

ARMS AND ARMOR



So. Much. Stuff. Here. I'll start with the saddle that gave me the idea for this tour, which is not only decorated with bone carvings, it is made of bone. Insane. There are about twenty saddles like this that exist, of which The Met owns quite a few, all dating from about the mid-fifteenth century.

Obviously, these would be very uncomfortable to ride in, so they were used primarily for parades or formal pageantry.

The snaffle bit from the ancient world dates as far back as the eighth century B.C., where it was probably buried in the tomb of a wealthy individual. So little has changed in the basic design of the bit, and it honestly looks perfectly usable today. That said, it's probably my favorite piece on the tour, as it really illustrates our basic relationship to the horse, one that hasn't changed in almost three thousand years. The curb bit from the fourteenth century, on the other hand, was mainly ceremonial. The iron mouthpiece, according to contemporary equestrian manuals, was designed for horses with a hard mouth and widely-split lips. The U-shaped curb bar, attached to the mouthpiece, was placed around the lower jaw. It would have pressed the sensitive chin of the horse when the reins were pulled. This would likely have been decorated with pendants like the one with the bird below, meant to adorn the bridle, reins, or saddle. Jewelry for horses!

You can see other examples in the Nuremberg parade album, which has provided an invaluable record of the colorful costumes, crests, and humorous emblems that decorated the riders' shields and horse trappings at Medieval jousts.

The armor for the horse's head is called a 'shaffron' and dates to ca. 1600. As it's decorated in gold and displays fine workmanship, it definitely belonged to the horse of an important individual. Apparently, the matching saddle is in Paris, so note that down if you're ever at the Musée de l'Armée.

At this time, the elevated war saddles and the very specific riding style, with long stirrup leathers and legs extended forward, increased the distance between a rider's feet and the horse's flank (see Nuremberg parade album again).

Thus, spurs with long necks allowed the rider to spur his horse without excess movement of his legs. As a knight's status was closely related to his horse, spurs became one of the symbols of chivalry, and one of the tokens given to him during a knighting ceremony.



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1

Title: Shaffron (Horse's Head Defense)

Date: ca. 1600

Culture: French

Medium: Steel, gold, textile

Accession Number: 27.177.2

On View: Gallery 374

2

Title: Pendant for Horse Trappings

Date: 15th century

Culture: Portuguese

Medium: Copper alloy, enamel, gold

Accession Number: 04.3.326

On View: Gallery 373

3

Title: Pair of Rowel Spurs

Date: 15th century

Culture: German

Medium: Copper alloy, gold

Accession Number: 14.25.1705a, b

On View: Gallery 307

4

Title: Pair of Stirrups (yob)

Date: possibly 12th–14th century

Culture: Tibetan or Mongolian

Medium: Iron, gold, silver

Accession Number: 1999.119a, b

On View: Gallery 378

5

Title: Snaffle Bit

Date: 8th–7th century B.C.

Culture: Villanovan or Etruscan

Medium: Copper alloy (bronze)

Accession Number: 42.50.494

On View: Gallery 370

6

Title: Album of Tournaments and Parades in Nuremberg

Date: late 16th–mid-17th century

Geography: Nuremberg

Culture: German, Nuremberg

Medium: Pen and ink, watercolor, gold and silver washes; paper bound in gold-tooled leather

Accession Number: 22.229

On View: Gallery 373

7

Title: Parade Saddle

Date: ca. 1450

Culture: German or Tyrolean

Medium: Bone, polychromy, wood, leather, iron alloy

Accession Number: 04.3.250

On View: Gallery 373

8

Title: Curb Bit

Date: second quarter 14th century

Geography: Naples

Culture: Franco-Neapolitan

Medium: Iron, copper alloy, enamel, gold

Accession Number: 04.3.478a, b

On View: Gallery 373