

Large-Print Booklet

ART & WAR

IN THE RENAISSANCE

*The Battle of
Pavia Tapestries*

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Kimbell
Art Museum



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Booklets made possible by the Alcon Foundation

Brescia Knight on Horseback in Tournament Armor with Thrusting Sword

c. 1550–70

Steel, wood, leather, and cloth

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

This tournament armor was produced in the northern Italian city of Brescia. The decoration includes an unusual motif of gilded whorls that extend over the entirety of the armor's surfaces. Variations and chiseled finishes can be seen on the crest of the rider's helmet and at the neckline, as well as on the horse's headpiece, tail attachment, and breastplate. In the center of the breastplate is a worn engraving depicting St. George slaying the dragon. This suggests a Sicilian provenance—from the Bonanno-Branciforte armory—where the Compagnia dei Cavalieri Giostranti, stationed in Palermo, held St. George to be their patron saint.

The barding (protective horse armor) is made of rectangular lamellae spliced together with chains of ring mesh in a “barley grain” style similar to that of typical Ottoman trappings, though their plates ran horizontally.

Art & War in the Renaissance

The Battle of Pavia Tapestries

The Battle of Pavia, fought on February 24, 1525, by the two greatest powers of the day, was the culmination of the confrontation between military forces of the Habsburg ruler, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, and the king of France, Francis I. After a long siege of the northern Italian city by the French forces, the two armies clashed, resulting in the capture of the French king and a stunning victory for Charles V, which gave the Habsburg empire geopolitical supremacy over Europe.

A decisive element in Charles V's victory was the technological superiority of the imperial army, which was equipped with increasingly sophisticated and powerful weapons that changed the face of warfare and served as a bridge between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era. The formerly invincible French heavy cavalry, composed of nobles, was decimated by imperial arquebusiers (riflemen).

To celebrate this victory, seven luxurious tapestries, designed by court artist Bernard van Orley and woven in the Brussels atelier of Willem and Jan Dermoyen—all leading figures of Belgian tapestry production at the height of their fame—were presented as a diplomatic gift to Charles V in 1531. Eventually bequeathed to the powerful d’Avalos family of Spanish origin, whose ancestors had fought with great honor at Pavia, the tapestries were donated to the Italian state in 1862 by the family’s last descendant, Alfonso V, Marquis of Pescara. Since 1957, the tapestries have been displayed at the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte in Naples.

After careful restoration of the tapestries, which allows visitors to appreciate their original splendor, the entire suite is being presented in the United States for the first time. Alongside the tapestries are impressive examples of precious arms and armor of the period from the renowned Farnese Armory—exquisitely detailed firearms, swords, and finely decorated armor crafted by the greatest armorers of the sixteenth century.

Art and War in the Renaissance: The Battle of Pavia Tapestries is organized by the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte and The Museum Box in collaboration with the Kimbell Art Museum, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Promotional support provided by American Airlines, NBC5, and Paper City.

The Battle of Pavia

The Battle of Pavia was a significant event in European history. Fought between the two greatest powers of the time for political and geostrategic dominance, their multinational armies included French, Swiss, German, Spanish, Italian, Flemish, Scottish, and English soldiers. The battle marked the culmination of a conflict between the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V (1500–1558)—who reigned over Spain, Naples, Sicily, and Sardinia and controlled the Low Countries, Franche-Comté, and the Habsburg Austrian territories—and the king of France, Francis I (1494–1547), who laid claim to the Duchy of Milan through birthright. The emperor wished to take control of the Duchy of Milan, the “key of Italy,” as well as the Duchy of Burgundy, to completely encircle France. Francis I aimed to conquer the Kingdom of Naples and thwart the imperial threat.

From October 1524 to February 1525, French forces laid siege to Pavia, an imperial-held city within the Duchy of Milan, in an attempt to gain ultimate control over the region. Around dawn on February 24, 1525, the massed forces of Charles V (who was in Spain at the time) descended to break the siege, with resonant success. In a matter of only a few hours, the imperial army won a stunning victory, due in large part to their distinct technical advantage and critical implementation of arquebusiers (riflemen).

The outcome was of major significance: many of the rank and file of the French army were killed, along with a significant number of noblemen. Most humiliating of all, Francis I was taken prisoner, leading to a year of captivity for him in Madrid. The resounding defeat of the French army at Pavia brought an end to long-standing French aspirations to conquer the northern Italian peninsula and changed the balance of power not only in that region but throughout the continent, marking a point of no return in European political and military history.

The Battle of Pavia Tapestries

Designed by the court artist Bernard van Orley (c. 1488–1541), this cycle of remarkable Flemish tapestries was created in the Brussels atelier of Willem and Jan Dermoyen (both active 1520s–1540s). Woven in deeply saturated hues and luxuriously highlighted with gold and silver thread, each exquisitely detailed composition is filled with richly adorned military leaders, horsemen, and mercenary foot soldiers armed with swords, pikes, and firearms, all inhabiting a stunning panoramic landscape of walled battlegrounds and undulating hills. The tapestries were presented by the States General as a diplomatic gift to Charles V in 1531, six years after the Battle of Pavia, when he addressed the assembly of delegates representing the Low Countries at the Coudenberg Palace in Brussels.

Monumental in scale and measuring about twenty-eight feet wide and fourteen feet high, the seven panoramic images tell the story of the battle. They were designed to be arranged in a certain order, though some of the events depicted happened simultaneously, given the short duration of the engagement. Key moments from the battle are packed with near life-size figures and horses in full battle regalia, set within the scenography of the battlefield and countryside outside the besieged northern Italian city of Pavia.

