

LANOLIN USED FOR METAL PRESERVATION GREASE AND ROME BY TONY D.

Lanolin is the secret to rust free armor and swords, relative comfort in wet weather, supple well-preserved leather, and general happiness.

Yes, lanolin, that nasty sheep grease. We know the Romans had it. Hell, it comes free with every sheep.

We know that Roman rain cloaks were greasy with it to help keep out the rain. It is impossible to wear a greasy, lanolin saturated cloak over armor without getting lanolin on your armor. I have done experiments demonstrating the protective value against rust. It is inconceivable that Legionaries failed to notice that the parts of their armor that were greasy didn't rust. It is a small step from there to deliberately applying additional lanolin to the armor in order to protect it.

I have had good results with lanolin on my segmentata and on my sword. I have been very minimalist in terms of care taken with the armor and the sword. Partially due to laziness and partly due to experimenting. Both still remain in good condition. Lanolin also does a great job of waterproofing a wool cloak. Perhaps not as good a plastic rain coat, but pretty good, and it's warmer.

The lanolin to use is "Lanolin Anhydrous" (meaning without water). You can special order it from pharmacies but it can be a bit expensive that way. I found that you can also get it in bulk on the internet. I purchased a gallon and it hopefully will last the rest of my life unless I decide to "lanolize" some more cloaks, which uses quite a lot. Pure lanolin is a dark yellow and has the consistency of Vaseline. My understanding is that chemically it shares some of the properties of oil and some of the properties of wax. Since it is hydrophilic, it is able to "breathe" moisture in and out, as opposed to waxes and oils which can trap moisture (bad for metal, leather, and comfort).

I have found the best way of applying lanolin to metals is with a chamois leather (split oil tanned sheep skin). It is very absorbent and will take up quite a lot of lanolin. Chamois doesn't leave lint behind as woven fabrics do, and it doesn't snag on the fancy bits.

LANOLIN & CLOAKS

The process I found for lanolizing a cloak is a bit complicated. I wrote up the procedure on RAT a while back. See: <http://www.romanarmytalk.com/rat/viewtopic.php?t=8818>

LANOLIN & LEATHER PRESERVATION

I have also found lanolin useful for softening and preserving leather. Oils and waxes can trap moisture in leather causing it to rot. Apparently lanolin tends to "breathe" and therefore does not have this problem. I found a site on the preservation of German military helmets that strongly discourages the use on helmet leather of anything except lanolin and "Picard's Antique Leather Restorer". Since lanolin is indisputably period, and Picard's is not. I say use lanolin. (see: <http://www.german-helmets.com/LEATHER%20BALMS.htm>)

DOWNSIDES

1. Well... dust does tend to cling more to armor covered in a layer of lanolin. This does not seem to cause any problems, beyond the cosmetic. Though I understand that in general dust tends to aggravate rust issues, I haven't noticed this with lanolin. Perhaps this is because of the breathing properties I mentioned earlier.

2. Cloaks get a bit stiff in cool weather. Not really a problem per se. I have worn mine while shoveling snow in a snow storm. It kept me a little too warm. The stiffness was odd at first.

3. Some people claim it makes you smell like a sheep. Just don't stand too close to a horny Scotsman, and you'll be fine.

On a side note, some people recommend the use of nut-oils for the prevention of rust. I will admit that I have absolutely no experience with these products. I have children with severe nut allergies. Consequently, I avoid all nut oils. However, I am highly suspicious as to whether these would perform as well as lanolin.