

Russian Empire, M 1881 Dragoon Officer Shashka Sword, dated 1904.

Essentially a version of the 1841 dragoon saber with leather-wrapped wooden scabbard, this weapon features a slightly curved single edged blade 30" long. Overall length in scabbard is approx. 40.5". The fittings and knuckle bow are in brass. The grip is in black Bakelite-like Ebonite (Эбонит) compound.

The ricasso of the blade has a clearly visible 1904 date of its manufacture and the logo of the Zlatoust Factory with Imperial double-headed eagle warrant. The other side of the ricasso shows three other stamped maker marks including a capital "A" and an "A with a crown". The "A" mark also appears on all three fittings of the scabbard on its front side. The upper side of the cross guard of the hilt shows the full name and location of the manufacturer: "Slava, Moscow". Additionally, there is a stamped maker mark "M" to the cross guard. The pommel features the cypher of Emperor Nicholas II indicating that the original owner was an officer who received his commission during Nicholas II's reign - i.e. no earlier than in 1894. Interestingly, the blade is of simplified, "enlisted man's" style having a single fuller rather than three. Considering its year of manufacture, this is not surprising: a sharply increased demand during the Russo-Japanese War certainly led to necessary production simplifications, at least when it came to mass-produced swords for junior officers. We have seen other similar examples of officer swords with a simplified blade dating to WW1.

The sword is in good condition for an edged weapon of its vintage. The blade shows modest amount of service wear, small notches to the cutting edge, some areas of surface-level oxidation, and minor abrasions. There is however no significant pitting or rust stains; the finish is brilliant and appealing.

The knuckle bow of the hilt has retained its shape beautifully and shows just normal wear, no abuse. The Ebonite grip is far better preserved than usual: it is still sound and free of cracks, and has only a few small surface flakes and chips that are not very noticeable or detractive. The cap piece with the Nicholas II cypher has some dents and a small drill hole; that and the fact that it does not fit the grip perfectly tight leads us to believe that it may be a period replacement. To reiterate, the cap itself is unquestionably an original period piece and completely appropriate for the sword. The tang button affixing the cap has some wear but the sculptured details of its embellishment are nicely defined and crisp. Same can be said about the Nicholas's cypher on the cap and the floral motif on the knuckle bow.

The scabbard is very good throughout. The leather is original and exhibits an appealing "healthy" sheen. Although it has scuffs from normal wear, there are no significant gouges or cracks; the only worn-through area where the background wood is showing is under the band (the brass fitting with a ring). The band is somewhat loose and can slide about an inch up or down the scabbard if pushed but will stay in one position even if the sword is tilted. The chape (lower fitting) of the scabbard remains sound and shows none of the dents we often see on swords from the period. Its holding bracket may have been replaced at some point long ago, but the chape itself is unquestionably original to the scabbard. The other two brass fittings are likewise original and show no significant wear; their screws are perfectly tight and appear to be original.

Overall, a great example of the scarce Russian edged weapon from the period of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.

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