A recent restoration has revealed just how sophisticated the tapestries are. Made with precious materials such as silk and wool yarns, as well as rich gold and silver threads, their weaving technique reflects the mastery of the great tapestry-makers working in sixteenth-century Brussels.

In this exhibition, the tapestries are presented in a manner that unites and reconstructs the vast, panoramic landscape of the city and its environs, offering a sweeping and comprehensive view of the events of the battle and drawing viewers into the world of Renaissance history, military technology, and fashion.

The Farnese Armory

Like most famous European dynastic armories, the armory of the noble Farnese family, now housed in the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, is an indispensable point of reference in the history of firearms and armor. Its key strengths are Milanese armor from the second half of the sixteenth century, specifically the work of Pompeo della Cesa (1537–1610), one of the era's most skillful armorers, who worked for important courts in Italy and throughout Europe.

The armory, which includes approximately three thousand pieces, is comparable in quality to the prestigious royal armories of Madrid, Vienna, Stockholm, and Dresden. It was inherited by Elisabetta Farnese (1692–1766), who had married Philip V (1683–1786), king of Spain, and subsequently bequeathed to her son Charles (1716–1788), who conquered the Kingdom of Naples in 1734 and ordered the transfer of the armory from Parma to Naples.

Recent studies have made it possible to correctly identify specific weapons and armor previously believed to have belonged to the Farnese family as in fact having come from the Bonanno-Branciforte armory of the princes of Cattolica, from the Sicilian town of Canicattì, before being given in 1800 to Ferdinand IV (1751–1825) in Palermo, where he had retreated due to the occupation of Naples by the French. Among these is a beautifully crafted “all’eroica” (in the heroic style) shield and helmet, attributable to Pietro Paolo Malfettano, who had a workshop in Palermo in the second half of the sixteenth century.

In 1967, the Farnese Armory reacquired, through an exchange with the Royal Collections at Windsor Castle, a wheel-lock arquebus made for Ranuccio Farnese (1569–1622) in 1596 by Giovan Battista Visconti. Described as “the most beautiful gun in the world,” the arquebus is one of the most significant firearms of late sixteenth-century Italian production, a masterpiece of steel carving and fretwork.

Horse faceplate

Late 15th–early 16th century

Boiled, painted, and gilded leather

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

This horse faceplate, made from hardened leather (cuir bouilli), is painted with a blue-green background embellished with a gold-leaf star-and-sun motif. It has raised blinkers and ends in an upward curve at the level of the nostrils. In the center is an applied plaque, also made of leather, depicting a heraldic shield. The decoration is too worn to positively identify what house it represents, but it can be dated to at least the end of the fifteenth century.

Attributed to Francesco Francia (Italian, c. 1450–1517)

Triumph of Abundance

early 16th century

Fragment of horse harness; boiled, painted, and gilded leather

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

This extremely rare and high-quality fragment of barding (protective horse armor) is entirely covered in a painted triumphal scene on a gold background. An allegorical figure of Abundance stands half-naked, holding a cornucopia and riding a chariot between two pillars, each with a sphinx at its bases and a flaming vase at its top; the gold background was originally covered by graffitied red lacquer, of which small fragments remain. Made from hardened leather (cuir bouilli), the barding would have been used in parades.

The decoration's attribution remains unclear: it has been variously attributed to the Bologna-based artists Francesco and Giacomo Francia and, more recently, to the school of Luca Signorelli. It has also been suggested that it could be from the school of Pinturicchio—specifically, one of his assistants who worked on the Borgia apartment in the Vatican.

Pompeo della Cesa (Italian, c. 1537–1610)

Components of an Armor Garniture

Early 17th century

Burnished steel

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

A garniture is a complete suit of armor composed of exchangeable parts adaptable for equestrian, tournament, or infantry use. The components of this garniture were made for Ranuccio Farnese (1569–1622), son of Alessandro Farnese (1545–1592). It was probably one of the last works completed by the renowned Milanese armorer Pompeo della Cesa (c. 1537–1610) before his death. The decoration is spread over the entire surface with a phytomorphic (plant form) lattice engraving with a rhomboidal pattern, featuring trophies of Farnese family arms and heroic figures. A church is engraved on the buckler shield—referring to the surname “della Cesa” (of the Church).



Infantry helmet



Close helmet



Horse helmet



Buckler



Breastplate
and two tassets



Culet

Tapestry designed by Bernard van Orley (Flemish, c. 1488–1541)
Woven in the workshop of Willem and Jan Dermoyen, Brussels
(Flemish, both active 1520s–1540s)

The Incursion of the Imperial Baggage Train into the Battlefield, and the Surrender of the Swiss Pikemen of the French Army

c. 1528–31

Wool, silk, gold, and silver thread

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

In this panoramic view of the battlefield, the Swiss infantry, fighting for the French, lay down their arms and abandon the battle. As troops of Swiss mercenaries signal their surrender, Swiss captain Johann von Diesbach valiantly offers up his life to an imperial knight to uphold his honor by dying on the battlefield. From the left, the imperial baggage train, with its assortment of family members and operatives, makes its way from the imperial encampment through a breach in the wall to the park occupied by the French. As the defeat of the French troops becomes evident, these imperial followers rush to the field to claim the spoils of war.

In the upper left-hand corner of the tapestry, the double-headed Habsburg eagle on one of the tents indicates the location of the imperial camp. The civilian camp followers and some imperial soldiers, identified by red saltire (diagonal) crosses, have begun to move through the defenses and breaches in the wall enclosing the French camp. Loaded with baskets and chests, they prepare to take the spoils of battle.



