

# Decorating armour

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Part of the ornamentation process involved marking a design on to the visible surface of any object. To do this meant the removal of some of the metal in a controlled manner in order to put down the design or pattern.

The two main methods are either physically cutting away the metal using tools (engraving, chasing (chiselling) and punching) or by eating the metal away using acid (etching).

The quality of the design engraved or etched depended on the skill and experience of the craftsman.

## Engraving

The main technique for adorning metal was to cut away the surface of the metal using special tools – gravers, chisels, little hammers and files.



Right: Detail showing engraving on the Charles I gilt armour.

## Chasing

Chasing is used to work on the front of the metal by pushing the metal down. The opposite of chasing is repoussé (pushed up) in which the metal is shaped from the reverse. The two processes were used together to create a finished piece. This slow process uses the plasticity of the metal, creating the design by degrees.

## Etching

Etching was a common form of decoration on armour. Etch comes from the Dutch and German words meaning to eat or corrode. The design is eaten into the surface of the metal using a corrosive acid.

The etcher's pattern was often selected from illustrated book of patterns intended as models for use by craftsmen and makers of decorative objects.

The whole surface of the metal was painted with protective wax or varnish. A master drawing was made of the chosen design which was then pricked through the paper onto the metal using a series of dots, scratching through the resist (wax or varnish) and exposing the metal underneath.

Then the surface was treated with acid. The acid ate into the metal where the wax had been cut away. Afterwards the wax was washed away with a solvent such as turpentine. The etched design was emphasised by

rubbing it with lamp-black in oil.

Alternatively the design could be preserved by the protective wax and the background etched away, using small dots or cross-hatching, leaving the design in slight relief.



Detail showing etching and gilding on the Smythe armour. (See page 12).

## Gilding and silvering

The ancient art of gilding is the process of applying a thin layer of gold or silver to a surface. The process involved applying an amalgam of the precious metal and mercury to a part of the armour and heating it. The mercury evaporated and the gold and silver became firmly attached to the metal.

## Damascening

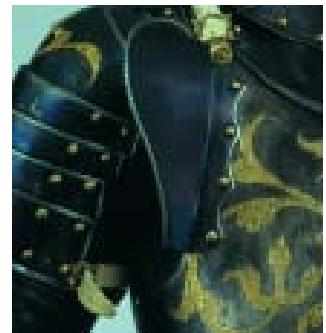
This is the art of cutting a narrow groove into the steel, hammering gold or silver wire into these recesses and then polishing the whole surface.



Right: Detail showing damascening and embossing on the Lion armour (See page 70).

## Blueing

The armour needed to be polished to a mirror finish. The iron was heated in a kiln or oven. It was a skill to control the heat and make sure the whole piece developed an even colour. The finished colours ranged from peacock blue through to black.



Detail showing blueing on the Elector Christian I armour. (See page 26).