is necessary to make the eyes of glass, put them in with the gesso for modeling; do modeling if it is called for. Then, if it is to be gold or silver, lay some bole, just as on panel; and follow the same method in every detail, and the same for the painting, varnishing it in the usual way.”

Condition and Dating

There are several deeper cracks. Some pieces of gesso have fallen off as you can see on the pictures. On the surface you will observe a craquelée which resembles the type on 15th century pavises, like its overall appearance does. It seems like a miracle that this fragile object has survived the centuries nearly undamaged and has never been restored.

Wishing to shed further light on this piece I conducted a pigment analysis at the laboratory of the HfBK Dresden which uses a non - destructive method based on Polarisation Microscopy and FT-IR-Spectrometry. The laboratory report states that the pigments used for this crest are not untypical for the 15th century.

³ Thompson: “This material cannot yet be identified certainly. A. Ilg, *Das Buch von der Kunst* (Vienna, 1871), p. 177, suggests "die sogenannten Exkerdoppen," known also as "Valonia, welcher aus Ciefalonia erkürzt scheint.””

Comparable examples

I. Crest of the Vogt of Matsch, 14th century, Castle of Churburg, Tyrol.

According to the shape of the cap this crest was supposedly worn on a great helmet, probably for tournament purposes. It is also made of leather, covered with canvas, coated with gesso and finally painted. However, the current complexion is not the original one. When pieces of gesso had fallen off, the crest was repainted with an oil colour in green and white, leading to the appearance as it is today. Originally the colour was red and white, as can be detected where the surface of the overpainting is broken. ⁴



Source: Trapp, O. G. (1929): *The Armoury of the Castle of Churburg*, pl. XVII.

⁴ Trapp, O. G. (1929): *The Armoury of the Castle of Churburg*, p. 31f. and pl. XVII.

II. Crest of Albert von Prankh, circa 1350, KHM Vienna, Inv. No. B74.⁵

This very famous crest was preserved together with a great helmet and apparently served for tournament purposes. Both pieces had survived on the tomb of Albert von Prankh at the Augustiner-Chorherrenstift in Seckau. They were bought by the Kunsthistorisches Museum back in 1878 and are on view as one of the most important exhibits in the museum today. It is of a similar construction. Leather is covered by gesso/linen and finally gilded and silvered with a simple tree ornament painted on the comb.

The curved buffalo horns are tapering to their ends. Heraldic sources show that early gothic horns are shaped more like a half-moon with pointed tips while late gothic ones resemble a lyra bearing mouthpieces at their top like our example.⁶ Albert von Prankh's crest seems to represent a stage of the development in between these two versions.



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⁵ Thomas, B., Gamber, O. (1976): *Katalog der Leibrüstammer*, p. 38 and fig. 7.

⁶ Cited from a script for a lecture by Hans and Maria Rüegg in Zurich, April 2nd, 2004.

III. Crest of Edward of Woodstock, called the black prince, third quarter 14th century, Canterbury Cathedral.

This crest was arranged on the tomb of Edward together with his great helmet and shield. It shows a leopard on a cap of maintenance. Both cap and lion were modelled of leather, the lion originally gilded, the cap painted red and the turned up edge in white.⁷



Historic image.

⁷Laking, G. F. (1919): A record of European Armour and Arms Through Seven Centuries, p. 278.

IV. Crest, dated to the late 14th century, Museo Bardini, Florence.

In the shape of a dragon's head and neck, made of leather, covered with gesso and painted, probably Florentine.⁸



Source: Boccia, L. G. (1984): Museo Bardini, Le Armi, p. 31.

⁸Boccia, L. G. (1984): Museo Bardini, Le Armi, p. 28 and 31.

V. Crest of King Martin I. of Aragón, early 15th century, Real Armeria, Madrid. Made of leather and gesso, gilded.⁹ This crest came originally from the island Mallorca in the Mediterranean Sea, where it was used by the king during the *Fiesta del Estandarte*.¹⁰ Back in 1831 the crest was confiscated by the Spanish Crown and is on view at the Real Armeria in Madrid since these days. The regional government of Mallorca is constantly making demands for repatriating the object.



Historic image.

⁹ Valencia, J. D., Crooke, J. B., Navarrot, C.(1898): Catálogo Histórico-descriptivo de la Real Armeria de Madrid, p. 139 and fig. 81.

¹⁰ Festivities in remembrance of the conquest of the city of Palma in 1229.

VI. Further examples of different materials.

Besides the hollow construction of leather used for the crests described above there are also examples made of wood and even of iron.

- In the *Staatliche Kunstsammlungen* Dresden there are three of these, made of wood, and dating from circa 1500. One is depicting the coat of arms of Schwartzenberg, the other two form part of the heraldry of Saxon noble men.¹¹
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art preserves the crest for the burgonet of Sforza Pallavicino (1519–1585). It is forged of steel in the shape of a hydra.¹²
- A similar piece, also resembling a hydra and made of iron is shown in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. The crest supposedly belonged to Ludovico Gonzaga (1412 – 1478).



