A HELMET MADE FOR PHILIP II
OF SPAIN

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Among the objects that came to the Museum with the last part of the William Henry Riggs collection of armor in 1925 was a sixteenth-century helmet of remarkable workmanship. Mr. Riggs had bought it in 1916 from the Duke of Luynes, but nothing more about it was known. It has since been identified as an additional helmet for an embossed suit of armor belonging to Philip II of Spain, which had supplementary pieces for different occasions. The armor was made about 1550 for Philip, then Duke of Milan, by Desiderius Colman of Augsburg, the most celebrated armorer in Germany, whose father and grandfather had been imperial armowers to Maximilian I and Charles V. The goldwork was done by Jörg Sigman, and the designs, chosen by Philip, were made by Diego de Arroyo, the court painter. The fortunate collaboration of the German armorer and goldsmith and the Spanish painter resulted in a magnificent work of art. Most of it is preserved in the Royal Armory in Madrid, where it is among the most admirable objects in that historic collection.

Philip is shown wearing the armor in a portrait by Alonso Sánchez Coello. Two other portraits of him in armor, both in the Prado, show another suit by Colman, made about 1549, of which the Metropolitan has enough elements to arm two men. One of these is by Titian, and the other, a posthumous equestrian portrait, is by Rubens. Nearly a hundred years later Velasquez painted the Count of Benavente wearing this same suit.

In addition to his own armor Philip inherited a large collection from his father, Charles V. The emperor had a particular fondness for decorated armor, and the greatest craftsmen in this field, in Italy, Germany, and Spain, flourished under his patronage. The rich treasure of arms and armor made for Charles and Philip was put in the Madrid Royal Armory, which was built by Philip in 1565 to glorify the memory of his father. The size of the collection makes one wonder how one person, even a king or an emperor, could need so many suits of armor. Although Philip inherited from his father an almost ceaseless series of wars, he did not have his eagerness or skill in soldiery. There were, however, other activities besides warfare that demanded the use of armor. It was Charles's intention to make Philip the heir to his empire and Spain the seat of the imperial government. Therefore it was important for Philip, as prince, to be in the spotlight. Jousts were frequently organized on his official visits, and armor was needed for these. In his youth he was considered an able fiker; contrary to published accounts he was not deformed, as may be judged by examining his armor, the lines of which are models of proportion.

Armor was also needed for parades, for solemn entries into towns, and on other state occasions. In the year 1548, when he was twenty-one, Philip went through Italy on his way to Brussels to join his father. The splendor of his progress was such that the description by Juan Christobal Calvete de Estrella, published at Antwerp in 1552, fills two large volumes. The moment was an opportune one for Charles to introduce his son to the princes and peoples of his empire. The year before, he had won the battle of Mühlberg, the great victory in his fight against the Protestants, in commemoration of which Titian painted the famous equestrian portrait of him in the Prado. The Hapsburgs were at the height of their power and prestige. But 1550 and 1551 were critical years in the prince's career, as Charles was considering future retirement. The emperor was in Augsburg with Philip, watching with anxiety the proceedings of the council at which the imperial succession was being heatedly debated.
At this time Philip's armor, commissioned in 1549, was being made in Augsburg, so that he must have had an opportunity to see work on it progress. Designed to delight the eye, it is as magnificent as one that a triumphant Caesar might wear for his entry into a city. The ornament consists of classical motives—satyrs and nymphs, Roman warriors and sphinxes, garlands, masks, pagan goddesses—and, for good measure, an assortment of Christian virtues, all framed in elegant cartouches. The metal is blued to give value to the lacework of gold damascening. On the upper part of the breastplate is the collar of the Golden Fleece in high relief, an appropriate motive, for Philip was Grand Master of the order, membership in which was the acme of knightly glory. The armor is laminated; the breast and backplates, instead of being single pieces, are built of transverse lames articulated by fixed pivots. In its construction the parade armor of this period did not differ from field armor.

The Museum's helmet is an open headpiece, or burgonet, classical in form and covered with ornament. Under the umbril, which curves away gracefully from the brow, is a separate browpiece, pivoted to adjust the fit and to secure the lining strap. Except for this piece the entire helmet, including the crest with a triton holding a dolphin by the tail and the more than fifty mythological and historical figures with which it is embossed, is hammered from a single piece of iron.

Iron is very far from being the rigid, unyielding substance it appears to be at first touch, for, given sufficient pressure or tension, it may be stretched or molded almost indefinitely. In embossing, metal is treated as a plastic substance to be shaped into the desired forms in a manner analogous to the modeling of wax or clay, as opposed to the carving of wood or stone, in which portions of the surface are removed. The thickness of the metal in our helmet varies from .03 inch in the lower part to .125 at the top of the crest, where strength was needed. A lead matrix must have been used for the embossing, since comparatively stout blows were required to form the background and pitch, the usual medium, would be apt to crack. The tips of the chisels employed were broad and blunt, as may be seen from the interior surfaces, which blend into each other without sharp dividing lines.

