

The Visual Language of Power: The Role of Equestrian Armor in Renaissance Europe

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INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

The hollow shells of human and equine armors are evocative, and continue to fascinate us, even centuries later. Visitors from around the world flock to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Arms and Armor Gallery on a daily basis, where two of the bards¹ examined here are displayed. Most of these visitors do not know that the collection is among the finest in the world—they admire the beauty of the objects. Many visitors have a highly romanticized idea of chivalry and tend to believe armor was only a medieval phenomenon, not realizing that the bulk of the items originated during the Early Modern period. If, however, we can penetrate past the rosy haze, the armors still have much to communicate to us about the time they occupied—a time that was actually fraught with tension and unrest.

Armor's origins are humble—sturdy, plain materials such as leather (and later steel) that were utilized for protection. By the Early Modern period, however, armor had evolved technologically as well as aesthetically. Sixteenth-century scholars can point to this period as the apogee where armor became works of art, created by a handful of skilled artisans, such as Kunz Lochner and the Negroli family. Parade armor would not only be decorative, but would come to be used as a medium to make specific statements among Europe's most elite citizens. In particular, equestrian armor's larger size would provide a perfect canvas for these statements. The increased decoration of equestrian armor would prove to be one of many expressions of a multi-layered "visual language of power." On the surface, all art commissioned by the nobility at this time would have the ability to "shock and awe" the general population by its opulence, particularly through tapestries, *imprese*, paintings, and of course armor, adhering to certain conventions. These messages were not playful, however—they were a way to maintain stability in an increasingly tumultuous time. These messages primarily announced dynastic ties, personal strength, and the right to rule, although there is one notable exception which will be examined within this thesis.

Equestrian armor on the battlefield had declined by the mid-fourteenth century because it was clearly impractical. It would continue to be used for ceremonies and processions, aiding Europe's elite in projecting an air of authority. In fact, it would be used to wage a form of psychological warfare in the political arena until the mid-seventeenth century. Nobles employed the decorations on their horse's armor to project



a carefully constructed image of themselves to others. This was only one part of a growing obsession with personal statements at this time among Europe's elite, but the most expensive. Parade ground armor, unlike contemporary tournament armor, did not need to be fully functional and thus allowed for greater originality in making a statement, incorporating methods such as etching, for example. These statements were driven by a need to maintain order in an increasingly turbulent time.

Common messages contained within the language of power focused on family affiliations, physical strength, and the right to rule. These issues also played out in the nobility's interpersonal and international relationships. Noblemen were extremely concerned with covering themselves with glory and behaving with honor. Glory and honor were concepts exacerbated by the increasing belligerence as a whole across Europe. The popularity of Roman artifacts, combined with Roman ideology which became prevalent in political thought, gave rise to two popular styles for armor: *alla'antica*, which means "in the ancient style" and *alla'eroica*, which means "in the heroic style." These names suggest the images that the nobility presented invoked heroes of classical Greek and Roman legend, and Roman emperors, which lent the wearer an air of dignity and *gravitas*.

There are many surviving pieces of armor which are incomplete, mismatched, or come from unknown origins. This thesis concentrates on interpreting the subtext of symbols present on extant, homogenous bards manufactured in the sixteenth century with a documented provenance. The decorated bard would not survive into the seventeenth century as a fashion statement. An examination of these sets will

aid in understanding how individual nobility perceived their own role in society, and what visual elements they considered crucial to conveying their power during this period. Power centered most often upon dynastic concerns—first by extending territories and influence through alliances within the nobility, and secondly by jealously guarding hereditary privileges. All nobles, no matter how minor, displayed an overriding obsession with personal glory and honor. Glory was often obtained through feats in war, with skills honed through military service. In addition, it could be found in martial pursuits such as hunting. The skillful warrior, possessed of both power and dominion, would be part and parcel of the symbolism projected through the bard by the minority who could afford them.

Steel plate armor projected authority, even as it became increasingly rare on the battlefield, as did the horse. Despite cavalry's declining role in Renaissance warfare, the horse continued to occupy its former position as a status symbol—a direct holdover from the medieval period, when the high cost of upkeep had placed the horse beyond most of the population's reach. The image of the horse as an elite symbol, bolstered by the survival of the fourth-century equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius,¹ ushered in a thriving sub-genre of artistic expression and noble power in the form of equestrian art and monuments. A horse of quality and breeding was a commodity that would increase a nobleman's standing, and even cement alliances when exchanged as gifts between rulers.² Excellent horses were costly: for example, an Arabian horse owned by Lorenzo de Medici was valued at the staggering price of 100 florins after his death in a surviving inventory. The equestrian breeding revolution that occurred between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries would see a gradual change from the warhorse, where size and mass carried the day, to what R.H.C. Davis refers to as the "courtly horse,"³ desired for its air of refinement and spirited temperament.

The six bards I have chosen for this study have been taken as representative of contemporary decorative customs, providing valuable insights into how the nobility saw themselves and the qualities they wished to emphasize to others—a deliberate fashioning of self-image. Taken together with the courtly horse, these messages indicated the owner's position in relation to his subjects, allies and enemies on the volatile chessboard of early modern Europe. Understanding these messages sheds light on the nobility's stratagems to gain and hold power. Early Modern Europe's unique crises during the sixteenth century gave the nobility a desperate need to seek an illusion of stability. Parade armor filled the bill admirably, first by reaching back in time to the Middle Ages and the ideals of chivalry, and then by combining those with classical Roman motifs.

As it currently stands, the subject of equestrian armor is a little-researched field. In general, armor studies have dwelt primarily on human pieces, with equestrian armor as little more than a footnote, no doubt due to the fact we have so few survivors. In 1922, Bashford Dean, a curator at the Metropolitan, estimated that only 37 complete bards survived in museums worldwide at that time.

As a field, armor studies first began in 1855, with the publication of John Hewitt's work, *Ancient Armour And Weapons In Europe: From The Iron Period Of The Northern Nations To The End Of The Thirteenth Century*, and the emphasis on human armor first and foremost. The most ground-breaking treatment regarding the subject of equestrian armor is the lavishly illustrated catalogue to the recent exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, entitled *The Armored Horse in Europe: 1480-1620*,⁴ which aided in providing leads for my work. However, while the authors discuss the examples' provenance, they do not take the next logical step: that of deciphering the symbols present. Armor needs to be removed from the curio cabinet, and examined as an important historical artifact of the early modern European political arena. From there, it needs to be integrated with contemporary intellectual trends, and placed within the context of its owners' lives. Nor should parade armor simply be relegated to art history—while it does have a place there, it should also incorporate intellectual, social, and even military history when it is examined.

THE BARDS

The bards will be grouped in chronological order in order to chart the developments. First, the statements made when gifting bards will be examined. Secondly, we will see the originally superficial statements made by the nobles commissioning the first symbolic bards. Finally, we will witness the evolution of the bards' decoration into multi-layered statements.

