

Basic Detail Report



Officer's “Willow-Leaf Saber” (liuyedao) of the late Qing period

Date

end of the 1800s–early 1900s

Primary Maker

Chinese

Medium

steel, brass, wood, rayskin, and silk cord

Description

A “willow-leaf saber” (liuyedao), slightly-curved single edged blade with a backedge towards the tip, multifullered with a single dorsal channel and a tripartite segmented channel next to it, the latter bordered by narrow grooves, well-forged and ground of good quality steel (in excellent condition, edge sharp and tip intact, visual evidence of heat treating at edge, steel makes clear ringing sound when struck). The fittings in yuanshi (rounded style), the metal fittings all of brass, with chiseled designs of stylized writhing dragons throughout, the pommel, ferrule, and scabbard fittings also pierced to accentuate the design, the rimmed ovoid guard engraved on obverse face as is the scabbard’s suspension bar. The downward-curving grip retains its original grip wrap and wrist loop (intact but somewhat faded). The wooden scabbard with fittings en suite with the hilt, ray skin covering intact, and with original cord suspension and brass belt hook. The yuanshi style of saber-mountings with its globular pommel and oval-cross section of hilt and scabbard appears in the Huangchao Liqi Tushi of 1759, providing the regulations for court and military dress and arms as of the mid-Qianlong reign. Fittings of this shape were prescribed for the sabers of the imperial princes of first and second ranks. The style became much more widespread late in the 18th and into the 19th century, and became the norm for officers’ and enlisted mens’ arms of various military formations. This example is typical of a dress sidearm worn by officers of the last decades of the Qing. Despite its ornate fittings, it has a usable edge, and is well-tempered. It is unusual to find one with an exceptionally clean blade, the ray skin without cracks or losses, and the original suspension system intact.

Dimensions

78.1 × 62.5 cm (30 3/4 × 24 5/8 in.), 1 lb, 14 oz (weight)