



## STIRRUPS

A stirrup is a light frame or ring that holds the foot of a rider. It is normally attached to a saddle with a strap called a stirrup leather. Stirrups are usually paired and are used to aid in mounting and as a support while riding a large animal. They greatly increase the rider's ability to stay in the saddle and control the mount. The stirrup revolutionized riding and warfare. It allowed cavalry to ride further and faster. Stirrups allowed the development of heavy cavalry, the use of lances and the evolution of mounted archers.

The first stirrups designed to take the entire foot were probably single, mounting stirrups recorded in China in the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. the mounting stirrup was easier than using a stool, and safer than vaulting onto a horse, especially when a soldier was fully armed. Paired stirrups were first recorded in the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. in China. By the 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E., they had found their way to Europe. During the late Byzantine Era (470-1456 C.E.), the elements of the saddle with which we are familiar (spurs, bit and bridles) had developed and spread throughout Europe. Open stirrups were most widely used, however heavily armored knights required greater stability than an open stirrup provided. Enclosed stirrups provided a firmer, wider, more solid base for the rider, and offered protection for the foot, as well.

Historians differ in their acceptance of the idea that conquistadors used closed brass stirrups during the conquest of the Western Hemisphere. While they were in use in Europe at the time, there is no contemporary painting, drawing, or sketch that shows a conquistador using enclosed stirrups. There is no written evidence either. Even a detailed list, like *Coronado's Muster of 1540*, makes no mention of them. Some historians assume their use as part of horse armor. Others look to their use later in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as a demonstration of wealth and power, much like silver embellishment on saddles and the use of Saltillo blankets.