

Spears

A Wikipedia Compilation
by
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Chapter 1

Spear

For other uses, see [Spear \(disambiguation\)](#).

“Spears” redirects here. For other uses, see [Spears \(disambiguation\)](#).

A **spear** is a **pole weapon** consisting of a shaft, usually of **wood**, with a pointed head. The head may be simply the sharpened end of the shaft itself, as is the case with **fire hardened** spears, or it may be made of a more durable material fastened to the shaft, such as **flint**, **obsidian**, **iron**, **steel** or **bronze**. The most common design for hunting or combat spears since ancient times has incorporated a metal spearhead shaped like a triangle, **lozenge** or leaf. The heads of fishing spears usually feature barbs or serrated edges.

The word *spear* comes from the **Old English** *spere*, from the Proto-Germanic *speri*, from a **Proto-Indo-European** root **sper-* “spear, pole”. Spears can be divided into two broad categories: those designed for thrusting in **melee** combat and those designed for throwing (usually referred to as **javelins**).

The spear has been used throughout human history both as a hunting and fishing tool and as a weapon. Along with the **axe**, **knife**, and **club** it is one of the earliest and most important tools developed by early humans. As a weapon, it may be wielded with either one hand or two. It was used in virtually every conflict up until the **modern era** and is probably the most commonly used weapon in history.^[1]

1.1 Origins

Spear manufacture and use is not confined to human beings. It is also practiced by the **western chimpanzee**. Chimpanzees near Kédougou, Senegal have been observed to create spears by breaking straight limbs off trees, stripping them of their bark and side branches, and sharpening one end with their teeth. They then used the weapons to hunt **galagos** sleeping in hollows.^[2] **Orangutans** also have used spears to fish, presumably after observing humans fishing in a similar manner.^[3]

1.1.1 Prehistory

Archaeological evidence found in present-day **Germany** documents that wooden spears have been used for hunting since at least 400,000 years ago,^[4] and a 2012 study suggests that **Homo heidelbergensis** may have developed the technology about 500,000 years ago.^[5] Wood does not preserve well, however, and Craig Stanford, a primatologist and professor of anthropology at the **University of Southern California**, has suggested that the discovery of spear use by chimpanzees probably means that early humans used wooden spears as well, perhaps, five million years ago.^[6]

Neanderthals were constructing stone spear heads from as early as 300,000 **BP** and by 250,000 years ago, wooden spears were made with **fire-hardened** points.

From 200,000 BP onwards, Middle **Paleolithic** humans began to make complex stone blades with flaked edges which were used as spear heads. These stone heads could be fixed to the spear shaft by gum or resin or by bindings made of animal sinew, leather strips or vegetable matter. During this period, a clear difference remained between spears designed to be thrown and those designed to be used in hand-to-hand combat. By the **Magdalenian** period (c. 15000-9500 BC), spear-throwers similar to the later **atlatl** were in use.^[7]

1.2 Military

Spears were one of the most common personal weapons used in the **Stone Age**, and they remained in use as important military and hunting implements until the advent of **firearms**. They may be seen as the ancestor of such military weapons as the **lance**, the **pilum**, the **halberd**, the **naginata**, the **glaive**, the **bill**, and the **pike**. One of the earliest weapons fashioned by human beings and their ancestors, the spear is still used for hunting and fishing, and its influences still may be seen in current military gear such as the rifle-mounted **bayonet**.

Spears may be used as both a **projectile** and **melee** weapons. Spears used primarily for thrusting may be used with either one or two hands and tend to have heavier and sturdier designs than those intended exclusively for throwing. Those designed for throwing, often referred to as **javelins**, tend to be lighter and have a more streamlined head, and they may be thrown either by hand or with the assistance of a **spear thrower** such as the **atlatl** or **woomera**. From the atlatl dart, the **arrow** for use with **bows** eventually developed.

1.2.1 Ancient history

Infantry

Short, one-handed spears featuring socketed metal heads were used in conjunction with a shield by the earliest **Bronze Age** cultures. They were wielded in either single combat or in large troop formations. This tradition continued from the first **Mesopotamian** cultures, through the various ancient Egyptian dynasties, to the period of the Ancient Greek city states.

