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Armour As a Symbolic Form

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> „It is perfectly possible to argue that some distinctive objects are made by the mind, and that these objects, while appearing to exist objectively, have only a fictional reality."
>
> E. W. Said, Orientalism, New York 1979

Somewhere in the remote past of mankind armour was born, its basic purpose being to protect the soft and vulnerable human body in combat. It is somewhat surprising that in the course of Darwinian evolution man lost his natural protective attributes, above all hair, and slowly became what is called, with some malice, „the naked ape". Very soon man the hunter adopted animal skins as his first dress and also as armour. The tradition of an armour of leather is very ancient and still lingers in the word „cuirass". Various natural substances such as hard wood, plant fibres, bones, hoofs, or even tusks were used to make the body protection more resistant, but as soon as metallurgy had been mastered metal became the supreme material for all kinds of weaponry, both offensive and defensive. Since a blow to the head was often lethal, special attention was paid to the protection of that principal part of the body: early bronze helmets of conical shape are represented in the Sumerian art as early as the third millennium B. C.[1]. The shield, a prehistoric invention, although detached from the body and movable, may also be considered as a kind of armour.

In the course of centuries a great number of types of armour and innumerable actual specimens were created. It is the task of hoplologists to research, describe, and classify all the varieties of armour and to comment on their features. Since the 19th century, after extensive studies by many scholars, our knowledge of armour has become considerable. Three basic sources are used for elucidation of the phenomenon of old armour: original objects which have reached us directly or through archaeology, written descriptions, and iconographical images. These three groups of information have evolved with separate complexes of problems to which access is impossible without specialization, but it is easy to prove that none of them gives enough knowledge for a full understanding of armour. It might seem that an original object could satisfy all questions but this is not so. Armours in full splendour are preserved only in a very small quantity, mostly from the 16th and 17th centuries, in some imperial, royal, or princely collections. There are entire centuries for which we are almost totally limited to archaeological material coming into our hands as a dumb and crippled witness, deprived of integrality and expressiveness, supplemented by scanty written remarks or iconographical traces. If real objects are missing both the other sources of knowledge win greater attention and are sometimes overvalued or misinterpreted. According to its primary function armour is above all considered as an object of war and therefore any pictorial representation of it is usually taken as a proof of a military background. The purpose of this article is to show some other meanings of armour, developed in various directions. Two factors seem to be important in this respect: all armour tended to be a work of art with regard to form, decoration, and the capacity of carrying symbols, but armour shown in art was entirely conditioned by artistic rules, above all by an imaginary mechanism. The basic aim of any art is not so much the portrayal of reality as the transfer of ideas.

I do not intend to diminish the importance of iconography but to point out the intricate relations between art and reality, above all the fact of free creation of unreal objects which is an obvious privilege of poets and artists. To make things more complicated, these imaginary objects were, for various purposes, sometimes materialized.

A good example of confrontation of three kinds of source is the round Greek shield, the hoplon, which is a part of the equipment of a heavy-armed Greek infantryman – a hoplite. We have at our disposal a small number of excavated hoplons, mostly from hoards of the Olympian temple of Zeus[2]. The typical shield was wrought in bronze, round, about 100 cm in diameter, about 3 kg in weight, convex, with a narrow, flat bor-

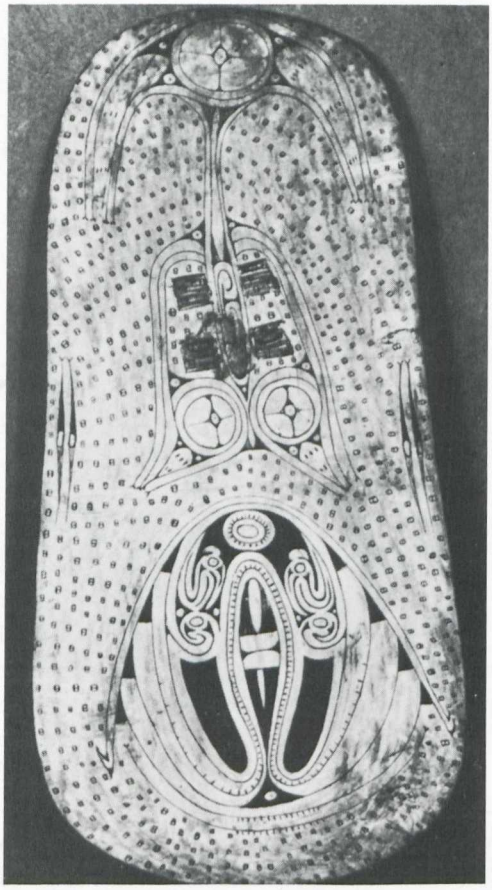
1. Greek hoplon-shield excavated at Olympia, 5th century B.C. Museum at Olympia