Bernard van Orley created numerous picturesque details of the imperial camp followers—the civilians who traveled with the army, including family members, porters, cooks, merchants, engineers, surgeons, clergy, and others—many of whom hurry to claim the spoils of war upon the French troops' imminent defeat. In the foreground, a churlish mercenary soldier accompanied by his son or a page catches our eye as he bounds forward with some chickens hanging from his pike—a common trope of plunder. Behind him, a friar and a few richly attired women enter the battlefield, while a chained monkey climbs above his cage, which has been loaded on the back of a horse. The weavers brilliantly capture the varied facial expressions of the motley entourage and vivid details like the multicolored chicken feathers.



At center foreground, an agitated group of soldiers represents the defeated French troops. To the left, a soldier rests his hand on the blade of an immense two-handed sword in the ground that served as a gathering spot for troops during the battle. Discarded weapons at their feet, a cowering drummer and fifer seem to sink under the weight of their heavy chains bedecked with fleurs-de-lis and a red rampant animal. A standard bearer next to them allows the French flag to fall to the ground, signaling the imminent defeat of the French forces. Nearby, soldiers wearing white crosses and imploring expressions doff their hats in humility and hold their right hands up in the air toward the imposing imperial horseman to indicate their submission.



The figure in light blue clothing wielding an immense pike that reaches from top to bottom of the tapestry is the valiant Swiss captain Johann von Diesbach, who offers up his life to an imperial knight whose sword is raised to deliver a fatal blow. By dying on the battlefield, Diesbach upholds his honor. The weavers have captured the splendor of the imperial horsemen in gleaming armor at right, identified by their red and white sashes and mounted on magnificent steeds.



Near the top right side of the tapestry, a crucial event unfolds. Identifiable by the white crosses on their doublets and jerkins, the Swiss mercenaries, who make up the bulk of the French infantry, abandon their formations, deaf to the pleas of their officers. The Swiss pikemen have been cut off by the sudden imperial cavalry charge. Facing the enemy, they realize their imminent defeat and discard their pikes at their feet, a sign of surrender.



D'Avalos Armor Helmet

c. 1550

Burnished steel

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

D'Avalos Armor Breastplate

c. 1550

Burnished steel

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

D'Avalos Armor Backplate

Late 16th–early 17th century

Burnished steel

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Jasper Broadsword

17th century

Jasper, garnets, and turquoise

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

This gala or ceremonial sword was likely made in a Milanese workshop. It has a beautifully carved jasper handle with a cruciform hilt and gilt silver mounts forming bezels to accommodate eleven small and twenty larger garnets and five small and eight larger turquoises. The pommel is missing a garnet. The blade is probably not original and appears to be an eighteenth-century adaptation.

Agate Dagger

early 16th century

Sardonyx agate and steel

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

The shape of this weapon, presumably made in the Milanese sphere, is inspired by the “disc” daggers of the fifteenth century. The handle, with an octagonal section, is made of sardonyx agate. The ridge is inscribed with *DUCE TUTUS ACHATE*, a reference to the story of Aeneas and Achates, one of Aeneas’s most trusted friends. The phrase is used to indicate an indivisible friendship. The first third of the blade has a damascened gold decoration inspired by plant forms and spiraling ornaments, reminiscent of decorative Spanish styles.

Pompeo della Cesa (Italian, active c. 1537–1610)

“Volat” armor garniture

1590

Steel

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

This is the last garniture that Alessandro Farnese (1545–1592) commissioned from Pompeo della Cesa, just two years before the duke’s death. The densely patterned decoration features etched and gilt bands alternating with thin engraved lines made to resemble chains, all atop a slightly debossed, stippled background. The breastplate features an abundance of rich ornamentation—trophies, cornucopia, Farnese fleurs-de-lis, ducal crowns, palm leaves, and olive branches—all framing an allegorical figure of Fame borne by a flying eagle; below this is a plaque emblazoned with the motto VOLAT (he flies). Small ovals at the neckline and back bear the name POMPEO, and a cartouche on the pivoting visor gives the date 1590.

The richly embellished surface decoration throughout emulates the stylistic conventions of clothing of the time, characterized by the extensive use of gold and silver embroidered threads on fine fabrics.

Tapestry designed by Bernard van Orley (Flemish, c. 1488–1541)
Woven in the workshop of Willem and Jan Dermoyen, Brussels
(Flemish, both active 1520s–1540s)

The Surrender of King Francis I

c. 1528–31

Wool, silk, gold, and silver thread

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

This tapestry depicts the climactic event of the battle: the capture of the king of France by imperial troops. To the left, Francis I is helped from his dying horse—shot with a firearm—by imperial military officers. At far left, Charles de Lannoy, viceroy of Naples and commander of the imperial army, dismounts to accept the surrender of the king of France. The swords raised high by the noble horsemen in the center of the tapestry denote imperial victory. Francis was imprisoned in Italy and then taken to Spain. He was released upon signing the 1526 Treaty of Madrid that abandoned French claim to the Duchies of Milan and Burgundy and other important territories—terms he broke shortly thereafter. Although hostilities resumed, Habsburg ascendancy in Europe and beyond was determined at the Battle of Pavia.

At the far left of the tapestry, the Habsburg emperor's banner soars high. The red flag displays the Habsburg double-headed eagle alongside Charles V's personal insignia of the Pillars of Hercules and the motto "Plus Ultra" (Further Beyond), here written in French: Plus Oultre.



