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LAMERIE, CORAZE, CORAZINE:
COATS OF PLATES IN ITALIAN ARCHIVAL SOURCES
AND EXCAVATIONS (13th-15th CENTURIES)

Abstract:

M. Vignola 2018, Lamerie, Coraze, Corazine: coats of plates in Italian archival sources and excavations (13th-15th centuries), *AMM XIV*: 131-152

Late medieval documents and archaeological works have yielded huge contributions to the history of the coat of plates. Italian excavations continuously provide new material evidence and archives are an endless mine of clues about their origins and development. The purpose of this paper, therefore, will be an interdisciplinary approach to these valuable sources, in order to lay down the historical background of the evolution of the coat of plates and their military significance in Italian warfare. At least three evolutionary steps are described by medieval scribes in their works, the eldest being the “lameria”, the intermediate “coracia” – “coyracia” – “coraza” (simple variants of the same name) and the final “coracina” – “corazina” (an equivalent of what we call a brigandine). These phases are also represented in the archaeology, while the introduction of supposedly 14th century models should actually be dated to the second half of the 13th century.

Key words: coat of plates, brigandine, Italian archaeology, Late-medieval warfare

Received: 05.01.2018; Accepted: 19.07.2018; Revised: 26.09.2018

Preface

Archaeological evidence of late medieval arms and armour in Italian excavations is a welcome but rare occurrence. In spite of a few notable exceptions (as we will see in the case of Campiglia Marittima, Soffumbergo and Povoletto), Italian warfare in archaeology is mostly evidenced by arrowheads, crossbow bolts and loose “brigandine” plates, while larger finds (such as swords, helmets, breastplates and so on) are significantly scarcer and sometimes poorly preserved. In spite of these limitations, however, Italian archaeology still provides a significant contribution to the knowledge of European medieval warfare. The armour industry in the Peninsula achieved its height in the 14th and 15th centuries, when desirable Italian armours were exported all over Europe. Although the history of the Milanese armour workshops is beyond the aim of this paper, the fame of these workshops is a reminder of the importance of such industry in the war-torn patchwork of Italian city-states. As such weapons had always been a pivotal asset for any government or lord, both as a source of taxation and a way to achieve military supremacy,

regulations were issued to keep this strategic industry in check and notarial deeds in Italian archives are an endless source of valuable information, still largely waiting for investigation and publication.

That being said, this paper will not attempt the formidable task of condensing all this scattered archival and archaeological evidence in a few pages, but will rather focus on one of the most common types of armour: the coat of plates. It will also focus exclusively on Italian examples and originals preserved in the Peninsula, leaving out some of the most famous artefacts excavated abroad, such as those from Wisby (Thordeman 1939) and Chalcis (Ffoulkes 1911, 381-390). In other words, this paper will not be an exhaustive study of the coat of plates, but rather a summary of some Italian archival and archaeological highlights.

As an additional foreword, I should also point out that the very definition of “coat of plates”, although largely accepted, is somewhat vague and is often used to describe a whole range of torso protection consisting of overlapping metal



Fig. 1. Statue of St Maurice, Magdeburg Cathedral (after <https://supernaut.info/2015/09/the-image-of-the-black-in-western-art-volume-ii-part-1-some-images>).

Ryc. 1. Rzeźba św. Maurycego, katedra w Magdeburgu (wg <https://supernaut.info/2015/09/the-image-of-the-black-in-western-art-volume-ii-part-1-some-images>).

plates riveted inside a cloth or leather garment. This term unfortunately inadequately reflects the multiple shades of meaning of many Italian words as found in documents. However, in the plethora of written sources our priority should be a precise comprehension of each single entry, so that we might form a “shapeless” word into a real object, related to iconography and surviving specimens. Keeping this in mind, the following pages will delve into ancient Italian documents, sticking as much as possible to their original terminology, while attempting to lay out the historical background of coats of plates’ evolution and their military significance in Italian warfare. As a second step, I will provide a catalogue of the most notable specimens in Italian museums and archaeological finds.

The “coat of plates” alias “lameria”, “coracia”, “coracina”

As previously said, the abstract concept of a “coat-of-plates” is basically that of a metal armour made from plates of different size and



Fig. 2. “Life of St. Martin”, Simone Martini, Chapel of St Martin in the Lower Church in Assisi. *Photo by M. Vignola.*

Ryc. 2. „Żywot św. Marcina” autorstwa Simone Martini, kaplica św. Marcina w kościele dolnym w Asyżu. *Fot. M. Vignola.*

shape, all riveted inside an outer layer of cloth or sometimes leather. Although the individual plates were covered, this type of armour is recognizable in art and sculpture thanks to the rivets’ heads protruding from the garment. These were sometimes decorated and organized in regular patterns. Medieval terminology in Italian documents is obviously very far from this English archetype, and the modern one as well. Lionello Giorgio Boccia in his “Dictionary” (Boccia 1982a, 19-20) commendably tried to clarify the evidence from written sources, giving a specific name to each of the four different patterns of plates. That said, although these terms are certainly useful for descriptive purposes, they should be handled with special care and taken as a loose interpretation of the words penned by medieval scribes. In his own vocabulary, Boccia calls “brigantina” (brigandine) a “coat” lined internally with small plates or strips. A “corazza” (cuirass) should have been a leather garment (hence its name, from the Latin word “corium” = hide) holding inside plates larger than in a brigandine, while a “corazzina” should have been made of a mixture or larger and smaller elements. Finally a “lamiera” (a word without a precise match in English nomenclature) should have been a breastplate crafted with larger sheets, wider than those of the “corazza” and riveted under or over an internal lining of leather



Fig. 3. Pisanello, "Codex Vallardi", fol. 2613 r (after https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/ca/Pisanello_-_Codex_Vallardi_2613_r.jpg).

Ryc. 3. Pisanello, „Codex Vallardi”, fol. 2613 r (wg https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/ca/Pisanello_-_Codex_Vallardi_2613_r.jpg).

or cloth, like the eldest specimens from Visby and a globose breastplate in the Churburg armoury (*ibid.*, tav. 33:D). As we shall see, some of these words are actually akin to originals, but many cannot be as rigidly defined as Boccia has proposed.¹

The first reference I have found concerning this type of armour dates to 1237. In that year a knight serving under Ezzelino da Romano protected his body with a mail shirt ("panceria") and a "lameria" over it (Settia 1993, 182). The diffusion of crossbows in Italian warfare probably made it necessary to strengthen the defences over the most vital body parts. On the other hand, the word "lameria" (which could be roughly translated into English as "sheet of metal"), is by itself potentially good evidence of a defence crafted with metal plates. A few years later in Chieri (Piemonte, north-western Italy), in 1253, we find seven more instances of "lamerie" among



Fig. 4. Frescoes in the church of Santa Maria di Bressanoro, Castelleone. Photo by A. Carloni-Rimini.

Ryc. 4. Freski w kościele Santa Maria di Bressanoro, Castelleone. Fot. A. Carloni-Rimini.

75 inventories containing weapons of some sort (*ibid.*, 146, 151). Furthermore, in 1262 in Bologna we come across the first mention of a manufacturer: a man named Petrus de Lameriis, member of the blacksmiths' guild. In Bologna again, in 1267, four members out of 301 recorded in the list of the art of "feris grossis" (large ironworks), "spatis" (swords), "cesuriis" (scissors), "lameriis et cervelleriis" (skull caps) specialised in the crafting of "lamerias" (Breveglieri 1988, 91). By the last quarter of the 13th century, these "lamerie" were already fairly common and in 1279 citizens of Bassano (in Veneto, north-eastern Italy) supported Padua with a levy of 15 knights, 15 crossbowmen and 100 infantrymen; 50 of them protected by "lamerie" (Settia 1993, 193). In the same year, a knight named Poncius Bastonus sadly died far from the battlefield in a Genoese hospice and among his belongings we once more find a "lameria" (Vignola 2009, 144), while in

¹ The following list of documents is mostly taken from my previous paper about this topic, partly based on unpublished archival sources (Vignola 2009, 136-161). The paper is freely downloadable on Academia.edu, as well as some of my previous archaeological studies: https://www.academia.edu/4178268/Armamenti_corazzati_e_archeologia.



Fig. 5. "History of the True Cross", Antoniazzo Romano, church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome. Photo by A. Carloni-Rimini.

Ryc. 5. „Historia Krzyża Prawdziwego”, Antoniazzo Romano, kościół Santa Croce w Gerusalemme, Rzym. Fot. A. Carloni-Rimini.

