

A Fine Armour Of The Time Of Bosworth by Frank Yeoman

The harness illustrated here formed part of the armoury of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen family until less than fifty years ago. In common with the contents of several other dynastic armouries and collections it was sold in the years of financial depression which followed the 1914-1918 War, and at that time was purchased by the American millionaire collector William Randolph Hearst.

In 1953 the Hearst Foundation presented to the Detroit Institute of Arts a magnificent gift of arms and armour, and it is by kind permission of the Institute that the illustration is reproduced.

This armour is typical of the knightly equipment made in the workshops of Southern Germany in the period c.1470-1485, and was particularly favoured in western Europe; so much so, in fact, that many similar harnesses were made in the workshops of Northern Italy in this German style, for export to the north.

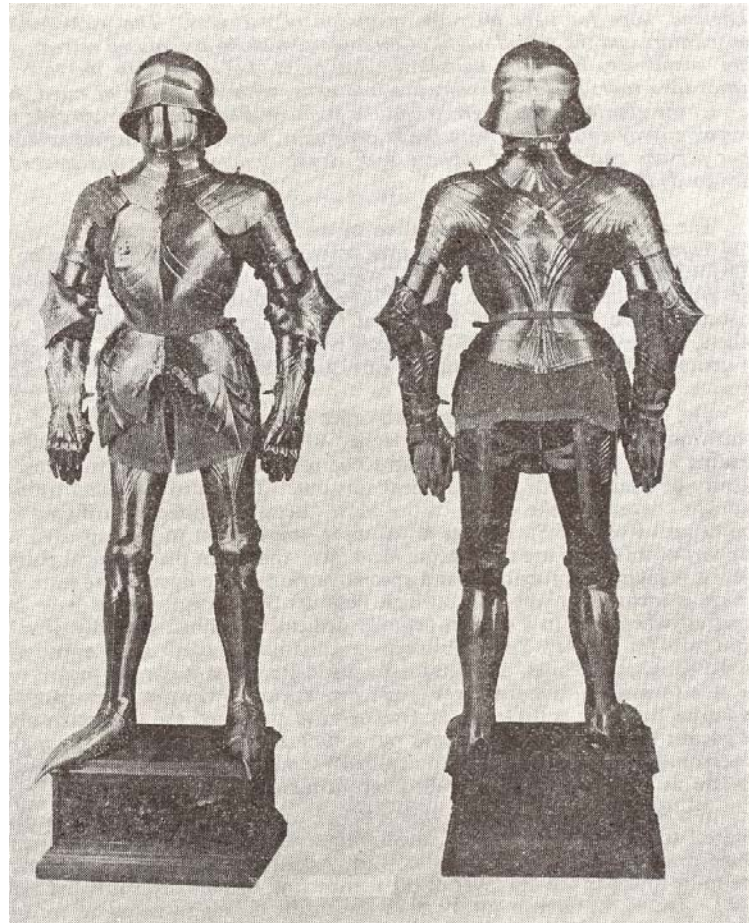
Such armour is now of great rarity, and although many national armouries display examples, they are usually composite, often including parts of several similar harnesses from varied sources. The reason for this was the remodelling of much armour to suit changing styles, and the fact that a knight might choose not to wear his complete harness, and pieces were discarded or lost. The harness illustrated has been restored to its former glory as some pieces had been detached and lost over the centuries.

The major plates bear the marks of the master-armourer Lorenz Helmschmied of Augsburg, perhaps the greatest armourer of all time, whose patrons included the Emperor Maximilian I, and the Archduke Sigismund of Tyrol.

The illustration of Richard III in the Rous Roll shows him wearing a harness which, plate for plate, can be compared with the photograph here. In the Rous drawing the *bevor*, which protects the throat and lower face, has been

omitted, revealing the mail collar beneath, but note the breastplate of three cusped plates, the form of the arms, the fingered gauntlets, the shield-shaped tassets hanging from the narrow waist-plates, and the legs with their long, pointed sabatons. The sallet helmet seen in the photograph is formed from a single plate and has the narrow sight cut into the face.

The ranks on both sides at Bosworth must have contained many leaders equipped in this fashion, and no doubt Richard's armour, as befitted his station, would be of the finest. Perhaps the same hand which fashioned the illustrated harness also made the armour in which he died that day.



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