

A Guide to Identifying Late Medieval European Armor

A [WORK IN PROGRESS] Guide By Caleb Hetchler, Knight of the [Company of the Lynx Argent](#).

Note that this is in no way a comprehensive guide and instead serves to show the broad stylistic differences in the most common and widespread armor styles in Europe at different points in time. Keep in mind that the tastes of people in these areas at these times were just as diverse as that of us in the modern day, and their armor reflected this.

Also note that most information in this guide is composed of both broad generalizations, and statements that, while to the best of my knowledge are true, are primarily based on my head knowledge as of the time of writing and should not be taken as gospel.

Before and while building or buying a suit of armor for reenactment, harnischfechten, etc. it is important to first consider what styles of Harness (the period term for “armor”, both are used interchangeably in this document.) you like and what you don't like,

This is a broad overview of a few of the main styles of plate armor worn in the late medieval period, focusing specifically on the general styles from 1350-1490 as this is the timeframe of focus for the Company of the Lynx Argent, as well as it being my primary area of knowledge for plate armor in Europe.

1350s-90s - Early Full Plate

Full coverage in armor first develops in western Europe

Splinted limbs with rondels on the joints, coats of plates and early breastplates, klappvisor bascinets, hourglass gauntlets/wisby style gauntlets. Lots of mail still worn to cover the many gaps in armor



(left) Lotte Karin Lückers' circa 1360 German armor. Note that in this period both breastplates (single piece and multi piece) and coats of plates were in use.

1380s-1410s - Full Plate Armor

Western Europe, primarily England and France due to the ongoing hundred years war

Generally comprised of solid, uncovered plates covering the whole body, but there are still instances of pieces made with “brigandine” construction, breastplates are a single piece with

a fauld and backplate, or a corrazina, a covered breastplate. Side pivoting “houndskull” bascinets were worn in France and England, klappvisors stick around in Germany, and Italy has “plough face” bascinets. Hourglass gauntlets are still the standard for nearly all of Europe.

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(Left) Ian LaSpina's turn of the 15th century English armor. (Right) Churburg s15.

1410-30 - English Armor

Highly optimized for fighting on foot. Especially long fauld in the english style. The bascinet develops rigid throat protection and neck protection and becomes the great bascinet (bascinet with rigid throat protection appear some time earlier but by this time they are a lot more common). Classic bascinets also stick around for quite some time. Hourglass gauntlets are still widespread, but at this time the cuff starts to be articulated and elongated, and the metacarpal plate starts to cover more of the fingers.



Ryan Hetchler's Agincourt era english harness. Note that the fluting of the gauntlets is later than is typical of this period, and the quisses would be enclosed and cover the entire back of the leg.

1410-20 - Transitional Milanese style

Italian - specifically the Churburg s18 suit

Early plackart strapped in three places to the breastplate, fauld is connected to the plackart and as such is technically removable (although the breastplate is not able to be worn on its own the way the straps are set up on the original). The backplate is connected to the

breast plate via straps on the shoulders, and is belted around the waist, which is an odd way of fastening a cuirass together in the 15th century.

The helmet of the armor is a peculiar example of an early form of armet, which is generally defined as a fully enclosed helmet with cheek plates that hinge closed and lock in the center, this design allows the opening of the helmet to be smaller than the head and offers a closer fit than is obtainable with the bascinet. The most striking feature of this armet is the “picket fence” face opening: this would serve to protect the face more than normal while the visor is up, while still maintaining an acceptable degree of vision. The original visor of the helmet does not survive; although many reproductions will take a shot at a plausible visor, they are all educated guesses. Early forms of the armet still have vervailles to attach an aventail to, reminiscent of bascinets.

The pauldrons associated with this armor are also very unique in style, they have a seemingly high degree of articulation, a built in besague, and are quite long. The arm harness is fairly standard of the late 14th and early 15th centuries; the rerebraces are very short in comparison to later styles, and the bicep is almost completely uncovered by plate. The gauntlets are typical of this transitional style, with an elongated metacarpal plate to protect more of the fingers, but not quite one that is articulated, the cuff is a separate piece, attached to the metacarpal plate with a single, loosely peened rivet, to allow the gauntlets to retain their mobility while still keeping the cuff longer and closer to the arm harness than in earlier hourglass gauntlets.

The quisses on this suit are more or less typical aside from the top lame of the knee articulation sitting under the quisse plates, rather than above, as is more typical of most quisses for the over 200 years of their use, although there are numerous surviving examples of cuisses with this style of construction from around this time, so







All photos taken of the S18 suit in the Churburg Armories.

1420-50s - Kastenbrust

German

Very unique style. "Box" shaped breastplates with very long faulds with tall lames, scale skirts are also documentable. Early armets are used, as well as a style of great bascinet that is very close fitting to the neck, with rondels on the side to protect the visor pivots on both helmet types.

Both armets and close fitting great bascinets were common.

This style of armor is extremely variable from harness to harness, but is generally characterized by the breastplates being a shape other than globose.