Bonvesin della Riva's "De Magnalibus Mediolani" (1288), the "lamerie" are part of the panoply of the Milanese well-armed warrior.²

These documents alone demonstrate that by the time of the battle of Wisby (1361) coats of plates were already widely used in Italian and Western warfare. Furthermore, two documents dating to 1251 and written by Bartolomeo de Fornari in Genoa, are of paramount importance to pinpoint some actual details of these "lamerie" and their evolution (*ibid.*, 148). In the first source, a mail maker named Bonus Segnor receives seven

Genoese "lire" for five "coiracie" (cuirasses): as far as I know, this is the first instance of "cuirasses" in written sources and it probably highlights an evolutive step between a more archaic form (the "lameria") and an updated version (the "coracia", or "coraza" in other documents). The second mention is about the sale of a dozen of *coracias lamerias clavatas albas de clavibus doratis*: this is a rather puzzling caption that mixes "coiracia" and "lameria", but with a precise indication of their white colour ("albas") and the presence of gilded rivets ("clavibus doratis"). The appearance

² *Non enim equitum solummodo, sed etiam peditum videres in bello decentes catervas in acie coruscantibus armis, loriceis, thoracibus, lameriis, galeis, galeriis, ferreis cerebralibus, collariis, cirotecis, tibialibus, femoralibus et genualibus, ferreis lanceis, pilis, ensibus, pugionibus, clavis decentissime coruscantes* (Chapter V, XX; Chiesa 2009, 125).



Fig. 6. "Legend of St Ursula", Vittore Carpaccio, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice. *Photo by M. Vignola.*

Ryc. 6. „Legenda o św. Urszuli”, Vittore Carpaccio, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Wenecja. *Fot. M. Vignola.*



Fig. 7. "Martyrdom of St Sebastian", Vaselli chapel in Basilica di S. Petronio, Bologna. *Photo by M. Vignola.*

Ryc. 7. „Męczeństwo św. Sebastiana”, kaplica Vaselli w Basilica di S. Petronio, Bolonia. *Fot. M. Vignola.*

of these primitive coats of plates might have been close to the famous armour worn by St Maurice in Magdeburg Cathedral (Fig. 1), whose original colours are still partially visible, including a yellow hue on the rivet heads, reminiscent of some gilding (half of the 13th century).

On the basis of this survey, it is not unlikely that the word "lameria" referred to a "Magdeburg-type" coat-of-plates and was probably akin to large plated examples from Wisby (Thordeman 1939, Armours 1-15).³ Unfortunately, it is a bit

harder to guess the structure of early cuirasses – "coirace", although they probably shared the same manufacturing technique, but with smaller plates, as in Simone Martini's frescoes in Assisi (second decade of the 14th century; Fig. 2). In early 14th century Genoa the word "lameria" seems to have fallen into disuse and in the "Liber Gazarie" (1316-1341, a collection of regulations pertaining to the administration of colonies on the Black Sea) the "coirace" were already issued as standard on Genoese galleys. Each ship had to store at least

³ I must agree with Mario Scalini about the necessity to reconsider the chronology of many of these armours that could have been very old by the time of their burial in 1361 (Scalini 2003, 388). However, I do not think, in contrast to what he says, that they were abandoned as a consequence of their age, but rather because the practice of scavenging decaying bodies must have been very unhealthy also in the 14th century.



Fig. 8. Fragment of a 14th century cuirass. Schloss Tirol Museum. Photo by A. Carloni-Rimini.

Ryc. 8. Fragment XIV-wiecznego kirysu krytego. Muzeum Schloss Tirol. Fot. A. Carloni-Rimini.

160 cuirasses and 60 out of them should have been “de media proba” (half-proof), possibly indicating a higher degree of protection, while those for the “comitus” (the captain) and the scribe had to be “de proba” (full proof). We can also argue from this valuable source how in early 14th century Genova coats of plates were crafted to three different levels of protection: normal, half proof, full proof (Vignola 2009, 149). Whether these states were achieved through a different thermal treatment of the plates, thicker plates or some other way to improve their toughness, it is now impossible to say. In Genoese documents, however, the word “coiracia” continued to be common well into the 15th century. For instance, “coirace” occur in several inventories of Genoese fortresses dating to between 1385 and 1423. According to the statutes of the art of cuirass-makers (dating to the first decade of the 15th century) we find that the plates were riveted to canvas and that their rivets could be replaced when the textile part wore out (the operation being called “clavare de novo”, meaning: “putting new rivets on”): these statutes also enforced the use of brand new canvases for this purpose (*ibid.*, 150). On the other hand, the habit of preserving old coat of plates’ elements for possible reuse is witnessed

by an inventory from the castle of Voltaggio (close to Genoa) dating to 1385, where we read that in the fortress were stored 127 *lamas pro coyraçis, computatis magnis et parvis* (127 coat of plates’ parts, small and large). These must have been loose elements, because otherwise they would have been simply listed as a “coyracia” or “coiracia” (*ibid.*, 150).

A change in terminology took place later in this century, since in a group of items in the castle of Vezzano Ligure (1469-1478) we already encounter the word “coracina”: a diminutive of “coiracia” which probably corresponded to what we nowadays call “brigandine” (Bernabò 1997, 109-113).

As has been stated, medieval Italy was a patchwork of small city-states and fiefs and this extreme fragmentation makes it very hard to describe the evolution of coats of plates solely on the basis of archival sources. Variations in meaning are always possible, since the language (or dialect) of each petty state sometimes differed from its neighbours. Although Latin was still largely used by notaries and in several official sources, local terminology became more and more vernacular in written documents, thus fostering changes in the meaning of words. Furthermore the evolution of



Fig. 9. Brigandine's back. Museo Civico Medievale, Bologna. Photo by A. Carloni-Rimini.

Ryc. 9. Tylna część brygantyny. Museo Civico Medievale, Bologna. Photo by A. Carloni-Rimini.



Fig. 10. Brigandine's back. Museo Storico della Caccia e del Territorio, Cerretto Guidi (FI). Photo by A. Carloni-Rimini.

Ryc. 10. Tylna część brygantyny. Museo Storico della Caccia e del Territorio w Cerretto Guidi (Florencja). Fot. A. Carloni-Rimini.

For instance, while in Genova the term “lameria” seems to have mostly disappeared by the end of the 13th century, the same word is still used in the statutes of the art of the armourers in Florence (1321), where we read that they crafted *coraçças*, *lamerias*, *staria de ferro*, *elmos*, *baccinectos*, *gamberolas*, *testerias* (Scalini 2004, 119-121). It is hard to infer from this passage whether these “lamerias” were still manufactured alongside cuirasses, but in an older style, or whether they already evolved into something else: furthermore, the passage testifies to the range of Florentine armourers’ skills in the early 14th century, which encompassed the manufacture of pieces for the whole body. However, unlike Genova (where the term “corazina” seems to appear much later in the 15th century), the same word was already common in Tuscany in the second half of the 14th century. In the inventory of fortress of Magliano in 1356 are listed *cinque paia di chorazine* (five pairs), beside several *paia di coraze*. In 1382 one *paio di chorazine* is stored in the fortress of Gargonza and it is the only laminated armour in the list (De Luca, Farinelli 2002, 481, 485). The metallic nature of the *corazze* is clarified by a bunch of loose plates from three cuirasses (*piastre di corazze di tre paia*) in Sassoforte: the word “piastra” is clearly indicative of a metal sheet and once more proves that, in spite of their name, these *corazze* were lined with metal plaques (*ibid.*, 483).

To make things even more complicated, in 15th century Milan the word “coraza” (a simple variation of the Genoese “coracia”) had totally changed its original meaning, indicating a whole

arms and armour industry in each country might have been different, making the comprehension of the subject even more complicated.

