ORIENTAL ARMS AND ARMOR

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Broadly speaking, the armor and arms of the East present a far more colorful picture than those of the West. But to the student of ancient war gear this effect, due largely to the lavish use of gems, precious metals, lacquer, and silks in the late periods, is outweighed in significance by the discovery of prototypes for many of the weapons and defenses of Europe among the early forms of the East.

Throughout the long generations of war between Rome and the countries of Western Asia, and during the subsequent movements of Persians, Arabs, Mongols, and Turks, waves of change in the methods of fighting swept over Asia. Offensive and defensive paraphernalia alike passed through overlapping periods of development, adaptation, and dissemination. Both were influenced by the maneuverability of the horse in warfare and by the constantly improving quality of the iron and steel used for weapons and body armor.

Examples left to us of Asiatic arms and armor that antedate the Crusades are few indeed, and even the large collections are richest in comparatively late decorated pieces, particularly weapons, produced during the last three or four hundred years. Collectors therefore treasure the scattered material dating earlier than the fifteenth century. Recent finds, carefully studied in relation to ancient paintings, sculptures, and texts, are now making it possible not only to produce an illustrated history of the hide, scale, and splint armors made in Asia before the rise of Islam, but to form a clearer conception of the development of military equipment during the succeeding centuries.

In its Gallery of Oriental Arms and Armor, recently opened to the public, the Museum has installed some of the finest objects from its extensive collection in this field. Here, against a deep blue-green background, are set the colorful panoplies of war—suits, swords, daggers, bows, arrows, shields, horse equipment, and banners—in an arrangement that shows the development of arms and armor throughout the East and the character of their decoration.

Almost half the pieces shown are drawn from the Museum’s collection of Japanese arms and armor, the greater part of which was assembled in Japan after 1900 by Dr. Bashford Dean and presented to the Museum by him in 1914. This collection is the most comprehensive outside Japan. Especially important are the burial finds antedating the seventh century, among which must be noted the rare fourth-century kondu maruhachi, a type of helmet of which but eight examples are known. Aside from these early grave finds, the most important piece in the collection is the ô-yoroi (great armor), one of the best-preserved suits of the Kamakura period (1186-1334).

In Japanese sword furniture alone the Museum holds an enviable position. All periods in this highly specialized field, from ancient times to the restoration of the emperor in 1867, are covered. Makers of all the main schools and most of the subschools, as well as those who were swordsmiths or armorers, are represented by numerous fine examples.

Since 1936, when the outstanding bequest of George C. Stone was received, the Museum’s collection of Asiatic armor and weapons other than Japanese has compared favorably with several important European collections. The Stone collection is particularly rich in signed and dated pieces, especially weapons—a gratifying circumstance, since the dating of oriental arms and armor has always been a vexing barrier to their proper evaluation. The mere bringing together for comparative study of the eleven watered-steel blades signed by the famous Asād-Ullah of Isfahan, swordsmith under Shâh ʿAbbās of Persia (1587-1629), produces a truer conception of that artisan’s consistently skillful craftsmanship.

The scope of the Dean and Stone collections
LEFT: Suit of steel plates and links articulated by internal straps. Turkish, fifteenth century.

RIGHT: Armor of embroidered satin with overlapping steel plates riveted inside, worn by an officer of the Imperial Palace Guard. Its top ornament is mounted beside it on another helmet. Chinese, reign of the Emperor Shun Chih (1644-1661). Bequest of George C. Stone, 1936

has been extended by other valuable acquisitions, the richest and most important of which is the group of jeweled weapons from the collection of Giovanni P. Morosini, presented by his daughter Giulia in 1923 and 1932. The most intrinsically valuable piece in the new gallery, the ornate saber of Amurath V illustrated on page 172, is from this collection.

Increased interest in the various fields of Asiatic art is growing out of the public curiosity in things oriental engendered by the war. The weapons and armor, some of them old and valuable, which make up a considerable part of the mementos brought back by many returned service men are even now being used as the foundations of small collections. Since the Museum's acquisitions in the Eastern field represent the combined collecting activities of
some of the most enthusiastic and best-informed amateurs in America over more than half a century, the installation in the Oriental Arms and Armor Gallery should stimulate this interest and serve to guide this trend in collecting.

For an understanding of the problems involved and the materials available in a study of Asiatic arms and armor, the reader is referred to Berthold Laufer’s history of defensive armor, *Chinese Clay Figures* (Field Museum of Natural History), part 1, 1914; Bengt Thorde- man’s *Armour from the Battle of Wisby, 1361* (Stockholm, 1939), especially chapter vii, and his earlier article, “The Asiatic Splint Armour in Europe,” in *Acta Archaeologica*, volume iv (1933), pages 117-150; and to George C. Stone’s *Glossary of the Construction, Decoration, and Use of Arms and Armor*, 1934.
ABOVE: Pair of swords (daishō) with blades signed by Fujiwara Sukesada (1520-1567) and fittings signed by Otsuriuken Miboku of the Hamano school and dated 1756-1757. Gift of Howard Mansfield, 1936. BELOW: Slung sword (shira tachi) with silver fittings signed by Harunari (active about 1800-1830), the eighth master of the Hirata school. Bequest of George C. Stone, 1936.

ABOVE: Turkish kilij with blade inscribed: “There is no hero like ‘Ali, no sword like Dhu ‘l-Faḵār” and mountings of gilt filigree set with coral and turquoise. BELOW: State saber of Amurath V, Sultan of Turkey (1876), with Persian simitar blade dated A.H. 1099 (A.D. 1688) and nineteenth-century mountings encrusted with diamonds and emeralds and signed by Mousa. Collection of Giovanni P. Morosini, presented by his daughter Giulia, 1923 and 1932.