2. Achilles protected by an aproned hoplon fighting Pentesilea, vase painting, about 460 B.C. Museo Nazionale Archeologico, Palermo

der; however, in their present state these objects are far from their original splendour (ill. 1). Happily, all the additional features of the shield as well as its way of use can be easily read from numerous representations of the hoplon in Greek vase painting. Investigating these images we learn that in the 5th century B. C. the lower edge of the shield was sometimes completed with a sort of apron made of leather (or thick fabric), a defence for the abdomen and thigh. Such an aproned hoplon is held, for example, by Achilles killing Pentesilea, Queen of the Amazons, in the vase decorated by the „Niobids' Painter", about 460 B. C., in the Museo Nazionale Archeologico in Palermo[3] (ill. 2). There is no real trace of such a shield with an apron in the archaeological material or the literary sources, and in this case only iconographical transmission gives us a full knowledge of the object and its function. Besides, from the vase painting we know that the round surfaces of hoplons were painted with simple ornaments, such as rosettes, circles, meanders, with figures of birds or animals, e. g. lions, bulls, snakes, eagles or owls, with hybrid creatures, such as a siren or chimera, and with typical apotropaia, such as the human eye in profile or gorgoneion. The gorgoneion or Medusa's head with its snake-locks, the very sight of which struck the enemy dead, worn by Perseus, was repeated in innumerable shields and armour of Greeks and Romans, reviving in European Renaissance. Surprisingly enough this kind of war magic was found by anthropologists as far away as the Pacific Islands. A particular shield from the Trobriand Islands preserved in the University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in Cambridge is painted in the figure of „flying witch" (mulukuausi) because of the poisonous emanations that are believed to be emitted by the vulva and anus of such creatures (ill. 3). To have one's shield painted was a challenge, since it was a great honour to split such a shield or to kill such a man. Therefore a painted shield attracted many more spears than a plain one, and it was distinctly dangerous to use this form of bravado[4]. Returning to the Greeks, the Lacedaemonians put the letter L (lambda) on their shields and the Thebans the figure of Heracles. Only exceptionally was a whole scene painted on the hoplon, as on a Panathenian amphore of the so-called Kuban group, from the end of the 5th century B. C., preserved in the British Museum, where Pallas Athena is holding a shield with figures of Harmodios and Aristogeiton, the killers of tyrants[5]. But we are also furnished with a literary image of the hoplon – a masterpiece of poetic imagination: the shield made by the god Hephaistos for Achilles, described in the 18th chapter of the Iliad. On this shield Homer displayed the entire view of Greece, of her lands, seas, and skies, with cities and people in their daily labour and festive joys, loving and fighting. It is quite clear that no armourer could make such a shield. It is simply a metaphor, an ideal object bearing symbolic contents. Later on a similar shield, attributed to Heracles, was described by Hesiod and another one, that of Aeneas, by Vergil. We touch a phenomenon which was explained as early as 1766 by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his treatise „Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie" in which he laid the foundations of a realistic theory of literature and art. Though time has made some corrections in Lessing's statements, nevertheless his basic ideas have proved valid, as each kind of human creation is limited by the material and means of expression. For our sake it should, however, be added that poetic images of shields and armour inspired the armourers and their customers to make real objects out of poetry. This tendency particularly increased in the Italian and German courts of the Renaissance, and continued still in France of King Louis XIV, documented by a series of marvellous parade rondaches (ill. 4–5).

Armour as a symbol of power and royalty

This aspect of armour is incontestable: any man wearing armour felt a sort of swelling power. His relative invulnerability made him selfconfident and proud. It is also obvious that among armoured warriors a chief, leader, commander, a king or emperor, or even a hero was distinguished by an armour of highest quality and beauty, with special decorations and signs. Here examples are very old. It is known that the royal crown was



3. Shield from the Trobriand Islands with the figure of a flying witch. University Museum of Archeology and Ethnology, Cambridge

4. Medusa shield made for Louis XIV. King of France, about 1700. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

an oriental invention and that it took various forms in many countries of „Hochkulturen", from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Iran to China and Korea. Fairly soon this noble head-decoration was combined with a helmet. All types of helmet were determined by some common factors: the shape of the human skull and the disposition of the sense organs. Besides, the helmet was an element which dominated the whole human silhouette, thus as an exposed object and a visual sign of the head it gained certain symbolic features. Among early original specimens a place of honour should be given to the golden helmet-diadem of the Sumerian King Meskalamdug, from the 25th century B. C., surviving in the Iraqui Museum of Baghdad (ill. 6). The helmet-crown of the Egyptian Pharaohs, a symbol of triumph, known as the blue crown (khepresh), probably made of painted copper, decorated with small circles and the uraeus-cobra, is known only from iconography[6]. Later on crowned helmets of kings appeared in the medieval Europe, as testified by numerous miniatures, particularly from the 13th and 14th centuries, but also by some actual specimens: the one attributed to King Casimir the Great of Poland (d. 1370) in the Cathedral of Cracow, that of King Martin I of Aragon (d. 1410) in the Armeria Real of Madrid, and that of King Gustavus I Vasa of Sweden (d. 1560) in the Livrustkammaren in Stockholm[7].

It was probably in the New Kingdom period that the royal armour of gilded plates or scales of bronze was established in Egypt. Surely scales were associated with the feathers of sacred falcons or with the skin of the sacred serpent, the cobra. Scale armour was also highly appreciated in Greece, presumably in relation to the sca-

5. A Renaissance shield with a scene of Iliad, Milan, about 1580. National Museum in Cracow, The Czartoryski Collection

le-shaped aegis, the attribute of Pallas Athena, which was in fact a goatskin (ill. 7)[8]. Heroes and kings wore such armour, for example Achilles, as represented on the red-figure vase painted by Sosias about 500 B. C., in Westberlin (ill. 8)[9]. Gilded scale-armours were adopted by Roman emperors, as documented in sculpture and coins. Often they were adorned with lion's masks or gorgoneia. They reappeared in the art of the Renaissance as appurtenances of heroes and chieftains, mostly in paintings and tapestries but very rarely in actual objects. In the 17th century, however, they were recreated in Poland as karacena armours, decorated with lion's masks, worn above all by kings and hetmans (ill. 9). Roman emperors, from Augustus, were also shown in the so-called muscle armour, with plastic figures of personifications and allegories, such as Virtus Romana or Aeternitas Imperii, and especially of Victory (Nike) over an subdued enemy, with an obvious propaganda tendency (ill. 10)[10]. The muscle cuirass, in a few examples revived in the Renaissance, had a more complicated origin[11].