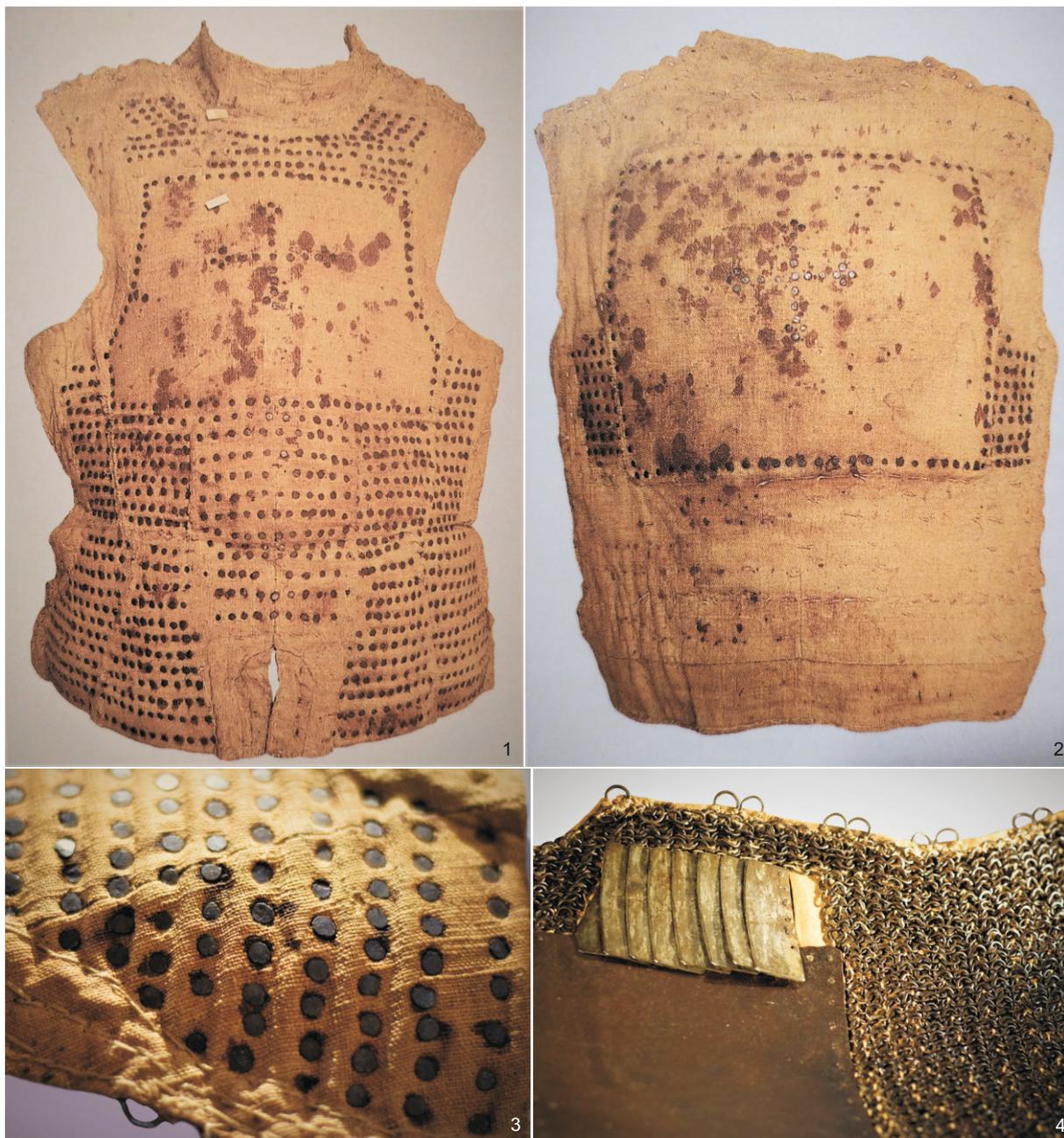


Fig. 11. Corazina, Musei Civici del Castello Sforzesco, Milan: 1 – front; 2 – back; 3 – detail of the rivets; 4 – detail of the backplates (1-2 – after Allevi 1998, 25, Fig. 24:a-b; 3-4 – photo by M. Vignola).

Ryc. 11. “Corazina”, Musei Civici del Castello Sforzesco, Mediolan: 1 – przód; 2 – tył; 3 – nity; 4 – fragment części spodniej (1-2 – wg Allevi 1998, 25, Fig. 24:a-b; 3-4 – fot. M. Vignola).

breastplate-backplate steel protection for the man-at-arms: the word “coracina” – “corazina” however designated a brigandine. In 1466 a man named Jacobino Vitali, a master in the craft of “chiodi da corazina” (brigandine rivets), complained that one of his labourers had stolen a great quantity of the brass he used for making rivets, thus providing some useful clues about them being manufactured by specialized artisans and traded in large quantities (Vignola 2017, 80).

As far as the origin of the now common term “brigandine” is concerned, the connection with the word “brighante” (which had a negative connotation and was sometimes applied to late medieval infantrymen) is evidenced by the sources. For instance, thanks to Datini’s archive, we know that in 1383 twelve so-called *choraze di fero da brighanti stangnate* were exported from Milan to Avignon and this sentence brings us back to the very genesis of the word “brigandine” (Frangioni

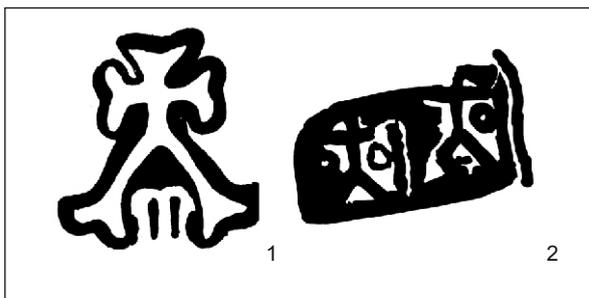


Fig. 12. Mark of the Missaglia family (1) and Milanese mark struck on the Sforzesco corazina (2). *Drawing by C. Paggiarino.*

Ryc. 12. Marka płatnerska rodziny Missaglia (1) i mediolańska marka na zbroi ze zbiorów Musei Civici del Castello Sforzesco (2). *Rys. C. Paggiarino.*

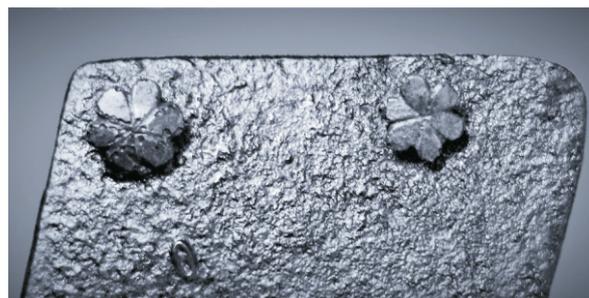


Fig. 13. Plate with copper alloy floral rivets, possibly German. *Photo by M. Vignola.*

Ryc. 13. Zbrojnik z miedzianymi nitami w kształcie rozet, prawdopodobnie produkt pracowni niemieckiej. *Fot. M. Vignola.*

1994, 5-7). This inventory also points out that these cuirasses were made of iron (*di fero*) and that their plates were tinned (*stagnate*). The same word “brigandina” would eventually appear in French 15th century documents,⁴ while being utterly uncommon in Italian sources.

This largely incomplete survey of Italian documents could obviously be expanded, but it would not add nor deduct anything to the complexity of the subject. What actually matters for this paper’s purpose is showing how terminology changed in time and across the country, creating confusion among scholars. A conventional vocabulary is therefore quite useful when trying to put some order in the various typologies which stem from the archetypal “lameria”, although by so doing it could also be occasionally misleading.

In a nutshell, we could say that the written sources seem to testify to at least three phases in the evolution of the coat of plates: the earliest being the “lameria”, the second “coracia” – “coyracia” – “coraza” (simple variants of the same name) and the third “coracina” – “corazina” (the equivalent of what we call “brigandine”). It is also very likely that each word was related to a specific step in their evolution, with plates becoming progressively smaller in order to achieve higher mobility and wear-ability.

This descriptive terminology based on documents could therefore be used to revise Boccia’s dictionary, and especially his use of the word “lameria” (which has nothing to do with any 14th century stove-made globoid breastplate) and the distinction between a “brigantina” and a “corazzina”, which can be taken now at face value, but that has no clear roots in archival sources.

Lastly, one more puzzle which can be solved by the documentary source concerns their actual diffusion on the battlefield. As I stated in the foreword, the importance of these defences in Italian warfare should not be underrated, at least from the 14th century onwards. The example of Genoese galleys alone, where 160 “coirace” were loaded on each ship, should be enough to highlight the massive manufacturing of these defences by the early 14th century. However, another source for shedding some more light on the actual extent of this mass production is to be found in a couple of Milanese documents from the second half of the 15th century. The first one is an inventory of weapons stored in the arsenal of the castle of Pavia (27th of August 1478), where we encounter some 447 “corazine discoperte” (uncovered brigandines, probably lacking an upper high quality cloth layer) (*ibid.*, 235-238). The second is an order of 2000 “corazine” placed by Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza to the armour-trader Filippo Corio (17th of November 1471), where Filippo stated that he would be capable of delivering 150 “corazine” per month, thanks to the collaboration of several other masters (*ibid.*, 59). These “corazine” should have been crafted in three different sizes: small, medium and large, and it sounds like a testament to the reality of “munition pieces”, that definitely were not tailored on the body of common soldiers, as custom-made sets for the well-off must have been.

Many more instances could be listed here, but these alone should provide enough evidence for the diffusion of this style of protection through the 14th and 15th centuries, until their decline in Italy in the first decades of the 16th century. Some of the last specimens, however, gradually lost

⁴ In his “Glossarium Mediae et Infime Latinitatis”, monsieur du Cange quotes several French documents (the earliest dating to 1453) where the word “brigandina” (or “brigantina”) has exactly the same meaning as today (*Glossarium* 1883, 750).