In the left corner, the commander of the imperial army, Charles de Lannoy, dismounts from his horse to accept the surrender of the king of France. A soldier and statesmen from a noble family in the Low Countries, he was viceroy of Naples. “Visseroy” is embroidered on his sword.



In this climactic scene, the wounded and disjointed body of Francis I is freed from his dying horse by three imperial captains identified with inscriptions: Count Nicolas Von Salm, commander of German cavalry, is assisted by La Motte de Noyers and Jean, bâtard de Montmartin, Burgundians who fought on the imperial side. Directly behind Francis I and his captors, an imperial knight raises the French Valois sword with two hands as a sign of victory. The trophies that signify Francis's defeat lie scattered on the ground: the royal horse's bridle and headpiece and the scabbard of the king's sword. Blood from the horse's gunshot wound falls tellingly onto an arquebus, a type of long-barreled firearm used by the imperial troops.



The central bearded figure, who has been variously identified, is probably another depiction of Charles III, Duke of Bourbon, who was present at Francis I's capture. The raised swords denote victory and are mentioned in contemporary accounts, as is Bourbon's honorable and deferential treatment of Francis I. Following the Battle of Pavia, in 1527 Bourbon accompanied the imperial troops south to Rome to relay Charles V's warning to the pope to come to his terms. Bourbon was famously killed outside the city walls, and the mutinous imperial troops proceeded to sack Rome. His portrait in the tapestry would honor his service to Emperor Charles V.



At the top right of the tapestry, Charles III, Duke of Bourbon—identified by the inscription “Bourbon” and fleurs-de-lis on his horse’s trappings—breaks into a gallop. Though he was a member of the highest French nobility, he harbored deep animosity toward Francis I over possession of the Bourbon estates, among other disputes, and supported the Habsburg cause. With him is Alfonso d’Avalos, Marquis of Vasto, riding a white horse and raising his sword.



Attributed to Pietro Paolo Malfettano (Italian, active 16th century)

Ceremonial Helmet originally from Canicattì

c. 1570

Burnished steel, gold and silver foil, and wood

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Recent studies have made it possible to correctly identify specific weapons and armor previously believed to have belonged to the Farnese family as in fact having come from the Bonanno-Branciforte armory of the princes of Cattolica, from the Sicilian town of Canicattì, before being given in 1800 to the king of Naples, Ferdinand IV (1751–1825). Among these are this exquisitely fashioned “all’eroica” (in the heroic style) helmet and a circular shield, attributable to Pietro Paolo Malfettano, who had a workshop in Palermo in the second half of the sixteenth century. This helmet depicts the Judgement of Trajan on one side and the sacrifice of Marcus Curtius on the other.

Attributed to Pietro Paolo Malfettano (Italian, active 16th century)

Rotella Shield

c. 1590

Burnished steel, gold and silver foil, and wood

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

The mythical scene on this embossed and chiseled circular shield damascened with gold and silver depicts the Roman hero Horatius Cocle holding back attackers so that the army can disable a bridge leading into the city. The architecture is not Rome, but Palermo, in Sicily, where the shield was made. Along with the ceremonial helmet also displayed in this case, this beautifully crafted shield was once part of the Sicilian princely collection and was subsequently given in 1800 to Ferdinand IV, king of Naples (1751–1825), who was living in Palermo, where he had retreated following the French occupation of Naples.

Farnese Guard Triple-combed Helmet

First half of the 16th century

Burnished and painted steel

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

This is one of twenty-four triple-combed helmets of the Farnese Guard that are housed in the Museo di Capodimonte. The helmet features three ridges along the crown and is prominently decorated on both sides with the fleur-de-lis motif, a symbol of the House of Farnese and in particular Alessandro Farnese, Duke of Parma and Piacenza and Duke of Castro (1545–1592).

Tapestry designed by Bernard van Orley (Flemish, c. 1488–1541)
Woven in the workshop of Willem and Jan Dermoyen, Brussels
(Flemish, both active 1520s–1540s)

The Advance of the Imperial Army and Counterattack of the French Cavalry Led by King Francis I

c. 1528–31

Wool, silk, gold, and silver thread

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

An early stage of the battle is depicted in this tapestry. The scene takes place in the park surrounding Mirabello Castle, a large, walled hunting estate located just outside Pavia, where the French encamped during the months-long siege. During the night, the imperial troops breached the park's brick walls and infiltrated their enemy's position by hiding in the woods. Now, at dawn, they advance toward the French army, drawing them into a trap. In response, the French launch a massive charge of heavy cavalry led by King Francis I himself.

Dominating the foreground of the tapestry, the French heavy cavalry charge forward following the unanticipated imperial attack, led by a knight with an open visor. King Francis I, wearing a helmet with a grand halo of plumes, rides a horse sporting the royal fleur-de-lis and an ornate headdress. Behind the king are a trio of illustrious knights: at left is the Grand Écuyer de France, Galeazzo da Sanseverino, identified by an inscription on his raised sword, who died in the battle. Next to him on the brown horse is Antoine de Lettes-Desprez, seigneur de Montpensier, whose title appears on his bridle; he was taken prisoner. The ostentatious trappings of the noble cavalrymen made them easy for the imperial arquebusiers—troops using arquebus guns—to spot and shoot in large numbers.



The imperial army can be seen emerging from the woods at dawn. Raising imperial flags and banners with X-shaped saltires (St. Andrew's or Burgundian crosses) and the Habsburg colors of red, yellow, and white, they advance to the cadence of the fife and drum. In the front ranks are infantry armed with long-barreled guns called arquebuses, two-handed swords, and pikes. Behind them and in the distance, moving to the right, are the imperial cavalry, carrying lances. The thick forest of pikes and lances suggests the power and supremacy of the imperial army. Their adoption of a new military tactical maneuver—known as “pike and shot”—enabled the imperial forces to prevail over the formerly invincible French cavalry offensive.



