

THE BOW AND ARROWS

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Archery, or the use of the bow and arrow, is one of man's most ancient war-making and hunting technologies. Despite its age, or perhaps because of it, archery remained popular even into the early 21st century. Knowing the history of the bow and arrow can explain this continued fascination with one of the most primitive technologies known to man. The use of the bow and arrow for hunting and for war dates back to the Paleolithic period in Africa, Asia, and Europe. Arrowheads were first made of burnt wood, then stone or bone, and then metals. Various woods and bones were used for the bow itself. However, it was not a powerful weapon until the invention of the compound, or composite, bow around 1500 B.C. on the steppes of Central Asia. A composite bow is made of various materials (wood, horn, sinew) glued together so as to increase their natural strength and elasticity. A crossbow is a bow set on a stock. It fires missiles propelled by mechanical energy and released by a trigger. It could be more powerful than the ordinary bow and could fire arrows, darts, or stones. For the rest of that century, the English emphasized skill with the longbow; it was inexpensive, mobile, and easily adapted to a peasant army. It was a powerful weapon, but it took great strength to pull and years of practice to master. The Chinese later developed the repeating crossbow, an ingenious weapon that proved ineffective against repeating rifles in the First Sino-Japanese War. Since bows and arrows are relatively easy to make and can produce a rapid rate of fire, they were used in warfare long after gunpowder was introduced, for primitive firearms required much time to load, were hard to manufacture, and often failed. In Japan and North America archery was very important culturally as well as militarily.

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