

# IRON

## One of Nature's Hardest Problems

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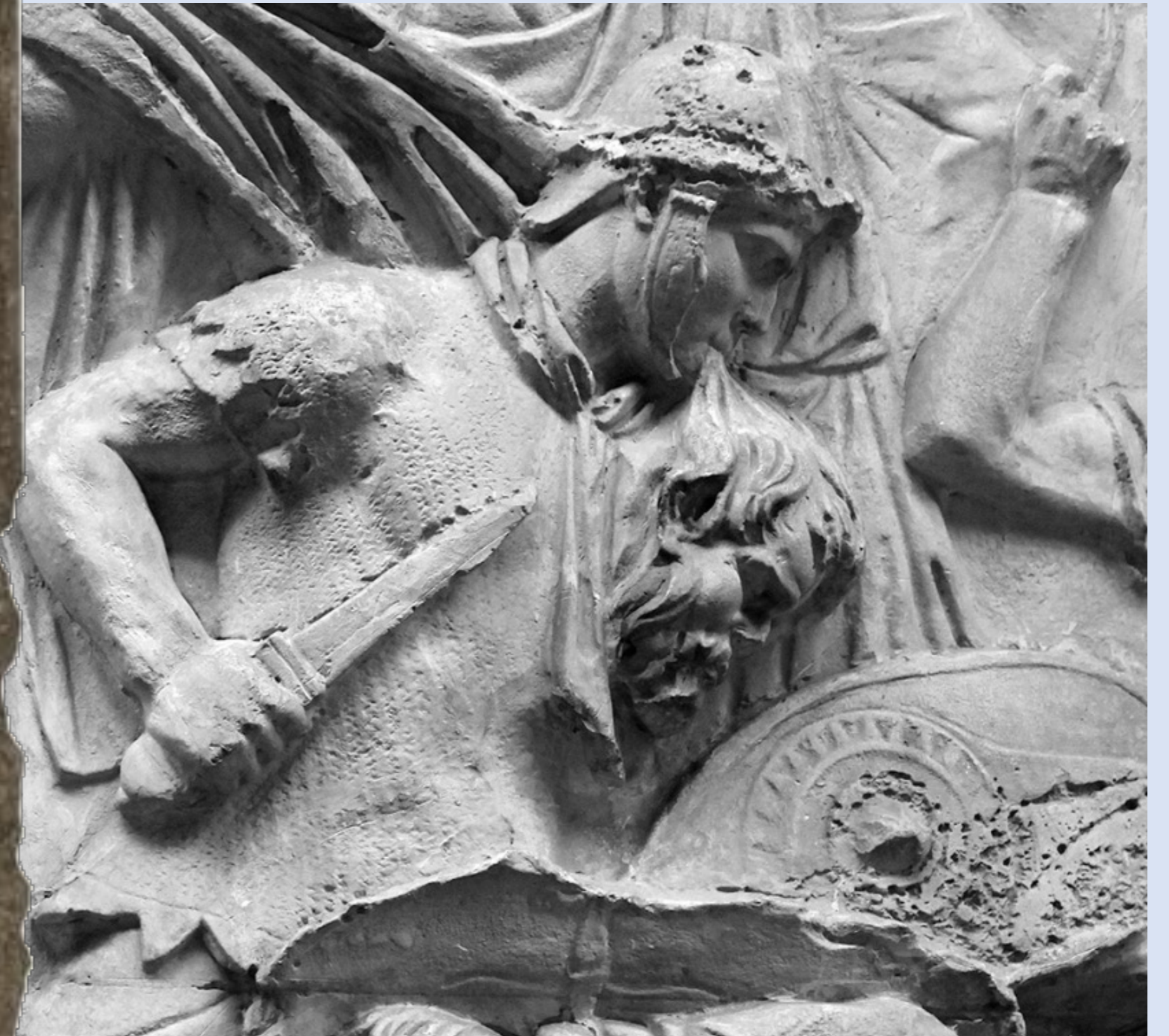
### What status do iron tools have in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*?

#### The Problem with Iron

“Iron is among the **best** and **worst** instruments of life, since indeed with it we plough the earth [...] but we also use it for war [...]. The **blame**, therefore, falls not on Nature, but on man.” (HN 34.138)

#### Nature's Solution

“The same **kindness** of nature stood against iron by punishing it with **rust**, and her **foresight** made nothing of all things more mortal than the thing that would be most dangerous to mortality.” (HN 34.141)



#### Nature's Role according to Pliny

- “She sustains us always [...] as a mother.” (HN 2.154)
- She is “kind, gentle, indulgent and always a maid in the service of mortals.” (HN 2.155)
- Educative kindness and foresight
  - Practical matters (agriculture)
  - Moral matters (against greed and violence)

#### Status of Iron Tools

- Associated with human virtues *and* vices (agriculture and war)
- Mankind is to blame for the deadly affordances of iron, *not* Nature
- Nature punishes iron with a fatal flaw (rust) to protect mankind from itself