MEDIEVAL ARMOR IN A PRAYER BOOK

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Myths die hard, so we are often told, in every realm of thought. Apparently because the age of chivalry and the literature it inspired belonged to the Middle Ages most visitors to the Museum associate the major part of the armor collection with that period. Actually medieval armor is so rare that only a small fraction of the extant armor is as early as the fourteenth century. Early medieval armor, in fact, with the exception of the steel helmet, was chiefly of mail, a type of defense, worn in the East until modern times, which it is extraordinarily difficult to date accurately. Complete plate armor was not fully developed much before the middle of the fourteenth century. It is true that the Metropolitan Museum's armor exhibition includes a generous share of the precious few fourteenth-century elements of extant armor. Nevertheless, this armor has, by fair wear and tear, lost its original polished or colored surface, or the original fabric with which it was covered, and the accessories worn with it: the sword belt and the surcoat with colored heraldic bearings have long since disappeared. Knowledge of the appearance of armor as it was worn in the Middle Ages must therefore come largely from contemporary sculpture, painting, and illuminated manuscripts. The present article is concerned with the representation of arms and armor in the Book of Hours illustrated by Jean Pucelle for Jeanne d'Évreux, as a gift from her husband, Charles IV of France.

The artist placed Biblical scenes in medieval settings. The Resurrection scene (p. 289) follows a traditional rendering with three soldiers shown more or less in their customary attitudes. Their military equipment includes two types of helmet (the chapel-de-fer and the basinet with latten ornamentation), two types of shield (heater-shaped and fist buckler), mail, including the coif, and the sword with shoulder belt. The chapel-de-fer is a normal example, with rounded bowl and prominent mid-ridge and wide brim. Montauban in France was renowned for the manufacture of this type of headpiece, which for centuries has been referred to in documents as "chaple de Montauban." The basinet are apparently enriched with latten ornaments not unlike the silver-gilt borders that appear on the sabaton of the armor of Charles IV of France (p. 288), which was, according to tradition, a votive offering in the cathedral of Chartres, and is now in the Musée de Chartres.

The shield of one of the soldiers is of particular interest, for it bears a lion's face. This badge is used with some license; instead of representing a Roman soldier the artist has shown soldiers wearing contemporary arms and armor, though he would obviously not attempt to identify a guardian at the tomb of Christ. But the lion's face as a personal badge is of some significance in our present study; it also appears on the sword belt of the effigy of Charles, Comte d'Etampes, in the royal abbey of Saint-Denis (p. 288), and Charles was the brother of Jeanne d'Évreux, for
ABOVE: Two views of a basinet; the bowl had eight applied fleurs-de-lis, as in the drawing, below left, of a stone sculpture in Chartres Cathedral. Right, sabaton from a boy’s armor, with applied silver-gilt ornaments. Musée de Chartres. LEFT: Detail, sword belt from the effigy of Charles d’Évreux, Comte d’Étampes, in the Royal Abbey at Saint-Denis. The lion’s face was the badge of this brother of Jeanne d’Évreux; lions’ faces appear on several pages of the Book of Hours, as opposite.
The Resurrection page. At the bottom are three soldiers with helmets (basinets and a chapel-defer) and mail, bearing swords and shields (the left-hand shield heater-shaped, the other a buckler).
whom our Book of Hours was made. The artist was no doubt familiar with the lion’s face as the personal badge of the queen’s brother, worn by his retainers.

The sword and buckler appear frequently in the manuscript. Foot soldiers, who were accustomed to use the sword without armor, necessarily developed skill in fencing. The “Eskirmye de Bokyler” or sword and buckler contest was already popular in the thirteenth century. The detail illustrated on this page shows the inside of the buckler, with grip and hollow for the hand, and the outside, with the embossedumbo. When not in use the buckler was carried at the side, probably by passing the grip over the sword hilt.

One of the soldiers in this scene also carries suspended from his waist belt a pair of fingered gauntlets. The hand was of necessity given much attention by the early armorer, who designed a defense with ingeniously articulated plates of steel to protect the wrist, metacarpus, knuckles, and fingers. The quillons alone form the guard of the early sword, so the knight had to rely mainly upon the gauntlet to protect his hand.

