

Ancient Roman Body Armor - LORICA

LORICA (θώραξ), a cuirass, and roman name of the Viriathus's birthplace, actual Loriga, in Portugal. The epithet λινοθώραξ, applied to two light-armed warriors in the Iliad, and opposed to χαλκοχιτών, the common epithet for Grecian soldiers, indicates the early use of the linen cuirass. It continued to be worn to much later times among the Asiatics, especially the Persians, the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, and the Chalybes. Iphicrates endeavoured to restore the use of it among the Greeks, and it was occasionally adopted by the Romans, though considered a much less effectual defence than a cuirass of metal.

A much stronger material for cuirasses was horn, which was applied to this use more especially by the Sarmatae and Quadi, being cut into small pieces, which were planed and polished and fastened, like feathers, upon linen shirts. Hoofs were employed for the same purpose.

Pausanias having made mention of a thorax preserved in the temple of Aesculapius at Athens, gives the following account of the Sarmatians:— Having vast herds of horses, which they sometimes kill for food or for sacrifice, they collect their hoofs, cleanse and divide them, and shape them like the scales of a serpent (φολίσιν); they then bore them and sew them together, so that the scales overlap one another, and in general appearance they resemble the surface of a green fir-cone. This author adds, that the Loricae made of these horny scales are much more strong and impenetrable than linen cuirasses, which are useful to hunters, but not adapted for fighting. The Asiatic cuirass exactly corresponding to this description. It consists of slices of some animal's hoof, which are stitched together, overlapping each other in perpendicular rows, without being fastened to any under garment. The projection nearest the middle must be supposed to have been worn over the breast, and the other over the back, so as to leave two vacant spaces for the arms.

This invention no doubt preceded the metallic scale armour. The Rhozalani, a tribe allied to the Sarmatians, defended themselves by wearing a dress consisting of thin plates of iron and hard leather. The Persians wore a tunic of the same description, the scales being sometimes of gold but they were commonly of bronze. The basis of the cuirass was sometimes a skin, or a piece of strong linen to which the metallic scales, or "feathers," as they are also called, were sewed.

The epithet λεπιδωτός, as applied to a thorax, is opposed to the epithet φολιδωτός. The former denotes a similitude to the scales of fish (λεπίσιν), the latter to the scales of serpents (φολίσιν). The resemblance to the scales of serpents, which are long and narrow, is exhibited on the shoulders of the Roman soldier. These scales were imitated by long flexible bands of steel, made to fold one over another according to the contraction of the body. They appear very frequently on the Roman monuments of the times of the emperors, and the following woodcut places in immediate contrast a θώραξ λεπιδωτός.

The Roman hastati wore cuirasses of chain-mail. Virgil several times mentions hauberks in which the rings, linked or hooked into one another, were of gold (loricam consertam hamis, auroque tralicem, Virg. Aen. III.467, V.259, VII.639).

In contradistinction to the flexible cuirasses, or coats of mail, which have now been described, that commonly worn by the Greeks and Romans, more especially in the earlier ages, was called θώραξ στάδιος, or στατός, because, when placed upon the ground on its lower edge, it stood erect. In consequence of its firmness it was even used as a seat to rest upon. It consisted principally of the two γόαλα, viz. the breast-plate (pectorale) made of hard leather or of bronze, iron, or sometimes the more precious metals, which covered the breast and abdomen and of the corresponding plate which covered the back. Both of these pieces were adapted to the form of the body, as may be perceived. The antique Greek thorax and that worn by the Roman emperors and generals...