

## Medieval & Renaissance Armour Terminology

Definitions of Medieval and Renaissance Types and Parts of Armour.

**Aketon** - quilted garment worn under armour (see gambeson, below) to absorb shock and impact. The term originated with Crusaders and is said to derive from the word "cotton."

**Armet** - a close-fitted, visored helmet that appears to have originated in Italy sometime before 1450 and remained in use through 15th and 16th centuries. The armet was lighter and more protective than the bascinet it supplanted and made use of a new innovation of hinged cheek pieces. This way, the helmet could be closed around the head, and the weight taken up by the gorget and the shoulders. The armet was supplanted by the close-helmet, in turn.

**Arming Cap** - a quilted cap worn beneath the helmet.

**Arnīs** - Italian for "harness", the historical term for being "in armour".

**Barbute** - another Italian helmet design of the mid-15th century, the barbute or barbuda was a close-fitting helmet that came in a variety of open, and close-faced forms. It's most famous design, had a "Y" or "T" shaped slot in the face to provide vision and ventilation, and was clearly modeled on ancient Classical Greek helmets.

**Bascinet** - a basin-shaped helmet, that evolved out of the small steel skull-cap worn beneath the great helm. The bascinet was initially open-faced, but as it supplanted the helm as the primary defense, a variety of hinged visors were developed. Bascinetes were in use from the mid-14th through the mid-15th centuries, and were still occasionally used by foot soldiers into the early 16th century.

**Besagew** - a large, sliding roundel, protecting a joint, such as the inside of the elbow or the armpit.

**Bevor** - also called a baviere or beavor. The bevor was a 15th century piece of armour that protected the lower part of the face when worn with a sallet. It could be affixed to the helmet of the breastsplate, and was often hinged, so that it could be lowered when not in use.

**Boss** - The round or cone-shaped metal plate at the center of a shield, protecting the hand. Also called an umbo.

**Breaths** - Holes in the visor or faceplate of a helmet to provide ventilation.

**Brigandine** - A type of coat-of-plates (see below) with hundreds of small, overlapping plates, providing great mobility at a slight cost in protection. Popular in the 15th and 16th centuries, the brigandine was usually worn over padding, but not mail.

**Buckler** - A small round shield (9 - 18" in diameter) gripped in the hand with either a single handle, or two enarmes. The name buckler is a corruption of the Old French word bocler meaning boss, which refers to the boss or umbo at the center of the shield. It has become a matter of convenience to classify the buckler as a small, agile hand-shield. The definition is a convenient one to use but the reader should be aware that the ancients were not so pedantic about such definitions and used the term

indifferently. Used since medieval times, bucklers were round or even square, approx. 8-20" and made of metal, wood, or metal trimmed wood. It was usually held in a fist grip and used to deflect or punch at blows and thrusts. The edge could also be used to strike and block. Some had long metal spikes on the front to attack with, or bars and hooks placed on the front to trap the point of an opponent's rapier. Italian "rondash" or "bochiero."

**Buff-coat** - a heavy coat of buff-leather, used a pikeman and gunner's armour in the Renaissance, alone or under a breastplate. Buff-coats were also often worn as light protection when dueling with rapiers or swords.

**Burgonet** - an open-faced helmet with a crest and cheek-guards, used in the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

**Byrnie** - a mail shirt, mid-thigh length, with elbow-length sleeves. This was the principal body defense for wealthy warriors from late Antiquity until the early 11th century.

**Camail** - a curtain of mail, hanging from the bottom of the helmet, as a defense for the chin, neck, throat and shoulders.

**Cap-a-pie** - an Old French expression, meaning to be armed from head-to-foot.

**Chausses** - leggings. In the case of armour, mail leggings, tied to the belt by leather thongs, and usually worn over quilted chausses.

**Close-helmet** - a form of close-fitting, full helmet, of the 16th and 17th centuries. The close helm clearly derived from the armet, which it supplanted.

**Coat-armour** - An overgarment of the late Middle Ages, particularly popular in tournament, that showed the wearer's heraldry, or that of his lord.

**Coat-of-Plates** - Steel, bone, or hardened leather plates riveted or sewn inside a leather or heavy fabric covering, to provide a flexible form of plate armour. In the late 13th and 14th centuries, the coat-of-plates would have been worn over a mail haubergeon.

**Coif** - a hood of fabric or mail, worn under the helmet.

**Couter** - plate armour protecting the elbow. Often fitted with a besagew.

**Cuirass** - a full, plate body-armour, comprised of a breastplate, backplate, and sometimes, tassets.

**Cuirbouilli** - leather, hardened by boiling in water, used as a material for armour, particularly in the 13th and 14th centuries.

**Cuisse** - armour for the thighs. Early cuises were simply quilted garments, like an aketon, but term also later applied to plate defenses.

**Enarmes** - leather straps used to grip a shield or buckler.

**Gambeson** - sometimes used to refer to the aketon, the gambeson more commonly in the period referred to a quilted and decorated coat-armour of the late 14th century,

worn over the breastplate, or alone.

**Gardebras** - a full arm-harness, comprised of the couter, vambrace and rerebrace.

**Gauntlet** - an armoured glove, often formed of a single plate for the back of the hand, and smaller overlapping plates for the fingers, enabling them to move easily.