THE ART OF WAR

Despite the armors examined here being ceremonial, the methods of warfare need to be discussed, as there is a direct correlation to the decorative. Warfare changed between the medieval and early modern eras as firepower was introduced to the battlefield. Fighting with projectiles was first done with archers and trebuchets during the medieval period. It would take time to develop effective cannons and handguns during the early modern era. Because of these innovations, new arrangements had to be made. This led to a greater dependence on foot soldiers, especially pikemen, who would be set in disciplined squares, with cannon supporting them during the latter half of the fifteenth cen-

tury. The *trace italienne* was built to withstand siege warfare better than its predecessors, creating a need for engineers, drawn from the lower classes, who could defeat the obstacle. Armies became increasingly professionalized, and mercenaries were used, rather than nobles with ties to the land. The Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) laid the groundwork for this shift to the modernization of armies, which would be comprised of a larger percentage of commoners.

Cavalry, long a staple of medieval engagements, was reduced to a subordinate role, which left the nobility seeking an outlet for their equestrian skills. Now, they found themselves increasingly alienated from their old way of life, at least on the battlefield.⁵ Noble commanders, envisioning themselves as Caesar's spiritual descendants, began to see themselves as generals, and would lead more from the command tent, increasing the need for talented map-makers and books on strategy. Wars could be fought in a more controlled and precise manner—with men organized into units, and the ancient Roman legions became the Early Modern model. The need for the nobility to maintain their equestrian skills and find new outlets for covering themselves with honor and glory would later lead to the art of *ménage* (now known as dressage), which would be touted as a rediscovered ancient martial art. Horses were now used primarily for heavy cavalry as a shock tactic, and light cavalry was only used on occasion, mostly to harass retreating foes.

By the fifteenth century, the use of steel plate on horses, especially decorative items, could only have been for symbolic import. Steel plate was obsolete by the fourteenth century. In areas facing Turkish invaders, such as Austria,

battles now demanded increased mobility, which necessitated a change in protective gear. The Ottoman cavalymen used metal plates attached to mail shirts, which were lighter, providing them with more speed. For the Europeans, heavy plate steel gave way to *cuir bouilli*, armor which is made of leather boiled with wax, which became increasingly prevalent after 1425. *Cuir bouilli* was easier to produce, lighter in weight, and less expensive.

Yet the production of plate armor would continue through the period. Johannes Huizinga's contention that the medieval period's conventions continued into the early modern period gets a strong boost here. Chivalry was not dead in Europe. The cult of chivalry, celebrated with themed tournaments, would continue for some time. These contests gave the nobility an outlet for their equestrian and military training that they could not use on the battlefield, and enabled them to gain glory and honor.

For example, while Henry VIII would be a Renaissance prince in many respects, he also was an avid joustier. Chivalry was a cherished illusion of the elite, and plate armor was a key component. A man's suit of armor was already expensive, but the cost of a bard was a luxury only a select few could afford.

The steel bard was only for the very powerful—men whose lives will be examined here. The list includes a Holy Roman Emperor, a king, an archduke, a duke, and finally, a newly created general. In some cases, these personalities are well known to the general population, and others are relatively obscure to all but the specialist. But their common ground is having extant, homogenous bards that are complete

and have survived the test of time. In addition, all of the men had fairly well-documented lives as contemporary public figures, which will aid in explicating the symbols and designs that were chosen for their bard, and where applicable, their matching harness.

PARTS OF THE BARD

The full bard encompassed a large number of pieces, which drove up the cost. Bards evolved over time and reached their most complex and costly form in the sixteenth century. Each part will be

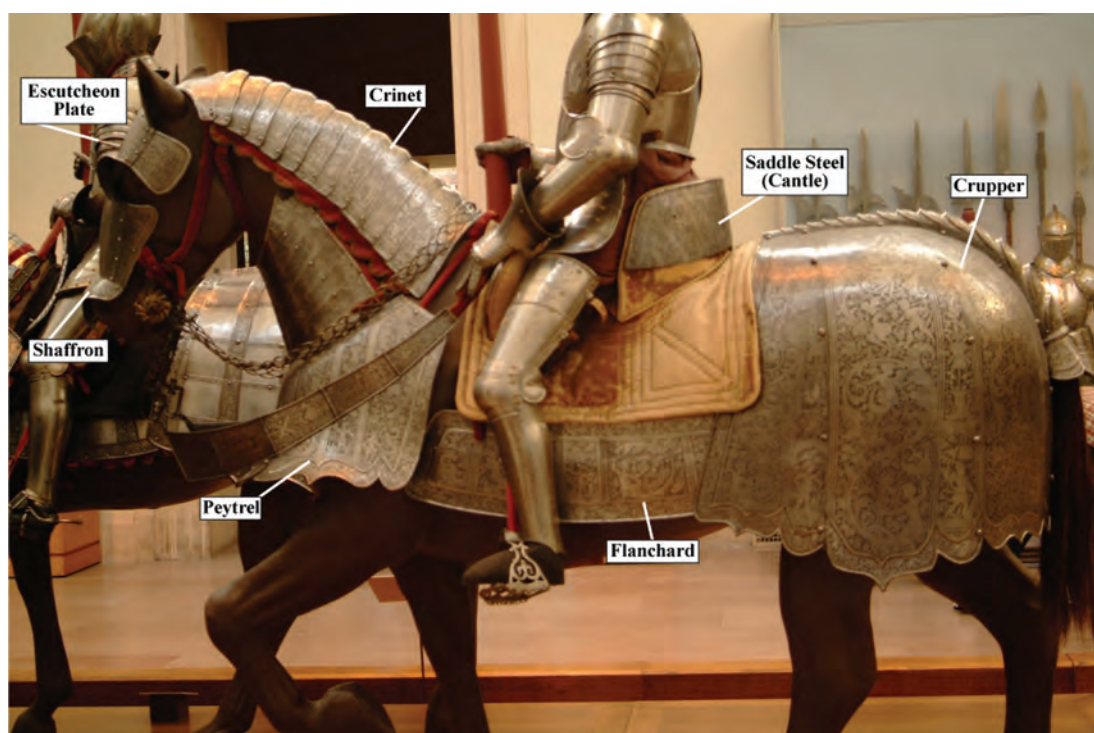


Figure 1. Parts of the Bard.

examined, and a brief history will be given where appropriate, in order to fully understand the mechanics involved.

A shaffron (also called a chamfron) protected the head from injury and began to appear around the middle of the thirteenth century. The shaffron covered the horse's head. Rondels and escutcheon plates were placed in the forehead area of the shaffron. These were decorative, but also reinforced the shaffron. One of the most popular designs for rondels was a small spike, giving the horse the appearance of the mythical unicorn. Another popular decoration was the escutcheon plate. These were usually shield shaped, and nobles would have their personal devices or initials engraved on them. Ear guards protected the animal's ears and could be rather whimsical at times—one surviving example transforms the horse's ears into a pair of dolphins. Cheek protectors or side plates were common options for the shaffron, as was a poll plate. This piece would attach to the shaffron and would protect the area between and behind the horse's ears, and be fastened to the crinet as well. The crinet shields the top of the horse's neck. Crinets sometimes had articulated steel plates to allow for flexibility, and would rest along the top of the horse's neck. If the crinet had an additional piece of mail or plate to protect the horse's throat, it was called a closed crinet, since it encircled the entire neck.

