ABSTRACT

The UWGB Linothorax Project is an ongoing multi-year endeavor in reconstructive archaeology at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay investigating a mysterious and poorly understood type of ancient body armor made out of layers of linen.

Traditionally, studies of ancient armor have focused on forms made of metal, of which physical examples survive. However, only two dozen specific ancient literary references and hundreds of images on vase paintings and sculptural reliefs testify to the existence of a type of breastplate made of linen, sometimes called a linothorax.

Evidence for the use of this type of armor encompasses a wide chronological span, from Homeric to Hellenistic times. Records of the lack of metallic defenses, modern scholarship has often ignored such armor or, more commonly, combined it as being of marred interior quality.

Backwards engineering from available literary and iconographic sources, we have reconstructed several complete sets of armor using only materials that were available in the ancient world. In order to assess the protective capabilities of this armor, especially in regard to its resistance to penetration by arrows, we have subjected sample fabric patches to controlled testing.

Our project provides an objective assessment of this understudied yet common form of ancient body armor.

METHODOLOGY

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