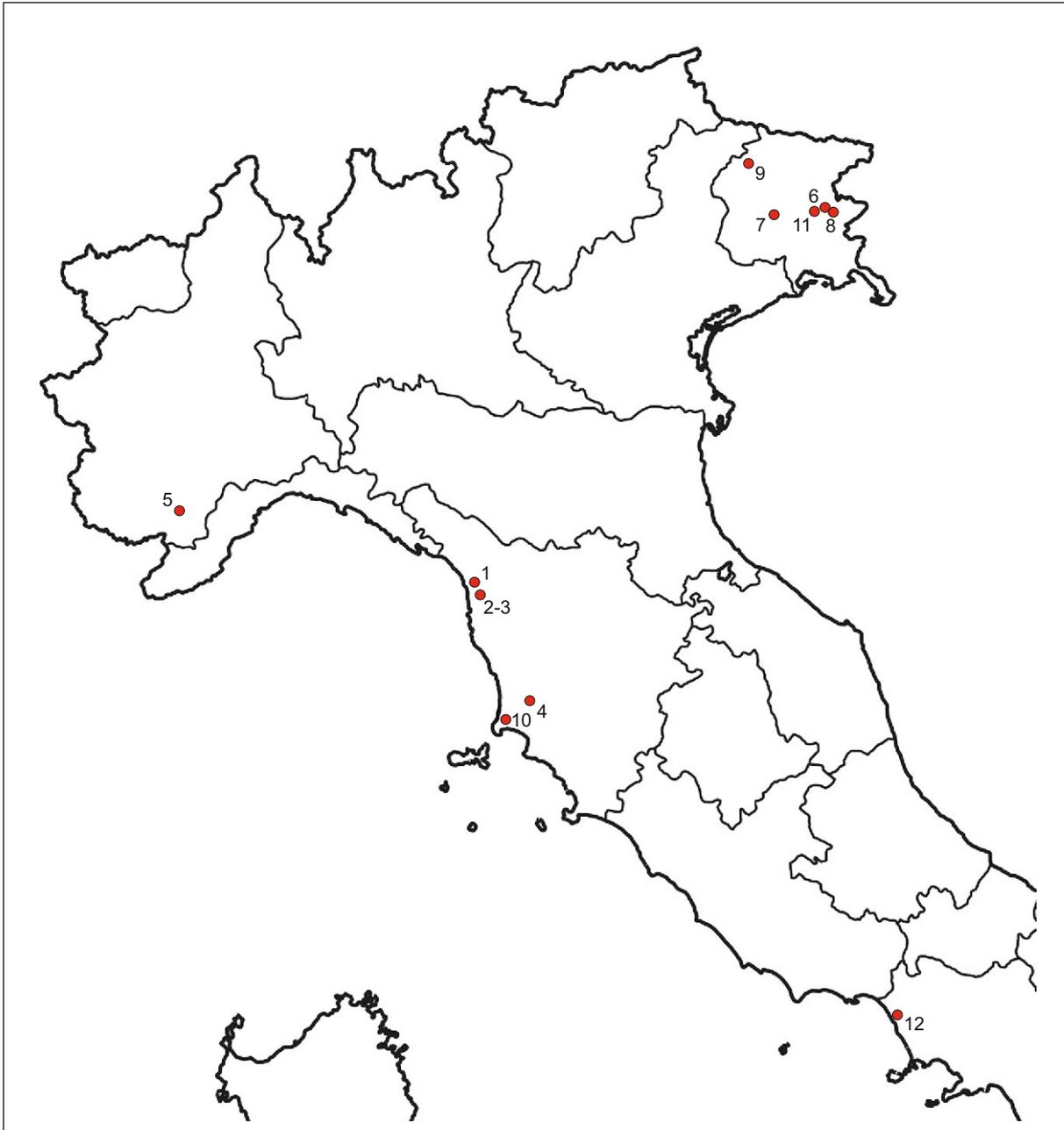


Fig. 14. Italy. Location of archaeological discoveries listed in the article. *Drawing by M. Vignola.*

Ryc. 14. Włochy. Lokalizacja znalezisk archeologicznych omówionych w artykule. *Rys. M. Vignola.*

their significance on the battlefield, becoming an exquisite ornament for the rich, with a profligacy of rivets and very tiny plates.

Iconography

The endeavour of giving a “body” to these archival sources is somehow even more complicated than escaping terminological misunderstandings. In fact, there is a huge gap between the wealth of written sources in Italian archives and surviving iconography, especially from the 13th and the 14th

century, the latter being woefully scarce. However, as far as this scattered evidence is concerned, there are many other pitfalls to be avoided. Small details like rivets’ distribution and plates’ pattern are often oversimplified or totally neglected, thus making it hard to evaluate the structure of the depicted items. Chronology is also another difficult area, since several iconographic sources have rather uncertain dating spanning over decades. Furthermore, many coats of plates are hidden under heraldic tabards and their presence

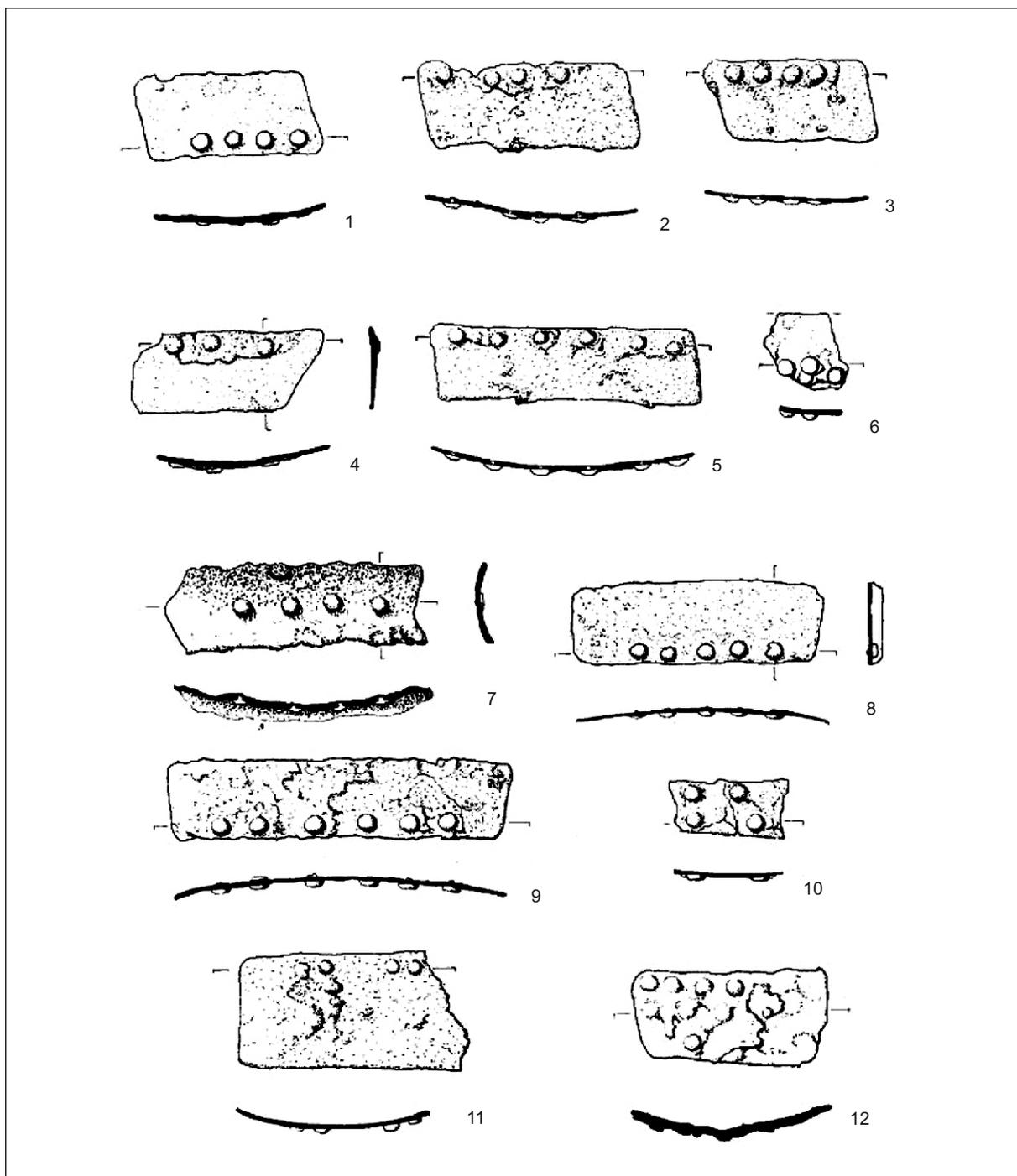


Fig. 15. Plates from the castle of Ripafratta (after *Amici 1989, 463, tav. 16*).