Armour as a magical, trophy, votive, or funeral object

In the desire to win power magic has often played a supporting role, hence the helmet and armour, strong as they were, sometimes acquired additional magical features. The dream of a peerless armour, resistant to any kind of weapon, found its expression in Greek and German mythology. Such armours were wrought in smithies by gods. Magical power lay also in some crests placed on helmets, especially horns. Horned helmets are generally attributed to Teutonic people from the times of the Great Migrations but this is incorrect. In fact the cultural range of such helmets is much greater going back to Egypt and including the Italian and Celtic lands. A very outstanding horned helmet of Celtic origin, from the 1st century B. C. and taken from the Thames near Waterloo Bridge, is now in the British Museum (ill. 11). Some horned helmets were still furnished with „eyes"

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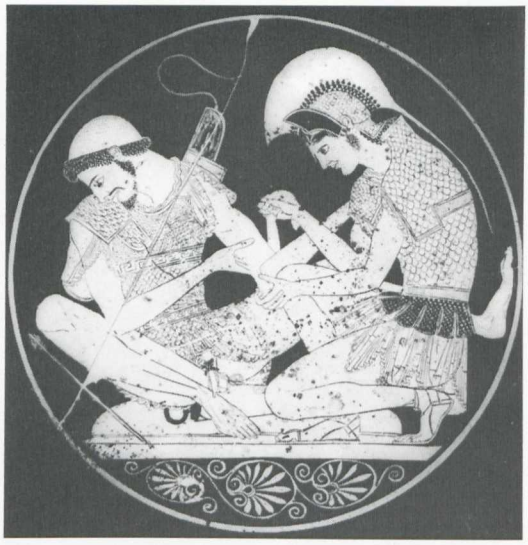

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6. Golden helmet of the Sumerian King Meskalamdug, about 25th century B.C. Iraqui Museum, Baghdad

7. Pallas Athena with an aegis in front of Jason and a drake, vase painting, about 490/485 B.C. Vatican Museum

8. Achilles and Patrocles, vase painting, about 500 B.C. Staatl. Museen zu Berlin

to strengthen the magical force. Two excellent examples of this kind, coming from Vikso in Denmark, dated as 8th century B. C. and preserved in the National Museum in Copenhagen, are mentioned by Ortwin Gamber as votive pieces[12]. Horned helmets were also used by the samurai in Japan. They appeared in the medieval Europe (ill. 12) and sporadically as late as the 15th century, this being exemplified by the so-called „Devil's Mask" with an Italian armour from Udine (ill. 13)[13].

A very peculiar type of armour, surely close to magic, was invented in Greece. Already in the Mycenaean period a full plate armour was designed and a magnificent specimen was excavated in 1960 in the tomb of a

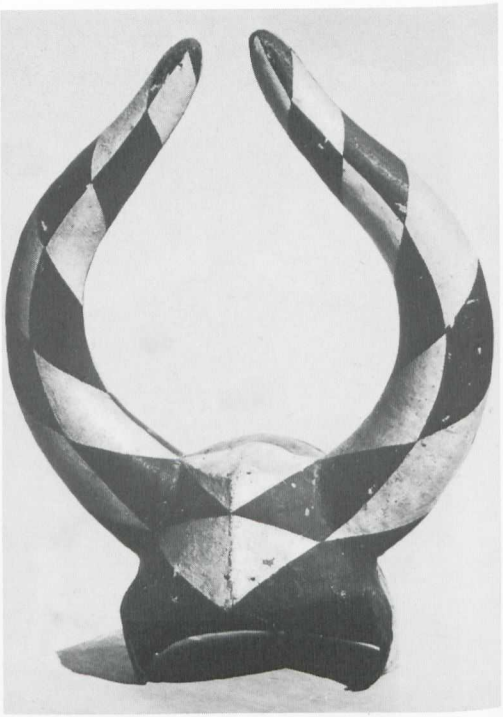
9. Polish scale armour – karacena, 17th century. State Art Collections in the Wawel, Cracow