To protect the horse's chest, a peytrel was used. The saddle would have the reinforcement of saddle steels in the pommel and cantle of the saddletree. The pommel is the front part of the seat of the saddle, and the cantle is the rear. These echoed the war saddles of the medieval period. The saddle steels protected the rider's vitals, and offered additional surfaces for decoration. In fact, the shaffron and saddle steels were often produced as small sets for lesser nobles, which would be added to a *cuir bouilli* bard or used with a caparison.⁶

HORSE AS SYMBOL AND THE BREEDING REVOLUTION

Time has swept away the nobles and their horses, leaving only the artifacts in its wake. It would be so easy to simply cite the bards by owner, area of manufacture, and relegate them to a museum catalogue. But the steel only tells part of the story. The more difficult and ephemeral part to capture is the culture of the horse, which played a large role in the early modern nobility's perception of themselves. The horse was not merely a conveyance, but a partner in projecting power and its' riders role.

The most famous literary passage for a horse communicating its rider's role (via its color) is found in Revelation 6, which contains descriptions of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Conquest rode a white horse, War had a red one, Famine uses a black one, and Death's pale horse

appears bruised. White stands for purity and light, and red for blood. Black stood for sickness in this context. Death's horse is self-explanatory. The medieval and early modern nobleman would have understood this innately.

Synonymous with knighthood and nobility, the cult of chivalry lived on past its medieval origin. In fact, chivalry has an etymology which betrays its grounding in an elite equestrian culture. It is derived from the French word *cheval*, which means horse. The horse was the most significant visual indicator of status for the elite, and a noble would look for "horses of admired colors, such as white, blood bay, and spotted"⁷ to further the image of power. Contemporary advice dispensed by Thomas Blundeville, which a nobleman might have followed when choosing a mount, points out that "of all colours, then these be the best, the browne Bay, the dapple Gray, the bright Bay, the Rone, the white Liard, and the pure Blacke with a white starre in his forehead. And in every wise, let the Stallion be all of one colour, and that be very cleare and bright...."⁸ Certain colors were to be avoided; for example, Blundeville advises against pied horses. A pied horse has large patches of contrasting colors, and would be known today as a pinto. Blundeville saw it as a sign of beauty if the horse has a white or black mark, such as a stocking or cornet on the horse's legs.

As Yuval Noah Harari points out, for all men of noble birth, "their story begins not with birth, but with their entry into the martial world—into history. And the boundary of history is often marked by the horse."⁹ Mounted cavalry service was part of their definition of masculinity. The horse remained symbolic of power and privilege, but the horse itself would undergo significant changes between the medieval and early modern period, culminating in a breeding revolution between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The bulkier warhorse would give way to the refined, lean mount, bred out of the fiery little Barb, highly refined Arabian, and athletic Iberian stocks.

In the early modern era, as the horse grew increasingly vulnerable to firepower and literally became cannon fodder, horses would remain on battlefields. Primarily, these would be the draught animals necessary to pull the wagons containing cannon, or for a heavy cavalry charge, suitable only as a shock tactic. The nobility used their horses when off the battlefield for hunting and other leisurely pursuits. The ability to tame a fractious stallion and bring it to heel was a potent symbol of authority and dominion among the European upper and lower classes alike. However, the high cost of a well-trained, well-bred horse put it beyond the reach of all but the elite.

The Turks, unlike their European counterparts, preferred mares because they were easier to handle in battle with their herd instinct and also "because stallions made too much noise."¹⁰ The mare's calm temperament was a great

advantage in battle. In fact, a favorite technique for causing confusion in European armies would be to let loose a few mares that were in heat. It would not be until the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that geldings would become more popular among the European noblemen due to their calmer nature. This was an essential component in order to master the art of *ménage* (known today as dressage) that became a new hallmark of status during this period.

Now that the nobility needed a new outlet for their now obsolete battlefield equestrian skills, they turned to *ménage*. This new art claimed to look back to the ancient Romans and Greeks. The rediscovery of Xenophon's *On Horsemanship*¹¹ by Federigo Grisone, who had it published, was key to this craze. Xenophon's work is the foundation for dressage. While Xenophon lived and wrote long before the introduction of the saddle or stirrup, his advice for handling a horse with kindness is timeless. Grisone's riding academy in Naples was the perfect place to disseminate the classical horseman's treatise. The first edition of the book, which was in Greek, was printed in Florence in 1516. The Latin edition followed in 1534. Xenophon advocated cultivating the horse's nature. The discipline of *ménage* did this by copying the movements which come naturally to a horse at play. *Ménage* is now called dressage and is performed worldwide today. *Ménage* was seen as a courtly yet martial art, and embraced enthusiastically, culminating in equestrian ballets during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, choreographed by great riding masters such as Antoine de Pluvinel in France.

Ménage was not the only way the nobility maintained and celebrated their equestrian skills. The rediscovery of Xenophon also inspired authors to write many equine-inspired books, which were very popular. The first to complete their own book on horsemanship was Federigo Grisone, who published *Gli ordini di cavalcare* in 1550, which gave pointers on how to tame a horse and make him more tractable, though some of his advice is clearly not in the horse's best interest—and some of the illustrations of bits the horse master provides would actually damage the horse's mouth. Grisone was translated by Thomas Blundeville, and would be instrumental for Blundeville writing his own 1565 treatise, *The Four Chiefest Offices Belonging to Horsemanship*, published in London, which addressed the mistakes he saw in Grisone's manual. Gervase Markham's *Cavalrice; or, The English horseman: containing all the art of horsemanship* was published in London in 1593 and went through many subsequent editions, for Markham was a popular author. Numerous bit¹² books appeared (which contain line drawings) explaining each type's use, and one German example was even dedicated to Johannes Ernst, whose bard appears later in this thesis. Equine anatomy was examined for the first time by Carlo

Ruini in his *Anatomia et medicina equorum nova*, which included skeletal and musculature illustrations. A new method of training was now introduced, which incorporated the animal's responses as emotional, thinking creatures.¹³ Prior to this, the term 'breaking' was very much a literal one, and great damage was done to animals due to ignorance.

The horse would not only be seen as more of a partner and companion, but would also come to symbolize passion and lust, an image that began in Late Antiquity, during the fourth century, shown in the *Psychomachia* by Prudentius. Alciati's *Emblemata* would also use this image. Correspondingly, the bridle and bit would come to be symbols of restraint. Such images can be seen in Shakespeare's play *Henry VI*, the first part appearing in 1591.

The horse was a viable, potent symbol in the language of power. *Ménage* and the corresponding equestrian ballets ensured the nobility continued to have an equestrian outlet that would be exclusive to the upper echelons of society. *Ménage* also contributed wonderfully to the illusion of control and the ability to rule, so crucial to those in power who needed to put on a show for the general population during special occasions. In the next section, we will look at the language of power peers used among each other.