Ryc. 15. Zbrojniki z zamku Ripafratta (wg *Amici 1989, 463, tav. 16*).

can be argued from some tiny details, but their actual structure is not clear.

As far as I could see, there are no Italian pictorial nor sculptural sources comparable in details to the figure of St Maurice of Magdeburg mentioned above (Fig. 1), leaving the early evolution of the “lameria” somewhat in the dark. The first realistic Italian depiction is probably to

be found in Simone Martini’s frescoes in Assisi (Basilica of St Francis, chapel of St Martin), dating to between 1320 and 1330 (Fig. 2). Here the structure of the two items looks quite primitive: one of them shows three rows of pretty large and squarish plates on the body and a fourth on the upper part of the chest, with some plates shaped to follow the curvature of the neck. The second



Fig. 16. Plates from the castle of Sacuidic still connected, as they were found, Forni di Sopra. Photo by M. Vignola.

Ryc. 16. Zbrojniki z zamku Sacuidic (Forni di Sopra) w momencie odkrycia, wciąż połączone ze sobą. Fot. M. Vignola.

one is rather similar, with a notable exception of its slightly smaller plates, with one more horizontal row on the body. A green cloth covers both these defences and like in the sculpture of St Maurice of Magdeburg, it continues under the lower edge of the last plate down to the knees, with a vertical slit to the front. The few large headed rivets are painted in yellow and are reminiscent of the “gilded rivets” that we found in 13th century Genoese documents. This simple pattern is possibly a development of the “lameria”, and probably matches the first progress towards the “coiracia” phase.

In the course of the 14th century surviving pictorial sources grow in number, but unfortunately most of them are oversimplified and thus we have little or no clues about the relevant details we look for (see Spinello Aretino’s frescoes in Siena and the “Room of the Guards” in the castle of Avio, Trento province, for instance). However, another valuable example dates to the late 14th century and is provided by Altichiero da Zevio’s frescoes in the “Chapel of St George”, in Padua (1377-1384) (for some interesting close-ups cf. Glinianowicz 2013, 166-167, Figs. 24-28). In this portrayal we can appreciate a further step in their

evolution, with a couple of large plates on the breast and much smaller elements on the waist and on the back, where they surround a large backplate on the dorsal. The rivets also are much more numerous than in the Assisi cuirass and the set shows a frontal opening, with straps and buckles to secure it. Furthermore, these defences are distinctively wasp-shaped, following the trend of contemporary fashion. Looking back at written sources once more, we also notice that their chronology coincides with the use of the word “corazina”.

The same typology portrayed in Altichiero’s frescoes is also depicted in two detailed sketches from the renowned “Codex Vallardi” (Pisanello and his entourage, ca. 1438), where the plates layout is substantially similar to the “corazine” in Padua, thus supporting the idea of a common model (Fig. 3).

Over the course of the 15th century, available iconography becomes relatively more abundant and shows some of the patterns that are usually found in archaeological specimens. The typical cluster of “three rivets in a triangle” of Jakob Von Embs’ brigandine, for instance, is clearly depicted on a guard in Santa Maria di Bressanoro, Cremona province (last quarter of the 15th century; Fig. 4) and in the frescoes painted by Antoniazio Romano in Rome (ca. 1490; Fig. 5), while in the famous Carpaccio’s Legend of St Ursula (1497-1498) we have an almost photographic rendition of a mature brigandine, with small plates all over the body and rows of rivets in a linear pattern (Fig. 6), similar to another one in the Martyrdom of St Sebastian in Bologna (1490-1495, Fig. 7).

A more detailed investigation of pictorial sources could yield a plethora of other instances, but would probably be pointless, especially for the 14th century. What actually matters is that Italian art seems to match the evolution described in archival documents: in other words, as the shape of coats of plates changed in iconography, so did their name.

Defences in museums: the example of the “Sforzesco’s corazina”

The remarkable wealth of entries in written sources, unfortunately, has little or no match in surviving originals in Italian museums, because the intrinsic weakness of their external textile or leather coating caused the loss of the greatest majority of these artefacts. When their significance on the battlefield diminished and their facing layers decayed, nobody was interested anymore in replacing them or simply there was a dearth of skilled armourers available for the task of trashing the cloth and recycling the metal elements. Plate



Fig. 17. Corazina from Campiglia Marittima, front and side view (after Scalini 2009, 384, 389, Figs. 2,12).

Ryc. 17. „Corazina” z Campiglia Marittima, rzut z przodu i z boku (wg Scalini 2009, 384, 389, Figs. 2,12).

armours could have been restored quite easily and maintained with just some abrasives and oil: however, when the outer layers of coats of plates were in bad shape, they simply lost their functionality and turned into a useless pile of loose plates. With a growing significance of handguns on battlefields, the reputation of brigandines quickly declined and so did the skill required for their maintenance, as well as any interest in them.⁵

In Italian museums the most conspicuous assemblage of such artefacts is in the Doge's Palace of Venice (five dating to the 15th century, one of them on display, cf. Boccia 1991, 43), while another brigandine dated to the early 16th century is preserved in the National Museum of Ravenna (Cristoferi 1997). A more or less contemporary brigandine is also in the Museum Poldi Pezzoli in Milan (Boccia 1985, 72), while a back presumably dating to the late 15th century and laced to the sides is currently exhibited in the Museo Civico Medievale in Bologna (Fig. 9; Boccia 1991, 42-43).

The list includes a brigandine in the Royal Armoury of Turin, which probably once belonged to Renato of Challant (mid-16th century: Dondi, Sobrito Cartesegna 1982, 325), an early 16th century set in Churburg Castle (Trapp 1929, 14-15; Scalini 1996, 85) and another early 16th century brigandine recently acquired by the Schloss Tirol Museum (Spindler, Stadler 2004, 192-206). In the same castle a fragment of a 14th century cuirass is also on display, in almost pristine condition. It was found in a putlog hole inside the castle in 1999 (Fig. 8; Stadler 2004, 20-31, Figs. 1-3).⁶ Three more brigandines are also in Tuscany: one in the Bargello Museum in Florence (Scalini 2004, 126-127), one in the Stibbert Museum, also in Florence (Inv. No. 3553), and a third one in the Museo della Caccia (Hunt Museum) of Cerreto Guidi (Fig. 10), the latter re-employed as the inner lining of a chest (*ibid.*, 126-127; 2007, 202-203, n. 46). To my knowledge, a couple of brigandine fragments in Piacenza and Brescia are not yet published and I could not gather enough information

⁵ An interesting episode about their obsolescence dates to 1622, when 100 brigandines from the Tower of London were issued to colonists of Virginia, but they were already *not only old and much decayed, but with their age grown also unfit and of no use for modern service* (Straube, Lucchetti 1996, 39-40). Obviously they had been stored and forgotten for decades, with no maintenance at all.

⁶ The textile part of this defence is made of three layers, the outer being a yellow silk, the intermediate an uncoloured linen canvas and the internal a red-dyed linen of the same quality.



Fig. 18. Lameria elements from the Motta Castle: the large backplate to the left. *Photo by M. Vignola.*

Ryc. 18. Elementy "lamerii" z zamku Motta: po lewej element naplecznika. *Fot. M. Vignola.*

about them. Finally, a brigandine in the Odescalchi Collection in Rome was restored a few years ago and cleverly published, with some really amazing close-up pictures (Barberini 2008).

As far as these relics are concerned, we have little or no clues about their origin, although the thriving Italian armour industry suggests that many of them could actually have been manufactured in local workshops. However, as in the case of plate armours (and in general for any other artefact), the only reliable method to ascertain the origin of a brigandine is the study of its marks. Marks are the true fingerprint of the artisan on his wares and the most valuable way to connect an artefact to its production area.

Although many surviving coats of plates and brigandines bear some marks,⁷ the surface of excavated items is usually too corroded to preserve any trace of these precious signs.⁸ Furthermore, the attribution of a mark to specific area is not always achieved. One notable exception, however, is an exceptionally important brigandine (or we should rather say, "corazina") on display in the Musei Civici del Castello Sforzesco in Milan, which is probably the most oldest non-excavated specimen of its kind, whose remains are in a remarkable condition. Since this relic is now kept in a controlled environment and behind glass, any direct examination is unfortunately impossible. Little or nothing is to be found in its very concise record in the museum

⁷ An extremely well preserved brigandine in the Royal Armouries, for instance, is struck several times with an A in a castle-shaped frame. The brigandine in the Poldi Pezzoli museum in Milan is punched with the letters OR under a porcupine (a pretty weird mark indeed: Boccia 1985, 72), while on the Churburg brigandine four plates at the back are struck with two double headed egles in a shield frame (Trapp 1929, 15).