10. Augustus in a muscle cuirass (Prima Porta Augustus). Vatican Museum

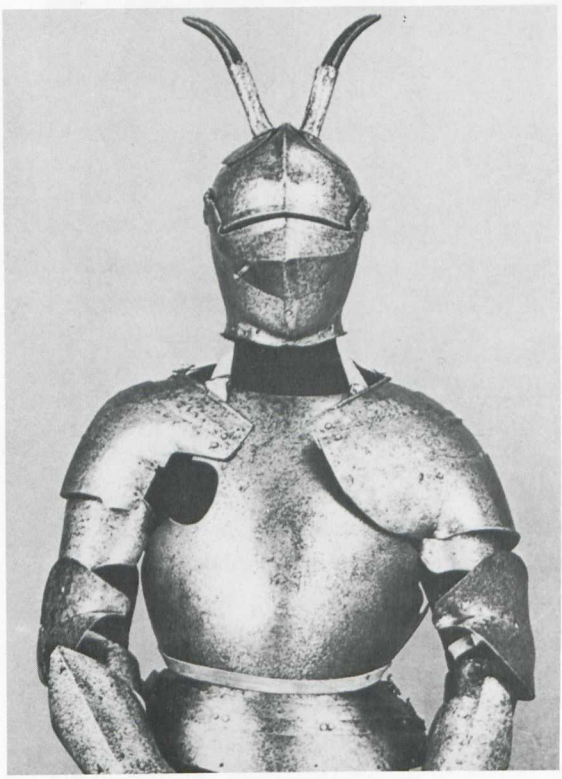
warrior from the end of the 15th century B. C. in the town of Dendra near Mycenae (now in the Museum of Nauplion, ill. 14). Such a type of armour was used for fighting from a chariot, being too heavy for foot combat, and it disappeared together with the chariot[14]. Somewhere between the 9th and 8th centuries B. C. a new type of hoplite armour was made in Greece. Normally it consisted of helmet, cuirass, and greaves but the breastplate was modelled into a shape imitating the naked torso of a muscular man[15] (ill. 15–16). This was the muscle armour, arising not only from the love of the Greeks for the nude human form but also connected with the old custom of fighting in the nude after self-sacrifice of the wearer to the gods of the nether regions. These warriors, protected only by a shield and called *gymnetes,* were highly venerated. Later on the nudity of hoplites was exposed chiefly in art and often exaggerated, this being correctly observed by A. M. Snodgrass[16].

The ancient custom, particularly practised by the Romans, of constructing a trophy, tropaion or panoply of the arms and armour of the defeated enemy by putting them on a high pole on the battlefield was also connected with magic: the arms of the enemy, bound and inert, ceased to be dangerous and could be freely observed and even touched[17]. This was closely affiliated to the ex voto system. In thanksgiving for the victory arms and armour, personal or those of the foe, were dedicated to gods and transferred to their temples, often with a votive inscription. It seems miraculous that an original helmet of Miltiades was excavated at Olympia where it

11. Bronze helmet from the river Thames, Celtic, 1st century B.C. British Museum



12. Crest for a helmet, 14th century. Churburg Armoury, Tyrol



13. An Italian 15th century armour from Udine with „Devil's Mask"

14. Mycenaean armour of Dendra, end of the 15th century B.C. Museum of Nauplion

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15. Muscle breastplate of a Greek armour, 5th century B.C. (?). Muzeum Wojska Polskiego, Warsaw

16. Achilles in an muscle cuirass killing Pentesilea, vase painting, about 525 B.C. British Museum

17. The helmet of Miltiades excavated at Olympia, about 490 B.C. Museum at Olympia

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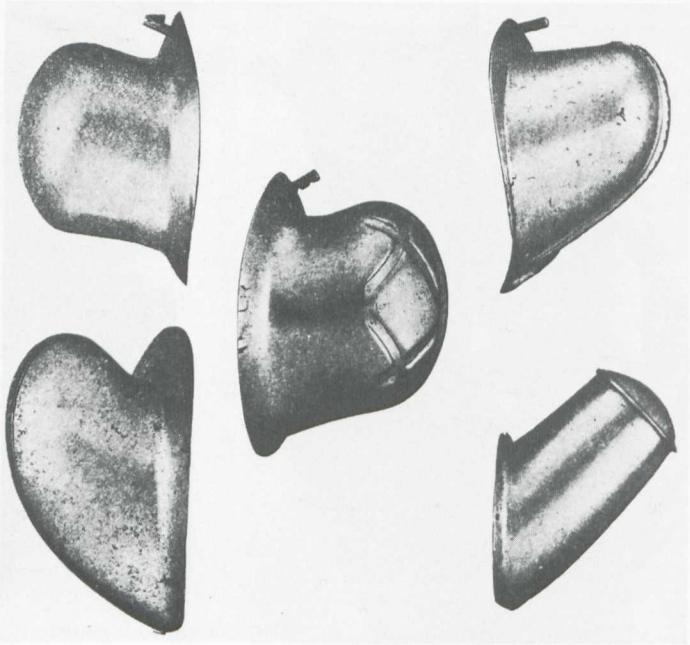
was given to Zeus after the battle of Marathon, in 490 B. C. (ill. 17)[18]. We also know that a rich panoply from the Persian wars was constructed in Delphi, straight onto the wall of the Athenian Treasury. Of course such arms and armour belonging to gods were never re-used, and if too numerous they were rather buried near the temple[19].