©KHM-Museumsverband, <http://www.khm.at>.

¹¹ Wozel, H. (1979): *Turniere*, p. 44f. and 83.

¹² Accession number 1972.144.4.

Background and Heraldic Meaning

Due to the evolution of defensive arms since the 11th century knights were increasingly enshrouded. So it became necessary to apply means of identifying the individual wearer which stimulated the development of heraldry. Since the 12th century helmets were painted with coat of arms. A first evidence for this practice can be deduced from the seal of Philipp of Flandern, dating from 1164.¹³ From the late 12th century on the first crests appeared to be worn on the top of the helmet. Initially their design repeated elements from the escutcheon and were called *Hilfskleinod* (Eng.: auxiliary crest), but in the course of time it was not confined to this aspect. Soon additional elements were involved in the composition of crests in order to communicate the rank of its wearer. Most important, they served to distinguish knights who had the identical hatchment, that is to say members of the same family or of different family lineages. They also identified individual castles if several belonged to a family.



Example

The tomb slab of count Kuno zu Eltz in the church of Münstermaifeld shows on the left the coat of arms of the father's lineage, count Wilhelm VII. zu Eltz and grandfather from the father's side count Lancelot III. On the right there is the coat

¹³ Siebmacher, J., Gritzner, M. (1890): J. Siebmacher's grosses und allgemeines Wappenbuch, p. 156.

of arms of the grandmother from the father's side, countess Gutgin. While the hatchment is the same, the crests are different for each lineage.

Another example might be taken from the heritage book of the house of Eptingen showing a group of different crests with the same hatchment:



Source: Christ, D. A. (1994): Schweizer Archiv für Heraldik, vol. 1994-I.

In the course of time it became common practice passing crests from father to son, so at least since post medieval times this heraldic element has been considered as being one family's coat of arms together with the hatchment.

Function and Use of the Present Pieces

Crests had been employed in various types of tournament. However the dome-shaped base of our present examples suggests they were intended for use in the so called *Kolbenturnier*. On the image below you can see one of the very few preserved helmets worn in this tournament.¹⁴ Its curvature on the back of the head is different from the one of a Stechhelm and would therefore probably better fit to the base of our pieces.

The construction of hollow leather is a necessity in this type of tournament, since in the last stage the knights tried to cut off the opponent's crest with a blunt sword. However the converse argument that every example of leather was made for the *Kolbenturnier* would be incorrect.



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Exkursus: The Kolbenturnier¹⁵

A Kolbenturnier usually formed part of an event called *Turnierhof*. This was a social event lasting several days, where the members of aristocracy came together. Besides pure entertainment this institution served also to settle disputes within this society and to punish all those who had violated the rules of knightly behaviour. It was also an opportunity for settling rivalries, politics and to arrange marriages between the families.

¹⁴ Helmet for the Kolbenturnier of Emperor Maximilian I., 1480 – 1485.

¹⁵ The following section is closely related to Jezler, P. (2014): *Gesellschaftsturniere – Die Turnierhöfe der deutsche Ritterschaft im Spätmittelalter*, pp. 57 - 71.



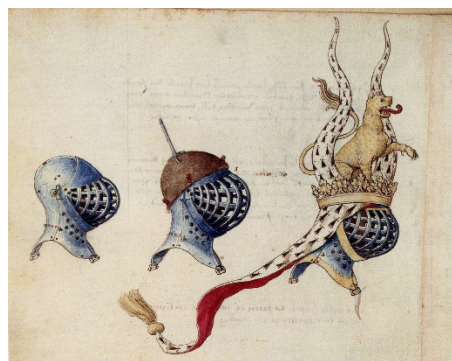
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Inspection of helmets

The preceding image shows the presentation of helmets and crests of those wishing to participate in the tournament.¹⁶ A committee verified whether or not each combatant met the criteria to be allowed for tournament. Those who tried to creep in were blamed publicly. For example at the tournament of Schaffhausen the ladies demanded that the helmet of Henman Seevogel shall be removed from the exhibition since he was just a wealthy civic who married a countess. The judges followed this accusation and the helmet of Seevogel was thrown on the streets together with the crest and people trampled on it. Seevogel was neither allowed to participate in the tournament nor in the festivities and would have supposedly been battered to death if he still had appeared on the tournament place.¹⁷

The access to a tournament was treated very restrictively, especially in late Gothic times, when the knighthood tried to set themselves apart from the aspiring citizens and the nobility by writ. So there were rules that only those received the admission who were able to proof four or even sixteen noble ancestors in the direct lineage and who did not marry a civic. Sometimes also an active participant of the family in a tournament within the last 50 years was required.