⁸ A remarkable exception is a "corazina" left-half breastplate, found in Milan in 1889 in St Catherine Street. The area around the pit is sided by floral-shaped brass rivets and the plate is punched three times with the joined letters FR in a triangle. Although the triangular cluster of signs is very typical on Milanese production, this mark lacks the crossed echelon of the "Sforzesco's corazina". The author of the paper dates this beautiful breastplate to 1500 but it looks like a much earlier specimen, possibly dating to the late 14th – early 15th century (Beaufort-Spontin 2004, 154-155).

catalogue (Allevi 1998, 25). G. L. Boccia however dated this relic to the end of the 14th century and identified this piece as being Milanese (Boccia 1991, 43), but the credits for a more critical approach among Italian scholars should go to Mario Scalini (2003, 387-389). Finally, a recent study by Marcin Glinianowicz (2013, pp. 157-170) compares this “corazina” to a pretty similar one in the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw and provides a useful survey on late 14th century Italian iconography. In spite of this critical interest, nevertheless, this awesome relic features a much more complex history than expected. From a structural point of view, the “Sforzesco corazina” is a side opening type, with a large plate on the breast surrounded by much smaller elements (five vertical rows) and another large plate to the back, sided by two rows of eight overlapping elements over the hips (Fig. 11:1-3). Its iron rivets have small round heads and were probably tinned, while large patches of mail are stitched to the outer layers on its back, thus filling the gaps left by the plates. Such a structure is rare and no other brigandine in Italian museums looks similar. This “anomaly” fostered some disputes among scholars about its chronology, but the most important feature has been so far overlooked: if we take a look to its back, the smaller elements are still tinned and show a very different colour from the brownish main plate. Furthermore, each smaller plate is struck with a mark (Fig. 11:4). The punched mark is also repeated two times on the side rows of plates and once in the central one of the breast half. The plates in the waist area, those of the left and right shoulder, those under the neck opening and the great breast and backplate are not marked. This difference alone raises the suspicion that this “corazina” could actually be a patchwork of elements assembled at a later date, possibly re-using some parts from older coats of plates in order to create a new whole, with the marked plates being the most recent additions. A better understanding could be achieved through a visual inspection of its inner front, but the current display keeps it hidden and there is no way to reach the inside without removing the “corazina” from its stand. However, the structure of its visible marks is of paramount importance, since in my own opinion (and Scalini’s and Boccia’s as well) they show some significant structural analogy with the signs adopted by Milanese armourers. If we compare the typical mark of the Missaglia family (Fig. 12:1) to the one on the brigandine (Fig. 12:2), in both cases we observe the presence of a split-cross, which is the

actual trademark of most Milanese workshops (Vignola 2017, pp. 91-96). However, these marks punched on brigandine elements are considerably smaller and linear than those impressed on wider armour plates: nevertheless, the basic structure of the split-cross looks akin and therefore a Milanese provenance of these bunch of plates is extremely probable. The first introduction of the split-cross symbol in Milanese armours is unknown, but evidence suggests that these signs did not appear earlier than the first quarter of the 15th century (*ibid.*, 204). This detail would place the second phase of the “corazina” well into the 15th century, while the large front and back plates could be earlier: how much time earlier it is impossible to say. M. Scalini suggested a chronology between 1360-1380, although this would only apply to the earliest elements and not for the plates struck with a typically 15th century mark (Scalini 2003, 389).

As far as its mark is concerned, while there is little or no doubt that the split-cross is accompanied by Z and O, the letter under the cross is read by Scalini and Allevi as an I, but it is actually quite unclear (Vignola 2017, 149). In the list of Milanese armourers I could not find any perfect match, but the structure of the mark is nevertheless interesting, since the letter under the cross could be the signature of the actual maker and those at its sides the acronym of the merchant who traded the finished item.

Since the “Sforzesco’s corazina” looks like a very functional defence and its history can be traced back to 1881,⁹ any later forgery should be ruled out. This patchwork, therefore, was probably made still back in the 15th century, as a testament to the habit of re-assembling older elements in new suits, as testified to by the aforementioned Genoese statutes.

The contribution of Italian archaeology

Loose plates are a relatively common occurrence in medieval archaeological excavations, also as stray finds (Fig. 13). Although always interesting in their own way, these items in most cases add little or nothing to our knowledge of the history of the coat of plates, except for being a piece of evidence for the military function of their finding location. Among all this scattered evidence, just a few relics are significant because they belong to some rare typology, they are still somehow connected in a pattern or they were found in stratigraphic contexts, with a precise *terminus ante quem*. Any survey of Italian archaeological sources should therefore make a sharp distinction between these rare

⁹ In that year this item was displayed in the Museo Patrio di Archeologia in Milan (Scalini 2003, 388).

pieces and relatively common armours. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is not to focus on a single dig, but rather to provide an overview of some of the most notable groups of plates from Italian excavations. Each dig will be numbered and placed on a map, in order to show its geographical position in the Peninsula (Fig. 14). The most notable finds will follow at the bottom of the list and will be dealt with a more intensive approach.

1) Castle of Ripafratta (Pisa province) (Fig. 15): 38 loose elements of various shapes, mostly from US 34-35, unclear chronology (Amici 1989, 462-464);

2) Castle of Vicopisano (Pisa province): 67 elements of various shapes, mostly from layers dating to the first decades of the 16th century. It is very likely that these elements were already old and rusty when they were been thrown away, because among them we encounter a couple of larger “coracia” plates, possibly dating to the 14th century. Three smaller brigandine plates are still in connection and their rivets are clustered in groups of three, as seen in iconography, in the “Campiglia corazina” and in Jacob von Embs’ brigandine in Vienna (Vignola 2006, 262-264);

3) San Michele alla Verruca, Vicopisano (Pisa province): a couple of brigandine elements, uncertain chronology (Dadà 2005, 374-375);

4) Rocchette Pannocchieschi (Grosseto province): seven coat of plates or brigandine elements, poorly preserved, from layers dating to between the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century (Belli 2003, 62-64);

5) Castle of Montaldo di Mondovì (Cuneo province): four remarkably well preserved plates. One of them still holds a row of 16 copper alloy rivets with stamped heads (floral design) (Cortelazzo, Lebole di Gangi 1991, 210-211);

6) Upper Castle of Attimis (Udine province): 20 narrow and elongated elements with a single row of rivets, sometimes found in connected groups of two (six groups). In my own opinion it is very likely that all these overlapping plates could originate from the same defence, since their shape and size is similar, as well as the distribution of their rivets. One further plate is wider and more archaic in style, and possibly comes from an earlier specimen. These finds, unfortunately, lack an appropriate stratigraphic placement, with a very wide chronology between the second half of the 14th and the 15th century (Vignola 2003b, 63-66);

7) Castle of Solimbergo (Pordenone province): about 70 heavily corroded plates with vestigial traces of rivets. Most of them are elongated in shape, but two are considerably larger (85 x 60 mm

and 95 x 65 mm) and possibly pertaining to an archaic coat of plates. Once more, the stratigraphic placement of these finds is not clear, though the excavation was made following a proper stratigraphic method (Gremese 1999, 68-71).

8) Castle of Soffumbergo (Udine province): a small hoard of defensive armament mostly dating to second half of the 14th century comes from this castle, although unfortunately it was discovered in non-stratigraphic excavations carried out in the 1970s. Beside fragments of a bascinet, a visor, a gorget, a right mitten and some limb protections, the dig yielded a bunch of pretty sizeable plates (not described individually in the paper). In his essay Boccia suggests that all these elements could be parts of the same 14th century “coracia”. Some of these plates are currently on display in the Museo Archeologico Medievale of Attimis (Udine province), randomly positioned on a dummy in a clearly unsuitable way. New studies on these exceptionally important finds would actually be welcome, as well as a rearrangement of the plates on the dummy (Boccia 1994, 45-53);

9) Castle of Sacuidic, Forni di Sopra (Udine province): this castle yielded 29 plates and a few more uncertain elements. Eleven of them were found in their original connection (Fig. 16), in the stratigraphic context of US 40A: 12 more were loose but in the same US and the rest was scattered in other areas. Although the metal of these plates is extremely deteriorated and every trace of rivets is now lost, the connected elements show beyond any reasonable doubt their provenance from an early form of “coracia”. Even more importantly, the context of US 40A is sealed by a layer of ashes and debris associated to a huge fire which destroyed the castle by the end of the 13th century. Archaeological evidence shows that the castle hosted a clandestine mint workshop, whose production did not last long beyond 1270 and was probably ended by the fire. In spite of their very poor preservation (all the metal is lost and only a lump of friable oxides remains), the exceptionality of this group is given by its stratigraphic context. As far as I know, this is the only defence of its kind in Italian digs that can be precisely dated back to the 13th century. It also shows some very up to date features for its own period, since a defence made from plates of this size (their long side is 5-7 cm on average, but many plates are broken and difficult to measure) would have looked like a much later “coracia”. A cross reference with Bartolomeo de Fornari’s Genoese documents (1251) is a useful reminder of the relationship between descriptive terminology and actual items (see the previous paragraph), although their area is distant

