Tapestries, both in legend and in fact, have been concerned with the military life from early times. The story of the beginning of tapestry-making at Aubusson relates that after Charles Martel in 732 turned back the Saracen invasion between Tours and Poitiers, some of the vanquished prisoners settled down to practice and teach the art of tapestry-weaving, since then continuously carried on. This legend probably grew out of the fact that tapestries went to the wars with the leaders to lessen the rigors of camp life and the frequency, as we shall presently see, with which they were taken as trophies by the enemy.

There is, of course, a gap in the history of tapestry-weaving between the rise of this legend and the making of the earliest tapestries of the fourteenth century. From the Apocalypse, of six centuries from which almost nothing has come down to us. The Apocalypse tapestries, the earliest in the current loan exhibition, were woven in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, when the Paris workshops were at their zenith. Paris lost its supremacy during the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) with its occupation by English troops, and other work than tapestries claimed French attention. It was then that Arras became the undisputed center of the industry, largely under the patronage of the dukes of Burgundy. Most of the tapestries discussed in this article have been assigned to the Paris or Arras schools. The subjects represented in tapestries have had much to do with their success, and military exploits were among the most popular. In the past, war was mainly an affair of heroes, whose feats and prowess were the theme of ballad and song and the example of youth. Many tapestries were based on literary sources extolling the deeds of the heroes of antiquity and the tales of chivalry. The Nine Worthies, Charlemagne and Arthur, David and Hector, and the others, were favorite figures and were represented as contemporary personages, clad in mediaeval armor, living in mediaeval fashion, talking mediaeval French. The exploits of Achilles, Alexander, Constantine, Roland, Clovis, and Bertrand Du Guesclin were also pictured. At the Field of the Cloth of Gold, where Francis I and Henry VIII were rivals in magnificence, the King of France showed four tapestries of the Victories of Scipio Africanus. The Duke of Burgundy especially admired Caesar, Hannibal, and Alexander, whom he wished to emulate. It has often been told how, after the defeat of Granson, his jester called out to him: “My lord, we are well Hannibaled this time!” A number of such tapestries exist today: several panels of Worthies in this Museum; the Story of Cyrus the Great, now in Madrid; the Trojan War tapestries, in the Victoria and Al-
King Clovis in gilded and jeweled armor, partly covered with brocade. Detail from the second tapestry of the History of King Clovis. Rheims Cathedral Treasury. Except for the fantastic visor and the over-ornate greaves, the armor is of a practical, wearable type.
The Siege of Soissons. Part of the first Clovis tapestry, Rheims Cathedral Treasury. The Franks, Romans, and Burgundians wear armor and use weapons of the xiv century. The fanciful elements were intended to suggest antiquity.
The battle between Clovis and Gondebaud, King of Burgundy. Part of the second Clovis tapestry. The richness of the equipment in these tapestries suggests mediaeval tournaments rather than the primitive warfare of the time of Clovis.
Detail from one of the Apocalypse tapestries showing a sword and buckler in use. Museum of Tapestries, Angers. No bucklers of the xiv century are in existence today.

There are, of course, many anachronisms in tapestries showing historical events, since historical accuracy was not easy to achieve in the fifteenth century. Caesar's Gallic wars are depicted, not in terms of Roman legions but as battles of the mid-fifteenth century. One often sees armor faithfully represented as it was worn in contemporary times, and one also often sees it represented according to the artist's idea of old-fashioned style, usually a false imitation of the armor of classical antiquity. The artist would often intermingle both in the same tapestry, but the student who has a little practical knowledge of armor can readily distinguish the authentic from the imaginative. The authentic representations are invaluable to the student, for tapestries often show details that are rarely seen in existing armor. In fact, because of “fair wear and tear,” a suit of armor has rarely come down to us in its original condition.

In the representation of contemporary events accuracy was the rule. Many tapestries were made which record current history and incidentally give a very informative picture of armor in use. Among the most noteworthy are: the Capture of Arzila by Alfonso V of Portugal; the Victory of Charles V at Pavia; the Conquest of Tunis, designed under the personal direction of the emperor Charles V; the Battle of Formigny; the Duke of Alva's victory over Nassau at Jemmingen; the Battles of the Archduke Albert; the Surrender of Breda, which ended the Spanish dominance in Flanders; and the Defeat of the Armada. Tournaments were also often represented in tapestries. One of the most famous of tournament tapestries is the one in the Musée de Valenciennes showing the Saxon tournament held at Antwerp in 1494, when Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, was in Flanders.
Detail from the first Clovis tapestry showing a soldier with a crossbow bolt through his helmet and another firing a cannon. The turret has peeps for archers to shoot through.