LANGUAGE OF POWER

The nobleman's ability to control his horse, always a stallion, was an overt symbol of dominance, and much thought went into choosing the best mount. The designs chosen for the armor were more subtle, but no less deliberate. In fact, one way to get at the deeper meaning of these symbols is to study the *impresa*, a popular device originating in Italy. The *impresa* became popular among those who participated in tournaments, and caught the attention of other nobles as well. The *impresa* had a symbol and motto chosen by the individual to make a personal statement. The *impresa* was similar in some respects to heraldry in being used for identification. However, heraldry was far simpler in its execution and planning than the *impresa*. Heraldry was composed of symbols, and by the early modern period was often based on inherited family designs, split in very specific ways to indicate marriages and alliances. All *impresa* were crafted by individuals. The best way to look at this in modern terms would be to see it as a brand, similar to a marketing device. An *impresa* had two parts, "an image (*corpo*) and a motto (*anima*), they expressed an individual's qualities, situation or his aspirations."¹⁴ More than one *impresa* could be employed and fell into two categories, one "which an individual could use throughout the course of his life (*generali*"), and one alluding to specific events (*particolari*)."¹⁵ The *particolari* could be "rather more difficult to interpret

without knowing the specific circumstances.”¹⁶ This may be another reason why some of the artwork on the bards and even other artifacts is perceived as simply decorative in today’s day and age—we lack the context. Yet, many contemporary treatises appeared to decipher the *impresa*, since the invention and translation of the *impresa* “provided the courtier with an opportunity to display his erudition, creativity...and thereby establish his reputation at court.”¹⁷ The mottoes came from classical sources such as Pliny, for example. The images had great significance as well and referred to various folklore and legends. Nobles also chose iconic animals, such as those characterized as strong, dangerous, or courageous, as suitable for *impresa*.

The *impresa* was to be understood only by peers. In *The Courtier*, Castiglione describes a game in which nobles try to devise *impresa*. Many treatises were published on the subject outlining conventions and expectations, including Andrea Alciati’s 1531 work, the *Emblemata*, which is still consulted as a primary source for emblem studies. The *impresa* was popular, probably because as Alan Young writes, “for those of social and intellectual status, it provided a suitably elitist form of expression, one involving the comprehension of a second language (usually Latin), the recognition of verses tags (particularly from Classical authors), the recognition of iconographic symbols, and the recognition of puns and witty verbal and visual conceits.”¹⁸ The conventions regarding their artwork would influence the bards’ designs.

However, the *impresa* were the only outlet for self-expression. An excellent example would be the Tudor courtiers, who engaged in “elaborate symbolism, much of it still not fully understood, [that] was used to convey more subtle messages.”¹⁹ This was done through jewelry and personal badges. The rest of Europe experimented as well, judging by the popularity of costume books. In addition, messages could be transmitted on a grander scale through pageants and parades.²⁰

The language of power was best conveyed symbolically. By carefully choosing the colors and cut of clothing, a noble could say volumes about himself to his peers. Add to this jewelry and personal badges, and any royal court was incredibly rich in messages through possessions and lively in its political dealings. Knighting ceremonies, coronations, elevations in rank and christenings added to the glamour along with parades, plays, masques, dances, costumes, and of course, armor. And some did not stop with portable items: for example, Henry VIII designed his own estates to function as a dazzling backdrop to complement his power.

THE BARDS’ PROVENANCE

The bards chosen for this study were selected based on their provenance, completeness, and the availability of the

individual owner’s historical record. Many bards are not complete, and when parts are lacking, it is difficult to determine their message. Museums are finding that the suits and bards in their collections might have been composed of two or more sets by former curators, especially during the Victorian period, when armor became extremely popular. These displays looked impressive to the public, but the exhibits were not authentic. Fortunately there has been, over the last eighty years, a revolution in examining armor and attempting to assign artist and provenance, resulting in more authentic displays. If the provenance is not known and cannot be determined, that causes the message to be lost.

The sixteenth century, judging by the documentary evidence, was marked by a general feeling of crisis and social instability. The Reformation challenged long-held religious views, and rulers were eager to gain territory outside of inherited borders—the push for the New World and the Italian Wars are excellent examples of this desire. The visual language of power, especially on the bard, was used only by the upper echelon of the noble population. Dynastic concerns and holding territory, whether inherited or conquered, was of paramount importance, and the message had to reinforce these goals. The visual language of power on armor was meant to counteract societal instability by symbolically conveying a sense of power and control. The nobleman’s peers were the primary audience for these messages. They would be cognizant of the symbolism and able to decipher it.

BARDS—PART I: DYNASTIC POLITICS

The steel plate bard with a unified statement appears to have begun with the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I’s gift of a bard to Henry VIII in 1509. Maximilian followed up approximately eight years later with his own bard in 1517. The trend seems to have ended approximately a century later, judging by the artifacts which have survived. Maximilian’s contributions foreshadowed the elaborate bards to come, but they lacked the subtlety and layers of meaning that later examples would come to possess. The Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian was a devoted armor collector and enthusiast, so it is little wonder he used armor to convey a powerful image of himself to others, and as a gift for Henry. This idea would be appropriated by a variety of rulers occupying different areas of Europe, but all with the same aim: to project power and, when necessary, the right to rule. The armors that will be examined were made in several different locales, but all exhibit the unmistakable influence of Roman artistic sensibilities and Roman ideology, influenced by the collecting of antiquities and in an attempt to promote an image of *gravitas*.

Henry VIII, King of England (1491-1547)

Henry, who was never meant to be king, ascended the English throne on April 21, 1509 after the death of his father, Henry VII. His older brother, Arthur, had died seven years before. In June 1509, Henry married his brother's widow, Katherine of Aragon, and both were crowned approximately two weeks later.

Two years later, Henry received a wedding gift from his wife's grandfather, the Emperor Maximilian, who headed the chivalric Order of The Golden Fleece. Henry had become a member of The Golden Fleece while still Prince of Wales. The gift was a splendid suit of horse armor, nicknamed the 'Burgundian Bard,' which can still be seen in the Tower of London. Originally it was gilded and silvered and must have been stunning when new. Henry's Tudor rose and Katherine of Aragon's pomegranate badges are prominent on the design. Other badges include the Tudor portcullis and Katherine's arrows. Clearly, it was a celebration of the union of the two houses. Maximilian also included the special cross of the chivalric order he presided over, adding his own mark to the gift. By the creation of this gift, Maximilian was setting the precedent for the bard to advertise family affiliations in its design. The bard, unlike later examples, has nothing personally significant to Henry, nor are there any deeper levels of meaning in the symbols.

Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor (1459-1519)

An entire style of armor would come to be known as "Maximilian" in honor of this man, so it is only fitting that he was the originator of the symbolic bard trend. He considered himself the "last true knight" and even wrote a chivalric romance titled "Freydal." Maximilian drew heavily upon the chivalric tradition in order to fashion his public image. His marriage to Maria, Charles the Bold's daughter in 1477, exposed the nineteen year old Maximilian to the Burgundian lifestyle, with its emphasis on chivalry and tournaments and it had a profound effect on the young man. Much of his education in art and culture came from his exposure to the Burgundian court, and he was an avid huntsman and jouster. Maximilian also would become the Grand Master of two chivalric orders: his father's Order of Saint George, and also the Burgundian Order of the Golden Fleece.

Maximilian's lavish lifestyle and system of patronage to a group of artists, craftsmen, and learned men can be compared in some fashion to his contemporary, Lorenzo de Medici. However, the artists attached to Maximilian's court rendered their works in a different style from the de Medici court. Often, pieces that came from Maximilian's court are seen as more medieval, but this was simply a stylistic differ-

ence. Lorenzo's court artists produced results seen today as distinctly Renaissance in style, from artists such as Michelangelo. Maximilian's artists included Durer, for example, who would also influence Renaissance art. It has been posited that Lorenzo's court was the pinnacle of the Renaissance, drawing as it did both artists and humanists into its orbit, who were influenced by art and ideas from ancient Rome and Greece, reaching into the past to create something new. Maximilian, to his credit, is beginning to develop new sensibilities by developing art as a political tool.