On the right side of the tapestry, in the middle ground, Francis I is depicted at an earlier moment, leading the French cavalry charge. The king—recognizable by the ornate plumage of his helmet, his luxurious armor and clothing, and the fleurs-de-lis that adorn his steed, is followed by his knights. With his sword held high, he prepares to kill his Neapolitan opponent, the Marquis of Civita Sant'Angelo, whose broken lance touches the ground.



In the lower right corner are imperial soldiers from the Spanish advance guard, identifiable by the red saltire (X-shaped) crosses on the white shirts pulled over their doublets, which allow them to be seen in darkness and not mistaken for the enemy by their allies. They aim their arquebuses toward the French cavalry, often targeting the horses and slaughtering large numbers of the enemy. The arquebusiers' activity is described in detail. The bandoliers slung across their torsos hold cartridges of ammunition. On their waists they carry powder horns and pouches with lead shot. The guns were ignited with a matchlock mechanism: a smoldering cord match held to the flash pan kindled the priming powder, which in turn ignited the propellant in the gun barrel. The arquebusiers moved to the rear to reload their guns, as others advanced to take aim.



Farnese Wheel-lock Arquebus

c. 1590

Forged steel and wood

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Wheel-lock Arquebus

c. 1590

Forged steel and wood

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Bernhard Albrecht (German, active 1557–1590)

Wheel-lock Arquebus

c. 1590

Forged steel and wood

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Giovan Battista Viscontia (Italian, active 16th century)

Ranuccio Farnese Wheel-lock Arquebus

1596

Forged steel and wood

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Described as “the most beautiful gun in the world,” this wheel-lock arquebus is among the most significant firearms of late sixteenth-century Italian production. It is a masterpiece of steel carving and fretwork: the large “Flemish-style” wheel-lock is engraved and chiseled, featuring ornate vines punctuated by anthropomorphic figures, griffins, unicorns, and fantastical dragons. The hammer (dog) is crafted in the shape of a dragon; its maw forms the jaws that grip the pyrite. On the left side at the knuckle, two angels hold a circular crown encasing the Farnese coat of arms with a putto above.

The solid walnut of the stock is richly decorated in engraved steel plates featuring entwined vines, dragons, putti, small unicorns, two trophies of arms with the keys of St. Peter and the papal banner, harpies, Jupiter’s eagle with thunderbolts, and Pomona with the inscription FLORET, all iconographic references to the Farnese family.

“Medallion” Armor Garniture

1575

Steel

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

This garniture was made for Alessandro Farnese (1545–1592), Duke of Parma and Piacenza and Duke of Castro. Farnese was captain general of the army of Flanders and likely wore this throughout his military campaigns there. All the components are decorated with alternately polished and etched bands, with figurative motifs, foliage, and small trophies on a gilt and stippled background. The slightly raised oval medallions with silver beaded frames depict men in “all’eroica” (heroic style) armor, allegories of Fame, and mythological characters, including Venus and Cupid and Diana and Atlas.

Young Alessandro’s character was shaped by humanistic studies, physical education, and ongoing training in the use of arms. The entire garniture exudes a sober, elegant air, and although the armor’s predominantly military function is clear, the decoration nevertheless gracefully emphasizes the wearer’s cultural upbringing, exalting his virtue and erudition.

Tapestry designed by Bernard van Orley (Flemish, c. 1488–1541)
Woven in the workshop of Willem and Jan Dermoyen, Brussels
(Flemish, both active 1520s–1540s)

**The Imperial Attack on the French Cavalry, Led by the
Marquis of Pescara, and on the French Artillery by the
Lansquenets under Georg von Frundsberg**

c. 1528–31

Wool, silk, gold, and silver thread

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

The chaos and violence of the battlefield in the fog of dawn is captured in this tapestry as imperial arquebusiers under command of the Marquis of Pescara, Fernando (Ferrante) Francesco d’Avalos, decimate the French cavalry. At the right, Germanic mercenary soldiers called landsknechts, also known as lansquenets, led by Georg von Frundsberg, are recognizable by the white-and-red bands they wear over one shoulder. The landsknechts attack the artillery positions held by renegade mercenaries known as Black Bands, who have been paid to fight for the king of France. These bitter enemies fight to the death, with the imperial infantry prevailing. In the background, the endless rows of upturned pikes evoke the imposing scale of the battle.

At far left, a prominent commander in half armor astride a gray horse wields a lance high over his head to signal his men toward the point of attack. An inscription on the neck of his steed identifies him as the Marquis of Pescara, Fernando (Ferrante) Francesco d'Avalos, who was among the highest ranked in the Habsburg army at Pavia. The d'Avalos family, of Spanish origins and residing in Naples, came into possession of this set of tapestries of the Battle of Pavia, which were later bequeathed to the Museo di Capodimonte. D'Avalos, like most commanders shown in the Battle of Pavia series, died before the work was completed. It was a great honor for a military leader to appear in a tapestry, establishing his reputation for posterity.



A pair of small figures in the middle ground at the center of the tapestry stand near a troop of imperial soldiers aiming firearms toward the French cavalry. The helmeted figure with a halberd wearing red breeches and a white and red sash is identified by an inscription as Alfonso d'Avalos, the Marquis of Vasto, commander of the Spanish infantry and cousin of Ferrante Francesco d'Avalos, Marquis of Pescara. As in the tapestry depicting the advance of the imperial army, here the stages of the arquebusiers' activity are described in detail, from igniting the guns with a cord match held to the flash pan through moving to the rear to reload.



