

Armorial Adjuncts

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WHEN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM'S Department of Arms and Armor was established in 1912, the agreed chronological limits excluded arms and armor made before the fall of the Roman Empire, thus allowing the older Classical Department (later renamed the Department of Greek and Roman Art) to continue collecting classical body armor and weapons without encroaching on the interests of the new department or competing with it. Fences make good neighbors, and relations between the two departments have been excellent for several generations. The fourth curator of Greek and Roman Art thus welcomes the opportunity to salute the fourth curator of Arms and Armor with some newcomers to our arsenal¹ that were acquired too late for Helmut Nickel to include in his splendid survey of the Museum's armaments, his highly readable and most instructive *Warriors and Worthies* (1969).

Unlike the panoply of medieval knights who were encased in metal from head to toe, allowing at best a chink in the armor, Greek body armor was makeshift and piecemeal. Its basic components were a helmet, a cuirass, greaves, and a shield, and instead of chinks, a Greek warrior displayed vulnerable gaps: the neck, the armpits, the hands and arms, most of the trunk below the waist, and the thighs, feet, and ankles. He was exposed to hostile missiles—arrows, slingshot, and spears—as well as to swords, battle-axes, and spears used in close combat. Even the best-trained and most agile hoplite could not defend himself simultaneously against everything that was hurled at him from all sides; bronze, moreover, the favorite material for helmets, cuirasses, and greaves, was easily pierced by the stronger iron of spears, swords, and arrowheads. Additional armor devised for the

obviously unprotected parts includes rerebraces and vambraces for the arms, especially the right arm, and thigh guards (*parameridia*) for the tops and sides of the thighs. A semicircular plate fastened with rings to the lower front edge of the corslet, the so-called mitra, shielded the groin without impeding the movement of the hoplite. Beginning in the sixth century B.C., overlapping strips of leather (*pteryges*) served the same purpose. Mail armor of interlinked rings—the revolutionary invention of Celtic armorers—did not become part of the Greek repertory, although tribal invasions of Italy and Asia Minor in the third century B.C. could not have left the Hellenistic world in total ignorance of the Gauls and their armaments.

Helmut Nickel's *Ullstein Waffenhbuch* (1974), a true encyclopedia of arms and armor, while making it unnecessary for me to go into details, has prompted me to investigate one type of supplementary armor that has received rather short shrift: the ankle guard. Its relative rarity—fewer than fifty have been discovered in the last 150 years—may reflect a lack of popularity in antiquity. To my knowledge, in this country there are only a singleton in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore² and two pairs in the Metropolitan Museum (Figures 1, 3, 5, 6).³ The Walters ankle guard, acquired in 1949 at the Brummer sale,⁴ is of the short type best known from more than sixteen examples found over the years at Olympia.⁵ The Metropolitan pairs, bought at auctions in Basle and New York, rise in back to the beginning of the calf and belong to the other type, of which those with known provenances come from Magna Graecia, more specifically Apulia. Its area of use thus comprised the heel and "Achilles tendon" of the Italian "boot," coincid-



1. Guard for left ankle, front view, Apulian, 5th–4th century B.C. Bronze, H. 23 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Helen H. Mertens Gift, 1975, 1975.11.2

ing fortuitously with the very portion of the human anatomy that ankle guards of Apulian type were meant to protect.

While the eastern, or mainland Greek, ankle guard resembles a low boot without its front, or a sole, cut off just above the ankle, the Apulian variation was hammered from a leaf-shaped sheet of bronze with its back rising well above the level of the ankle. The sheet was then embossed, often in the shape of teardrops, for the protruding inner anklebone, the *malleolus medialis*. Three carinations, a central vertical flanked by two curvilinear ridges, reinforced the



2. Right profile of ankle guard in Figure 1

back of the ankle guard and gave special protection to the Achilles tendon against slashing blows of sabers and swords. The outside of the anklebone, the *malleolus lateralis*, protrudes more and is more vulnerable than the inner bone; hence, on the two Museum pairs the armorer has created more space by hammering a rather long vertical ridge that kept the metal a safe distance away from the bone itself. Special padding for the outer anklebone, now lost, must have kept the bronze guards firmly in place. The metal was bent slightly outward along the edges to prevent chafing; holes at the sides served as eyelets for tying the armor over the instep. Unlike the mainland Greek examples, the Apulian guards are not



3. Guard for right ankle, front view, Apulian, 5th–4th century B.C. Bronze, H. 23.3 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Helen H. Mertens Gift, 1975, 1975.11.1

perforated along the edges and so presumably were not worn with a lining of leather, felt, or cloth. These ankle guards were probably worn over stockings or gaiters.