Sometimes selected arms and armour, particularly helmets, shields, and swords, were placed in churches over knightly tombs as so-called achievements. They simply represented the dead, his power, and his heroic deeds. The achievements of Edward the Black Prince in Canterbury Cathedral are here an outstanding example, as well as those of King Henry V in Westminster Abbey[20]. In medieval Poland a substitute for the dead

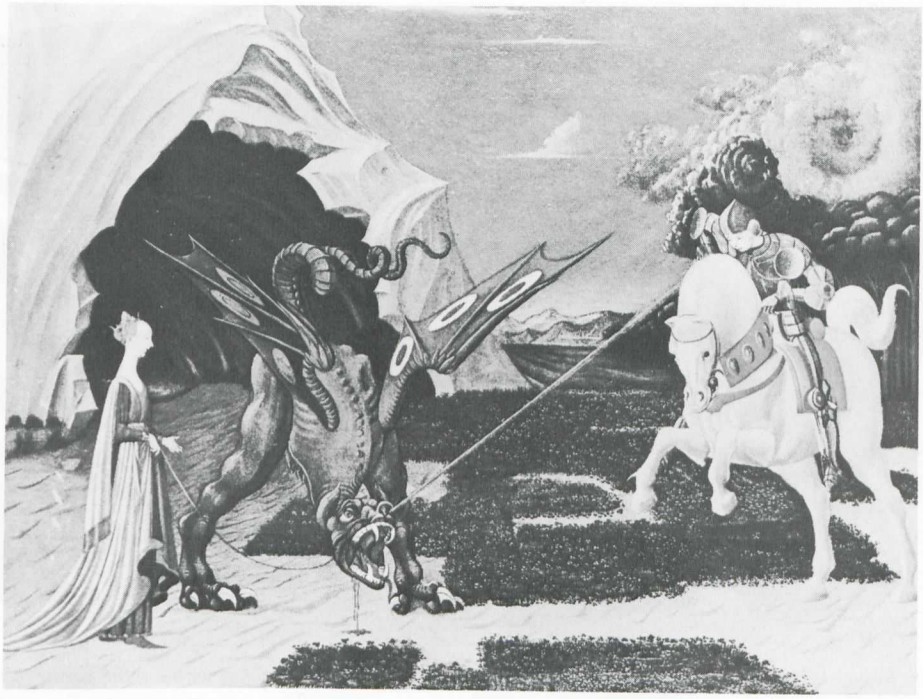
18. Corinthian helmet in phallic form, 500–490 B. C. Staatl. Antikensammlung, München



19. Various forms of the brayette or cod-piece, according G. C. Stone, A Glossary of the Construction, Decoration and Use of Arms and Armour... New York 1934 (1961)

20. German joust of the 14th century, a miniature in the Manesse Codex. Heidelberg, University Library

21. John Everett Millais, The Knight Errant. Tate Gallery, London

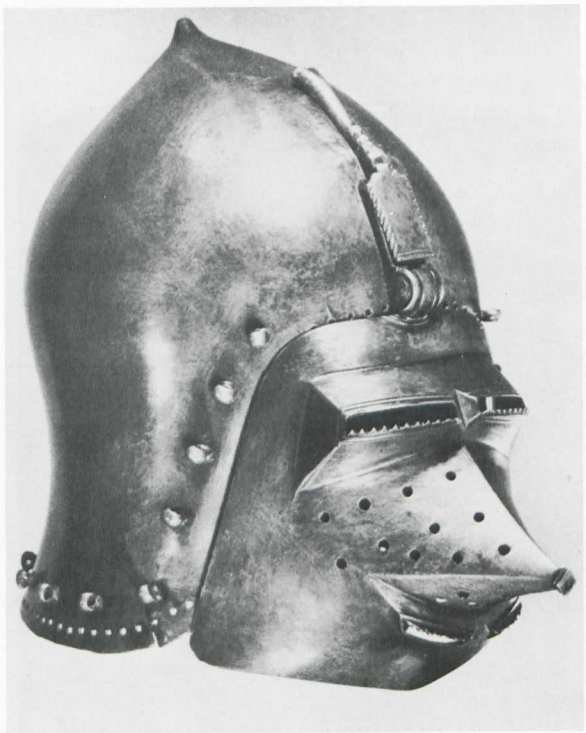


22. Paolo Uccello, St. George and the Dragon. National Gallery, London

23. Peter Paul Rubens, Perseus and Andromeda. The Hermitage, Picture Gallery, Leningrad

24. Bronze helmet with a mask, 1st century A.D. British Museum

25. Iron helmet with a mask sheathed in silver, 1st century A.D. National Museum of Damascus



26. „Hundsgugel" helmet, German, 1400–1410. Coburg, Kunstsammlungen der Veste

27. Grotesque helmet with an armour attributed to Konrad Seusenhofer, 1510–1515. Waffensammlung, Vienna (A 78)

28. Grotesque helmet made by Hans Seusenhofer for Emperor Ferdinand I, 1526–1529. Waffensammlung, Vienna (A 461)

29. Italien helmet in form of a lion's head, 1480–1490. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

king, clad in his armour, took part in his funeral. In the account of the funeral rites of King Casimir the Great, who died in 1370, we read that a fully armoured mounted knight rode into the Cracow Cathedral and in front of the royal coffin deliberately fell with his horse causing a terrible confusion. So ended the Piast dynasty.

Armour as an erotic object

Strictly connected with a man's behaviour and actions, armour very soon became a symbol of manliness and male erotic power. This was expressed already in the creation of the muscle or ,,naked" Greek cuirass of the archaic period as well as in the mentioned ,,horned" helmets. More distinctly it was developed in the phallic shapes of a sort of Corinthian Greek helmet created around 500 B. C.; a specimen from the Antikensammlung

in Munich is here a quite convincing example but there are still other objects and images (ill. 18). They were also popular among the Scythians[21]. The cult of the phallus combined with orgiastic festivals had its place among the religious rites of Greece and Rome, so it was quite natural to expose forms which for us now, educated in the ambience of Christian culture, are quite simply shocking.