Germanic mercenary soldiers known as landsknechts (or lansquenets) were critical for the imperial victory. Admired for their skill and bravery and feared for their ruthless brutality off the battlefield, the lansquenets adopted flamboyant and often outrageous dress in a style known as “puffed and slashed.” Underlying fabric was pulled through cuts in the outer layers of clothing to create decorative puffs. Billowing sleeves and voluminous or tight breeches created striking, often intimidating silhouettes. This swaggering and colorful costume influenced contemporary civilian fashion. In contrast to a more tempered portrayal of elite military commanders belonging to the nobility, Bernard van Orley exaggerates the facial expressions and dynamic physicality of these fearsome mercenaries.



The owl perched on the brick wall at the bottom of the tapestry, toward the right, signals that the troops' encounter takes place at dawn. A creature of the dark, the owl may also allude to the decimation of the battlefield. The wall teems with beautifully observed plants and wildlife—from birds and snails to a remarkable variety of blooms, berries, and foliage. With these stunningly naturalistic depictions, Bernard van Orley has supplanted the medieval tradition of flat, overall patterns of botanical ornamentation in tapestry design with more technically challenging three-dimensional representations.



Another key imperial leader is depicted toward the right side of the tapestry, standing beside a cannon decorated with fleurs-de-lis: Georg von Frundsberg, formidable commander of the German lansquenets. Holding an upright halberd, he wears half-armor and the imperial white and red sash, with his name picked out in gold letters on his sword's belt. Frundsberg triumphantly signals the capture of the French artillery.



The clash between the German lansquenets—identifiable by their white and red sashes—and the Black Bands fighting for the French is extremely violent, and many of the dead lie at the foot of the artillery. The commander of French lansquenets, François de Lorraine, is about to be struck from his white horse and killed by a mighty imperial pikeman. Next to him in the corner, toppled upon his prone horse, is the armored body of Richard de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk. The inscription “La Blanse Rose” on his horse’s bridle refers to the white rose of the House of York. Living in exile in France, the Duke was the last active Yorkist claimant to the throne of England.



Wheel-lock Arquebus

c. 1590

Forged steel and wood

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Gunpowder Flask

16th century

Wood, boiled leather, and steel

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

The body of this gunpowder flask is made of wood covered with black cloth. The edging and endplates are embellished with delicate floral patterns in gold damascened steel-alloy. This type of gold decoration was inspired by decorative motifs in vogue in Spanish circles at the time. The lower, small doser was used to load the ignition system with finer gunpowder. The larger doser was reserved for filling the barrel chamber.

Gunpowder Flask

16th century

Wood, boiled leather, and steel

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

This gunpowder flask is composed of a wooden body covered with leather on the flat side and cuir bouilli—leather that has been first softened by soaking, then pressed, molded, or stamped to shape, and then hardened by drying—on the convex side. This side features a depiction of Adam and Eve. In general, motifs seen on arms and armor of the period were mainly inspired by allegorical figures or mythological deities. The portrayal of biblical characters on this flask was unusual.

Round Gunpowder Flask

16th century

Wood, boiled leather, and steel

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

This semispherical gunpowder flask is composed of a wooden body covered with leather on the flat side and cuir bouilli on the convex side, which is decorated with a noble coat of arms that is difficult to identify. The top closing plate with dispensing spout has a semicircular spring opening. A hook protrudes on the flat side to enable the gunpowder flask to be attached to a belt.

Tapestry designed by Bernard van Orley (Flemish, c. 1488–1541)
Woven in the workshop of Willem and Jan Dermoyen, Brussels
(Flemish, both active 1520s–1540s)

The Invasion of the French Camp and the Flight of the Women and Civilians

c. 1528–31

Wool, silk, gold, and silver thread

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

In this tapestry, the imperial forces storm in from the left to capture the French headquarters, overwhelming all resistance. At the top left stands Mirabello Castle, and to the right is the French camp, composed of white tents. Below, to the right, French soldiers are deployed in two trenches, protected by cannons between wicker-clad emplacements. The imperial cavalry has already invaded the camp and broken through the second line, pursuing the French, who take flight into open ground. In the foreground, alarmed civilians in the French army's retinue—family members, auxiliaries, and orderlies—flee to safety in several directions, carrying what they can gather.