The visored basinet shown in the illustration of the Betrayal of Christ brings to mind a basinet in the Musée de Chartres (p. 288). This headpiece was long believed to have belonged to Philip IV, called the Fair (reigned 1285-1314), King of France and father of Charles IV. It came from the cathedral of Chartres, where it is said to have been placed by the French king as an offering to the Virgin Mary after the battle at Mons-en-Puelle, which he won over the Flemings on August 18, 1304. The helmet was originally enriched with applied borders and a crown, both of gold, which were removed during the French Revolution. The patination of the bowl shows where the crown and border were applied. There were eight fleurs-de-lis, alternately large and small, and the contour of the crown is clearly visible. It is of more than passing interest to note that the basinet on a stone head in Chartres Cathedral (p. 288), carved late in the thirteenth century, also shows an applied border and a prominent frontal fleur-de-lis. Although the stone sculpture has a visorless basinet it is known that basines à visières were also used in the thirteenth century. This remarkable sculpture gives credence to the attribution to Philip the Fair.

The Chartres basinet may, of course, date later in the fourteenth century, but in any event its original ornamentation and its provenance indicate that it was made for a king of France. We should note that it retains its pivoted and hinged visor, and it is precisely the type of visored basinet that is clearly shown in the Book of Hours of Jeanne d’Évreux. No extant basins have been dated in the first quarter of the fourteenth century, but it would be difficult to prove that the Chartres basinet could not be so dated.

The Chartres basinet owes its survival to the custom of suspending armor high up out of reach in a church. The knight was invested with his rank in the church from which he received his armor. His military activities were often in the interests of the church, and when he was victorious his armor was sometimes placed above an altar as a votive offering. After his death the knight’s armor was returned to the church, and the knight himself was buried there. It is mainly for these reasons that at least a little of the early armor has survived. Also from the cathedral of Chartres and now in the Chartres museum are some other elements of fourteenth-century armor; these comprise a pair of short-cuffed gauntlets, a right leg defense (the cuish and the knee cop of one plate with the wing), a right vambrace with the elbow cop, and the left sabaton for a boy, which we have already mentioned. Tradi-
The Betrayal, showing three types of helmets—visorless basinets, a visored basinet, and a chapel-defer. The weapons are spears, guisarmes, a berdiche, a crossbow, and swords. Below is a rustic till.
tion ascribes all these to Charles IV of France.

The crossbow was the principal infantry weapon in France, and so it is natural to see it represented twice in the manuscript, once being carried over the shoulder (p. 291), and again held by a Bowman in the act of bending the bow (right). The crossbow is of the stirrup type, and the Bowman has a hook suspended from the waist belt to aid in bending the bow. A foot was placed in the stirrup, the Bowman bent forward and attached the hook to the string. As he rose the string was pulled up to the nut, which was locked in position until released by pressing a long lever or trigger. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the crossbow was bent by the simple process of the Bowman lying on his back, pressing both feet against the bow, and drawing the string with both hands up to the notch. But the strength of the crossbow gradually increased. The wooden bow was replaced by a composite one of wood, horn, and sinew, and to bend the composite bow it was necessary to use leverage. It should be remembered that the bows used by the Genoese crossbowmen at Crécy (1346) were composite ones, bows of steel having been introduced later.

The various forms of tournament and joust took up much of the medieval knight’s time, and these military sports were represented frequently. Our Book of Hours represents a rustic tilt—two men mounted on goats tilting at the bunghole of a barrel (p. 291). This burlesque imitation is no doubt intended to call attention to the ludicrous pretensions that were involved in tournaments. It is likely that accounts of tournaments and single combats with lance and sword, mace and axe may have been as tedious to some people then as accounts of baseball games are to others now. Certainly tournaments seem to have been as satisfactory to their admirers as baseball games are to their fans today.

The study of the royal prayer book and the royal helmet and armor is an excellent example of the interrelation of the arts of the Middle Ages. The cult of the Virgin and the cult of chivalry grew up together. Many medieval authors revel in descriptions of rich armor. We are told that it was painted, gilded, covered with embroidered materials, ornamented with precious stones, decorated with monumental crests, gemmed crowns, and fluttering ribbons. These enrichments have survived only in rare instances. But we have vivid reminders of their splendor from the many contemporary illuminated manuscripts, like this Book of Hours, which show us how unbelievably rich were the knights’ costumes and armor. Here, too, we have reminders among the nameless marginal monsters that the knight not only pledged his lance and sword for the defense of the Christian faith but that he also set out on preposterous exploits to conquer dragons.