In 1493, a year after Lorenzo de Medici's death, Maximilian was elected King of the Romans. In 1508, he was crowned as Holy Roman Emperor. He prided himself on a grasp of various languages, which included Latin, German, French, and Flemish. He also claimed to know Italian and English. While not necessarily fluent, this indicated a cosmopolitan flair. In addition, Maximilian would also initiate a craze for the collecting of art and artifacts within the elite circles of Europe, and commission works of art intended to bolster his public image.

Maximilian thought often about his image not only in his own day, but also in the historical record. To this end, he conceived a design for a grand tomb, with carvings of his own exploits and famous ancestors. He commissioned learned men to research his family tree, wanting it to be detailed back to the time of Noah and the Flood. In his book *Weisskunig*, the protagonist (a thinly veiled version of Maximilian), explains that a man "who does not make for himself in his life remembrance, he has after his death no remembrance and is forgotten with the toll of the bell."²¹

He constantly thought about posterity and about his dynasty, two concerns which drove him. His son Philip would marry Joanna of Castile, and influence the Spanish Habsburgs, culminating in Charles V who would follow in Maximilian's footsteps by becoming another Holy Roman Emperor (Charles' father would die too soon to see that honor). Maximilian's daughter Margaret was less successful in marriage. Maximilian first tried to wed her to the French prince, but it fell through on France's part. Then he married her to Juan, Ferdinand and Isabella's heir. Juan died before she gave birth to their son, who was stillborn. Then Maximilian made a marriage for her to the Duke of Savoy. Her childlessness would deny Maximilian further generations to control.

Maximilian left his descendants a legacy of using art to advance political agendas, something that the Habsburgs (whom his son had married into), would use consciously within the next century. Maximilian sought the best artists and craftsmen of his day for his image building projects. Kolman Helmschmid, a master armourer based in Augsburg, was commissioned for a number of Maximilian's armors, and produced a stunning bard for Maximilian around 1517-1518, only a year or two before his death. So far, this has been the

earliest symbolic bard made for its purchaser that I have been able to find, suggesting that Maximilian began the tradition of a parade bard with messages contained in the designs. The bard has Hercules and Samson, an overt message of strength—later examples contain more subtlety with their symbolism. Maximilian would bequeath this bard to his grandson, Charles V. The bard has been somewhat damaged in part due to the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, predominantly on the right side. The bard features an open filigree style, making it appear rather delicate, which is a deliberate contrast to the subject matter depicted. Various episodes from the strongmen's lives appear on this bard. There is Hercules slaying the Nemean lion, for example, and Samson bringing down the columns to crush the Philistines at their banquet. As a cautionary note, it also depicts the classic scene of Delilah cutting Samson's hair. In addition to showcasing strength, however, it also shows redemption in Samson's final, sacrificial act. The dolphin's head that serves as a tail piece also symbolizes the resurrection. The dolphin was the most commonly portrayed fish, and sometimes was used as a stand-in for Jonah's whale. The emperor had apparently been struggling with the issue of his mortality for the last few years of his life, even going so far as to travel with a coffin. Maximilian's bard would begin a new trend, emulated throughout Europe. However, those who followed would expand upon the bard and make larger statements, such as Maximilian's grandnephew, Ferdinand II, whose bard is an unusual one in the fact it is not steel plate.

Ferdinand II, Archduke of Tyrol (1529-1595)

Ferdinand II was part of the powerful Habsburg family, which produced several Holy Roman Emperors during his lifetime—first, Charles V, Ferdinand's uncle, and after Charles' abdication, Ferdinand's own father. The Habsburgs controlled a large portion of Europe, thanks in part to Maximilian I, who received Austria and its associated territories with the Treaty of Pressburg in 1491. These eastern territories would be inherited by Ferdinand's father, who was made king of Hungary and Bohemia in 1526 and also ruled the region called Further Austria, which included the Tyrol. Ferdinand II would become Archduke of Tyrol in 1564, but his first appointment would be as the governor of Bohemia.

While Maximilian I's bard has a straightforward message and the artwork is very Germanic, Ferdinand's garniture boasts a decidedly exotic flavor. This truly spectacular garniture is now housed in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. It was created between 1547 and 1550. I argue for the 1547 date because that was the year Ferdinand I put down a religious rebellion in Bohemia and sent his son, Ferdinand II, to take charge of the new government there. Such an occasion would have necessitated parade armor.

This garniture draws beautifully from both Roman and Turkish influences to create a statement of power.

Ferdinand's garniture boasted Turkish influence with its highly unusual patterned mail. The Habsburg court would hold tournaments where participants would dress in a Turkish manner, as a way for the victorious to display arms and armor captured from their Ottoman enemies. This was important to keep up the spirits of the Europeans, and to celebrate victory against the Ottoman Turks. Ferdinand's garniture here is meant to evoke military triumph. However, it was also to inspire respect and fear in this case, since a strong stand needed to be taken in light of the recent rebellion. The Turks were known for savagery to their defeated enemies—they would impale them and leave the stakes with their victim stuck in the ground as a warning.

Only eighteen years old at the time, Ferdinand II would need to offset any perceived lack of experience and send a clear message to the population regarding his father's recent victory. Ferdinand wisely announces all of his affiliations by displaying the ducal arms of the Austrian Hapsburgs on his saddlecloth. Ferdinand himself might have had some input into its design—he would later become a well-known armor enthusiast in his own lifetime. The origin of the bard and harness was Milan²², which was known for its high quality of craftsmanship and the ability of the artists to mimic any style currently in vogue. Milanese armor was so well-made and highly sought after that Milan's government strictly controlled its export through licenses, viewing their armor as an actual weapon that they did not want to fall into the wrong hands. The only other Turkish themed armor that has survived to date appears to be the Negroli helmet with a bound Turk lying on his back that forms the crest, made for Charles V in 1545, commemorating his victory at Tunis a decade earlier.

The Roman influences of this garniture are clearly an allusion to his father's position as King of the Romans and also suggest he is a conqueror like Caesar. The horse's shaf-fron has foliage accents surrounding a face that looks like the "Green Man." The Green Man was a familiar figure "across most of Europe, where he is associated with spring fertility festivals and the power to make rain."²³ This may indicate that Ferdinand was declaring not only his sovereignty over his people, but perhaps declaring dominance over the natural world as well. The Green Man also protected people from evil, so Ferdinand can be seen as making a tacit promise to his new subjects: if they will obey, they will not have to fear.

Ferdinand continues Maximilian's theme of strength with this bard, albeit through different avenues. Maximilian, as a Holy Roman Emperor, saw no need to announce his family affiliations. Here, Ferdinand II uses his family's arms in order to show his right to rule, as Johannes Ernst would in his bard for the following year's Diet of Augsburg.

