

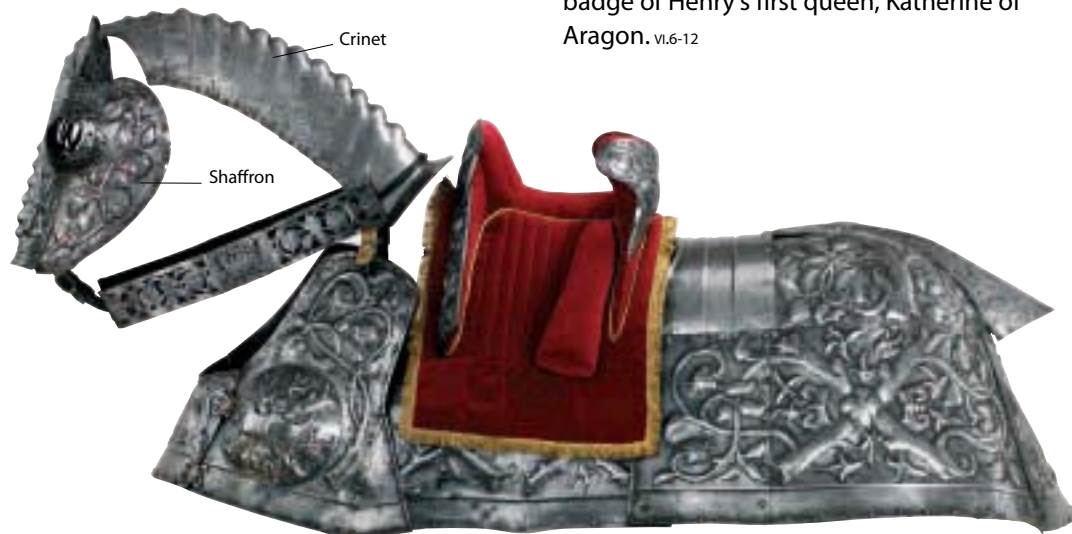
Horse armour

A knight counted his horses among his most valued possessions. A warhorse (destrier or courser) was essential for a knight, and a status symbol because of its price. A wealthy knight would protect his horse with a horse armour or bard.

Horse armour was fitted with padded fabric linings to prevent chafing.

An early 16th-century armour for man and horse weighed about 62 kg (130 lb).

It is a myth that knights had to be craned onto their horses. Armour was designed to be as light and flexible as possible so it might be comfortably worn for long periods. Knights mounted their horses in the normal way and could get up unaided after a fall.



Spurs

From the Roman period onwards, spurs were used to aid the cavalryman in controlling his horse. In medieval Europe they became symbols of knighthood. The earliest spurs, called prick spurs, had simple points.

From the 14th century spurs were usually fitted with pointed rowels (a spiked revolving disc).



Rowel spur, of iron sheathed in pierced brass, German, about 1490. One of a pair. vi.371

▼ This horse armour was a gift from the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I to King Henry VIII, about 1510.

Originally the bard was silvered and gilded but none of this decoration has survived. Each element of the decoration refers to something specific about the King Henry VIII. The pomegranate, for example, was the family badge of Henry's first queen, Katherine of Aragon. vi.6-12

Horse armour, probably made at Greenwich about 1515. vi.14-16



Shaffron vi.488

Shaffron

Often the only piece of plate armour worn by a horse, the shaffron was worn on a horse's head to protect it from injury. In a charge the horse's head was the leading part of the animal and very vulnerable to injury.

Saddle

Safer saddles were developed towards the end of the Middle Ages. The front arch was made higher and wider, and protected by saddle steels giving protection to the midriff and thigh area. The high pommel (front) and cantle (rear) also helped to hold the rider in place.

Stirrups

Stirrups reached Europe from Asia in the 8th century AD, and helped provide the knight with a more secure seat during the charge.



Stirrup, 10th century. vi.128