

Arms and Armor in Renaissance Europe

Although arms and armor are most commonly associated with warfare, both were used in other contexts, including hunting, tournaments, and as parade costume.

For warfare, arms and armor must, above all, be practical, affording the utmost protection and functionality without impairing body movement because of excess weight or inflexible material. Even such practical equipment, however, was often [decorated](#), care being taken that the decoration would not impede its [function](#).

Almost all types of weapons have been used in hunting, including bows, crossbows, and firearms, as well as special kinds of swords and spears. In rare instances, armor was worn for hunting bear or wild boar.

Early forms of the tournament were little different from military exercises, with combatants using the same equipment that they would have used in warfare. The first objects specifically for use in tournaments—such as extra plates for the protection of the throat and hands, or blunted lance heads—were introduced around 1300. During the late fourteenth century, equipment such as the shield and Great Helm were superseded on the battlefield by more sophisticated gear, but continued to be used in tournaments. This development ultimately led to the creation of specialized armor designed exclusively for certain types of tournament. Also important was the invention of the garniture, a basic suit of armor that, through the addition of further pieces and plates, could be adapted for various purposes both on the battlefield and in different types of tournament. The idea of highly specialized tournament armor lives on in some of today's sports equipment.

The symbolic value of arms and armor was reflected in their use as display objects in tournaments, parades, and triumphal entries, and as funerary achievements (for instance, a grouping of weapons and armor hung over a knight's tomb). During the Renaissance, some of the most sumptuous swords, maces, firearms, shields, and armor were made specifically for ceremonial purposes. Such armor was sometimes referred to as armor *all'antica* or *alla romana*. These objects were intended to imitate arms and armor of the style used by the heroes of [classical antiquity](#) and [medieval chivalry](#). Worn or carried in processions or at court, they were designed to bestow upon the wearer the glory and fame, virtues and achievements of those [antique military leaders](#) who Renaissance princes and commanders sought to emulate. Since these accoutrements were not intended to face the risk of damage or loss in battle, many of the functional and protective qualities of “normal” arms and armor—lightness, practicality, and the “glancing surface”—had been abandoned in favor of theatrical and symbolic effect.

Finally, mention must also be made of [armor for horses](#) and dogs. Whereas horses could be protected by or adorned with armor for most of the above occasions, armor for dogs was rare and only used—if at all—for hunting and warfare.

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