Ernst, unlike the other men examined here, would not be exalting a victory or promotion when he had his bard created for the 1548 Diet of Augsburg. He was a rebel in the eyes of his earthly lord, Charles V. The year before, Ernst and his family had been involved in the Schmakaldic War, a rebellion of Lutheran princes against Charles. Ernst's bard shows a completely different point of view of power. Rather than exalting either sheer physical or dynastic power, this bard instead shows submission to divine power—to God's overarching authority and explicitly trumpets God's grace. However, in political terms, Ernst's standing was far less secure at the Diet, and grace would not be forthcoming.

The Emperor first convened the Diet in February 1548 at Augsburg to attempt reconciliation of the Catholic and Protestant princes that ruled the various territories of Germany. The Diet was a *gebarnischer Reichstag*, which is an armored congress. With memories of the conflict still so fresh, an armored congress was necessary for both sides to feel secure.

Johannes Ernst, twenty-six years old at the time of the Diet, represented his family's Saxony holdings, and clearly agreed with his father's religious convictions. He was the son of a defeated foe, but his bard does not reflect that. Rather, it challenges Charles. His father might be a prisoner, the future uncertain, but Johannes does not back down—it is overt in its Protestant sentiments. Johannes' father, absent due to his capture, had never been a supporter of the Habsburgs and did not hide the fact. Eighteen years prior to the Battle of Muhlberg, he refused to vote for Ferdinand I as the King of the Romans. Ferdinand received the title despite the loss of the vote. Two months after that election, the Schmakaldic League came into being. Saxony was a bastion of the Protestant faith, so it is little wonder that Johannes, son of the rebellion's leader, would not practice diplomacy at the Diet. The armor would have been manufactured in 1547 as the Diet was held in February the following year. There is no exact amount of time that can be assigned to armor creation. It would depend upon the maker and the conditions, as well as the order parameters.²⁴ This was not a fashion that lent itself to spontaneity, so statements had to be carefully executed. Johannes had approximately ten months' time to have the bard created by Lochner.

The peytrel bears the date 1548, and the following monogram is prominently displayed: ITGVG/HE. This stands for "*Ich traue Gottes unendlichen Gnaden/Johannes Ernst Herzog zu Sachsen* (I trust in God's unending grace/Johannes Ernst, Duke of Saxony)."²⁵ Clearly, such a statement would have been a proverbial slap in the face of a practicing Catholic such as Charles. Grace was Luther's prevailing ideal, and where he broke with the Church's views. Ernst may have also recalled

Erasmus' Christian knight and Paul's letter to the Ephesians, where the apostle discusses the armor of God in chapter 6. However, armor for Ernst's purposes served less as a defense and more as a declaration of faith and perhaps even evangelism. The shaffron had curled ram horns, a favorite device of creator Kunz Lochner, but these have been hacked off at some point during the bard's existence. The escutcheon plate, bearing the Saxony arms, is clearly a declaration of family affiliation—Ernst is showing his submission to God, but also acknowledging his own temporal authority that comes from his family. The horse's shaffron with its ram horn ear guards could represent sacrifice, harkening back to the ram that was God's gift to the Biblical patriarch Abraham in Genesis. Johannes might have seen attending the Diet as a necessary sacrifice for peace in Germany and used the ram horns and the monogram to convey that. After all, blood had been spilled for the cause, and his own father was currently a prisoner of the Emperor.

The bard depicts certain creatures that were known to have links to Christ and self-sacrifice. The bard contains the following creatures on the edge of the flank pieces: "boar, dolphin, goat, greyhound, griffin, hare, lion, squirrel, stag, unicorn, peacock, pelican, swan and eagle."²⁶ Animal symbols with links to Christ or connected to Christ's sacrifice on the cross include the unicorn, griffin, pelican and the lion. The unicorn in particular was a "Christian symbol of the incarnation." The griffin "became a symbol of Christ and the resurrection." The pelican was a "Christian symbol of self-sacrificial love, based on the medieval misconception that the birds tore their own breasts to feed their young. This link with shedding its own blood led to its use to represent Christ." The lion represented "power and dominion."²⁷ In addition, Jesus Christ is called the "Lion of Judah" in Revelation 5:5. In addition to the theme of sacrifice, however, were symbols of strength. The boar, griffin, lion, unicorn and eagle all represent strength, while the peacock symbolizes beauty and immortality. In addition to the peytrel's declaration of faith, swans appear on the bard, indicating fidelity, since the birds mate for life. None of these animals appear to have any tie to the family name—some tapestries and paintings, for example, might have a play on a family name with animals or other objects. The etching within the bard shows many grotesque creatures living among ornate foliage, possibly indicating the fallen world man now inhabited as indicated in the Biblical account of Adam and Eve in Genesis. Another indicator of man is the hare. "The hare, itself defenseless, is a symbol of men who put the hope of their salvation in the Christ and His Passion."²⁸ It could also represent fertility and lust, but taken in context with the other symbols, clearly the religious meaning is the one indicated. Johannes Ernst might have chosen the design to remind others that the actions taken at the Diet would have eternal consequences.

The bards up to this point have used power as a constant motif, particularly dynastic. However, the last two examples, created in the latter half of the sixteenth century, point to a different road to power. Rather than relying upon the power inherent in birthright, the two men examined, while of the nobility, are primarily military men who were able to leverage their service to their respective governments to reach relatively lofty heights. From this road to power, their bards play up their accomplishments and pay homage to their patrons.

BARDS—PART II: SELF-MADE MEN

Sir William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, Second Creation (1501-1570)

Pembroke's bard was created in 1557 by the Greenwich workshops in England. Maximilian's 1509 gift of the 'Burgundian Bard' had galvanized Henry VIII into establishing an armor workshop at Greenwich. The young king realized that he could not reciprocate in kind to other rulers who might also gift him armor. By 1525, he imported men from all over Europe who were skilled in the art, and paid them salaries, rather than commissioning individual pieces. The king also paid for the workshop's supplies. In fact, after Henry's demise, "Greenwich was making armour exclusively for the key male courtiers, not the monarch."²⁹ The only complete surviving example of this enterprise is the Earl of Pembroke's garniture, today housed at the Glasgow Museum. The Earl of Pembroke had the privilege of being able to obtain a license to have the armor made by the King's workshop, and unlike most courtiers, had series of armors made at the workshop, rather than just one special set. With the cost of armor being fairly high, this was a valuable privilege to have.

William Herbert's singular talent appears to be associating with the right people at the right time. The bare bones of his life that have been recorded for posterity hint at a political savvy second to none. He survived Henry VIII, Edward VI, and finished his career under Elizabeth I, though his previous support of Lady Jane Grey and Mary I affected his standing somewhat at the court. Reports are conflicting as to his religious beliefs, some claiming he changed between Protestant and Catholic as the current power on the throne dictated. What cannot be contested is that he amassed a fortune in assets while playing the game of politics.

Pembroke's garniture is unique as the sole surviving example of the Greenwich armor workshops complete with its bard.³⁰ The bard and its matching suit have been dated circa 1557. Like Count Antonio Collalto, who will be examined later, the Earl was a military commander. In 1554, Mary I had married Philip II of Spain. In 1557, the Earl was slated

to lead an army into France to support Philip II in his war, and the garniture was prepared for that reason.