Africa

The spear probably originated in Africa sometime during the evolution of the genus **Homo**. It was an important part of the **Nubian** and **ancient Egyptian** military and continued to be used throughout African history even after the introduction of gunpowder. The most common kind of spear used in Africa is the **assegai**, which is usually thrown. Later, the **Zulu** people of eastern South Africa would become known for their particular skill with shortened thrusting spears called **iklwa**. These spears were designed for close combat and often were wielded in conjunction with a large oval shield. Advanced skills in close combat allowed the Zulu military to conquer much of southeast Africa.

Greeks The spear is the main weapon of the warriors of **Homer's Iliad**. The use of both a single thrusting spear and two throwing spears are mentioned. It has been suggested that two styles of combat are being described; an early style, with thrusting spears, dating to the **Mycenaean** period in which the *Iliad* is set, and, anachronistically, a later style, with throwing spears, from Homer's own **Archaic** period.^[8]

In the 7th century BC, the Greeks evolved a new close-order infantry formation, the **phalanx**.^[9] The key to this formation was the **hoplite**, who was equipped with a large, circular, bronze-faced shield (**hoplon**) and a 7–9 ft. (2–2.75 m) spear with an iron head and bronze butt-spike (**doru**).^[10] The hoplite phalanx dominated warfare among the Greek City States from the 7th into the 4th century BC.

The 4th century saw major changes. One was the greater use of **peltasts**, light infantry armed with spear and javelins.^[11] The other was the development of the **sarissa**, a two-handed pike 18 ft. (5.5 m) in length, by the **Macedonians** under **Phillip of Macedon** and **Alexander the Great**.^[12] The pike phalanx, supported by peltasts and cavalry, became the dominant mode of warfare among the Greeks from the late 4th century onward^[13] until Greek military systems were supplanted by the Roman legions.

Cavalry

During this time the spear was also used by cavalry. The majority of ancient cavalry units were equipped either with javelins or a one-handed thrusting spear similar to that used by infantry. Some, however, used longer spears. The Macedonian **xyston** was 12–14 ft. (3.6–4.2 m) in length and could be used with one or two hands. The use of the two-handed **kontos** by heavily armoured soldiers on horseback, known as **cataphracts**, was developed first by nomadic eastern Iranian tribes and spread throughout the ancient world. These would be used to great effect by the **Diadochi** kingdoms and the **Parthians** and, later, by the **Sassanians** and **Sarmatians**. Later Roman and **Byzantine** armies also made use of these troops.

Romans

In the *pre-Marian* Roman armies the first two lines of battle, the *hastati* and *principes*, often fought with a sword called a *gladius* and *pila*, heavy javelins that were specifically designed to be thrown at an enemy to pierce and foul a target's shield. Originally the *principes* were armed with a short spear called a *hasta*, but these gradually fell out of use, eventually being replaced by the *gladius*. The third line, the *triarii*, continued to use the *hasta*.

From the late 2nd century BC, all *legionaries* were equipped with the *pilum*. The *pilum* continued to be the standard legionary spear until the end of the 2nd century AD. *Auxilia*, however, were equipped with a simple *hasta* and, perhaps, throwing spears. During the 3rd century AD, although the *pilum* continued to be used, legionaries usually were equipped with other forms of throwing and thrusting spear, similar to *auxilia* of the previous century. By the 4th century, the *pilum* had effectively disappeared from common use.^[14]

1.2.2 Middle East and North Africa during Islamic period

Muslim warriors used a spear that was called an *az-zagāyah*. Berbers pronounced it *zagāya*, but the English term, derived from the Old French via *Berber*, is “assegai”. It is a pole weapon used for throwing or hurling, usually a light spear or javelin made of hard wood and pointed with a forged iron tip. The *az-zagāyah* played an important role during the *Islamic conquest* as well as during later periods, well into the 20th century. A longer pole *az-zagāyah* was being used as a hunting weapon from horseback. The *az-zagāyah* spread far into Sub-Saharan Africa as well as India, although these places already had their own variants of the spear. It was the weapon of choice during the *Fulani jihad* as well as during the *Mahdist War* in Sudan. It is still being used by Sikh *Nihang* in the *Punjab* as well as certain wandering Sufi ascetics (*Derwishes*).

1.2.3 European Middle Ages

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the spear and shield continued to be used by nearly all Western European cultures. Since a medieval spear required only a small amount of *steel* along the sharpened edges (most of the spear-tip was wrought iron), it was an economical weapon. Quick to manufacture, and needing less *smithing* skill than a sword, it remained the main weapon of the common soldier. The *Vikings*, for instance, although often portrayed with *axe* or *sword* in hand, were armed mostly with spears,^[15] as were their *Anglo-Saxon*, *Irish*, or continental contemporaries.

