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Jacobus Nauta – The Thinnest Watches of their Time

A Unique Watch up for Auction in Germany

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From Breguet to Patek Philippe, the German auction house Dr Crott has some exquisite timepieces coming up for its next auction this month (Saturday 12 May 2018). But perhaps the most remarkable is a verge pocket watch from the seventeenth century which is so slim that the auction house measures the inner case, including glass, at a mere 14.4mm in height.

The watch, by Dutch watchmaker Jacobus Nauta, is dated circa 1685 and may be unique within its period for its thinness, see **Figures 1 and 2** and featured on the **Front and Rear Covers**. The only other known watch from the time with a comparably slim movement is another Nauta watch, held at the British Museum in London (though according to the museum, it is thicker at 16.4mm).

It is not only the thinness that makes these timepieces significant, however. The auction house noted: 'Although it is the case that a few watches from the period have a movement approaching the thinness of the Nauta, it is the incorporation of an (early) balance spring and regulator that distinguishes these watches.'

Both the outer and inner cases of the timepiece being auctioned in Frankfurt are 22 carat gold. The inner case is engraved, the outer polished, and the dial is gold *champlevé*. As for the movement, it is a fine, full-plate movement with a fusee and chain, blued steel set-up ratchet, (early) balance spring, silver regulator disc and three-arm steel balance. Significantly, however, the gap between the two gilt plates is just 3mm.

The plates are held by four pillars of an unusual form: plain balance with spring, superbly pierced and engraved bridge balance cock and a similarly decorated plate retaining the silver regulating disc. The movement is signed J. Nauta, Leuwaerden.

It is certainly beautiful. The edge of the inner case tapers to a narrow band to accentuate the watch's slimness, and it has a split front bezel for the glass, square joint and loose ring pendant. The outer case is engraved with foliate scroll work, while the back features a ducal coat of arms, a pair of heraldic birds and a woman's face.

The dial has finely matted ground and a polished ring with quarter-hour divisions and roman chapters. At the centre, a high relief engraving shows floral scroll work on a matted ground, and a single blued-steel hand.

Though comparable in thinness, the British Museum's Nauta watch has some differences. It has a worm-and-wheel set-up rather than a ratchet, and whilst its inner case is engraved gold, the outer one is gold piqué leather with a monogram. In addition, its blued-steel hand is not original.

It is not often that such a unique timepiece comes up for auction. How much it will fetch remains to be seen, but whoever buys it will have a unique, antique work of art.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