Several tapestries in the present loan exhibition are excellent sources of information for the study of arms and armor. At the time when tapestries such as the Apocalypse series were being made the popularity of warlike subjects was evident even in stories taken from the Bible. Tapestry designers were often inspired by early paintings and illuminations, many of which gave opportunities for introducing armor. The Painted Chamber of the Palace of Westminster, executed in the latter half of the thirteenth century, which included figures of the combat of Virtues and Vices, was painted with “all the warlike pictures of the whole Bible.” So it is not at all surprising to find arms and armor well represented in the Apocalypse tapestries. In two of them one sees horses with human heads wearing caparisons of mail reaching to the knees, which remind one of the two examples of mailed horses in the Painted Chamber. Representations of this kind of armament are of the greatest rarity. Arming the steed in mail originated towards the close of the twelfth century, but the practice does not seem to have become general until towards the close of the thirteenth.

In the tapestry representing “the dragon making war on those who keep the commandments of God” are shown two lances, a fine Gothic sword, and a fist shield, or buckler. These represent the principal offensive and defensive equipment of the warrior. The sword was at all times the knightly weapon, but the lance was also an indispensible combat weapon, so much so that the fully equipped man-at-arms with his followers was classed as a lance fournie. The use of the sword and buckler, admirably shown in this tapestry, was already popular in the thirteenth century. The tapestry also shows an interesting detail, that is, the inside of the shield and the way it was held. When not in use, the buckler was carried at the side, by passing the grip over the sword hilt. In the tapestry of Saint Michael and the Dragon are also shown lances and swords of the type represented in this Museum by actual specimens.
Detail of the Siege of Soissons from the first Clovis tapestry. The stirrup crossbows and the tall standing shield to protect the crossbowman are typical equipment of the fifteenth century. One of the archers is about to shoot although the bowstring is obviously slack.
An Arras tapestry of about 1420 representing the Resurrection is woven of metal and fine silk threads which, by shading, give realistic rounded contours to the armor. The two sleeping soldiers in complete plate armor are of extraordinary interest especially since there is no complete homogeneous armor of this period extant. However, rare elements of such an armor may be seen in the Museum’s collection. In the tapestry, all the plates have decorative borders of latten, an alloy of copper, zinc, and lead which was not subject to rust. The mail also has latten borders. Each cuisse is of two plates and encases the thigh completely. A leather strip is secured to the inner edge of each plate, and laces pass through holes in the leather, thus holding the cuisse plates close to the thigh. Laces supported the armor on the body and limbs and made it reasonably comfortable to wear. The visored basinet is surmounted by a panache. One of the Museum’s basinet has an internal thread at the apex for securing a panache, but no actual panache of this period is in existence. The war axe is somewhat imaginative, presumably to give it age, but it is certainly based on the contemporary weapon. The irregular-shaped shield has a notch for supporting the lance; one of the Museum’s shields is so like it that it could have been used as a model for the tapestry designer.

The most valuable tapestries in the exhibition for the study of arms and armor are the Clovis tapestries from the cathedral of Rheims, the only two remaining tapestries from a set probably woven about the middle of the fifteenth century for Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy. A set of Clovis tapestries, presumably this one, hung in the Hall of the Chamberlains in Bruges on the occasion of the marriage of Philip’s son, Charles the Bold, to his third wife, Margaret of York, in 1468. Through Charles’s daughter, Mary of Burgundy, they descended to her grandson the emperor Charles V, in whose abandoned baggage they were found after the siege of Metz in 1552. They were allotted as booty to Duke Francis of Guise and were subsequently presented to the cathedral by Charles of Guise, Cardinal of Lorraine.