Infantry

Broadly speaking, spears were either designed to be used in melee, or to be thrown. Within this simple classification, there was a remarkable range of types. For example, M.J. Swanton identified thirty different spearhead categories and sub-categories in Early Saxon England.^[16] Most medieval spearheads were generally leaf-shaped. Notable types of Early medieval spears include the *angon*, a throwing spear with a long head similar to the Roman *pilum*, used by the Franks and Anglo-Saxons and the *winged (or lugged) spear*, which had two prominent wings at the base of the spearhead, either to prevent the spear penetrating too far into an enemy or to aid in spear fencing.^[17] Originally a Frankish weapon, the winged spear also was popular with the Vikings.^[18] It would become the ancestor of later medieval polearms, such as the *partisan* and *spetum*.

The thrusting spear also has the advantage of reach, being considerably longer than other weapon types. Exact spear lengths are hard to deduce as few spear shafts survive archaeologically but 6 ft. – 8 ft. (1.8m – 2.5m) would seem to have been the norm. Some nations were noted for their long spears, including the Scots and the Flemish. Spears usually were used in tightly ordered formations, such as the *shieldwall* or the *schiltron*. To resist cavalry, spear shafts could be planted against the ground.^[19] William Wallace drew up his schiltrons in a circle at the *Battle of Falkirk* in 1298 to deter charging cavalry,^[20] but it was a widespread tactic, sometimes known as the “crown” formation.^[21]

Throwing spears became rarer as the Middle Ages drew on, but survived in the hands of specialists such as the Catalan *Almogavars*.^[22] They were commonly used in Ireland until the end of the 16th century.^[23]

Spears began to lose fashion among the infantry during the 14th century, being replaced by *pole weapons* that combined the thrusting properties of the spear with the cutting properties of the axe, such as the *halberd*. Where spears were retained they grew in length, eventually evolving into *pikes*, which would be a dominant infantry weapon in the 16th and 17th centuries.^[24]

Cavalry

Cavalry spears were originally the same as infantry spears and were often used with two hands or held with one hand overhead. In the 11th century, after the adoption of *stirrups* and a high-cantled saddle, the spear became a decidedly more powerful weapon. A mounted knight would secure the lance by holding it with one hand and tucking it under the armpit (the *couched lance* technique)^[25] This allowed all the momentum of the horse and knight to be focused on the weapon's tip, whilst still retaining accuracy and control. This use of the spear spurred the development of the *lance* as a distinct weapon that was perfected in the medieval sport of *jousting*.^[26]

In the 14th century, tactical developments meant that knights and men-at-arms often fought on foot. This led to the practice of shortening the lance to about 5 ft. (1.5m.) to make it more manageable.^[27] As dismounting became commonplace, specialist pole weapons such as the *pollaxe* were adopted by knights and this practice ceased.^[28]

1.2.4 European Renaissance and after

Infantry

The development of both the long, two-handed *pike* and *gunpowder* in Renaissance Europe saw an ever increasing focus on integrated infantry tactics.^[29] Those infantry not armed with these weapons carried variations on the pole-arm, including the *halberd* and the *bill*. Ultimately, the spear proper was rendered obsolete on the battlefield. Its last flowering was the half-pike or *spontoon*,^[30] a shortened version of the pike carried by officers and NCOs. While originally a weapon, this came to be seen more as a badge of office, or *leading staff* by which troops were directed.^[31] The half-pike, sometimes known as a boarding pike, was also used as a weapon on board ships until the 19th century.^[32]

Cavalry

At the start of the Renaissance, cavalry remained predominantly lance-armed; *gendarmes* with the heavy knightly lance and lighter cavalry with a variety of lighter lances. By the 1540s, however, pistol-armed cavalry called *reiters* were beginning to make their mark. Cavalry armed with pistols and other lighter firearms, along with a sword, had virtually replaced lance armed cavalry in Western Europe by the beginning of the 17th century,^[33] although the lance persisted in Eastern Europe, from whence it was reintroduced into the European mainstream in the 19th century.

