



## Breastplate for Heavy Cavalry Use, decorated with etched bands and borders

### Date

1530s

### Primary Maker

Michel Witz the Younger

### Medium

steel and leather

### Description

Comprising a very robust breastplate with movable gussets at the arm-openings, a folding lance-rest, a fauld of three lames and a pair of tassets each of three lames; and a backplate with a culet of two lames. The main plate of the BREASTPLATE is of bombastic form with a pronounced medial ridge. Its upper edge is cut with a deep, U-shaped neck-opening bearing a prominent, angular, inward turn decorated with bold roping having the strands separated by pairs of incised lines. Each side of the main plate is cut with a concave arm-opening having a rectangular step at its upper end. Attached within each arm-opening by a round-headed rivet and circular, internal washer top and bottom is a crescentic GUSSET. The top rivet moves within a horizontal slot. The outer edge of the gusset bears a prominent inward turn decorated with roping en suite with that of the neck-opening. Each gusset is pierced towards its upper end with a pair of lace-holes that probably served to secure the distal end of an internal shoulder-strap that issued from within the upper end of each side of the backplate. Attached by a round-headed rivet at the top of each shoulder is a double ended, tongued iron buckle. The buckles are

not an exact pair. The left buckle appears to be old. The hasps of both buckles are modern. Attached to the right side of the breastplate, adjacent to the lower end of the arm-opening, by two large rivets with domed octofoil heads, is a modern, folding lance-rest. The LANCE-REST has a D-shaped base-plate which is file-roped at its inner edge and shaped with an elaborate ogee profile at its outer edge. Riveted at its center is a sturdy rectangular block from which the lance-rest proper issues, the junction of the two elements taking the form of a three-barreled hinge with a sturdy vertical pivot. The upward-curving arm of the rest proper is of tapering triangular section decorated with single filed lines proximally and distally. The holes in the main plate of the breastplate that now serve to secure the lance-rest are the upper and lower of a vertical line of four such holes. The two vacant holes are threaded to receive screws. It is likely that the upper and lower holes were similarly threaded. The lance-rest would therefore have been detachable (rather than fixed as now) and probably adjustable in height through the use of alternative holes. The lower edge of the main plate is flanged outwards to receive the fauld. The FAULD is formed of three transversely-curved, medially-ridged, upward-overlapping lames, each of which has cropped corners and is decorated at the center of its upper edge with a filed ogee between V-shaped nicks. The lames are connected to the waist-flange of the breastplate and to one another at each side and at their centers by modern internal leathers secured by pairs of externally-flush rivets. The inner of the pair of rivets that secured the right leather to the second lame has been omitted since the hole for it has broken out. Flat-headed rivets with circular internal washers have incorrectly replaced the externally-flush rivets that originally secured the lower end of the central connecting-leather to the third fauld-lame. The lower end of the central connecting-leather has been replaced, the new piece of leather being connected to the old by a pair of flat-headed rivets. Construction-holes in all three fauld-lames, aligning with the outer of each of the three underlying pairs of rivets that secure the outer connecting-leathers, are occupied by purely decorative, round-headed rivets, except for that at the left end of the third lame which is now vacant. The lower edge of the third fauld-lame is bordered by fifteen lining-rivets of which six are those that also serve to secure the lower ends of the three internal connecting-leathers mentioned above. Except for the two that secure the central leather, all the rivets are of externally flush form. The three to the left of the central leather retain a fragment of what is perhaps the original lining-band. Now-vacant construction-holes at either end of the lower edge of the third fauld-lame, aligning with corresponding construction-holes in the upper outer corner of each tassets, may also at one time have been occupied by lining-rivets. The upper edge

