

# Armor

IN THE ARMS AND ARMOR GALLERIES

## The Queen's Champion

During the Middle Ages, mounted armored warriors, or knights, were dominant in armies in Europe. At first, most knights were of humble origin, but by the later 1100s many were considered members of the nobility and they followed a system of courteous knightly behavior called chivalry. The creation of the knight's shining plate armor, with its slick, curving surfaces, came from the need to protect the knight from speedy arrows or crossbow bolts. In addition to protecting the knight, armor was used to show his social position, wealth, and status.

This suit of armor, beautifully decorated but strong enough to be worn in battle, was made for Sir George Clifford, who lived during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I of England (ruled 1558–1603). He sent his own warships against enemy Spanish fleets ten times, and even commanded a ship against the Spanish Armada in 1588, when Spain tried to conquer England. In 1590, he became Queen Elizabeth's official Champion.

**Much of the decoration on this armor symbolizes Clifford's connection to the queen. Can you find:**

- the five-petaled **Tudor rose**, an emblem of the English royal family?
- the **fleur-de-lis** (*flur-de-lee*), or lily, which was a mark of English royalty? (Hint: look for a design that looks like three leaves tied together)
- at least three back-to-back "E"s? (Whose initial are they? Hint: who was queen?)

**Bonus:** What weapon would have rested on the piece of metal sticking out of the knight's breastplate?



Answer: A lance.

Armor of George Clifford, Third Earl of Cumberland, about 1580–85; made in the royal workshops, Greenwich, England; steel, etched, blued, and gilded; 69 1/2 inches high, weighs about 60 lbs (27.2 kg); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Munsey Fund, 1932 (32.130.6a–y)

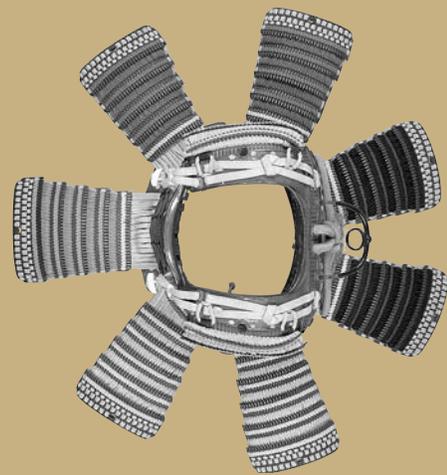
# Warrior Poet



The warriors in Japan were known as **samurai**, which means “one who serves.” They followed a strict code of behavior called *bushido* (way of the warrior). In contrast to their profession as fierce warriors, samurai wrote poetry and practiced calligraphy (the art of beautiful handwriting) and *ikebana* (flower arranging). Until the 1300s samurai fought on horseback with bows and arrows. Later they fought on foot. They used their swords only in the final, hand-to-hand stages of battle when all their arrows were gone. The iron helmet, flaring neck defense, and large rectangular shoulder guards protected the samurai from his opponent’s arrows and sword. The mask not only protected his face but also made him look more frightening in battle.

To make the samurai’s armor flexible, it was made of many small scales—called **lamellae**—of shiny, lacquered iron, copper, and other metals. Silk lacing connected the lamellae and thick silk cords tied the larger sections together.

How did a samurai put on such complicated armor? The usual order was from the bottom up. After donning a short silk **kimono** (robe) and full matching trousers, the samurai would put on shoes and tie leg armor to his shins and thighs. Arm defenses were strapped in place next. Then he would put on the body armor with hanging skirts, the shoulder pieces, and the helmet.



Does this kind of armor remind you of any animals? List three here:

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Are you looking at

- a) an exotic flower?
- b) a Japanese windmill?
- c) this samurai armor, seen from above?
- d) a ninja throwing star?

**Armor of Gusoku type**, Edo period (1615–1868), 18th century; Japanese; lacquered iron and leather; shakudo, silver, silk, horse hair, and ivory; 58 1/8 inches high, as mounted; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Etsuko O. Morris and John H. Morris Jr. in memory of Dr. Frederick M. Pederson, 2001 (2001.642)

Possible answers: beetle, armadillo, turtle, lobster

Answer: (c) This picture shows that the skirt is made of sections that separate, making it easier for the samurai to straddle a horse.

# Arms and Armor Fit for a Sultan

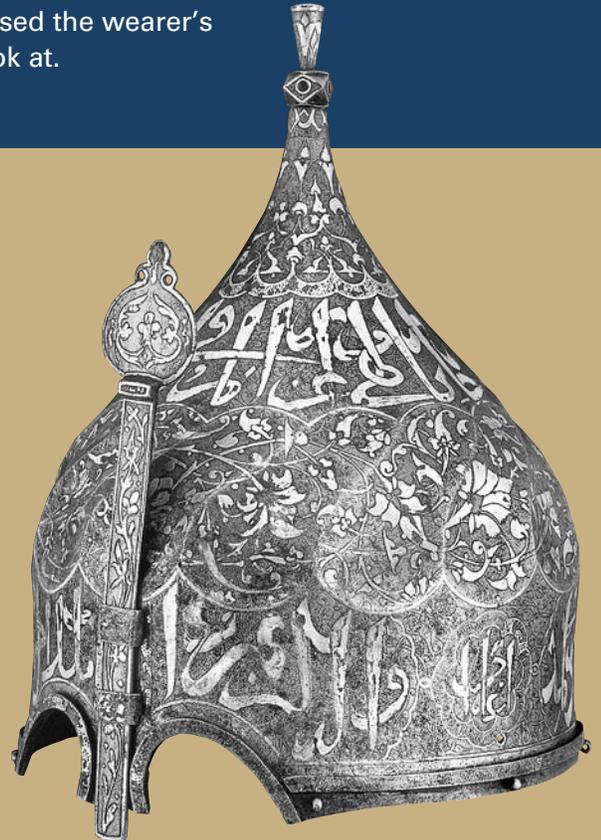
Islamic artists relied on the words of the Prophet Muhammad to inspire their designs, so calligraphy—the art of handwriting—became the most used form of decoration for both religious and non-religious objects in the Islamic world. A wide variety of passages from the Qur'an and other holy words appear in the decoration of Islamic arms and armor, as you can see in this helmet. The holy words expressed the wearer's devotion to God, helped protect him in battle, and were pleasing to look at.