(Left) Dierk Hagedorn's Kastenbrust harness

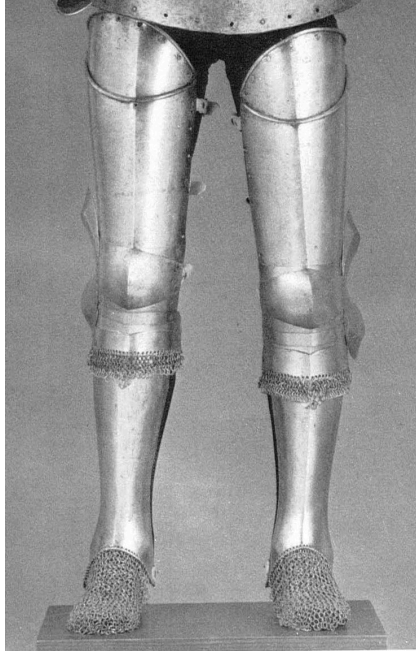
1430s-80s - Milanese Style

The Italian knights of the fifteenth century favored fighting on horseback, and their armor reflects this; everything about the Milanese style of armor is optimized for maximal frontal protection while on a horse. It features a lot of large, smooth, unadorned surfaces which help guide lances away from the wearer. Tall plackart, shorter length fauld, and large tassets.

This style features heavy asymmetry favoring a higher degree of protection on the left pauldrons, counters, and gauntlets (while on horseback the left hand is the one holding the reins, and as such did not require much dexterity).

Armets with wrappers are the most popular helmet in the region, but sallets, barbutes, kettle hats, and great bascinets were also used. Mitten gauntlets were worn with long, unarticulated cuffs; when you look at later sources, these cuffs will be narrower and more leaf shaped. Full maille shirts were worn under the cuirass, with sleeves covering the outside of the rerebrace, and down past the bottom of the fauld, and then an additional maille skirt was worn. a maille valence was attached to the bottom of the demigreave (a specifically italian way to wear maille; was not done in known export armors)





(Top left) B2 suit in Mantova (1460-1480) (right) Avant Suit in Glasgow, barbute is contemporary, but not original. (1435-1442) (Bottom Left) Example of a domestic Italian leg harness from the B1 suit in Mantova, displaying a maille valence, as well as maille sabatons.

Italian Armor elsewhere in Europe

During the latter half of the 15th century, armor workshops in Milan and in nearby Brescia were some of the primary armor exporters to all of western Europe. These masters had their own way of making armor, and, while the armorers would tailor these pieces to the styles and tastes of the buyers throughout Europe, those preferences still showed up on the export armor of the time, as such, “Italianate” armor was being worn all across Europe, this is apparent when looking at many French, English, and German sources:

- While french sources are scarce, what is known about french armor is that it was quite Italianate, with fluted sallets generally being favored over great bascinets or armets.
- In England there are many examples of both Italianate and stylistically Italian harnesses being worn, due to the wealth of effigies still existing from the time period. The Richard Beauchamp effigy (also called the Warwick effigy) is a great example of a harness that is essentially the same as contemporary domestic Italian armors, aside from minor stylistic changes.
- (Alla Tedesca armor (German import armor) is easy to spot for its large, italianate pauldrons and arms, and plackarts sometimes connected to the breastplate via leathers, mixed with german tastes such as fluting, cusped edges, fine filework, and sallets.)



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(Left) Reproduction based on the Warwick effigy. (Right) Composite armor in a generally Alla Tedesca style, helmet is not original but is contemporary, and gauntlets date to around 1500 so just pretend they aren't there

1470s-90s - Gothic style.

Highly fluted armor, usually very decorated. By this time the sallet (pronounced "Sal-it", from the Italian "Celata") and bevor is the standard across Europe, especially ubiquitous in the German kingdoms, and are particularly derived in this later style, with some examples featuring an articulated tail to cover the back of the head and neck to a greater degree while still offering maximal protection.

The Pauldrons are relatively small and dexterous, and can be either symmetrical or asymmetrical. Arms are floating, meaning that the rerebrace, vambrace, and couter, are pointed together (or on leathers) instead of being articulated with plates and rivets. Gauntlets offer a high degree of articulation, and can be moved in almost any way that a hand can bend; they can either have separated fingers, mittens, or bifurcated fingers in some instances (meaning the gauntlet has two "fingers"; with the index and middle finger moving as one, and the ring and pinky fingers functioning as one. Pictured below) .

The cuirass will have one to two plackarts which are sometimes just purely decorative; the breastplate and plackart being solidly riveted together or in some instances one solid plate made to look like two. In other examples there is a degree of movement that the plackart offers. The fauld is generally very short and uniquely shaped, with the back of the fauld coming down further and resembling a bird's tail feathers. Tassets are sometimes worn, but there are some notable suits that don't have them (the armor of Maximilian I pictured below is one of them), however to make up for it, these suits have very high quisses, with many more points of articulation than other styles of leg harness.





(Top left) Gothic Harness of Maximilian I, circa 1480

(Bottom right) A pair of bifurcated gauntlets made by Robert MacPherson

(Bottom left) Raven Eastwood's Gothic Harness