The result is bolder and less painstakingly executed than the usual goldsmith's work; furthermore, from the fact that the embossed crest and triton are integral parts of the helmet it is obvious that Desiderius Colman not only forged the armor but did the embossing as well. The goldsmith Jörg Sigman assisted him in the decoration; his was the delicate task of chasing and damascening—heightening the whole effect with touches of gold. When a goldsmith embossed an element of armor the decoration of the finished piece was of greater importance to him than its function, and in concentrating on the detail he often lost the feeling of the contour. In such examples the flowing lines that would have been created by a first-rate armorer are lacking. Our helmet represents the culmination of the armorer's work; after the middle of the sixteenth century it became increasingly usual for parade armor to be made by goldsmiths, and such armor was more ornamental than practical.

The crest of the helmet, a distinguished achievement, is surmounted by a sheaf decoration similar to that on the medusa-head shield made by Negroli for Charles V in 1541, now in the Royal Armory in Madrid, and on the helmet belonging to Henry II in the Metropolitan. Below the triton is a figure of Fame; on the umbril are two genii writing history, with bound captives and trophies on either side; on the left of the bowl is the battle of Pharsalus (where Caesar
defeated Pompey in 48 B.C.) between figures of Mars and David; on the opposite side is the Triumph of Caesar between two Roman soldiers. The field is further covered with mascarons, male and female figures, horns of plenty, satyrs, and abstract ornament.

Some time after the completion of the helmet the head of the triton was damaged, and it was repaired by inserting a cylindrical dowel and brazing the exterior breaks. That this occurred after the helmet was finished is known because the original chasing may be seen where the repair was made. The helmet was further damaged by being scraped to recover the gold, traces of which are still present here and there. This has somewhat marred the beauty of our headpiece. However, the armor in Madrid is in practically mint condition, so that we know what our helmet looked like in its pristine magnificence of blue and gold.

Since Philip’s armor still belongs to the Royal Armory one may wonder why our helmet became separated from it. The first record of it as a separate piece is in 1825, when the eighth Duke of Luynes bought it at the sale of the collection of the painter Anne Louis Girodet-Trioson. It is illustrated as part of a panoply on plate 9 of the album of his castle, Le Château Historique de Dampierre, published in 1905. I had an opportunity of seeing the helmet in Paris in 1918 when
The helmet was made by Desiderius Colman of Augsburg, who embossed it with classical ornament, human and grotesque figures, and historical scenes. The chasing and damascening were done by the goldsmith Jörg Sigman.

Mr. Riggs was already past seventy and not often disposed to show his treasures. But it was wartime, and as I had several times brought Mr. Riggs a dollar box of army cigars, much superior to the abominable French cigars, I was able to see some extraordinary armor! I recall clearly the hour-long midnight discourse that Mr. Riggs gave on the virtues of this headpiece, repeating often that it was worthy of the hand of Cellini. In this he was not wrong, for it was made by an armorer who was a genius in his field.

The Madrid Armory is so incomparably rich in harnesses of the rulers of Spain that our helmet, although a valuable work of art in its own right, is not actually needed there. The royal armor has always had a headpiece, our helmet, as already noted, being an exchange element. It is not the only part of this armor that has found its way out of the Royal Armory. The chamfron (which has on an escutcheon the arms used by Philip when he was hereditary prince), two rondelles, and a pair of extra elbow cops also became separated from the armor. They have been traced to the collections of Lépage, Count Nolivos (who bought them in 1837), Debruge-Duménil, Prince Soltykoff, Napoleon III, and the Musée de l'Armée in Paris. A decree issued by President Poincaré on January 11, 1914, ordered the Musée de l'Armée to restore to the Royal Armory in Madrid the elements of
Philip's armor. There was some resentment on the part of French collectors, and Poincaré was accused of being a Louis XIV President! Be that as it may, these pieces, which had come from Pierrefonds with the collection of Napoleon III, were returned to the Royal Armory in Madrid, where they may still be seen.

Sánchez Coello's portrait of Philip in his armor may be better known today than the armor itself, as less study is given to armor now than to
Details of the sides of the helmet, showing the battle of Pharsalus and the Triumph of Caesar
painting. But in the mid-sixteenth century armor was as highly prized as a portrait. When Charles V abdicated and retired to the monastery of San Yuste he took with him his armor as well as his Titians. If one judges the position of an artist by his pay, Desiderius Colman outranked many court painters. For example, receipts for payments made to Lucas Cranach while he was working at the court of the Elector of Saxony show a miserable compensation. Colman was paid three thousand gold escudos for making Philip’s armor; at least, a record in the archives of Simancas states that in 1550 he was given two thousand escudos of a future total of three thousand. This was three times the amount received by Titian for each portrait of the emperor Charles V. Colman and Titian were apparently considered of similar rank, and it obviously took less time to paint a portrait than to make an embossed harness.

The artists who assisted Colman in making Philip’s armor were highly skilled craftsmen. Diego de Arroyo, who accompanied Philip to Augsburg in 1550 and made the designs for the armor, was celebrated for his delicate portraits in miniature, which had gained him the place of painter-in-ordinary to Charles and Philip, and for the illustrated choir books that he made for the cathedral of Toledo. He also designed the tonlet armor made for Philip in 1545 by Colman and is known to have painted two saddles in the Royal Armory in Madrid.