**Gorget** - a close-fitting plate defence for the neck, throat, and upper chest.

**Great Helm** - the first helmet in the Middle Ages to encompass the entire head, usually made of four or five iron plates riveted together, and worn over a mail coif, and sometimes a small steel skull-cap. Great helms first appeared in the last decade of the 12th century, and became wide-spread in the 13th and early 14th centuries. They remained the dominant form of tournament helmet into the Renaissance, becoming progressively heavier and more massive. After 1420, the helms came down to the shoulders and were bolted to the chest and back.

**Greave** - armour for the shin and calf.

**Guige** - The strap which slings a shield from the shoulders or neck

**Harness** - the common Medieval term for armour.

**Haubergeon** - a hauberk with the long skirts removed, so that it ended between crotch and mid-thigh length, usually with a dagged-hem. The mail coat was worn in this form in the 14th and 15th centuries, usually under some form of plate defense.

**Hauberk** - a long coat of mail, knee-length or longer, initially with half-sleeves, which by the 12th century, had extended to the wrist. Later, the hauberk sleeve became even closer fitting and ended in mail mittens called mufflers. Although there is a clear distinction between the hauberk and haubergeon, as noted above, in early writings the two terms were used interchangeably. The hauberk of mail was the principle body armour of the 11th - 13th centuries.

**Jack** - a cheap defensive coat of fabric or leather, with small plates sandwiched and stitched between its layers.

**Jupon** - a short, fitted surcoat, worn over armour in the 14th and early 15th centuries. Made of several thicknesses of fabric, the other layer was often a rich velvet or silk, with the owner's arms embroidered or appliqued on.

**Kettle hat** - a plain iron hat with a broad brim, nearly identical to the civil defense helmets of the 20th century, or those of English "doughboys" in the First World War. The kettle-hat was common defense from the 12th through 15th centuries.

**Lammellar** - believed to have originated in Asia, a semi-rigid form of armour consisting of short metal plates pierced, overlapped, and laced together. Lammellar was used from Antiquity until the 20th century, but outside of Eastern Europe (and to a lesser extent, Scandinavia and Sicily) it was known, but never popular, in the West.

**Mail** - a type of armour formed of rings punched from a sheet of metal, or individually riveted together. A coat of mail could have over 20,000 rings in it. Mail was flexible, and when properly belted, reasonably comfortable, but was insufficient protection against thrusts or concussive force, unless worn with heavy padding underneath. In

the mid-13th century, the first additional plate defenses were added at the shin, elbows, and kness, but before the Hundred Years War (c.1338 - 1453) the knight was still essentially armoured in mail. By the end of the 14th century, mail was a primary body defence only for poor knights and common soldiers, but it continued to be used as skirts and armpit protection - areas that plates could not protect, throughout the period. Note, the term chain mail is an incorrect, Victorian, "invention."

**Morion** - a late form of helmet (c. 1570 - 1650) with a strongly curved brim and high "comb" on top. Associated in popular imagination with the Spanish Conquistadores, the style actually developed after Spain's initial conquests in the Americas.

**Pair of Plates** - a body defense, with larger plates than a standard coat-of-plates, but still not a solid breastplate.

**Pauldron** - plate armour for the shoulders, devised of several, overlapped and articulated plates.

**Poleyn** - plate armour for the knee.

**Rerebrace** - armour for the upper arm.

**Sabaton** - articulated, steel foot armour.

**Salade/Sallet** - a helmet of the 15th and 16th centuries, often with a small, hinged visor, and a long, articulated tail, to protect the back of the neck. Variants existed for both footsoldiers and men-at-arms.

**Shield** - a defensive devise that came in a variety of shapes and sizes, made of leather-covered wood or metal, and hung from the arm by a series of straps, or gripped by a handle.

**Sights** - the 'eye slot' in a helmet's visor. Also called ocularium.

**Studded and Splinted Armour** - a term sometimes given to the transitional armour of the 14th century, in which a variety of rigid materials was riveted in strips or plates to the inside of heavy fabric or leather coverings.

**Surcoat** - a long, tunic-like, cloth garment worn over the armour, in a variety of forms, from the 1170s to the 1420s. The early surcoat was almost heel length, and progressively became shorter and tighter-fitting. Surcoats served a variety of purposes. Firstly they kept a certain amount of rain and dirt off of the armour. Secondly, they provided a screen to keep the metal armour from the sun's heat. Third, they became a background for the display of the wearer's coat of arms.

**Tabard** - a simple garment, similar to a surcoat, slit down the sides, with the front and back held together by ties which could be drawn tight or left loose. Tabards were used in tournaments to display the knights' heraldry in the late 15th century, and survive today as the elaborate garments worn by officers of the English College of Heralds on ceremonial occasions.

**Targe** - A targe ("targa" or Italian "rondella") was a small wooden shield with a leather cover and leather or metal trim. Some later Renaissance versions were made entirely of steel. Targets were worn on the arm as with typical shields. They were also usually flat rather than convex. The "targe" actually comes from small "targets" placed on

archery practice dummies.

**Target** - a round shield, mounted on the arm, used throughout history. Most targets were large (30 - 36") and made of wood, but in the Renaissance, a smaller (24" diameter), steel version became popular.

**Tassets** - Overlapping plates that cover the juncture of hip and thigh in a full suit of plate armour.

**Vambrace** - armour guarding the forearm.