The same symbolic features of an armour were accentuated in the time of the Renaissance when a special part covering the genitals – the cod-piece or brayette – came into fashion (ill. 19). Erotic elements can easily be discovered in medieval jousts and tournaments. The knightly combat in front of the most beautiful ladies could be reduced to the primordial and eternal fight of the males to win the female, common in the animal world (ill. 20).

Erotic elements are involved in numerous representations in art, especially popular from the Renaissance, in which the legendary hero or medieval knight fully clad in armour and carrying sword and lance, fought a monster or dragon to liberate a virgin, often nude. Here Uccello's „St. George" and Rubens's „Andromeda" are outstanding examples (ill. 22, ill. 23). The delicate and sensuous bodies of the young women are contrasted with the hard, smooth, and shining armour, sometimes ridged or bristling with spikes – a clear symbol of masculine sexual readiness. The longevity of this motif is testified by the well-known canvas of John Everett Millais „The Knight Errant", preserved in the Tate Gallery in London (ill. 21).

Transformation through armour

Armour has always been a sign of a definite class. Established and serving a group of warriors, it was practically reserved for them and nontransferable: the unlawful use of privileged armour by an outsider was punished. The very putting on of an armour changed the man and almost automatically set him in a new situation. Everything was even more complicated by the introduction of helmets with masks – the visored helmets which were most probably initiated in Hellenistic times and developed under the Roman Empire[22]. Robinson gives, however, an example of an Etruscan helmet with large cheekpieces forming a half mask, from the 4th to 3rd century B. C., which may be a forerunner of the full-masked Hellenistic type. Visored helmets were used chiefly for sports, in the so-called *hippika gymnasia,* or parades. Numerous excavated pieces are preserved in the British Museum and in some other museums, as in Vienna, Berlin, Istanbul, and Damascus (ill. 24). Some of the helmet „faces" are young, smooth and beautiful, of an almost flawless classical perfection, but inert, emotionless, and therefore cruel. A cavalcade of riders in such statuary armour must have made an absolutely terrifying impression. On the other hand, there are also masks with distinguished racial features, the faces of „Syrians" or of „Barbarians" (ill. 25).

Visored helmets continued their life and flourished in the Middle Ages. The „faces" were changed into animals and monsters. The famous 14th/15th century bascinet with elongated and sharpened visor, the *Hundsgugel,* did indeed resemble a dog's muzzle (ill. 26). Grotesque forms of medieval armour and helmets in art had still another special meaning which will be explained in the next section of this article. In the Renaissance period some helmets took the shapes of monsters and griffons, often with wings on both sides of the head, or lions (ill. 27–29)[23]. There were imitations of grim faces with moustaches, even with spectacles, as in the Tower of London, or masks of Moors and negroes, as in the court of the Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol in Ambras, now in the Waffensammlung of Vienna. Earlier a knight could be transformed through his armour into his own heraldic symbol. An emblazonment in molded form was placed on his helmet, and coats of arms were scattered on the tunic covering the armour as well as on the caparison of his horse (ill. 20). Even heraldic colours influenced armour: it could be painted or blackened, hence there were Green Knights, Red Knights, or Black Knights. A peculiar, almost travestite appearance was given by the use of a textile or steel skirt, fashionable in the first decades of the 16th century, mostly in German and English „costume" armour.

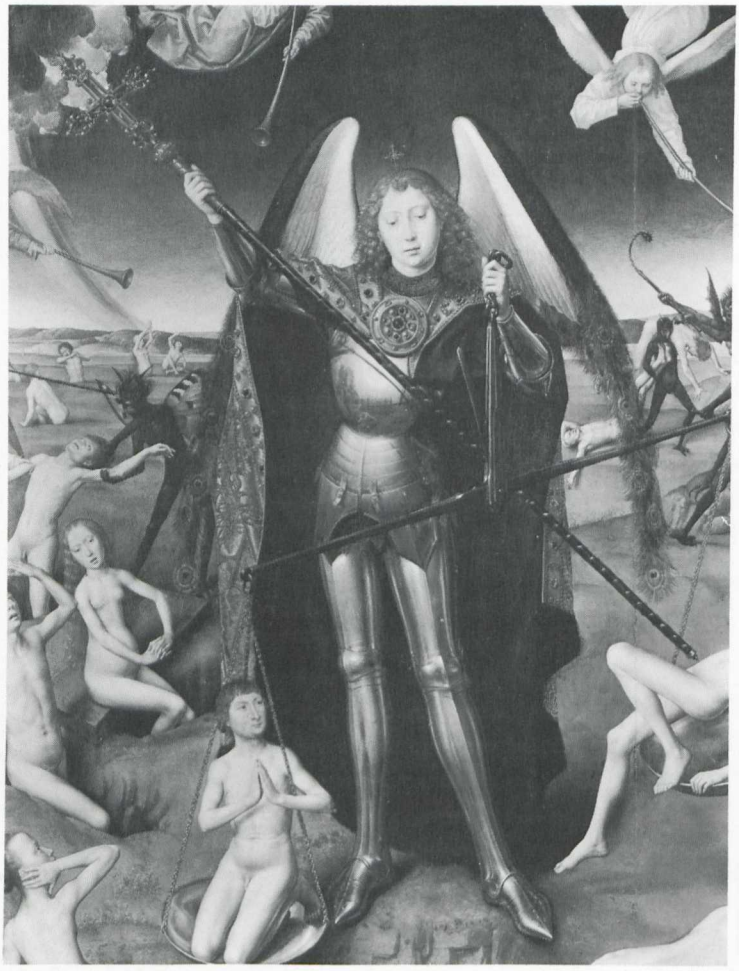
30. Armour made by Missaglia for Kurfürst Friedrich von der Pfalz, Milan, about 1450–1455. Waffensammlung, Vienna (A 2)