The Coronation of Clovis the Frank and theBattle of Soissons are pictured in the first tapestry. By a victory over the Romans and Gauls in 486 Clovis became master of Soissons, which he chose for his capital. Ten years later he was converted to Christianity. With his reign commenced the “glory, empire, religion, laws, and usages” of the French. The Clovis tapestries show arms and armor worn a thousand years after the time of Clovis. In fact from them one gets a splendid idea of the manner in which the French fought twenty-five or thirty years after the death of Joan of Arc. There is not even a suspicion of the type of equipment that was worn by the Franks. Today we are familiar with the arms and armor of the time of Clovis, for
A hand cannon being fired from the shoulder like the modern bazooka. Detail of the second Clovis tapestry. Cannon were first in use eight hundred years after the time of Clovis.

the tomb of his father, Childeric I, containing his seal, medals, arms, and so forth, was found near Tournai in 1653, and these are today deposited in the Louvre.

The brilliance of the armor in the Clovis tapestries makes up for the lack of color in extant armor. They show in a vivid and convincing way how the armor looked originally, covered with rich textiles—and tapestries, of course, lend themselves to a realistic representation of textiles—so that the effect is both original and striking. One also sees a mounted knight in complete white Gothic armor and a second mounted knight wearing a complete gilded Gothic harness, obviously Clovis. These are representative of the earliest type of plate armor, known as Gothic because its pointed terminals are related to the terminals of the arches and windows of contemporary buildings. Throughout the fifteenth century armor followed the excellent outlines of the costume, which was tight-fitting; plate armor afforded really effective protection only when its elements fitted accurately. At this time the knight with his complete armor and barded horse was in his heyday. Of all the exercises of knighthood, none was so important as horsemanship, and cavalry was still the strongest arm of military power. Knights riding horses and wearing armor had a tremendous advantage over the foot soldier. But one also sees cannon in use, and eventually gunpowder blew chivalry into the discard. The development of artillery caused a shift of power from noble to king. Only kings or very great nobles had enough money to set up a foundry and produce cannon.

The crossbow, too, was a formidable weapon, and it was necessary to wear heavy armor as a protection against it. In the first tapestry there are no less than seven stirrup crossbows represented, some with steel bows, others with composite bows. The stirrup at the end of the stock was for the foot to steady the crossbow when bending the bow. In winter, when extreme cold makes steel brittle, a bow of horn replaced the metal one. The main constituents of the composite bow were horn, a compressible substance for the belly, wood to give stiffness to the center, and sinew for the back, to give elasticity. Two methods of drawing back the string and bending the bow are shown. By means of a claw fixed to the waist belt the bow could be bent by the straightening of the body. For the strong steel bows, a “windlass” was employed. All positions for the use of the crossbow, winding, placing the bolt on the string, and aiming, are shown in this tapestry. There is also a soldier protecting a crossbowman with a tall triangular shield (taller than the soldier), holding both enarmes. Behind such shields the heavy crossbows were wound up in safety. The Museum has two of them, which until a few decades ago hung in the Town Hall of Erfurt. The artist who designed this tapestry was apparently not too familiar with the use of the crossbow. In the scene where the knight is winding the windlass, the upper face of the bow is towards the knight, which is the reverse of what
Banner with Saint Michael and the dragon. From the Winged Stags. Museum of Antiquities, Rouen. Saint Michael was patron saint of the kings of France, who carried such banners in battle.

it should be. And in the scene of the archer aiming, the bow is fully bent, but the string is slack!

In addition to the crossbows four longbows as tall as the archers are also shown. Both weapons had certain advantages. The crossbow, being a mechanical device, was the more effective weapon against armor. But the longbow was cheap, had a range of two to three hundred yards, and could be discharged rapidly.

The first tapestry also shows a pigskin quiver full of bolts, a feathered, pointed bolt held in the archer’s mouth (just as the soldier who used a muzzle-loader carried the lead balls in his mouth), archers’ peeps, a war hammer, a cannon with a shield to protect the cannoneer and a forge for heating the iron rods that set off the priming powder, tall lances, an arch-shaped stirrup with a loop for supporting the lance, swords, brigandines, and fantastic helmets.

In the second tapestry Clovis and his queen, Clotilda, establish the church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. But war comes again, and the second scene represents the battle against Gondevaud, Clotilda’s uncle and successor to her father as king of Burgundy, whom Clovis defeated near Dijon in A.D. 500. The third scene represents the attack on Alaric, king of the Visigoths, who was killed by the hand of Clovis in 507. In the melee of soldiers mounted and afoot there is gilded and jeweled armor, embroidered textile coverings, quilted defenses, helmets with orles, mail hose reaching below the knees, horse trappings reaching to the fetlocks, a lance with rondel to protect the hand, a throwing dart with a feathered end, laces for securing armor to man and horse, short bows, and swords. There is also a hand cannon, with match cord for igniting the priming. It is fired from the shoulder like a modern bazooka. The rowel spurs are inverted, a curious mistake at a time when everybody wore spurs!