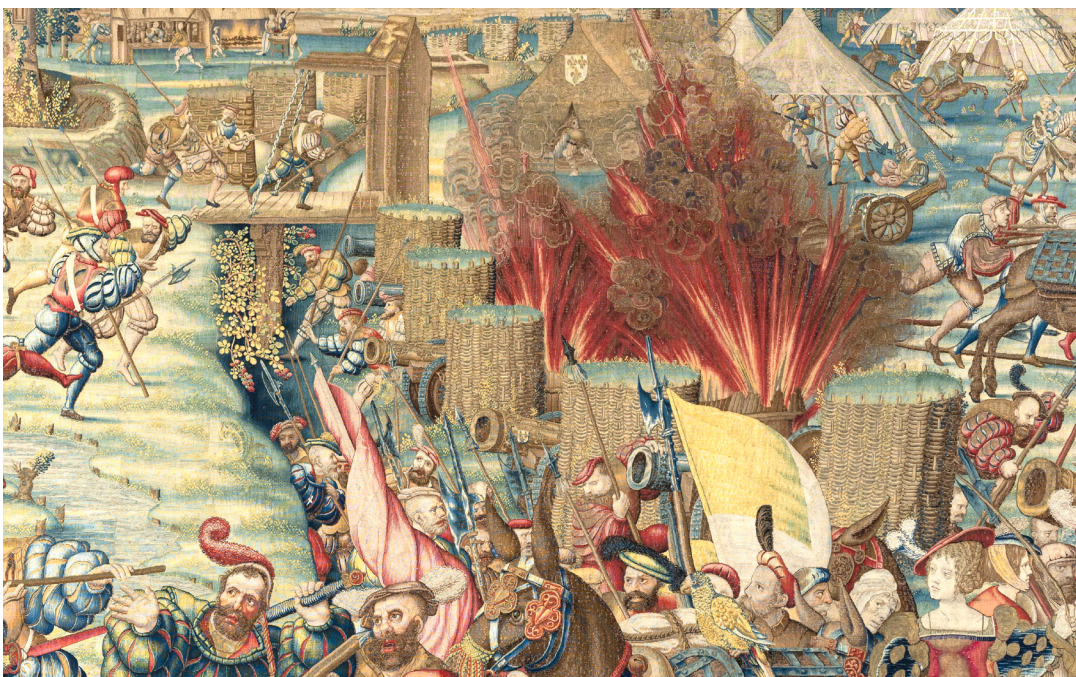
In the left foreground, a burly imperial foot soldier, or landsknecht, wields a hefty double-handed sword to break the pike of his opponent. Such elite, experienced soldiers—armed with huge double-bladed swords or with halberds (polearms topped with an axe blade and often hooks used to unmount horsemen) or with the long firearms called arquebuses—were known as “doppelsoldner,” since they received double pay. The landsknechts paid for their clothing and armor—here an impressive set of half-armor with chainmail protecting the chest. Above this group of infantry, imperial cavalry and Germanic pikemen attack the besieged French troops, and a French horseman, identifiable by his white cross, is killed with a lance.



At the top left stands Mirabello Castle, near two trenches that protect the French artillery. Its drawbridge is down, allowing the imperial troops, identifiable by their white and red sashes, to storm the camp. To its right sit the white tents of the French encampment. A golden tent decorated with fleurs-de-lis—just behind the huge explosion that scatters mules and soldiers in different directions—probably housed the king. It, too, was sacked by Spanish infantry, and the Marquis of Pescara took the tent itself as a war trophy.



The French are deployed in two trenches, protected by their artillery positioned between wicker-clad emplacements called gabions. Within the encampment, the excitement of the battle is underscored by explosions that drive mules and soldiers in various directions. Critically for the outcome of the battle, none of the French cannons are firing. Although the French had an advantage in numbers of large guns, ammunition supply and flawed strategy prevented them from using the artillery, which would have struck their own troops. At the end of the battle, the French artillery was a significant part of the war booty obtained by the imperial troops.



In the foreground, the French baggage train—civilians in the French army’s retinue—begins to flee both to the right and left. Family members of the combatants, vendors, porters, cooks, orderlies, and others attended to the army’s daily operations. Led by a bounding hound, a young woman—purse and keys hanging from her waist—escapes with a fluffy dog. An elegant lady—perhaps a French officer’s wife or a courtesan—in a red velvet robe rides sidesaddle on a white mule with a lavish harness. Details of her fashionable dress, like the puffs of contrasting fabric pulled through slits in the blue sleeves, are meticulously described. Likewise notable are the trappings of the brown mule in front of her, such as the fine net muzzle, the bells and fringe of the harness, and the golden parrot perched on a trunk above the saddle.



D'Avalos Armor Helmet with Visor

c. 1550

Forged steel

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Knights of Malta Breastplate

Late 16th–early 17th century

Burnished steel

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Forked Halberd

Early 17th century

Forged steel and wood

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Brandistock

17th century

Forged steel and wood

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Folding Pike

c. 1540

Forged steel and wood

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Tapestry designed by Bernard van Orley (Flemish, c. 1488–1541)
Woven in the workshop of Willem and Jan Dermoyen, Brussels
(Flemish, both active 1520s–1540s)

The Sortie of the Besieged Imperial Troops from Pavia, and the Rout of the Swiss Guard

c. 1528–31

Wool, silk, gold, and silver thread

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

As the battle draws to a close, the imperial commander Antonio de Leyva, who had resisted the French siege for months from the imperial garrison in Visconti Castle, makes a sortie, and his soldiers attack the remains of the French army. The composition is dominated by a panoramic view of Pavia—largely imaginary, but portraying some recognizable landmarks, such as the city’s civic towers and the hospital and church of San Matteo toward the center of the city. Since the designer of the tapestries, Bernard van Orley, never traveled to Italy, these details were likely drawn from the German artist Jörg Breu the Elder’s woodcut of the battle and other sources. In the tapestry, this emblematic image of the city of Pavia is associated with the eternal glory of Charles V’s resounding victory on the battlefield—providentially on February 24, the emperor’s birthday.

At the lower left corner of the tapestry, two soldiers in extravagantly plumed hats, possibly officers, will doubtless join their compatriots scrambling over the brick wall to escape the Spanish imperial onslaught. One wields a double-handed sword marked with a white cross over his shoulder, and the other, in half-armor, bears the French flag. Most infantry were pikemen, but the most skilled, experienced soldiers (“doppelsoldner”) wielded huge double-handed swords or halberds (polearms topped with an axe blade), which they used to penetrate the enemy’s pike formation, or carried arquebuses.