The armor was created by Erasmus Kirkener, a supervisor at the workshop, in the fortieth year of his fifty year career. Pembroke may have had a hand in designing this armor, but that cannot be verified. The circular pieces appear to echo the Order of the Garter's key symbol, which would be only fitting, as it is the highest honor to be bestowed. In the Order, there are only 24 Companions, the reigning monarch, and the Prince of Wales within the Order at any given time. The initial "H" is the only concession to a dynastic concern, clearly to identify Herbert as the owner. The decoration lacks a personal touch, overall, however, outside of the initial. The decoration, while quite well-tooled, appears a bit pedestrian with its foliage, wild men and fruit motifs. There appears to be nothing personal at all. Like Antonio Collalto, the final example which will be discussed, the symbols present on Herbert's garniture point at power assigned by the man's relation to the powers that be rather than family affiliations or personal touches. Pembroke's circular designs in the armor draw upon the Garter affiliation, as does the matching portrait, which has a large rendition of the Garter badge in the upper left hand corner, and can also be seen at the Glasgow Museum. In addition, his cuirass is quite similar to one owned by Philip II. Since Herbert is a commander under Philip, this continues the power-by-association motif.

Unfortunately, due to an error in restoration, the finish is now brown, which obscures some of the detailing, so it is possible there may be more personal symbolism than can currently be determined.³¹ The original finish, where it can be viewed on areas that were hidden due to overlapping plates, is simply steel, which would have been far more striking with the gilding that was a design element on this garniture.

Count Antonio Collalto IV, Collateral-General of Venice's Land Forces (1548-1620)

Prior to this, we have looked at emperors, archdukes, and princes. Similar to our previous example, the earl, this final example also examines a man who rose to power partially through associating with the right people, but who was also a military man whose hard work paid off. Both Herbert and Collalto can be seen as more of the rank-and-file of the nobility rather than its elite. Here, the bard was not designed to exalt a family bloodline and personal power, but rather to trumpet the power of the state, celebrating a military appointment by Venice, the Serene Republic.

The Collalto family had served as mercenaries during the Italian Wars (1494-1559). Like most Venetians, who were very focused on making a profit, war for the Collalto family was simply another form of business. Early in his career as *condottiere*, Antonio would serve with Emmanuel Philibert,

the Duke of Savoy. The Duke of Savoy, due to the occupation of his hereditary lands by the French, would serve the Habsburgs in a military capacity. Meanwhile, Antonio's association with Philibert and through him, the Habsburgs, would be very profitable, as he would later become a field marshal for Maximilian, Archduke of Austria.

Antonio Collalto's military abilities were recognized in 1578 (at the age of 30), by the Marquis Sforza Pallavicino, who was then Governor General of the Venetian army. Pallavicino had an impressive record and good reputation in Venice, but would not live to see Antonio's promotion in 1589.³² Antonio's promotion happened, according to Pier Angelo Passolunghi, who has collected extensive genealogies for the Collalto family, "in 1589, late on June 7th, the Venetian Senate selected him as Collateral General of the Serene Dominion for his singular faith and the quality of the many merits of the family towards the Republic."³³ Antonio was aged 41 at the time of his promotion and had clearly distinguished himself to receive such a high honor.

Antonio's position as Collateral General was a great responsibility. Sensitive to the importance of the *Terraferma*, enemies of Venice realized that if the mainland territory could be conquered, Venice would have to capitulate. The other Italian states saw Venice as a far greater threat than any foreign invader, with its success in both maritime and land conquests. Antonio's appointment would have demanded armor to be commissioned for the occasion, and fortunately, part of it still survives. The resulting bard design depicts Roman soldiers, which act as a visual representation of Antonio's martial prowess as well as his employer's ancestry. This was highly appropriate from Venice's point of view regarding its history. Like all Italians at the time, Venetian elites fostered an image of themselves as direct descendants of the Roman Empire, though there was no direct evidence. Most likely, the Roman soldiers here are designed to evoke the military might of Rome and as part of the *alla'antica* style currently in vogue. The figures offering up tribute indicate victories. Antonio's bard has a great deal of etching in a freehand style, giving it a lively feel, where the artist clearly was in control, but willing to be less precise—reinforcing my theory that this bard may have been created within tight time constraints, judging by how plain the bard is overall. The crupper has pointed and rounded edges, which adds to its artistic appeal.

The ornamentation includes "putti, dragons, and other fantastic creatures set against a blackened pebbled ground."³⁴ This bard has no gilding, and the style of etching indicates this was a bard originating from Brescia, which Venice controlled, and was a major source for armor for city troops. It is curious that for such an important appointment, the bard was not gilded. This might have been in an attempt to keep the costs down or to avoid ostentation. However, it is far

more likely that time may have been of the essence. Armors often "were blackened, a technique that simplified production and reduced maintenance."³⁵ The goldsmiths' art was a time-consuming and exacting one, requiring fine gold wire to be rolled and melted into shape. It is possible that the Senate did not give Antonio much time to prepare for his new role.

While the bard's Roman influence is palpable, there are some unusual designs on its surface, which give it a strictly Venetian touch. Upon closer examination, mermen and even snails appear to the observer. The snail was a symbol that could be "associated with cyclical or periodic processes in nature" while the merman could be symbolic of Triton, who controlled the seas. With these maritime creatures, and Venice's position as a power at sea, Collalto is taking pride in Venice, which indicates less of a preoccupation with personal glory, but instead honors the city and his new rank within it. This pride is a manifestation of a Venetian ideal. Other Italians saw the fanatical devotion the Venetians had to their republic and both mocked and admired it. The Venetians believed that since their most important decisions were made by groups, rather than one ruler, their republic would last through any difficulties. Pope Pius II once declared that the Venetians "never think of God and, except for the state, which they regard as a deity, they hold nothing sacred, nothing holy."³⁶ There was a subtext to this comment—Venetians, it was believed by outsiders, were also considered the most politically astute and scheming of all Italians. However, when the Venetians joined in the battle against the Ottoman Turks, this image began to fade during the 1540s.

CONCLUSION

Henry VIII's bard, given as a gift by Maximilian, clearly celebrates family affiliations. Maximilian's own bard, the one that is most likely the trend's progenitor, is clearly based on raw strength, combined with the chivalric ideal. By using Samson and Hercules, he makes a statement about his strength and fortitude. Maximilian was very much aware of his image and leaving behind a monument of himself for posterity, as evinced in other projects he commissioned during his lifetime, not just in works of art, but even his dynasty's future by arranging profitable marriages for his children. The bards that Maximilian was responsible for having designed, his own and Henry VIII's, however, clearly have a less sophisticated style, but they are crucial as the starting pieces of the trend. Over time, the trend would evolve.

One of the descendants of Maximilian, Ferdinand II, used his bard to play down a decided lack of experience for the young man, and instead emphasized dynastic stability. The bard identified Ferdinand as a member of the powerful Habsburg family. Like Maximilian, it also drew on images that suggested

strength and military might in its Roman and Turkish influences. This bard used more subtle interplays in its symbols. It also is the only full European garniture to survive that has such an overt Turkish influence with its unusual patterned mail.