So far I have avoided calling the ankle guards by the Homeric Greek word *ἐπισφύρια* (*episphyria*) with which A. Furtwängler a hundred years ago attempted to identify them.⁶ My caution calls for an explanation. In *The Iliad* the word occurs four times, thrice in an identical couplet used in the arming of Paris (III, 330–331), Agamemnon (XI, 17–18), and Patroklos (XVI, 131–132):



4. Back view of ankle guard in Figure 3

κνημίδας μὲν πρῶτα περὶ κνήμῃσιν ἔθηκε
καλὰς, ἀργυρέοισιν ἐπισφύροις ἀραρυίας

(first he put around his shins beautiful greaves fastened with silver *episphyria*). The word is mentioned a fourth time in the passage (XVIII, 458–460) in which Thetis implores Hephaistos to make new armor for her son, Achilles, to replace the first armor, which he had lent to Patroklos, who was killed by Hektor, and which was lost to the Trojans. She enumerates the need for a shield, a helmet, and

καλὰς κνημίδας ἐπισφύροις ἀραρυίας καὶ θώρηχ'

(beautiful greaves fastened with *episphyria*, and a cuirass).

In the subsequent account of how Hephaistos set to work honoring Thetis's wishes (XVIII, 468–613) the poet's attention is devoted almost entirely to the marvelously decorated shield, while his work on the cuirass, the helmet, and the greaves is described in a scant four lines at the end. In this passage nothing is said about the *episphyria* or their material, but the greaves are characterized as being made of tin.

Viewed in this context two facts emerge: the *episphyria* were the means by which the greaves were fastened above or near the ankles and were not an essential, separate piece of body armor.

Another question is whether ankle guards were worn alone or in conjunction with greaves. Furtwängler was the first to observe that the posterior extension of the ankle guard in the Apulian examples is cut in such a way as to complement the greaves by protecting that part of the leg not covered by them,⁷ yet in complete panoplies that have come down to us,

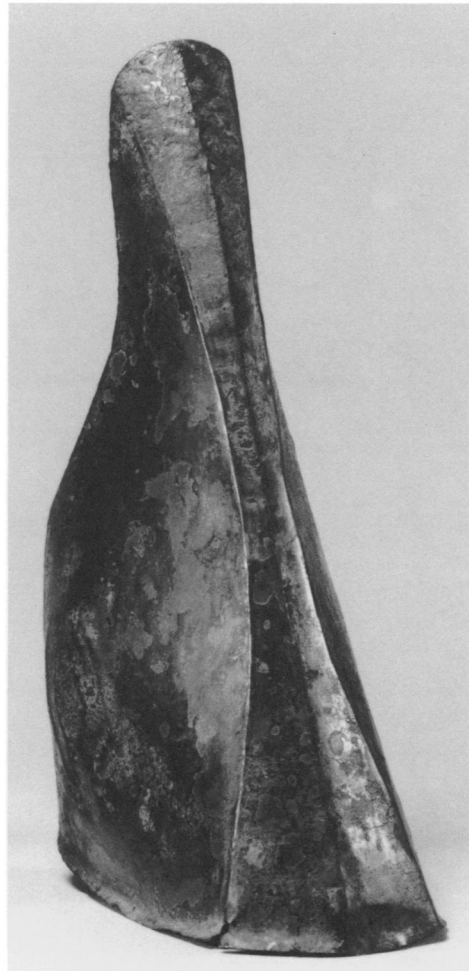
or in *tropaia*, ankle guards are not included. It may be tempting to think that ankle guards were on occasion used in lieu of greaves, and some have gone so far as to suggest that such equipment was “intended for horsemen whose feet were more vulnerable than those of the infantry.”⁸ In archaeology one learns early not to generalize from the scant remains known to us at any given moment, since many of our most erudite theories are often upset by unexpected new discoveries. Quite recently, a collector in Geneva allowed me to study four pieces of armor that he had acquired in Sion as a group—two greaves and two ankle guards of the Apulian type. The state of preservation of all four pieces suggests strongly that they were found together; they are now on loan to the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva and are illustrated here thanks to the generosity of its curator of Greek art, Jacques Chamay (Figure 7).

Another oddity worth noting is the total absence of

5. Guard for left ankle, back view, Apulian, 5th–4th century B.C. Bronze, H. 22.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Norbert Schimmel Gift and Arthur Darby Nock Bequest, in memory of Gisela Richter, 1982, 1982.11.5



6. Guard for right ankle, back view, Apulian, 5th–4th century B.C. Bronze, H. 23.2 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Norbert Schimmel Gift and Arthur Darby Nock Bequest, in memory of Gisela Richter, 1982, 1982.11.6



representations of metal ankle guards on vases, especially Apulian vases of the fourth century. On Attic red-figured vases of the Archaic Period we sometimes see tassels below the lower edges of greaves above the ankles. These fringes are not part of the greaves or their linings but represent the lower edge of spatlike triangular pieces of leather worn on the legs above the ankles, where the edges of the metal greaves might chafe the shins. On a calyx krater by the Eucharides Painter in the Louvre⁹ in a scene depicting Sarpedon's body deposited in Lycia by Sleep and Death the ankle guards are shown in their entirety, not half hidden by the greaves, since after Sarpedon's death in battle his body was stripped of its armor, leaving him naked except for the anklets. The guards recur on a fragmentary amphora by the same painter at the Getty Museum.¹⁰ Clearly, they are to be differentiated from the red fillets worn on Brygan cups¹¹ and from the plain strips tied above the ankles of *hoplitodromoi* arming themselves for the race in armor on a cup by the Antiphon Painter in the Louvre¹² and on the neck of a pointed-neck amphora by the Kleophrades Painter in the Antikenmuseum,

Berlin.¹³ In each of the instances cited, the anklets leave the ankles themselves unprotected but act as a buffer or cushion between the lower edge of the metal greaves and the skin.

