



Ceremonial Sword for the Order of St. Michael

Date

1816–1824

Primary Maker

Couleaux Frères

Medium

steel (formerly blued), ormolu (copper and tin/zinc alloy), gilding and mother-of-pearl

Description

Straight single edge hollow-ground polished steel backsword or spadron blade with slightly rounded back & acutely pointed tip. Faces etched from hilt to mid-length with gilded foliation, candelabrum, & fleur-de-lis device enclosed by laurel branches at mid-height, and surmounted by a palmette which is axially pierced by a winged arrow. At the base of the candelabrum is a blank, elongated octagonal escutcheon supported by floral and foliate tendrils. Below this, at the shoulder of the blade face is a rectangular cartouche etched with script. The obverse is described in "marks". All of the script and decoration retains traces of gilding, on a hatched ground. Traces of iridescence suggest former blueing. Ormolu "stirrup" hilt with a stout rectangular quillon block that is slightly outwardly curved obverse and reverse. At the sides are calyxes from which project the rear quillon and knuckle-guard of square section. The rear quillon is straight, and expands slightly to a shell-like terminal. The base of the knuckle-guard is straight, then turns upward and curves slightly outward, with columnar fluting above and below the mid-section of generally elliptical section, flattened at the sides. The knuckle-guard terminates in a scalloped capital with a short lug that engages the pommel. This is cast as a lion's head, and the lug enters the beast's mouth. The neck and "mane" are decorated with acanthus motifs and the end of the tang appears at the top. The mother-of-pearl grip is encased in ormolu straps, and have a "wave and egg" pedestal below. The grip is fitted with cast bronze plaques with the helmeted head of Athena within a laurel leaf framed, and symmetrical floral/foliate terminals with radiating palmettes above and below. Between the quillon block and the blade shoulder are sandwiched an oval sleeve for the scabbard, and a downturned convex shell-guard of oval shape. The quillon, knuckle-guard, back and forestraps are cast with laurel branches, those on the straps having floral motives as well, on a granular ground. The faces of the middle section of the knuckle-guard have a central fleur-de-lis framed by laurel branches, with identical framing of palmettes and foliate stalks above and below. The obverse and reverse of the quillon-block have the crowned "L" (for Louis) within a laurel wreath, with divergent branches undulating to the sides. The obverse of the shell-guard has the triple fleur-de-lis royal arms on a horizontally hatched shield, surmounted by a crown, and to the sides are royal scepters. The shield is surrounded by the chain of the order of St. Michael, the oval pendant of which hangs below. At this point in the intersection of crossed cornucopia, which are themselves framed by undulating laurel vines and floral blossoms. The perimeter of the shell is bordered by acanthus, with floral and palmette terminals recurving in at the top.

Dimensions

2.2 × 76.2 × 90.2 cm (7/8 × 30 × 35 1/2 in.), 1 lb 5 oz (weight)