An Ottoman stamp on the inside of this helmet tells us that although it was made in Iran, it eventually passed into Turkish hands when the Ottomans conquered Iran. The **mail aventail** hanging below (not pictured here) would have protected the wearer's lower half of the face as well as the neck.

**Using your head: Can you think of why this is sometimes called a turban helmet?**

**Helmet**, late 15th century;  
Ak-Koyunlu / Shirvan period;  
Iranian; steel, engraved and  
damascened with silver;  
13 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches high;  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
Rogers Fund, 1950 (50.87)

(Helmet shown here without mail)

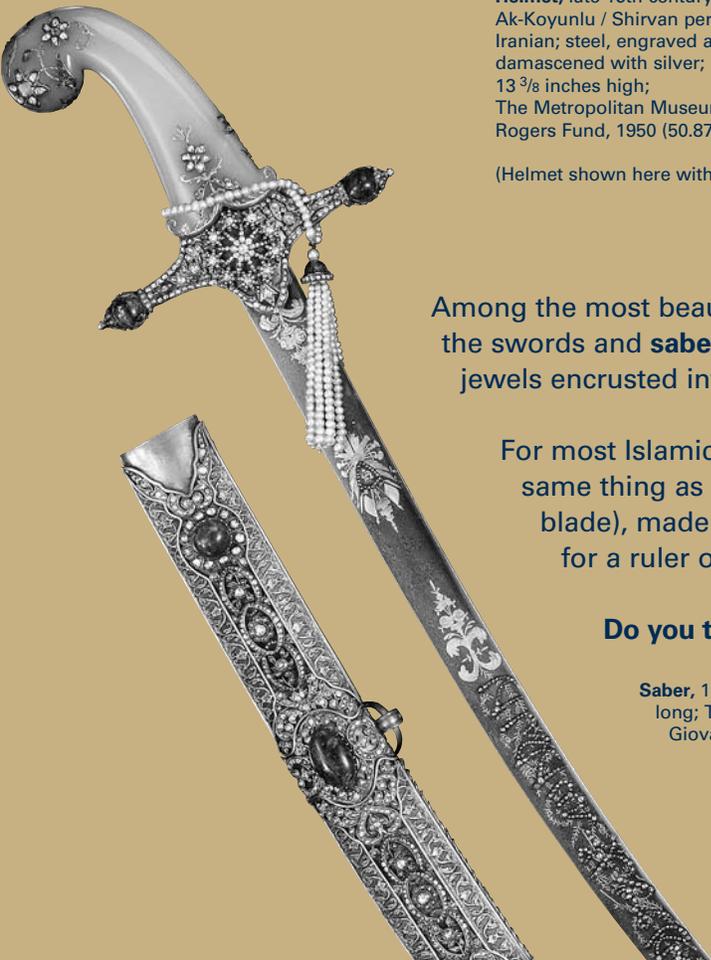


Among the most beautiful objects produced by Islamic metalworkers are the swords and **sabers** made for aristocrats. These weapons had precious jewels encrusted into hilts of jade, rock crystal, and ivory.

For most Islamic rulers, the ceremony of receiving a sword meant the same thing as receiving a crown. This **saber** (a weapon with a curved blade), made with gold, diamonds, and pearls, was probably created for a ruler of Turkey.

**Do you think this saber was used in battle?**

**Saber**, 19th century; Ottoman period; Turkish; steel, gold, diamonds, emeralds, pearls; 39 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches long; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Giulia P. Morosini, in memory of her father, Giovanni P. Morosini, 1923 (23.232.2)



*Answers: Helmet: It resembles a turban in shape and its flutings imitate the folds of a turban. Perhaps it was worn over such a headdress. Saber: No. Its precious materials tell us that it was probably made for ceremonial use.*

## Learn More

Ever wonder what it was like to be a knight in shining armor? Find out in the Museum's online exploration of arms and armor, *Knights in Central Park* at [www.metmuseum.org/explore/knights/title.html](http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/knights/title.html).

**This publication is made possible by  
The Aronson Family Foundation and  
the Murray L. and Belle C. Nathan Fund.**

## Draw Your Own Suit of Armor!

Use colored pencils, pens, or other materials to draw a suit of armor below. What kind of clothes would fit best under your armor—tight or baggy? Would your armor be used for protection or as a costume in a parade? Can you decorate the armor so that it gives you clues about the kind of person who wore it?



Education  
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