1.2.5 Asia

China

Spears (*qiang*) were used first as hunting weapons amongst the ancient Chinese. They became popular as infantry weapons during the *Warring States* and *Qin* era, when spearmen were used as especially highly disciplined soldiers in organized group attacks. When used in formation fighting, spearmen would line up their large rectangular or circular shields in a shieldwall manner. The *Qin* also employed long spears (more akin to a pike) in formations similar to Swiss pikemen in order to ward off cavalry. The *Han* Empire would use similar tactics as its *Qin* predecessors. Halberds, polearms, and dagger axes were also common weapons during this time.

Spears were also common weaponry for *Warring States*, *Qin*, and *Han* era cavalry units. During these eras, the spear would develop into a longer lance-like weapon used for cavalry charges.

India

South Asian spears were used both in missile and non-missile form, both by cavalry and foot-soldiers. Mounted spear-fighting was practiced using with a ten-foot, ball-tipped wooden lance called a *bothati*, the end of which was covered in dye so that hits may be confirmed. Spears were constructed from a variety of materials such as the *sang* made completely of steel, and the *ballam* which had a bamboo shaft. The *Rajputs* wielded a type of spear for infantrymen which had a club integrated into the spearhead, and a pointed butt end. Other spears had forked blades, several spear-points, and numerous other innovations. One particular spear unique to India was the *vita* or corded lance. Used by the *Maratha* army, it had a rope connecting the spear with the user's wrist, allowing the weapon to be thrown and pulled back.

Japan

Medieval Japan employed spears for infantrymen to use, but it was not until the 11th century in Japan that **samurai** began to use spears over bows. Several spears (*yari*) and pole weapons were used in the Japanese theatres; the **naginata** was a heavy but powerful pole arm often used by mounted samurai in the 16th century. It was described as a sword attached to a spear and although it was unwieldy, skilled users could fight many opponents at once.

Korea

Spears and pole-arms were utilized heavily throughout the history of Korean warfare with some types serving specialized purposes. Especially during the **Three Kingdoms of Korea** period, in which wars among the Korean states, as well as with neighboring Chinese dynasties, were highly frequent, Korean military forces were constantly improving upon weaponry and martial practices. During this time period, spears were often lengthy and sturdy and were armed by heavily armored shock infantrymen, reflecting the prevalence of cavalry engagements and open combat.

The **Goguryeo Empire**, which was by far the most powerful Korean sovereignty of that time with its domain stretching from northern Korea to the entirety of Manchuria and parts of northeastern China, was especially well known for its highly motivated and battle-hardened soldiers. Goguryeo cavalymen were primarily armed with spears, with swords relegated to a secondary position.

Pole-arms and spears eventually became commonplace weapons among Korean infantry during the **Joseon** dynasty, and military officers were expected to be proficient in the use of at least several types of spears. One of the most prolific pole weapons of this period was the **dangpa**, a modified type of trident. Its unique feature is the slightly crooked two outer teeth of the weapon, with a middle tip extending farther. This design was made so that the soldier could stab and penetrate deep into his enemy with maximum force, while the two outer teeth would prevent the weapon from becoming stuck to the opponent's body. Most Korean foot soldiers, especially those positioned to defend fortresses and strongholds, were highly trained in the use of the dangpa. Some other pole weapons were used such as the **woldo**, a weapon that resembles its more well-known cousin the Chinese **Guan dao**. The woldo was used mostly by Joseon warriors and officers.

In the late sixteenth century, Japanese forces under the leadership of warlord **Toyotomi Hideyoshi** instigated an invasion on the Korean peninsula to initiate the **Imjin Wars**. The dangpa continued to be a favorite among Korean soldiers stationed to defend fortresses because of its versatility in siege combat. The dangpa's balanced weight allowed the soldier to achieve great striking power and its piercing capabilities were invaluable to forcing off climbing Japanese soldiers. Because of its length, Korean infantry armed with the dangpa could use it to corner multiple Japanese troops en masse. The dangpa was also used by Korean marines in **Admiral Yi's** naval operations, although to a less prominent extent. The tactical nature of Korean naval warfare relied upon superior firepower and maneuverability of Korean ships, and as such Korean sailors preferred using projectiles such as bows and arrows as primary weapons. However, in the case of boarding and close combat situations, a small number of Korean marines would be armed with the dangpa. These sailors acted as "pushing" infantry by being the first to board an enemy vessel during an engagement. The sailors, with their dangpa, would stave or "push" off approaching Japanese infantry until a significant number of Korean swordsmen could board the vessel.