of the second fauld-lame is pierced at each side with rivet-holes for the attachment of the three straps that would appear at one time to have served to suspend each of the tassets. The outer hole is in each case the same as the previously mentioned construction-hole now occupied by a purely decorative round-headed rivet, while the remaining holes are now plugged by externally flush rivets. The tassets are now incorrectly suspended from each side of the third lame of the fauld by a pair of modern iron hasps attached at both their upper and lower ends by single, round-headed rivets with circular, internal washers. The hasps are hinged at their centers by means of rectangular loops, and have lobated terminals separated from their constricted sides by short cusps. Each TASSET is formed of three transversely-curved, upward-overlapping lames that narrow towards the lowest one, which is deeper than the rest and has an obtusely-pointed lower edge. The narrowing occurs at the inner edge of the tasset which is cut away in a concave curve that begins just below its upper corner. The inner edge bears a prominent, partial, inward turn decorated with roping en suite with that of the breastplate. Full inward turns at the outer and lower edge of the tasset are similarly decorated. It is possible that the round-headed rivets that now retain the suspension-hasps at each side of the upper edge of the tasset together with a further round-headed rivet located midway between them, served at some time to attach three buckles intended to receive the three suspension-straps thought to have formerly issued from each side of the first fauld lame. It is unlikely, however, that this arrangement represents the original one since the central buckle would in that case have obscured an important detail of the decoration of the tasset. It is more probable that each tasset would have been suspended from two rather than three straps and buckles. The buckles might in that case have been attached by the now functionless round-headed rivets located at each side of the first lame of the tasset, just below and to the inside of the rivets that retain the lower ends of the hasps. The straps that engaged these buckles probably issued from the lowest fauld-lame. The inner one is likely to have been attached by the rivet that now secures the upper end of the inner hasp at each side. The outer one is likely to have been attached by the rivet occupying or formerly occupying the outer construction-hole immediately adjacent to the rivet that now secures the upper end of the outer hasps. The tasset lames are connected to one another at their outer ends by modern round-headed sliding-rivets with circular or octagonal internal washers and at the inner ends and centers with modern internal leathers secured by pairs of rivets, all of which are externally flush except for those in the lowest lame which are round-headed with circular internal washers. Construction-holes in the second and third lames of each tasset, aligning with the inner of the pair of rivets that secure the inner leathers, are occupied by purely decorative round-headed rivets. Similar decorative rivets are be found midway down the inner end of the second lame of each tasset. The upper edge of each tasset is pierced with six holes of which all but two of those of the left are occupied by round-headed rivets. The outermost holes of each tasset can be identified as construction-holes overlying corresponding holes in the lower edge of the fauld. It is conceivable that they and the other holes bordering the upper edge of each tasset originally served to attach a lining-band. However, as the placing of some of the holes is neither even nor symmetrical, it is likely that these irregular holes at least result from subsequent temporary repairs or alterations. The outer edge of each tasset is bordered by six round-headed lining-rivets of which the top one is identical with the outer of those that bordered the upper edge. The inner edge of the first lame of each tasset is bordered by two round-headed lining-rivets. The inner edge of the inner connecting-leather of each tasset may have served as the downward extension of the lining-band secured by these two rivets. The lower edge of each tasset is bordered by two short lining-bands, of which the inner one is retained by three round-headed rivets with circular internal washers, and the slightly broader outer one is retained by four rivets and washers of the same form. The lowest lame of each tasset is pierced, just above the pair of rivets that secure the central internal to it, with a pair of fairly large, horizontally aligned holes that may originally have served to lace the tasset to the top of the underlying cuisse. Pierced just to the inside of each of the sliding-rivets at the outer ends of the first and second lames of each tasset is a rivet-hole which, together with a round-headed rivet in the third lame, may at some time have retained a third internal connecting-leather. Located at the upper edges of the second and third lames are several round-headed rivets that have no identifiable function. Since some of these rivets are not symmetrically placed, it is possible that they result from subsequent temporary repairs and alterations, as has been suggested for some of the rivets bordering the upper edges of the first lames. The front and rear edges of the neck- and arm-openings of the breastplate and backplate, and the lateral and lower edges of the tassets are bordered by pairs of recessed bands of which the outer ones are slightly wider than the inner ones and separated from them by raised ribs enclosed by pairs of incised lines. The bands at the front and rear of the neck-opening are of shallow V-shaped form. The lower edges of the fauld and culet are in each case bordered by a single recessed band accompanied to the inside by a raised rib enclosed by a pair of incised lines. On the tassets, a pair of narrow, slightly divergent recessed bands, accompanied to the outside by similar ribs, rise upwards from the point of the V-shaped lower edge to its uppermost lame where they curve outwards to either side of a raised lozenge to form a stylized fleur-de-lis. The outer of the pairs of recessed bands that border the neck and arm-openings of the breastplate and backplate, those that border the free edges of the tassets, the single recessed bands that border the lower edges of the fauld and culet, the pairs of divergent recessed bands that run up the centers of the tassets, as well as the waistlines of the breastplate and backplate, are all finely etched with running foliage, flowers and belted balls on a stippled and blackened ground. The decoration that borders the neck-opening of the backplate includes at its center a winged cherub's head between confronted harpies, while that which borders the neck-opening includes, also at its center, a full-faced sun-in-splendor enclosed within a circular frame and flanked by a pair of addorsed suns-in-splendor in profile between harpies. The etched decoration of the cuirass varies in its details from one band to another. For example, whereas most of the bands show scrolling foliage of an alternating character, the bands at

the arm-openings of the backplate are entirely symmetrical in their design and incorporate masks and trophies not seen elsewhere in the decoration of the cuirass. The lower edge of the culet is decorated with a repeated pattern of leaves that diverge symmetrically from a central stem and are interrupted by transverse bars or flowerheads. The same design occurs in the pairs of divergent bands that run up the center of each tasset and at the outer ends of the border of the neck-opening of the breastplate. The lozenge-shaped boss forming the central element of the stylized fleur-de-lis that decorates the first lame of each tasset, is bordered by an engrailed line. A single incised line decorates the backplate medially. The cuirass is bright with an overall light patina showing some patches of heavier pitting and minor blemishes. The metal shows evidence of delamination at a few points. The etched decoration exhibits a moderate amount of wear, greater at some points than others. The cuirass appears to have been reduced in girth at some time, quite probably in its working life. This has been effected by cutting the sides of both the breastplate and the backplate. As a result the latter is now difficult to fit within the former, and both elements lack the construction-holes that one would expect to find at their sides. In addition, all of the transverse bands of etching of the cuirass appear, with the sole exception of that occurring at the bottom of the left arm-opening of the backplate, to have been cut through. It is conceivable that the earlier-discussed reduction of the culet from three lames to two lames may have been contemporary with the reduction in the girth of the cuirass.

### **Dimensions**

41 × 32.5 × 17 cm (25 9/16 × 12 13/16 × 6 11/16 in.), 13 lb (weight with tassets)