31. Armour made by Lorenz Helmschmid for Archduke Siegmund, Augsburg about 1480. Waffensammlung, Vienna (A 62)

Mock armour as the sign of an anti-knight

The phenomenon in question concerns the field of art in the late Middle Ages. First of all it is necessary to formulate some rules operating in the representation of costume, armour, and other accessories by medieval artists. Especially in the 14th and 15th centuries the custom of bringing costume and armour up to date was observed. This was valid for portraiture but also for all historical, biblical, or mythological subjects. Sometimes there were attempts at archaization but they were rarely successful and rather partial, limited to some additional items. Of course, in depicting the current fashion some conventional patterns were applied or stylization tending towards embellishment. But there was also some wilful deformation or even the creation of objects not existing in practical life, and it is this case that we are here most interested in. A brief reminder of the armour styles predominating in the late Middle Ages will elucidate the problem[24].

After a long period of experiments and tests the 15th century brought about the crystallization of the full and statuary knightly armour, constructed of steel plates, totally covering the human body, but having a definite and almost autonomic status, as a hollow sculpture. This armour was much superior to the old Mycenae-



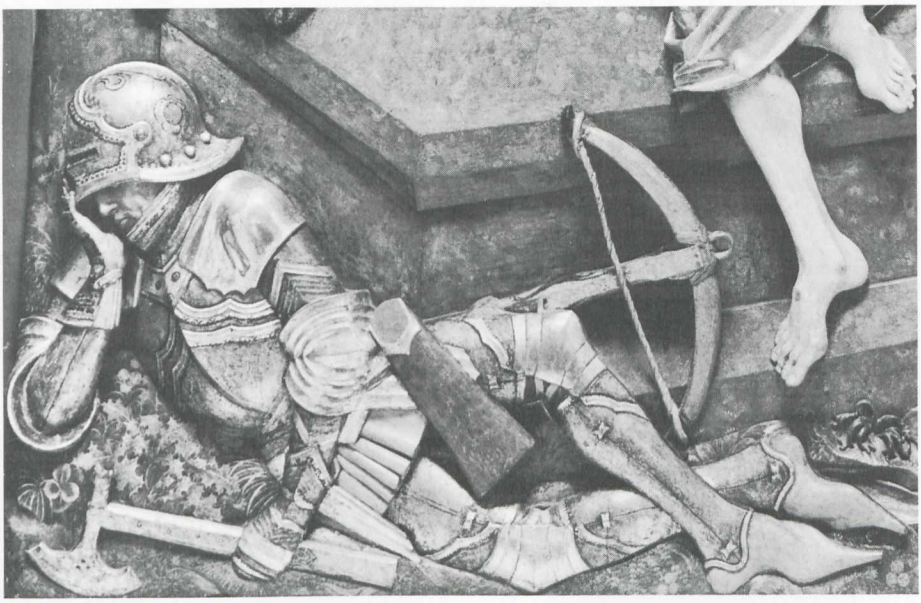
32. Archangel Michael in an Italian style armour, from the triptych Last Judgment, painted by Hans Memling, about 1470. National Museum in Gdańsk

an-Greek armour in the material used – instead of breakable bronze, resistant and elastic wrought iron – and in its technical and functional abilities. Towards the end of the 14th century the plates of the cuirass were still covered with leather or textile but in the 15th century such coverings were discarded and plates of polished steel only became an optical sign of knighthood[25]. Earlier the knight was distinguished by the crest on his helmet, by emblazoned ailettes attached to his shoulders, and by the emblazoned gambeson worn over his armour, but now it was in the brilliance of the armour itself, like a mirror reflecting the sun and dazzling the eye that these symbolic values were concentrated. Two antagonistic styles of armour developed, Italian and German. The Italians, according to the tradition of antique sculpture always present in that country and taken over by the Pisani, by Ghiberti, Donatello, and Verrocchio, were fond of smooth and rounded forms. Italian armour ingeniously reflected the natural asymmetry of the human body: its left side, concealing the heart and more exposed in combat, was stronger and built up. The Italian creation also inspired some Flemish armourers. This type of armour is preserved in a few original specimens (ill. 30) and in much more numerous representations in art, where it adorns mainly Christian saint-knights, such as St. George, St. Martin, or St. Eustace, but also archangels. An outstanding example of such an armour is to be found in the figure of the Archangel Michael in the triptych showing the Last Judgment painted by Memling, about 1470, now in the National Museum in Gdańsk, Poland (ill. 32). The brilliant golden breastplate of the Archangel forms an epicentre of the power of