Philippines

Filipino spears (**sibat**) were used as both a weapon and a tool throughout the **Philippines**. It also called *bangkaw*, *sumbling* or *palupad* in the islands of **Visayas** and **Mindanao**. Sibat are typically made from rattan, either with a sharpened tip or a head made from metal. These heads may either be single-edged, double-edged or barbed. Styles vary according to function and origin. For example, a sibat designed for fishing may not be the same as those used for hunting.

The spear was used as the primary weapon in expeditions and battles against neighbouring island kingdoms and it became famous during the 1521 **Battle of Mactan**, where the chieftain **Lapu Lapu** of **Cebu** fought against Spanish forces lead by **Ferdinand Magellan** who was subsequently killed.

Vietnam

Along with the axe, the spear was the most common ancient weapon found in Vietnam. Spearheads are of various sizes and shapes, some only 12 centimetres in length and others 30 to 40 cm long. Spear shafts also vary greatly.

saw the development of specialised types, such as the boar-spear and the bear-spear.^[40] The boar-spear could be used both on foot or horseback.

- Javelin
- Harpoon
- Trident

1.3.2 Modern revival

Spear hunting fell out of favour in most of Europe in the 18th century, but continued in Germany, enjoying a revival in the 1930s.^[41] Spear hunting is still practiced in the USA.^[42] Animals taken are primarily wild boar and deer, although trophy animals such as cats and big game as large as a Cape Buffalo are hunted with spears. Alligator are hunted in Florida with a type of harpoon.

Gene Morris, a former Air Force colonel lobbied to legalize spear hunting Alabama in 1992. Through Morris' actions, spear hunting was legalized in Alabama, though officials said they believed Morris was the only person to hunt with a spear in the state.^[43] Morris described himself as "The Greatest Living Spear Hunter in the World." He opened a spear hunting museum in Sumerdale, Alabama. He died in 2011.

1.4 In myth and legend

1.4.1 Symbolism

Like many weapons, a spear may also be a symbol of power. In the Chinese martial arts community, the Chinese spear (Qiang 枪) is popularly known as the "king of weapons".

The Celts would symbolically destroy a dead warrior's spear either to prevent its use by another or as a sacrificial offering.

In classical Greek mythology Zeus' bolts of lightning may be interpreted as a symbolic spear. Some would carry that interpretation to the spear that frequently is associated with Athena, interpreting her spear as a symbolic connection to some of Zeus' power beyond the Aegis once he rose to replacing other deities in the pantheon. Athena was depicted with a spear prior to that change in myths, however. Chiron's wedding-gift to Peleus when he married the nymph Thetis in classical Greek mythology, was an ashen spear as the nature of ashwood with its straight grain made it an ideal choice of wood for a spear.

The Romans and their early enemies would force prisoners to walk underneath a 'yoke of spears', which humiliated them. The yoke would consist of three spears, two upright with a third tied between them at a height which made the prisoners stoop.^[44] It has been surmised that this was because such a ritual involved the prisoners' warrior status being taken away. Alternatively, it has been suggested that the arrangement has a magical origin, a way to trap evil spirits.^[45] The word *subjugate* has its origins in this practice (from Latin *sub* = under, *jugum*=a yoke).

In Norse Mythology, the God Odin's spear (named Gungnir) was made by the sons of Ivaldi. It had the special property that it never missed its mark. During the War with the Vanir, Odin symbolically threw Gungnir into the Vanir host. This practice of symbolically casting a spear into the enemy ranks at the start of a fight was sometimes used in historic clashes, to seek Odin's support in the coming battle.^[46] In Wagner's opera *Siegfried*, the haft of Gungnir is said to be from the "World-Tree" Yggdrasil.^[47]

Other spears of religious significance are the Holy Lance^[48] and the Lúin of Celtchar,^[49] believed by some to have vast mystical powers.

Sir James George Frazer in *The Golden Bough*^[50] noted the phallic nature of the spear and suggested that in the Arthurian Legends the spear or lance functioned as a symbol of male fertility, paired with the Grail (as a symbol of female fertility).

Tamil (Thamizh) people worship the spear as the weapon of the god Murugan. Murugan's spear is called the Vel. In Sri Lanka and India there is a dominant caste named Vellalar. The name Vellalar is derived from Vel and Alar, which means "ruler of the spear".

The term *spear* is also used (in a somewhat archaic manner) to describe the male line of a family, as opposed to the distaff or female line.

