



MORION

circa 1580, Germany (probably Nuremberg).
Height: 28 cm.
Depth: 25 cm.
Length: 33 cm.
Weight: 1270 g.

Forged in one piece, with a hemispherical skull rising to a high medial comb roped along its apex, an integral brim tapering to an obtuse point at the front and rear, its edge decorated with a file-roped inward turn. Lining rivets with iron washers encircle the base of the crown; etchings all over the surface on a blackened and stippled ground, comprising seven vertical bands, with arabesque interlace, scrolling foliage inhabited by birds and a double eagle.



A Musketeer Wearing a Morion Helmet.

In the center there is a large cartouche depicting a mounted warrior in contemporary dress on the right side and a smaller drummer on the comb. The opposite one shows a color sergeant, respectively, and in the center 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.

Discussion

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? 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.

So, who might have been this wearer? Several theses seem plausible. 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 leaders of these combatants. To this

context corresponds the depiction on the comb. 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.

It is also possible, that the present helmet once formed part of the equipment of a lifeguard, since several morion helmets with the same design have survived the centuries. The most prominent example of a lifeguard equipped with an identical dress, arms and armour are the *Trabanten* of the Saxon Court in Dresden. Their elaborate gear can still be admired in the *Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden* today. You have to bear in mind, that this fact is a notable exception. The great majority of suchlike armouries have been looted at one occasion or the other in German history, like the thirty years war, lasting from 1618 to 1648. Most of these treasures are lost, while some have survived to the present age. Today, the original context of many objects that once existed at both larger and smaller courts in Europe has fallen into oblivion and cannot be reconstructed.

Comparative Examples of the same Series

- Musée de l'Armée, Paris, Inv. No. H2091.
- Livrustkammaren, Stockholm, Inv. No. 23374_LRK.
- Museo Stibbert, Firenze, published in Boccia, L. G. (1975): Il museo Stibbert a Firenze, no. 80, fig. 77a.

- 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 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 emperor's personal guards and town or city defenders it formed an integral part of their equipment.



Landsquenets 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.

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