

ROMAN BREASTPLATES/ARMOR AND THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Roman military used several types of body armor to protect the chest and back in combat. The *lorica hamatica* or ring-mail armor was one of the earliest used by the legions. While it provided good flexibility, the rings could be pierced by a sharp spear or arrow with a small tip. It also could “sandpaper” the wearer with its rough rings. Furthermore, it took a long time to manufacture. Centurions in the time of Christ frequently wore this style of armor with an extra layer of ring-mail over the shoulders and upper back for added protection against slashing or hacking attacks.



Another style of breastplate and back-plate armor was the *lorica musculata* or muscled armor modeled after the earlier Greek hoplite style. It consists of a solid breastplate attached to a solid back-plate. While it looked good, and is frequently seen on statuary of emperors and very high ranking officers, it is very rigid and hampers body movement. In the time of Christ it was used more frequently for ceremonial occasions than for actual combat even though it provides good protection.

Both of these styles called for some kind of *subarmalis*, or padding garment, under the breastplate to reduce chafing.

Another type of breastplates was the *lorica squamata*, made of bronze or iron scales stitched or wired to a leather or strong cloth vest-type garment. Sometimes the scales were ridged in the middle and had the appearance of feathers. While flexible, this kind of armor was not protective against upward thrusting

In a few cases leather armor was hardened by boiling it in hot water, oil, or wax. While this kind of breastplate could be quite hard/rigid and protective against blows and sword thrusts, the residual wax and oil provided lubrication to spears and arrows piercing at higher speeds and with more striking power.

The breastplate style most frequently used in the New Testament period was the *lorica segmentata*. This type of armor/breastplate was made up of soft iron overlapping bands riveted to leather straps inside the breast and back segments. Because of its construction it gave both great flexibility and protection. Think “metal armadillo” and you have a picture of what it was like. The *lorica segmentata* seen on this DVD set has 530 individual pieces, counting rivets, buckles, leather straps, and metal plates. It provides the wearer with free range of motion and superb protection. This style of armor/breastplate was used extensively throughout the first and second centuries by Roman troops all over the empire.

Soldiers could put their breastplates on by themselves, but helping each other with this 20 pound armor was the norm, making it much easier to become battle ready quickly and efficiently. Armoring up, like battle, was a cooperative effort. Roman soldiers lived, fought, marched, and worked as teams, not as individuals.

Roman armor protected the wearer all the way around the torso and shoulders, not just in front. So “breastplate” was more than just armor for the front of the body.

Roman breastplates/armor were items of durability, flexibility, beauty, and function. They were clearly thought out. Nothing about them was incidental or accidental. Each breastplate was custom-made to fit the individual soldier specifically.

Key Roman terms:

<i>Lorica hamatica:</i>	Ring-mail armor
<i>Lorica musculata:</i>	Two piece muscular molded armor
<i>Lorica squamata:</i>	Scale armor resembling fish scales or feathers
<i>Lorica segmentata;</i>	Segmented/banded armor
<i>Subarmalis:</i>	Under-armor garment for padding



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