1.4.2 Legends

- Amenonuhoko, spear of Izanagi and Izanami, creator gods in Japanese mythology
- Gáe Bulg, spear of Cúchulainn, hero in Irish mythology
- Gáe Buide and Gáe Derg, spears of Diarmuid Ua Duibhne which could inflict wounds that none can recover from
- Green Dragon Crescent Blade, a guan dao wielded by General Guan Yu in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*
- Gungnir, spear of Odin, a god in Norse mythology
- Holy Lance, said to be the spear that pierced the side of Jesus
- Octane Serpent Spear of Zhang Fei (Yide) from the Three Kingdoms period in China
- Spear of Fuchai, the spear used by Goujian's arch-rival, King Fuchai of Wu, in China
- Spear of Lugh, named after Lugh, a god in Irish mythology
- Trident, a three-pronged fishing spear associated with a number of water deities, including the Etruscan Nethuns, Greek Poseidon, and Roman Neptune.
- Trishula, a three-pronged spear wielded by the Hindu deities Durga and Shiva
- Rhongomyniad, or simply 'Ron,' the spear of King Arthur according to British tradition.^[51]

1.5 See also

- List of types of spears
- Arrow
- Atlatl
- Dart
- Spearfishing
- Viking Age arms and armour
- Woomera
- Boomerang

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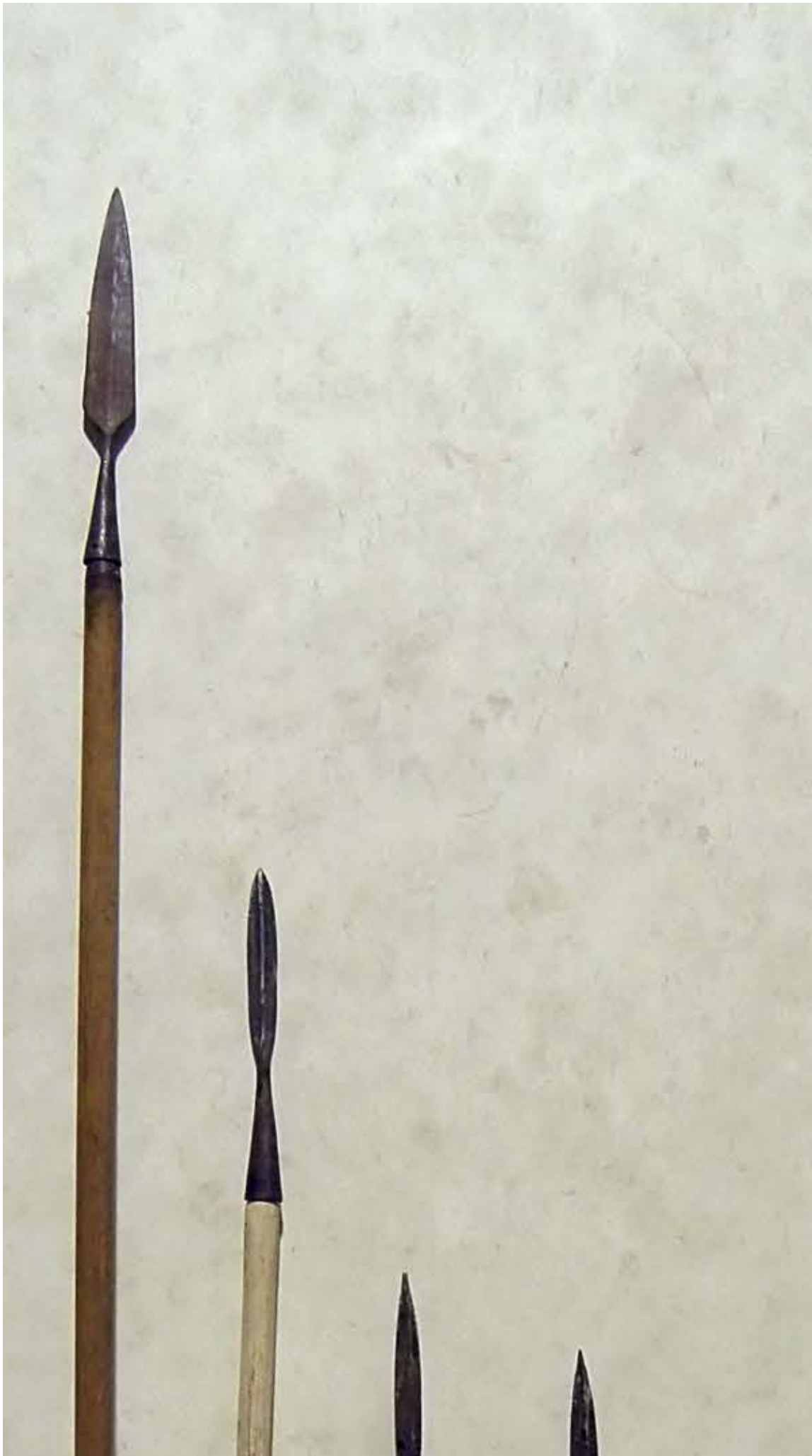
1.7 External links