This development supposedly stimulated the writing of armorials, which provide such a rich source of information for us today. In order to create a document that could proof the lineage and admission in a past tournament these books were written for the successors.



Source: D'Eyck, B. (ca. 1460): *Le Livre des Tournois de René d'Anjou*.

¹⁶ Grünenberg, K. (ca. 1480): *Das Wappenbuch Conrads von Grünenberg, Ritters und Bürgers zu Constanz*, p. 233.

¹⁷ Stehlin (1915): *Ein spanischer Bericht über ein Turnier in Schaffhausen im Jahr 1436*, p. 163 and 174.



D'Eyck, B. (ca. 1460): Le Livre des Tournois de René d'Anjou.

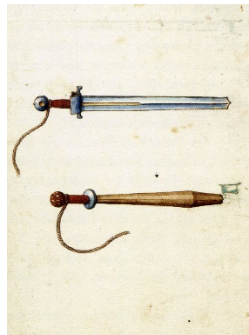
The Tournament

At the beginning trumpeters on horseback rode through the city and called both teams to move to the course, where they entered the place through separate entrances on the opposing sides, kept apart by two cords strained in the middle. In between both parties a supervisor took care for the combatants adhered to the rules of tournament, like a referee does in the sports of our days.

After all participants take their position the main herald is shouting three times to let the servants cut the cords, for both parties ride against each other. Reports providing information about the detailed course of action in such a fight are rare. Presumably it was intended to break through the opponent's line, turn around the horse and return to the initial position for at least two times. The wooden club served as a weapon, while hits were only allowed on those parts of the body, protected by armour, manufactured specifically for this purpose. It was covered with a surcoat bearing the individual coat of arms. The helmet for the Kolbenturnier is equipped with a large visor in a grille shape that provided a good ventilation and visual field. It could be made entirely of steel, but also of a metal frame that is covered with leather, gesso and finally painted. As a saddle the same type like the one for the *Gesteck in hohem Zeug* (Eng.: in the high saddle) came into action. For the handling of all this equipment and other support the combatants had servants, a noble man one, a knight two, a count three and a prince four. If one of these died or was wounded in the turmoil on the course, one of the *Grieswärtel* (referee) held his flag on the head of the combatant in order to indicate he was not allowed to be attacked until his servant was replaced.

After the battle of teams had finished the stage of punishment began. The Turnierhof was not only a sportive and festive event but also served as a court of law for the upper class. In some cases it was apparently the duty of elected noble ladies to assume the role of the accusing party and appoint all those who broke with the rules of knightly behaviour. In other occasions this was taken over by heralds. If a participant was found guilty by the judges he was castigated after the team battle. All the other combatants hit the wrongdoer with their clubs. Even though it was only allowed striking on the areas protected by armour and never below the saddle, in some cases people were seriously injured.

A punishment considered more severe was the so called *Schrankensetzen* (sitting on the barrier). After being beaten up the culprit was taken off his horse together with the saddle and put on the barrier of the course. He lost his expensive armour and horse and he had to sit there below the stand of the ladies for the rest of the battle.



Source: D'Eyck, B.(ca. 1460): Le Livre des Tournois de René d'Anjou.

When the herald gave a signal for the last stage of the tournament, called *Nachturnier*, the club was replaced by a blunt sword and the participants tried to cut off the other's crests. The crests for the *Kolbenturnier* seem to have always been a heraldic device associated with the wearer which was not necessarily the case at the *Gestech*. Swords used for this purpose were controlled during the inspection of helmets and had to be three to three and a half fingers wide and blunt at the top.¹⁶ Those not willing to take part in this stage of the tournament had to be respected.¹⁷

¹⁶ Gumpfenberg, L. A. (1862): Die Gumpfenberger auf Turnieren, p. 133.

¹⁷ Gumpfenberg, L. A. (1862): Die Gumpfenberger auf Turnieren, p. 99.



A Tournament Scene by Georg Ruxner

The image below shows a depiction taken from the tournament book of Georg Ruxner, first published in 1530. It illustrates various deeds happening at a Kolbenturnier in one image. In the foreground on the right you can see a combatant who is punished with Schrankensetzen. His armour is about to be taken off by his servants. Behind the culprit two participants are fighting the Nachturnier, where the warrior on the left hits successfully the crest of his opponent on the right. On the left side of the foreground a punishment takes place. The culprit is marked with a flag, his horse held by his servant. Several knights surround and beat him with their clubs. In the background of the place there are several fights of the Nachturnier. Behind the barrier you can observe musicians, referees and above all, the honourable ladies on their stand high above and other guests watching the tournament.



Source: Ruxner, G. (1532): Anfang, Ursprung und Herkommen des Thurniers inn Teutscher Nation.

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