33. A knight from the Resurrection Scene in the Mary's Altar of Veit Stoß in Cracow

34. An anti-knight in the mock armour from the Scene of Arresting of Christ in the Mary's Altar of Veit Stoß in Cracow

35. Mock armour of Herod's henchmen, from a triptych of the 15th century at Olkusz, Poland



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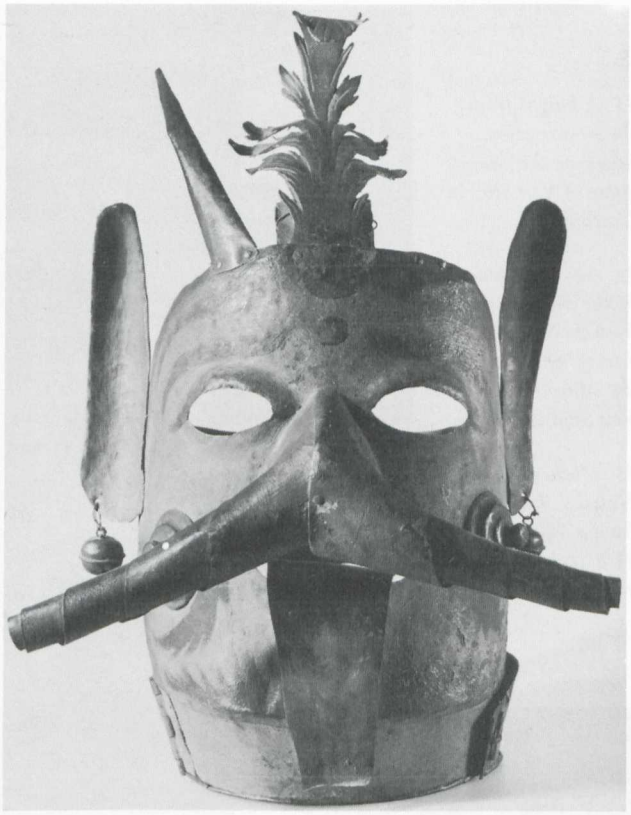
36. Pillory helmet, Polish, 16th/17th century. State Collections of Art in the Wawel, Cracow



37. Pillory helmet, Germany, 16th century (?). State Collections of Art in the Wawel, Cracow

God and of strength and chastity as well. Like a Flemish convex mirror it reflects the world's mystery, the secret of the terrible Judgment, solving for all time the human fate. This armour, near to perfection, corresponds to the principles of beauty defined by St. Thomas Aquinas as being composed of harmony, completeness, and brilliance.

The German Gothic armour differed from its older Italian counterpart. Naturally, it was also full and functional but distinguished by Gothic sharpness and angularity of forms as well as by extreme slenderness, particularly of the arms and legs. Its surfaces were enriched by fluting and ornamental trimming of brass, skilfully incised and perforated. These features originated in late medieval refinement with a nervousness approaching neurosis and with mannerism close to convulsions. White and polished plates with radiant innervation reflected the sun in an unexpected way, blinding in the play of lights. The knight was transformed into an almost celestial being. Late Gothic German armours have survived in extraordinary imperial examples in the Waffensammlung of Vienna but also in excellent images of art, works of the best sculptors and painters of that prolific period (ill. 31).

One of the most outstanding connoisseurs and reproducers of German late Gothic armour was Veit Stoss, busy in Cracow from 1477 till 1496, the author of the huge altar in St. Mary's Church in that city. His knights in full figure and low relief carved in wood, painted and gilded, are among the masterpieces of medieval realism (ill. 33). But we discover in the Cracow altar a creation with quite different features which may be defined as „mock armour" (ill. 34). It arose as a result of a medieval allegoric and dualistic way of thought. Christian

dualism was based upon the opposition of such notions as God and Satan, Christ and Antichrist, Heaven and Hell, Angel and Devil. There is no question that the idea of a perfect knight, the Saint-Knight, was counterbalanced by the figure of the Anti-Knight. Bad knights surely appeared in real life as robbers (the Raubritter), mercenaries killing for money, heretics, or renegades in the service of the Mussulmans, but the true world of anti-knights was framed by the Bible and evangelical legends shown in the Gothic art: here are Herod's knight-butchers slaughtering the Innocents of Bethlehem, here are knight-myrmidons, the henchmen of the Jewish high priest, or the Roman soldiers arresting Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, here also are knight-torturers tormenting the imprisoned Jesus. Could they wear the brilliant armour and swords which served the Archangels and Saint-Knights? Could their faces radiate with beauty, faith, and love? Could their gestures charm with grace and elegance? The visage of the anti-knight was distorted by grimaces, branded by cruelty, and his movements were violent and brutal. His armour was much deformed, grim and repulsive: instead of bright plates there were scales and iron bars, fish fins and bat's wings, and helmets with spikes like those of the infidels or crested with a dragon's tail. And the colour of this armour, instead of whiteness and luminosity, was brown, reddish, or even black, associating it with hell and limbo. It is necessary to add that the mock armour was not applied to the soldiers assisting in the crucifixion of Christ or guarding His tomb but generally to His tormentors and the executors of Herod's cruel command.

There are in fact numerous examples of mock armour in the painting of various countries, from Flanders and Spain and throughout Germany, Bohemia, and Poland (ill. 35). Art historians who turned their attention to the peculiar style of these armours tried to explain them as *licentia artistica* or anachronism but so far have failed to discover their real origin.

Finally one may ask whether the mock armour invented by late Gothic artists had any influence on the actual fashion. The answer may be in the affirmative because we can point out several pillory helmets used mostly between the 16th and 18th centuries for the punishment of various criminals or even heretics (ill. 36 and 37). Generally based upon the old visored helmets, they were sufficiently grotesque to make a miserable culprit look a fool.

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