Visconti Castle, the garrison commanded by the Spanish captain Antonio de Leyva, whose soldiers had resisted the French siege for four months, is shown in the upper left of the tapestry. De Leyva's troops make a sortie from the city and strike what remains of the enemy. Bearing the brunt of the Spanish sortie was a Swiss infantry unit that was quickly routed.



In the middle ground of the tapestry, French soldiers and civilians can be seen emerging from some of the protective dugouts in an effort to quickly escape from these now unsafe positions. Nearby are two French horsemen, one of whom is identified with an embroidered inscription on his horse's bridle, reading "Mofort," as François de Laval, Count of Montfort, who is listed among the dead at Pavia.



The Swiss infantry flee toward the right, seeking safety across the Ticino River. However, upon reaching the riverbank, they discover that the pontoon bridge has been destroyed by the Duke of Alençon, who has already escaped. At this point, the Swiss have no choice but to throw themselves into the rising waters of the river, and many perish by drowning. The weavers show remarkable skill carrying out Bernard van Orley's highly detailed composition, teeming with closely observed plants and figures in animated poses.



This panoramic, bird's-eye view of Pavia and its environs uses fine gradations of color to carry the eye into the distant hills and valley—an astonishing achievement in the medium of tapestry. Bernard van Orley's design captures the aftermath of the battle in striking details, from the frenzied soldiers navigating the Ticino River, past the covered bridge and city ramparts, and into the calm of the countryside.



Thrusting Swords

16th century

Forged steel and wood

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Cavalryman's cutlasses

1600–1610

Forged steel and wood

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Two-handed broadsword with flame blade

16th century

Forged steel, wood, and leather

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

This exceptionally large two-handed broadsword was made purely for military use. It was carried resting on the shoulder as a sign of power during parades; when planted with the blade in the ground, it served as a point of reference and gathering spot for troops during battle. The handle has a piriform pommel shaped into wedges. The hilt with curved arms ends in a spiral with a ring at the crossbar. The black leather-covered heel features two crow's-beak side stops. The flame blade is engraved with "IOHANNES ME FECIT" (Johannes made me) on one side and "IN SPANNILLI 1568" (in Spanilli, in 1568) on the other.

Two-handed broadswords

16th century

Forged steel and wood

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Tapestry designed by Bernard van Orley (Flemish, c. 1488–1541)
Woven in the workshop of Willem and Jan Dermoyen, Brussels
(Flemish, both active 1520s–1540s)

The Flight of the French Rear Guard under the Duke of Alençon

c. 1528–31

Wool, silk, gold, and silver thread

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples

Another key event of the battle unfolds in this tapestry. At left and center, battlefield skirmishes show the formerly invincible heavy French cavalry, weighed down by head-to-toe armor, routed by the nimbler Spanish cavalry wearing half-armor on smaller, more agile horses. Overwhelmed by the unstoppable Spanish breakthrough, Charles IV, Duke of Alençon, brother-in-law of Francis I and commander of the French rear guard, leaves his position and, instead of engaging in combat, retreats to the other side of the Ticino River, shown at far right. In France, his actions will lead to accusations of cowardice and treachery, although his tactics ensured the survival of his troops.

At lower left, a soldier desperately clings to a branch to save himself from drowning, as feathered berets and discarded weapons float in the rushing waters that have already claimed many victims. Elements such as the way the soldier's body is seen beneath the rippling water showcase the masterful skill of the weavers in replicating painterly detail and illusionistic effects. Their sophisticated and varied weaving techniques required using a high warp count and ever-finer shades of dyed silk and wool to capture subtle color variations, as in the veins of the soldier's hand.



In the center foreground, a French horseman in full armor futilely raises a broken lance as he attempts to defend access to the pontoon bridge against the swift, fierce assault of two Spanish light cavalrymen—their bodies largely unprotected—attacking with lance and sword. Elsewhere on the battlefield, French heavy cavalry are toppled by the onslaught of the highly responsive Spanish attack.



At right, the French rear guard, crushed on the bank of the Ticino River by enemy cavalry, seeks to escape by crossing the river on a pontoon bridge. On orders of the Duke of Alençon, the pontoon bridge is then destroyed to prevent the imperial soldiers from pursuing them. A French foot soldier in red unmoors the bridge from the left bank of the river with his halberd, as two soldiers—one carrying a drum and broken pike and the other the Swiss flag—rush toward safety.



The bucolic landscape with fields of grazing cattle and gentle wooded hills in the upper part of the tapestry—more Flemish or Northern than Italian in inspiration—suggests a world of peace and safety remote from the horrors of war shown in the battlefield, where soldiers fight to the death.



Red lance skyward, a French horseman rushes to cross to the other side of the Ticino River before the bridge is destroyed on orders of the Duke of Alençon, commander of the French rear guard. Just to his right into the distance, at the very edge of the tapestry, we see a horseman from behind. The inscription “De Alenso” on his horse’s golden caparison (cloth covering) identifies him as the duke, who escorts the French cavalry to the right bank of the river, where they are safe from the pursuit of the enemy.



All seven tapestries were originally framed by rich borders on all sides. The top and sides were decorated with garlands of flowers, fruits, birds, and animals; the bottom border featured aquatic motifs. The borders were later removed from the tapestries, but by the time they were bequeathed to the Museo di Capodimonte, the borders of three of the tapestries—including this one—had been restored on the top and sides with floral borders from the original series. The borders on the other four tapestries are painted on fabric to resemble the originals. On the right border of this tapestry is Willem and Jan Dermoyen's weavers' mark.

