

A medieval manuscript illustration of a knight in armor. The knight wears a dark, ornate helmet with a visor and a large, dark surcoat with a cross. The background is a textured red. The knight's face is pale and has a somber expression.

# Beaten Black and Blue

The Myth  
of the Medieval Knight  
in Shining Armour

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## The Myth of the Medieval Knight in Shining Armour

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This leaflet is to announce the release of my new book on the original colour finishes applied to Western European armour and edged weapons during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and also the Baroque period.

**Title:**

Beaten Black and Blue. The Myth of the Medieval Knight in Shining Armour.

**Author:**

Chris Dobson

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A4 paperback printed book. 323 pages. 376 illustrations.

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Cover: Ambrogio Lorenzetti *Allegory of Good and Bad Government* (detail). Fresco. Siena, February 1338 - May 1339. Sala del Nove, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena. Photo: The Yorck Project Gesellschaft für Bildarchivierung GmbH (PD-Art (PD-old-70)).



Author. Reconstruction of  
A North-Italian armet, c.1505-10.  
Steel, leather, textile.  
Private collection.  
Photo © Chris Dobson.

Imagine that the very foundations of what we believe about the appearance of Medieval and Renaissance armour and weapons turned out to be wrong.

What if, in some periods, ‘white’ armour was rarely - if ever - used at all?

For centuries it has been assumed that Medieval and Renaissance European armour and edged weapons were generally very-highly polished ‘white’, and the use of coloured and hammer-finishes on armour was something that arrived around the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and ran through until armour largely went out of use. I too, used to believe that, and it was only as I handled more and more of the real thing, and then carried out restoration work on it, that I began to find evidence of colour finishes everywhere, and when I say everywhere, I really do mean *everywhere*, and on early pieces. This book is the product of what I found hidden away underneath rivets and between the plates of that armour, and on edged weapons. It is full of photography which has never been published before, including pieces from private collections, although some of the biggest surprises will come from iconic pieces well-known to you already.

Right: Anonymous. A Nasal Helm, Probably Early 10<sup>th</sup> Century. Southern European, possibly Italian. The nasal and band around the rim of the helmet have silver wire 'false-damascened' decoration. Private Collection.

Just think for a moment: silver decoration would not stand out against a polished white iron background at all. It would be pointless. Therefore, this helmet would have had a darkened finish originally.

Photo: © Chris Dobson.



Left: Anonymous. A hammer-finished foot combat or tourney helm. South Germany, possibly Austria, c.1450-75. Private Collection.

This piece demonstrates that in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, helmets for the sporting pursuits of the nobility could have a rough hammered finish, instead of a high polish.

Photo: © Chris Dobson.

Regular readers of my books will know that I combine my work on armour and weapons with the scholarly study of period art and documents, and since I know what this book contains will be met with a great deal of scepticism - not to say outright disbelief - I have gone to great trouble to build my case methodically, and I base it on firm evidence. As with my book on hardened-leather armour, in this book I use my skills as a Master Armourer to show how colour finishes were originally applied to armour and edged weapons. By the time you get to the end of this book, not only will you know the period terms that were used to describe a whole range of different colour finishes - for example, exactly what 'russet' armour actually was - but you will also know how these finishes were originally applied, and just how impressive they were when new. This book also challenges long-held assumptions about the appearance of armour in the Classical World.

So sit down and strap in for what is going to be a rollercoaster ride for fans of polished 'white' arms and armour - you are never going to be able to look at those pieces in the same way again.

## Contents:

### Introduction

A detailed examination of artistic techniques from the Middle Ages to the Baroque, explaining how armour and weapons were actually depicted by artists, and how artworks may have discoloured, if at all.

### Chapter 1. Mantua, Holy of Holies

The story of the consequences for the armours now in the Museo Diocesano in Mantua, after the intervention of an English Antiquarian in 1937.

### Chapter 2. What's in a Name?

Analysis of period descriptions of armour and weapons from documents and inventories from the 17<sup>th</sup> century back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, compared to evidence of colour finishes on surviving pieces.

### Chapter 3. “*through a glass, darkly...*”

The truth about ‘russet’ armour and weapons. Description of the ‘russeting’ technique. Surviving Italian and German armour. The ‘*AVANT*’ armour.

### Chapter 4. Black from the Hammer and Blackened

Hammer-finished and blackened surfaces. The different levels of quality of hammer-finished pieces. Early surviving examples.

### Chapter 5. Midnight Blue

Evidence of dark-blue colour oxide finishes. Description of how the colour finish is obtained. A 14<sup>th</sup> century *barbuta*. The Imperial ceremonial sword of Frederick II.

### Chapter 6. Botticelli Blue

Pale-blue colour oxide finishes. Description of how the colour finish is obtained. The ‘*AVANT*’ armour. Friedrich the Victorious. A 14<sup>th</sup> century German *barbuta*.