Jörg Sigman was one of the most accomplished goldsmiths in the arts of chasing and damascening. Not being a native of Augsburg and not having served his apprenticeship there, he did not have the right to open his own workshop. However, regardless of his lack of the title of master he was engaged by Colman, who would not have collaborated with any but the most capable craftsman. And the armor on which Sigman worked is an outstanding masterpiece. In the archives of the Goldsmiths’ Guild in Augsburg is a petition addressed by him to Philip, in which he refers to the two years devoted to completing his armor and asks the prince to intercede with the burgomasters so that he would not have to serve four years as an apprentice. He ultimately became a master goldsmith in Augsburg, where he lived from 1548 until his death in 1601. Not very much is known about Sigman’s other work in the field of arms and armor. His only extant piece is Philip’s armor, although two other pieces in museums, inscribed with his name, have been mistakenly thought to be by him.
Three elements of Philip’s armor are signed by the armorer and goldsmith. The helmet in Madrid is inscribed Desiderio Colman in Augvs 1550 at the junction of the umbril and the bowl; it also has Sigman’s monogram and his initials I.S., which are repeated, with the date 1549, beneath the place where the plume-holder once was. The two dates indicate the years in which the helmet was begun and completed. On the saddle pommel are the pine cone of Augsburg and Colman’s mark, a helm surmounted by a five-pointed star. The shield has four cartouches with embossed scenes personifying War, Peace, Force, and Wisdom, and around the boss is inscribed Desiderio Colman Gays May Harnasch-Macher Avsgemaakt in Augvsta Den 15 Aprilis Im 1552 Iar (Desiderius Colman, Armorer of His Imperial Majesty, finished this in Augsburg on April 15, 1552). This inscription gives conclusive evidence that the embossing was done by Colman alone.

Desiderius Colman, who “masterminded” the
project, was the last of four generations of a family that had established the fame of Augsburg armor. His father, Koloman, shared a workshop with Hans Burgkmair the Elder, who painted the portrait of Koloman and his wife in the Rohonczi collection in Lugano. Desiderius became a master at twenty-one, in 1534, when he took over his father’s workshop. He was in great demand and kept collaborating artists busy, one of whom was Daniel Hopfer, who married into the Colman family. In Madrid there is a trellised targe belonging to a suit of armor made for Charles V by Desiderius and etched by Hopfer, who signed it with his name and the date 1536. The etcher Jörg Sorg, who also married a Colman, made an album of armor drawings, now in the State Library at Stuttgart. It records a series of forty-five suits made for distinguished patrons between 1548 and 1563. Sixteen harnesses by Desiderius are included, and the patrons of ten of these are known. From the album we learn that the year 1551 was a busy one for him. Besides working for Philip, he made a harness for man and horse for Ferdinand, third Duke of Alva, Governor of the Netherlands, and a suit for Heronimus Kegell, who was married to Barbara Blumberg, the former mistress of Charles V and the mother of Don Juan of Austria.

A deep rivalry existed between the two great armor-making centers, Augsburg and Milan. An allusion to this is included in the decoration of the shield belonging to Philip’s armor, on the lower right part of the border. Colman represents himself as an infuriated bull overthrowing a luckless Roman warrior, whose buckler is inscribed Negroli. Colman was so proud of this armor that he believed he had finally vanquished his famous rival, Negroli, who shared with him the favor and patronage of Charles V and Philip II. The armor does, in fact, mark the climax of his brilliant career, for no later work by him is found in the Madrid Royal Armory. On August 7, 1556, a month before his retirement at Yuste, Charles assigned fifty gulden annually to Colman, who had made the armor he wore in the field at Mühlberg.

Charles V’s love of art descended in full measure on his son. Besides the problems of war and peace, heresy, marriage, and money, which competed for Philip’s attention, he was also occupied in commissioning armor, having portraits painted, collecting Flemish tapestries for his palaces, and amassing books for his library. The great monument of his reign is the Escorial. Since this article deals with a masterpiece of ironwork it may be of interest to note that the name Escorial comes from the heaps of slag, or escorias, the refuse of iron-smelting furnaces, that were found there. And the Spaniards, of course, were noted for their artistic ironwork. The Escorial was dedicated to Saint Lawrence, on whose feast day the battle of Saint Quentin was fought in 1557. The Spanish troops surrounded the town and won the great victory in which the Constable of France, Anne de Montmorency, was taken prisoner. The constable’s armor, which was forfeited at this battle, is in the Metropolitan. The armor of many of the princes of Philip’s court and of his allies may still be seen in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, one of the most interesting being the suit made by Colman for the Duke of Alva.

Philip’s helmet is one of a group of noteworthy elements of arms and armor in the Metropolitan Museum that were made for Spanish royalty. The collection includes armor belonging to the emperor Charles V, Philips II, III, IV, and V, Don Carlos, Don Juan José, Charles III and Charles IV, and the Duke of Alva. The attributions of our Spanish historical pieces were verified by the late Don José Florit, Director of the Royal Armory in Madrid, when he visited the Museum in 1919 at the invitation of the Trustees.