Bronze ankle guards, whether of Greek or Apulian type, do not limit the movement of the foot, as has sometimes been claimed.¹⁴ As the guards stop at the instep, the feet can be flexed without discomfort in ordinary exercises such as walking, running, or climbing, although toe-dancing might be more difficult with the Apulian type, which makes the lower back of the leg more rigid. The ankle guards are certainly less clumsy than ski boots and weigh much less: of our two pairs, the larger ones (1975.11.1 and 1975.11.2) weigh little more than eleven ounces each, while the smaller ones, made of somewhat thinner metal, weigh less than six ounces each. I can well imagine that a hoplite equipped with this special armor was grateful for the additional protection in the heat of battle as a defense against a strong missile, or *ἐρκος ισχύρω βέλεος*, as Alcaeus called the greaves.¹⁵

7. Pair of ankle guards, back view, Apulian, 5th–4th century B.C. Bronze, H. 27 cm. On loan to the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva (photo: Y. Siza)



NOTES

1. Acc. nos. 1975.11.1 and 1975.11.2. H. $9\frac{3}{16}$ in. (23.3 cm.), $9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (23.2 cm.) Münzen und Medaillen (Basel, 1975) *Auktion* 51, 14–15 März 1975, p. 99, no. 219; H. A. G. Brijder, "A Bronze Ankle-Guard and Belt in Amsterdam" in *Festoon A. N. Zadoks-Josephus Jitta* (1976) p. 188 n.12b. Acc. nos. 1982.11.5 and 1982.11.6. H. $8\frac{3}{16}$ in. (22.8 cm.), $9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (23.2 cm.). Cat. Sotheby-Parke Bernet (New York, May 20, 1982) p. 130, no. 130 (ill.); MMA, *Notable Acquisitions 1981–1982*, pp. 10–11 (ill.).
2. 54.2337. H. $4\frac{15}{16}$ in. (12.5 cm.) D. K. Hill, "Five Pieces of Early Greek Armor" in *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 9 (1952) pp. 316–317, fig. 7.
3. See note 1.
4. Parke-Bernet Galleries, Inc., *Part Two of the Notable Art Collection Belonging to the Estate of the Late Joseph Brummer* (New York, May 11–14, 1949) p. 183 (there called a "bronze equine muzzle").
5. A. Snodgrass, *Early Greek Armour and Weapons* (Edinburgh, 1964) p. 240 n.55.
6. *Die Bronzen und die übrigen kleineren Funde von Olympia* 4 (Berlin, 1890) pp. 160–161.
7. Ibid.
8. H. A. G. Brijder, "A Bronze Ankle-Guard," p. 188, paraphrases E. Kunze (*VIII Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Olympia* [Berlin, 1967] p. 212) but does not seem to have realized that

Kunze talks about bronze *foot* guards that protect the top of the feet from the toes to the instep.

9. J. D. Beazley, *Attic Red-figure Vase-painters*, 2d ed. (Oxford, 1963) p. 227, no. 12; D. von Bothmer, "Euphronios and Memnon? Observations on a Red-figured Fragment," *MMJ* 22 (1987) p. 9, fig. 5, n.17.
10. J. Paul Getty Museum 85. AE. 499 (unpublished).
11. See J. D. Beazley, *ARV*², p. 373, no. 48; p. 402, no. 15.
12. Louvre Cp 10905. J. D. Beazley, *ARV*², p. 340, no. 76 (since augmented by MMA 1973.212.2).
13. Inv. 1970.5. A. Greifenhagen, *Neue Fragmente des Kleophradesmalers* (Heidelberg, 1972) p. 20, pl. 11, n.37. Greifenhagen cites the MMA calyx-krater by the Kleophrades Painter 08.258.58 (J. D. Beazley, *ARV*², p. 185, no. 36) as another example, but there the bandagelike device is painted as being *on top* of the lower edge of the greave, not under it, where it would keep the greave from chafing the skin. If, conversely, these strips of cloth were intended to hold the greaves in place (like the Homeric *episphyria*), there would have been no point in tying them on the legs *before* putting on the greaves.
14. H. A. G. Brijder, "A Bronze Ankle-Guard," p. 188, misquoting Emil Kunze.
15. The Loeb Classical Library, *Greek Lyric* I (Cambridge, Mass., 1982) p. 304, no. 140, line 10.