Ferdinand's uncle, Charles V, would encounter the son of his conquered enemy, Johannes Ernst, at the Diet of Augsburg. Ernst's bard would look past the unrest created by the Schmalkaldic War and the Reformation. Ernst's bard is the only remaining example of a heavily religious nature. Instead of focusing on the uncertainty of his father's imprisonment by Charles V, and the political wrangling at the Diet, Ernst would portray stability based on something above mere dogma, namely the power of Jesus Christ, who "was and is and is to come" (Revelation 1:8) by the selection of imagery depicting sacrifice. The only indication of his earthly connections is found in the escutcheon plate and peytral which indicate his family—the rest of the bard is peppered with Christological references.

Clearly, however, there was a paradigm shift during the mid-sixteenth century with the bard and its intended effect. No longer do the bards only go to high-ranking noble elites, but judging by the bards of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, and the bard of Antonio Collalto, they have become the province of military commanders as well. Those who could afford a bard (or have one created by the powers that be) for certain occasions were now making use of this elite trend. In the case of Herbert and Collalto, their bards' designs could be seen as an effect of the corresponding shift in law, where power became more and more concentrated in the hands of the state rather than the nobility. Both would actually be proclaiming the power of the *civitas*, that ideal of Roman law, by using imagery that focuses on their authority given by their respective domains. As more bards can be reassembled and researched, new trends and ideas may come to light among the artistic themes, but for now, the bard appears to have been a solid expression of power, whether acquired by the virtue of one's own powerful dynasty, or in the ascension within the governmental structure to powerful positions.

APPENDIX A: EVOLUTION OF ARMOR AND RIDING EQUIPMENT

Since man first began riding, tack³⁷ has been a means of self-expression. The history of such personalization prior to the Renaissance is limited at best, since so few examples survive. Some of the oldest and most unusual artifacts have come from the Pazyryk burials in Siberia, where frost preserved many delicate items made of felt and leather. These artifacts date between the sixth and third century B.C.E. and include lavishly decorated bridles and saddle covers with embroidery and metalwork accents. In addition, the saddles would boast trees (the frame of the saddle with pommel in front and cantle in back) that would

appear modern today. However, it is unknown if there were any messages contained within the artwork.

There are accounts and artifacts from the time of Claudius in the first century C.E. detailing some of the decoration of equestrian equipment used by the Roman cavalry. "Pendants were suspended from the *phalerae* and these employed imagery derived from the oak tree (oak leaves and acorns in low moulded relief), mixed with Bacchic designs."³⁸ Riders wearing stylized masks mounted horses bearing these decorations, in elaborate riding displays known as the *Hippika Gymnasia*. Everyday equipment consisted of tanned leather armor or scale armor, examples of which have been found at the rich archaeological site of Dura-Europas.³⁹ It is theorized that the masks and the images were for religious purposes, not for self-expression.

Overall, however, equestrian armor served a single purpose, that of defense, and would remain plain and utilitarian. *Cuir bouilli*, the boiled leather armor which would eventually replace plate on the early modern battlefield, would endure from the fall of Rome to the end of the 16th century. This was no doubt due to its lower cost. Medieval and Renaissance tournament riders would use *cuir bouilli* and have it gilded, silvered and gessoed in order to create a personal statement.

The next advance in equine armor was the mail trapper, which appeared by the twelfth century. No examples have come to light, but there are artistic representations of this type in contemporary chess pieces and drawings. The trapper looked like a horse blanket, made of rings of mail, with no textile attached. However, for the animal's protection, a separate quilted cloth blanket would be placed underneath, similar to the undergarments for humans wearing mail during this period. In fact, "mail remained the basis of the knight's protection until the first half of the fourteenth century."⁴⁰ It was discontinued because crossbows were able to pierce mail, and some more powerful ones could even pierce plate. By the fifteenth century, equine armor development was complete.

Over both mail and plate, some nobles added a colorful horse blanket called a caparison, which was quilted for further protection. A tournament book from Nuremberg, currently housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, shows a group of knights on their caparisoned chargers. This record was kept from 1446 to 1561, and gives us a glimpse at a long-vanished world, which relied on the symbolism conveyed by heraldic devices. The tournaments would have boasted much color, pomp and pageantry. The delicate textiles of the caparisons have not survived, but steel plate bards, the final evolution in equestrian armor, have.

The large surfaces of the steel horse bards lent themselves to the creation and transmission of bold personal statements, usually influenced by classical Rome. Every surface was an opportunity to display a statement about its owner. Ceremonial

armor began to grow more fanciful and personalized among the very wealthy. The equestrian pieces that survive show a richness of statement as well as artistry that rival any purely decorative item produced during the same period. Military commanders, nobles, and rulers all preferred to sit for portraits dressed in armor in order to portray strength and dignity. Armor would increasingly come to reflect and influence fashions, as seen in the portraits and surviving artifacts of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. After all, as Stephen V. Grancsay points out, “armor and costume were always worn together, and it was inevitable that their forms and ornamentation should influence each other.”⁴¹ By etching with acid, craftsmen created intricate patterns in the steel, echoing the rich fabrics used for human costume. Etching, like embossing, weakened the metal, so these two methods were used primarily on parade armor, not working armor. Gilding, bluing, and blackening were common artistic methods that proved practical—they prevented rust. Blackening and bluing tended to be more common, due to the high cost of gilding. Painting was another method, but far less popular. One reason for this may be its vulnerability. The Museum at Leeds has a suit of armor created for the Earl of

Worcester, which has lost its russet paint—a fact known only because a surviving design album provides a record of how the armor originally appeared. Bards which are still extant have no traces of any original paint. Surviving contemporary inventories with watercolor drawings of the bards as they originally appeared bolster the theory that bards were not painted.

From the highly decorated bridle and saddle of the Pazyryk horseman of the Russian steppes, to the pendants of the Roman cavalryman participating in the *Hippika Gymnasia*, armor became nothing more than another utilitarian tool in the soldier’s arsenal. The evolution from defense mechanism to *objet d’art* would take centuries to complete. Imagination, ambition, and stunning technological skills would unite in the creation of the parade armor of the Renaissance, with far-reaching political and military overtones.

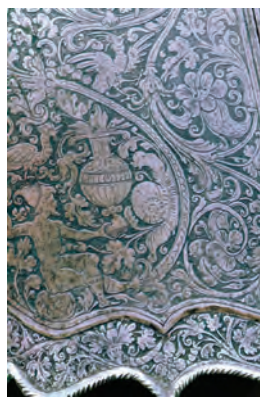
Ferdinand’s bard can be seen in Stuart W. Pyhrr and Jose A. Godoy’s *Heroic Armor of the Renaissance: Filippo Negrolì and His Contemporaries* on page 273.

Pembroke’s bard can be seen in Tobias Capwell’s *The Real Fighting Stuff: Arms and Armour* at the Glasgow Museums on pages 48-55.

APPENDIX B: BARD IMAGES

Johannes Ernst, Duke of Saxony-Koburg

Count Antonio Collalto, Collateral-General of Venice’s Land Forces



Top: Full shot of Johannes Ernst’s 1548 bard for the Diet of Augsburg. Left: Detail shot of the Ernst peytral. (Both images © A.A. Olsen, 2011)

Top: Full shot of Collalto bard. Left: Detail of snail from Collalto bard. (Both images © A.A. Olsen, 2011)

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