Clovis’s flag is emblazoned with three frogs, the traditional ancient arms of the Merovingians and of France. Nostradamus, in his “Centuries,” refers to the Merovingians as “crapauds,” and “frog” is still a slang term for a Frenchman. Clovis himself is said to have adopted the fleur-de-lis, apparently from the Burgundians. A tapestry representing his marriage to Clotilda was among the many rich hangings assembled for the marriage of Charles the Bold. In it was shown a hermit carrying a cloth of azure with three golden fleurs-de-lis, given him by an angel. This he presented to the new queen for her husband, to use as his arms in place of those he bore.

The fleur-de-lis appearing below the frogs in the second tapestry was added in a repair. In making the extensive restorations in this area parts of the tapestry were misplaced, and a knowledge of armor helps in identifying the pieces. The misplacements were probably made in an attempt to fill space, since there are gaps in the scenes, some of which had to be filled in with non-pictorial areas. It would have taken an experienced jig-saw-puzzle enthusiast to place each piece in its proper position, even if
all the pieces had been available. Parts of the gilded and jeweled horse trapping of Clovis appear in three places, isolated and unrelated to the neighboring areas. The fleurs-de-lis take the place of Clovis's horse's head, the panache which surmounted the chamfron being above the fleur-de-lis. This panache with a large jewel is similar to the panache which surmounts the chamfron of Clovis's second horse (see illustration). There are many other puzzling features in the restored area. One sees only the hind part of one horse and the forelegs of a second horse. In another place there is a rein and bit but no horse. One of the knights is divided by the fleurs-de-lis, another knight's head is missing, and a kneeling man has lost his upper half.

Banners played an important part in war, pageant, and funeral in fifteenth-century France. In the tapestry of the Winged Stags a banner representing Saint Michael and the Dragon is of particular interest, for it shows the archangel wearing a complete harness, carrying a shield, and brandishing a fine knightly sword. Charles VII had borne the image of Saint Michael on his standard when he took the field, in consequence, it is said, of the appearance of Saint Michael on the bridge of Orleans to defend the city against an assault of the English. Louis XI, in accordance with the will of his father, founded the Order of Saint Michael.

The Hercules tapestry shows a harness of a type that was worn in pageants. It has some elements of fighting armor and some elements of parade armor. The shoulders and knees represent embossed lion heads which are purely decorative and of little defensive value. On the other hand, the shirt of mail with border links of latten and the brigandine body armor and sleeves are practical war harness. The armor is covered with red fabric, studded with stones and rivets, and enriched with applied brass bands.

The Museum has in its armor collection the right shoulder piece of a magnificent pageant armor in the form of a monster's head, which was made about 1535 for Guidobaldo II, Duke of Urbino. Our shoulder defense was at least temporarily a studio property of Titian; its mate appears in Titian's portrait of D. Claudius Caesar, one of twelve portraits of Roman emperors commissioned by Federigo Gonzaga to decorate his castle at Mantua. The designer of the Hercules tapestry must have had similar pageant armor to inspire him, although no pageant armor of this early period has survived.

The Family of Darius offers a striking comparison with a piece of equipment in the Museum's armor collection. The conqueror Alexander wears a helmet surmounted by a dragon which is similar to the parade casque of bronze gilded and colored that was made for Louis XIV. In the loan exhibition this casque is shown near the tapestry. Such comparisons, of which many could be made, are rewarding for the student of armor, and they also bring home to us the life-like accuracy of these woven scenes of mediaeval life.

The knights in tapestries are constant reminders that wherever there is a suit of armor there was once a living man. In tapestries one sees animated figures and the liveliness of color of the original armor. The knights are all vivacity and action, clenching their swords; doughty blows are given and received, banners wave and trumpets sound and feats of arms are performed. These colorful documents also answer for us the question of the wearability and comfort of armor. By examining tapestries in the neighborhood of armor, one is convinced that armor was practical, that it was built on a foundation of usefulness.

Apollyon, from one of the Apocalypse tapestries. His horse wears a caparison of mail.