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A Rare Early Ottoman Shaffron

Ottoman Turkey, 16th century

Steel

59cm high, 22cm wide

Stock no.: A5464

An impressive shaffron (also known as chanfron, chamfron, or baraki) with eye guards, fitted with two cheek pieces and two temple pieces attached with mail links to the central plate on each side. The central piece is formed from a single piece of steel and tapers towards the bottom by the nose. The plate is flanged at the ears and wide, shallow grooves on the plate follow the contours of the eyes and ears, and continues to the muzzle. At the top of the plate is a raised crest holder or plume socket, and beneath it appears the engraved Ottoman arsenal mark (tanğa) of St. Irene. The plate features split palmette decoration and engraved scrollwork.

This shaffron would have covered the forehead of the horse belonging to an Ottoman heavy cavalryman. It was an essential piece of armour in battle. Some shaffrons made of tombak (gilt copper) while others were made of steel. Those made of tombak (gilt copper) while others were made of steel. Those made of tombak, such as an example in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (accession no. 36.25.496), were much lighter than steel ones, and were used more often for parades and ceremonies. A shaffron like this one would have been used primarily in battle as it would provide more protection. It would have once been a part of full horse armour of mail and plate, and the rider would have been similarly protected. A number of comparable shaffrons are held in the Furusiyya Art Foundation Collection, Vaduz, notably accession nos R-977, R-1577, R-159, and R-158.¹

¹ The Arts of the Muslim Knight : The Furusiyya Art Foundation Collection. New York: Skira, 2008. pp. 339-342.