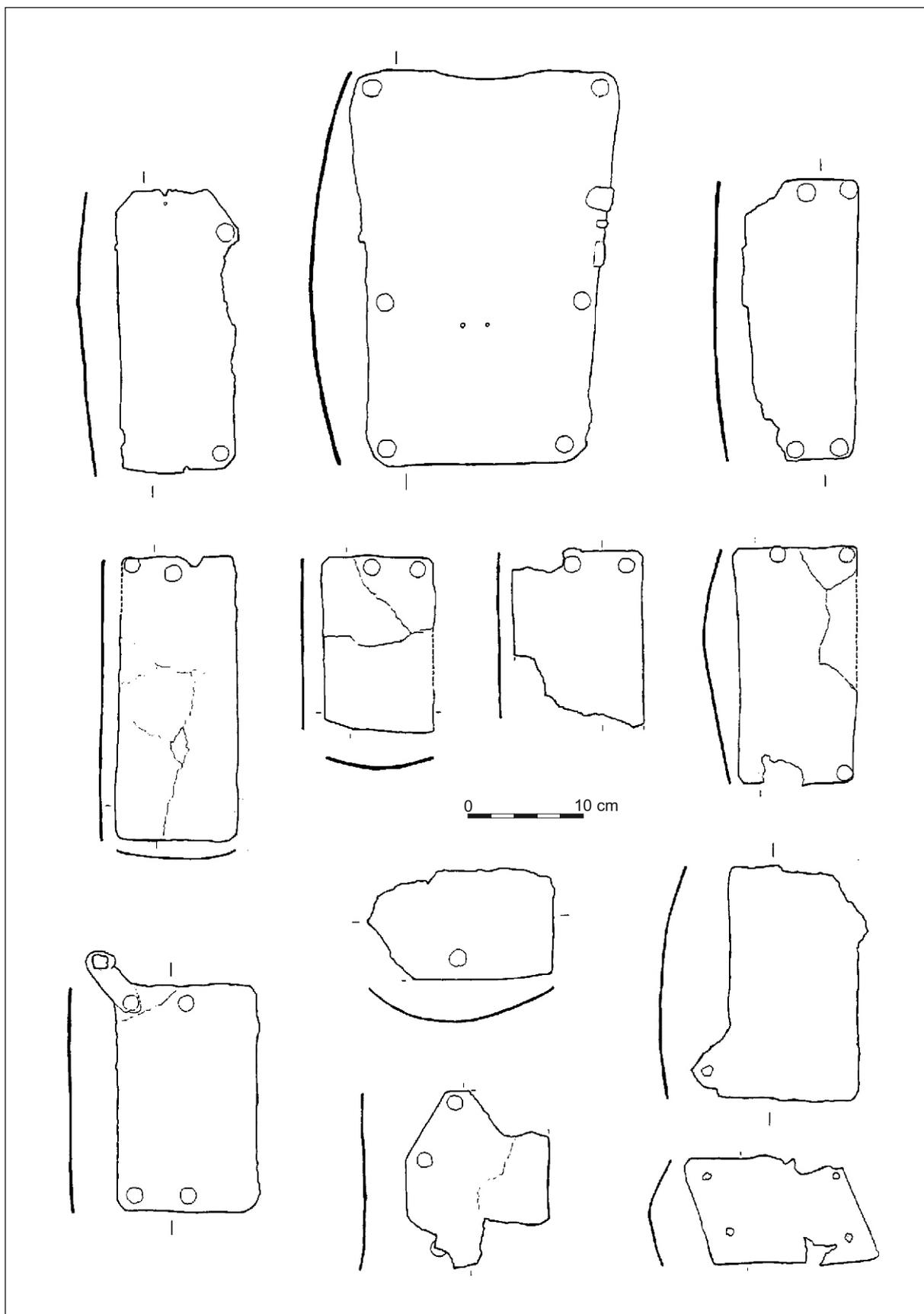


Fig. 19. Lameria elements from the Motta Castle: drawings with position and size of their rivets (after *Piuzzi 2003, 121*).

Ryc. 19. Elementy "lamerii" z zamku Motta: widoczne umiejscowienie i rozmiary nitów (wg *Piuzzi 2003, 121*).

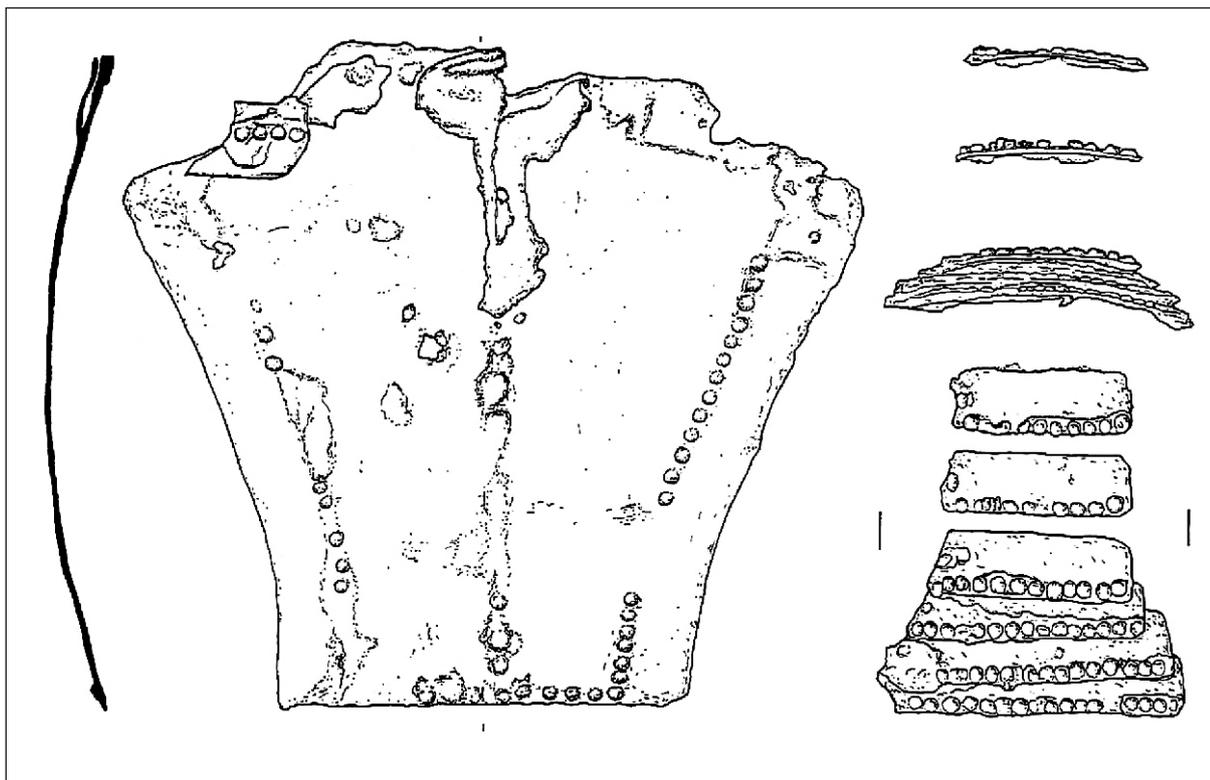


Fig. 20. Corazina backplate from the Motta Castle: to the left, the smaller connected plates from the same set (after *Piuzzi 2003, 82*).