### Chapter 7. Sanguine, Peacock Blue and Bronzed

Iridescent colour-oxide finishes. Different names for the same finish in different countries and at different times. Description of how the peacock-blue finish is obtained. The Helmschmid workshop.

### Chapter 8. A Touch of Colour

Painted armour. Influence of heraldry. *Cuir bouilli*. ‘Black sallets’.

### Chapter 9. Covered or Uncovered?

Textile and leather-covered armour. Examples of period textiles. The Munich breastplate. Tournament pieces and armoured clothing.

### Chapter 10. White Armour, “*the armour of light*”

Examples of polished ‘white’ armour in context. The Berruguete portrait of Federico da Montefeltro. Silvered and tinned armour.

### Chapter 11. “*everywhere the glint of gold*”

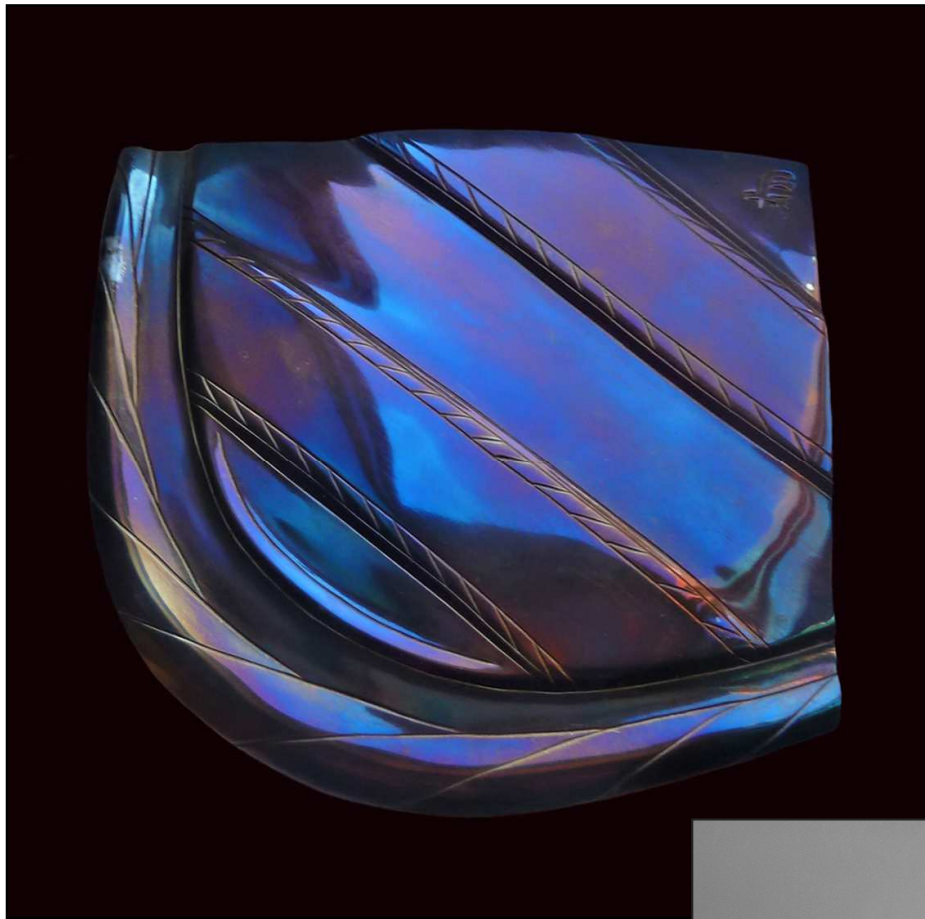
Examples of gilded armour. Conrad Seusenhofer and the ‘Gift Armour’ of Henry VIII. Detailed explanation of the mercury-gilding technique.

### Conclusion

The legend of ‘the knight in shining armour’. The reality of Medieval and Renaissance armour and edged weapons. Implications for arms and armour used in the Classical World.

### Appendix: Temperature Charts





### Peacock blue armour:

Left: Chris Dobson. A sample plate based on the pauldron of the armour of the Chevalier Bayard, French, 1505-10. This what a pristine peacock-blue finish looks like (the engraved decoration was later gilded).

Photo: © Chris Dobson.

Below: Lorenz Helmschmid. The armour garniture of Sigmund of the Tyrol, Archduke of Austria. Augsburg, c.1490-95. Steel, gold, copper alloy, leather. Imperial Armoury, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (A 62). Photo: © Copyright Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Below: Fig 213. Kolman Helmschmid (armourer), Hans I Burgkmair (etcher). The armour garniture of Willhelm, Reichsfreiherr von Roggendorf, formerly the armour of the Emperor Charles V. Augsburg, dated 1523. Steel, brass, leather. Imperial Armoury, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (A 374). Photo: © Chris Dobson.







