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A Treasure of the Napoleonic Era

The Sword of a Great
Imperial Admiral

Auction at Hôtel Drouot
on 30 May 2024



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Estimated €500,000-€800,000

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Paris, 16 May 2024 – A rare, precious remnant of history will be brought to auction at Hôtel Drouot on May 30th. As part of the second edition of its auction titled “Tentation”, the auction house Giquello will offer a sword very likely commissioned by Napoleon for Joachim Murat, Marshal and Great Admiral of the Empire. Crafted by the famous bladesmith Nicolas-Noël Boutet – the legendary “artist-director” of the state arms manufactory in Versailles –, this steel-and-gold sabre, featuring complex sculpted designs, is a true treasure of the French Empire.

An exceptional piece representing a glorious era

Gold-adorned swords produced in Versailles are extremely rare memorials to imperial opulence: their production was limited, and very few remain today. Moreover, this one has a specific hilt design, and a single duplicate of it is known to exist, on a sabre given to Prince Eugène de Beauharnais that is now kept at the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg. Such exception makes this object even more sought-after by any history aficionado.

While honorary arms generally do not bear a nominative dedication, this luxurious sword could only have been intended for Murat, the Emperor’s brother-in-law, since its iconography includes marine symbols such as the dolphin and Neptune’s trident. Murat distinguished himself on the battlefield and was made French Prince and Great Admiral of the Empire on the 1st of February 1805. By bestowing this sword upon him, Napoleon clearly wished to honour Murat’s new titles and reward his bravery.

After the Waterloo defeat of 1815, Paris was occupied by the coalition troops. All the arms manufacturing equipment from Versailles – as well as the finished arms – were transported to Prussia. It is therefore quite probable that the sword of the Great Admiral of the Empire was seized by the Prussians during the considerable plundering of Paris, which explains why it reappeared later in Germany near Kassel. After decades abroad, this historical treasure is finally returning to France.



Nicolas-Noël Boutet and the Versailles state arms manufactory

The sword was crafted by Nicolas-Noël Boutet (1761-1833), a prominent French bladesmith who became the “artistic director” of the Versailles state arms factory in 1792. Boutet supervised the production of war weapons before becoming specialised in honorary and ceremonial models to be awarded for the service of meritorious officers. The manufactory’s reputation quickly spread throughout all of Europe, as it produced the sabres given to the kings with whom the Empire had dealings. Boutet also provided arms of unparalleled luxury to the European allies of France.

Joachim Murat, the rise of a flamboyant imperial figure

Joachim Murat was born on 25 March 1767 in Labastide-Fortunière (today Labastide-Murat), in the current-day département of Lot. A French military officer and high dignitary of the First French Empire, he was appointed Marshal of the Empire and French Prince by Napoleon I. He was also made Grand Admiral of the Empire, Grand Duke of Berg, and later King of Naples from 1808 onwards under the name Joachim Napoleon I.

Born into a family of innkeepers, Murat was originally destined for the Church, but he abandoned priesthood to join the army. His military rise was dazzling, and he became a respected general during the French Revolution. During the Consulate, Murat took part in the coup d’état of the 18th Brumaire and married Napoleon’s sister, Caroline Bonaparte. Under the Empire, he distinguished himself in several military campaigns, becoming famous for his role in the battles of Eylau and Moscow. His reign as King of Naples – which he began on 15 July 1808 under the name Joachim-Napoleon I – was marked by progressive reforms and attempts at modernisation. However, the end of his reign was tragic. After Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo in 1815, Murat was forced to flee Naples. He attempted to reclaim his throne but was captured and executed in Pizzo, Calabria, on 13 October 1815.



TENTATIONS °2

AUCTION AT HOTEL DROUOT
Thursday 30 May at 6pm

Public Exhibition

28 May - 11am/6pm

29 May - 11am/6pm

30 May - 11am/4pm

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