Ryc. 20. Naplecznik „corraziny” z zamku Motta, obok mniejsze połączone ze sobą zbrojniki pochodzące z tej samej zbroi (wg *Piuzzi 2003, 82*).

from the archaeological site of Sacuidic. The first occurrence of the word “coiracia” in his deeds, however, could actually portray a step in the evolution from the original “lameria”. A simple equation between size and chronology (larger meaning earlier) should therefore be blurred, and it is very likely that in the second half of the 13th century elder “lamerie” were currently being used beside defences made from smaller elements. This is exactly the situation portrayed by the renowned Wisby’s coat of plates’ hoard (Thordeman 1939), where archaic defences manufactured with large iron staves were buried in 1361 along with armours made from smaller plates (Vignola 2008, 78-81);

10) Castle of Campiglia Marittima (Grosseto province): with about 1000 plates from at least four different armours, this is probably the largest hoard of plates excavated in Italy so far. Thanks to the specific pattern of its rivets (organised in triangular clusters of three), M. Scalini was able to partially reassemble one of these armours on a dummy and dated it around 1370 (Fig. 17). In the same excavation came to light remains of a late 14th century bascinet and a few fragments from a couple of visors (Scalini 2003, 382-396);

11) “Castello della Motta”, Povoletto (Udine province): in the field of coats of plates’ history and evolution, this is probably the most notable castle investigated in Italy so far. Among the first group of 13 plates from US 55 and US 32, at least 10 share the same round large headed iron rivets (1.3-1.4 cm wide), while the rest are loose elements pertaining to a couple of other armours (Figs. 18-19). This larger group includes a huge massive plate (about 34 cm long) originally interpreted as a breastplate: however, this theory was proved wrong and so needs to be updated, since its shape does not fit well enough the anatomy of a human breast, while it sits perfectly on the back, as we could experiment later on. The two holes almost in the middle of the plate probably held a couple of rivets for a strap used to fasten the loop attached to the squarish plate originally positioned on the lower back, as in some specimens from Wisby (Thordeman 1939, Armours 1, 3, 6-9, 11, 12, 15, 16). One of these plates is preserved in Motta’s hoard and its rivets are actually like those on the backplate, so it is very likely that they came from the same set. Similar rivets are also on a group of eight other elements (mostly fragmentary), possibly from the same item, which complement the backplates to create a “lameria”:

that is to say, the most archaic version of a coat of plates and the only one ever found in Italian digs. Unfortunately, the many missing parts make any attempt of reconstruction very hazardous, but it is very likely that the vertical staves created a sort of high belt around the waist, like in Wisby Armours 8-16 (*ibid.*, Pl. 39-87): all these specimens, however, lack the hefty backplate of Motta's one, which looks like a very unique feature, thus misleading the first evaluation of its nature. Among this hoard, one plate was certainly placed on the breast, as one can guess from the diagonal section under the pit, but the different shape of its rivets rules out any attribution to the same "lameria". This hoard unfortunately came from rather superficial layers dating to the 15th century, after the destruction of the castle in a siege in 1413. By that time these defences must already have been old, piled up in the proximity of a forge (whose traces were found in the same excavations) and ready to be forged into new pieces. Nevertheless, these precious plates from the earliest coat of plates are not the only treasures yielded by Motta. 40 more elements and some fragmented plates are the remains of several "corazine", found in layers dating to Period D2 of the castle (15th – early 16th century). 13 elements out of 19 in US 421 were excavated in their pristine position and must have belonged to a defense closely akin to the specimen from Campiglia Marittima. Even more interesting, the castle also yielded a perfectly preserved "corazina's" back (height: 28.4 cm; width: 31.1 cms; rivets' size: 0.4-0.5 cm; Fig. 20), very similar to one now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (accession number: 29.150.98; Boccia 1982b, 17, 33). Some traces of the ancient cloth cover are still impressed on its surface and one small plate is stuck in its original position over the shoulder, showing that this armour was lost with its textile cover. Furthermore, eight small plates were found in the same US 80 (four of them still connected) and their riveting close sequence is strikingly similar to the backplate. There is little or no doubt that these elements must have been part of the same "corazina", which therefore had a large backplate connected with tiny and narrow plates on the rest of the back. All these finds are unfortunately from the later stages of the castle's life, when after the 1413 siege the structure began to decline and was

progressively abandoned. It is therefore impossible to say whether this back had been scavenged from the ruins (thus dating before 1413), or it comes from some other place and was stacked for a reuse that never happened. Its shape is actually very anatomical and lacks the distinctive "hourglass" design that is documented in Altichiero's frescoes in the Chapel of St George in Padua (Glinianowicz 2013, 167, Fig. 28) and in a backplate now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, dated to the first half of the 15th century, but possibly earlier (accession number: 29.150.95). In my own opinion, the dating of these backplates is not an easy task. As far as we may argue from surviving brigandines, all the later sets seem to lack these large elements, thus prompting a chronology to an earlier stage. The back of coats of plates are also rarely depicted in iconography, with the notable exception of Altichiero, making it hard to follow a trend in evolution in pictorial sources. However, it is pretty likely that the popularity of this kind of backplates reached its peak between the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century. Such backplates were used together with wide globoid breastplates¹⁰ (Vignola 2003a, 189-198);

12) Monte Massico (Caserta province): in 2008 archaeological excavations in the castle of Mondragone (Rocca Montis Dragonis) yielded 450 brigandine elements, which had been oddly assembled on a dummy. This hoard would be as much important as that from Campiglia Marittima, if only it were studied and published with proper method. However, I was unable to locate any scientific paper and all I could find was a quick description on an internet page.¹¹

Conclusions

The history of coat of plates is a chapter still largely to be written. Although archaeology and archival sources are the bricks and mortar for building a better comprehension of this topic, the reality is (in my humble opinion) much more complicated than we originally expected. We can probably draw a sort of evolutionary scheme from the "lameria" to brigandines, but the single steps of this evolution and their chronology is still shrouded in uncertainty. Important Italian finds (like those listed above) or new acquisitions from foreign sites like Szczerba Castle (Marek 2008), are paces

¹⁰ After results of the excavations had been published in 2003, the castle added another gem to its crown. A very nice half-breastplate (that could possibly match the "corazina's" back) was discovered, but I have no images of this precious relic, since the director of the digs changed and I was not involved in the scientific study of this item.

¹¹ Access to article on site: <http://lebellezzedelmassico.blogspot.it/2012/10/larmatura-medievale-brigantina.html/> on 5th January 2018.

forward in our understanding, but new questions continuously arise that need a response. Coats of plates could actually have had an extremely long operative life before being discarded, and even then old plates could have been refurbished in new sets. Evidence like the Motta Castle or Wisby armours suggests that between construction and burial, decades or even centuries might have lapsed, while iconography is seldom as detailed as we wish it to be. This paper therefore has no simple

answers to offer and should be taken solely as bridge between Italian sources and international scholars, beyond the language barrier of Italian scientific output, which should actually rely more and more on English as a way to disclose its contents to a wider audience.

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LAMERIE, CORAZE, CORAZINE: ZBROJE KRYTE WE WŁOSKICH ŹRÓDŁACH PISANYCH I ZNALEZISKACH ARCHEOLOGICZNYCH (XIII-XV WIEK)

Streszczenie

Definicja przyjmowana dla zbroi krytych obejmuje całą rodzinę ochron tułowia składających się z zachodzących na siebie metalowych płytek przymocowanych przy pomocy nitów do wnętrza tekstylnej lub skórzanej kamizeli. Niestety, terminologia dotycząca osłon ciała funkcjonująca w wielu włoskich źródłach pisanych jest niejednoznaczna. Źródła te zawierają jednak kilka terminów, które można wiązać z realnymi, znanymi z przedstawień ikonograficznych i znalezisk archeologicznych rodzajami zbroi krytych. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu wykazanie powiązań pomiędzy poszczególnymi określeniami, a realnymi elementami uzbrojenia oraz ukazanie ich zmienności w czasie i znaczenia we włoskiej wojskowości doby średniowiecza.

Analiza źródeł pisanych pozwala ustalić dość prosty cykl ewolucyjny zbroi krytych na terenie Włoch. Można tutaj wyróżnić trzy podstawowe fazy: pierwsza, najstarsza, związana jest z terminem „lameria”, druga ze słowami „coracia” – „coyracia” – „coraza” (będącymi wariantami tego samego terminu) i trzecia,

najmłodsza, z wyrażeniami „coracina” – „corazina” (odpowiadającymi brygantynie). Wydaje się, że każdy z tych terminów wiąże się z nieco innym elementem uzbrojenia ochronnego – różnice przejawiają się przede wszystkim w wielkości poszczególnych płytek. Zabieg taki miał na celu przede wszystkim zwiększenie wygody i mobilności właściciela zbroi. Cykl taki zdają się też potwierdzać źródła ikonograficzne.

Badania archeologiczne stosunkowo często przynoszą odkrycia zarówno pojedynczych, jak liczniejszych zbiorów zbrojników należących do płatów lub brygantyn. Ze względu na ten fakt są one tylko pomocnym źródłem dla rozważań o konstrukcji całych zbroi, stanowią jednak fizyczne świadectwo ich popularności na terenie Włoch. Wśród tych znalezisk trafiają się jednak zabytki, które są niezwykle istotne dla omawianej problematyki, nie tyle przez swą liczebność, ale przede wszystkim przez fakt ich zalegania w określonych sytuacjach stratygraficznych. W niniejszym artykule zostały one, po raz pierwszy, przedstawione szerzej anglojęzycznemu czytelnikowi.