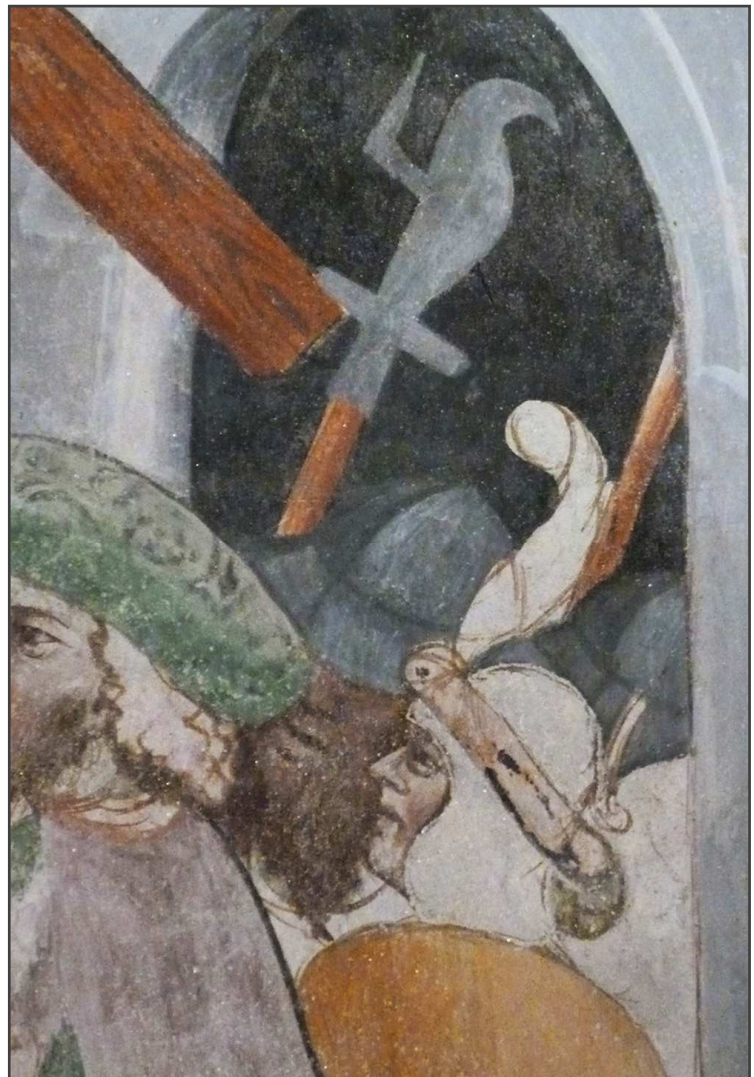
### Edged weapons with colour-oxide finishes

Above: *The Archangel Michael*, by Simone Martini. Siena, c.1320-25. The saint holds a sword which has a grey blade. The pigments used to paint the blade have not discoloured and become dark, because the cutting-edge of the blade is still white by comparison, so this sword remains more or less as it was painted. Photo: The Yorck Project Gesellschaft für Bildarchivierung GmbH (GNU Free Documentation Licence ).

Above right: Anonymous Master Craftsmen. Imperial ceremonial sword. Palermo (Sicily), before 1220; Prague, third quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (pommel). The blade of the sword has been given a midnight blue finish, with polished white cutting edges. The surface finish dates back to at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and was probably applied when the sword was made.

Photo: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Right: Anonymous, *The Journey to Calvary* (detail). Church of Santa Maria al Castello, La Manta, c.1425-30. Fresco. The bill carried by the bearded foot soldier in the centre has the same grey oxide finish as his kettlehat, and the kettlehat of the soldier to the right (mostly hidden). The helmets of the other two soldiers in the foreground appear white because the fresco was never finished: the final colours were never applied to their armour. Photo: © Chris Dobson.





### Grey oxide finishes:

Right: Matthes Deutsch (German, Landshut, documented 1485–1505). Sallet. Landshut, c.1490. Steel, textile. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bashford Dean Memorial Collection, Bequest of Bashford Dean, 1928 (29.150.8a). Photo: MET.

Below: Friedrich Herlin *Saint George and the Dragon*. Nördlingen(?), c.1460–61. Mixed media on panel. Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe (Accession number 2269). Photo: Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe (CC0 1.0).

The Italian 'alla tedesca' export armour, and sword of the saint have the same grey oxide finish which survives on the sallet (right) and the besagew (below right).



Above: a 15th-century German besagew which retains a lot of its original grey oxide finish. Photo: © Chris Dobson.

You can now order your copy of this book at the price of **Euro €95.00** plus shipping.  
Books are shipped via express tracked service.

To see more information on shipping charges and to order your copy, visit the webpage for the book:

<https://renaissancedissident.com/medieval-armour-colour-finishes.html>

If you have any questions about the book, please email me at: [contact@renaissancedissident.com](mailto:contact@renaissancedissident.com)