1.7.1 Historical

- SPEAR (O. Eng. spere, O. H. Ger. sper, mod. Ger. sp)
- Anglo-Saxon spear forging
- Ancient Weapons – Spears
- Viking Spears
- Irish Living History site
- Masai Spears
- The Vel in Sri lanka

1.7.2 Modern

- Modern spear-forging techniques
- Legal Status of Spear Hunting in the United States of America
- Jimmy’s Backpacking Page—Trail Spears





Hunting spear and knife, from Mesa Verde National Park



Sumerian spearmen advancing in close formation with large shields – Stele of the Vultures, c.2450 BC



Zulu man with iklwa, 1917



Athenian warrior wielding a spear in battle



Re-enactor outfitted as a Roman legionary carrying a pilum



German reenactors of pikemen



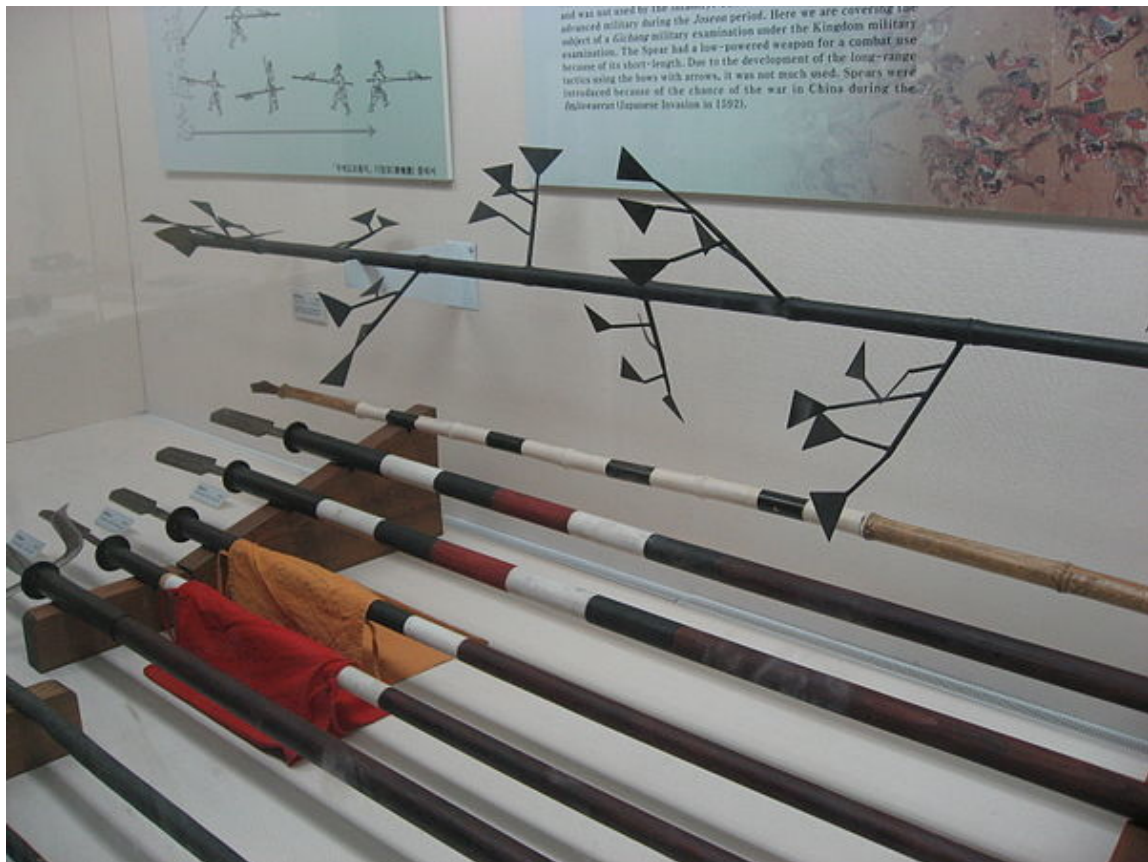
Shang Dynasty spear heads



Engraving of a Maratha soldier with spear by James Forbes, 1813



Ukiyo-e print of a samurai general holding a yari in his right hand



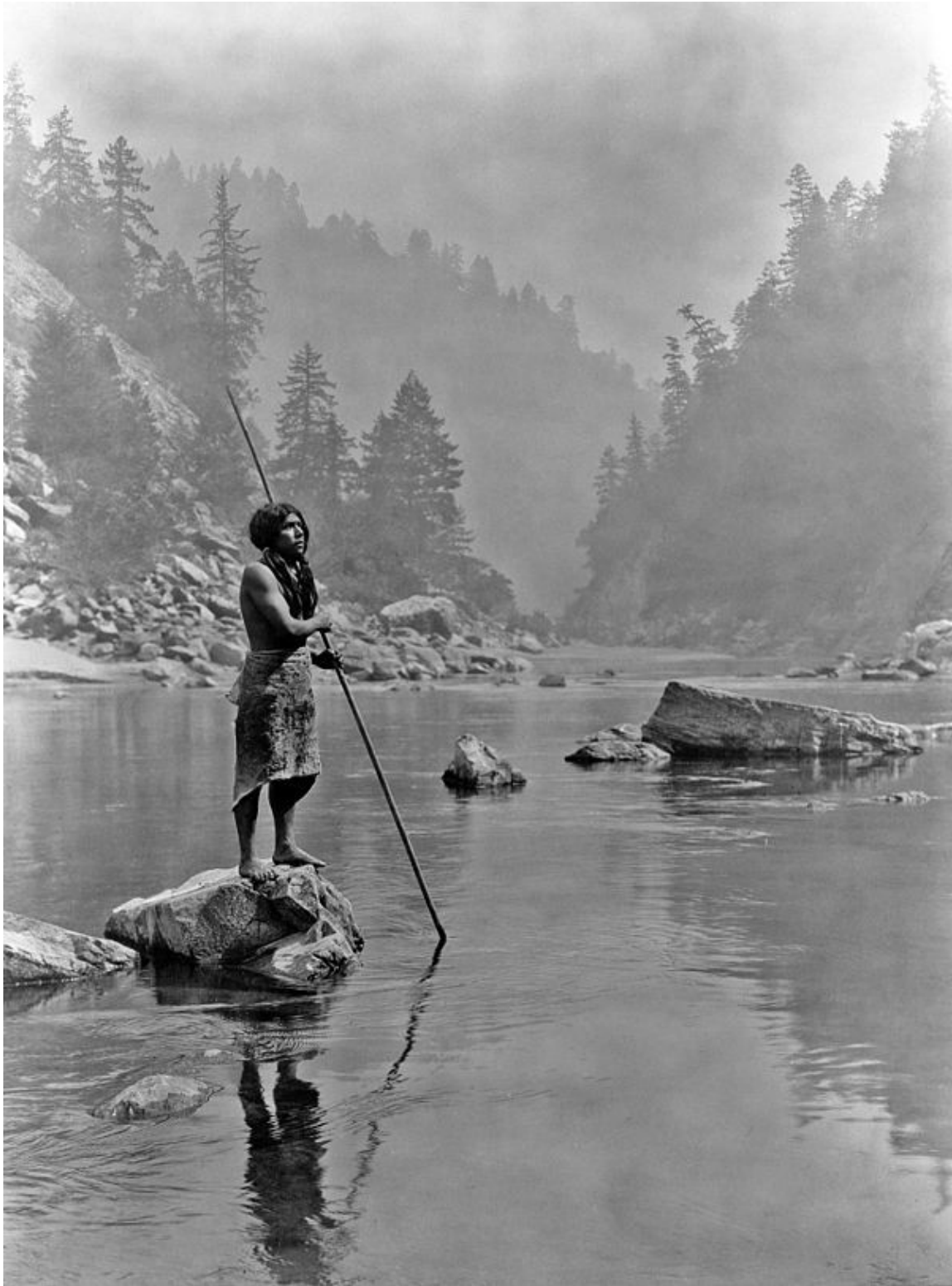
A selection of Korean spears



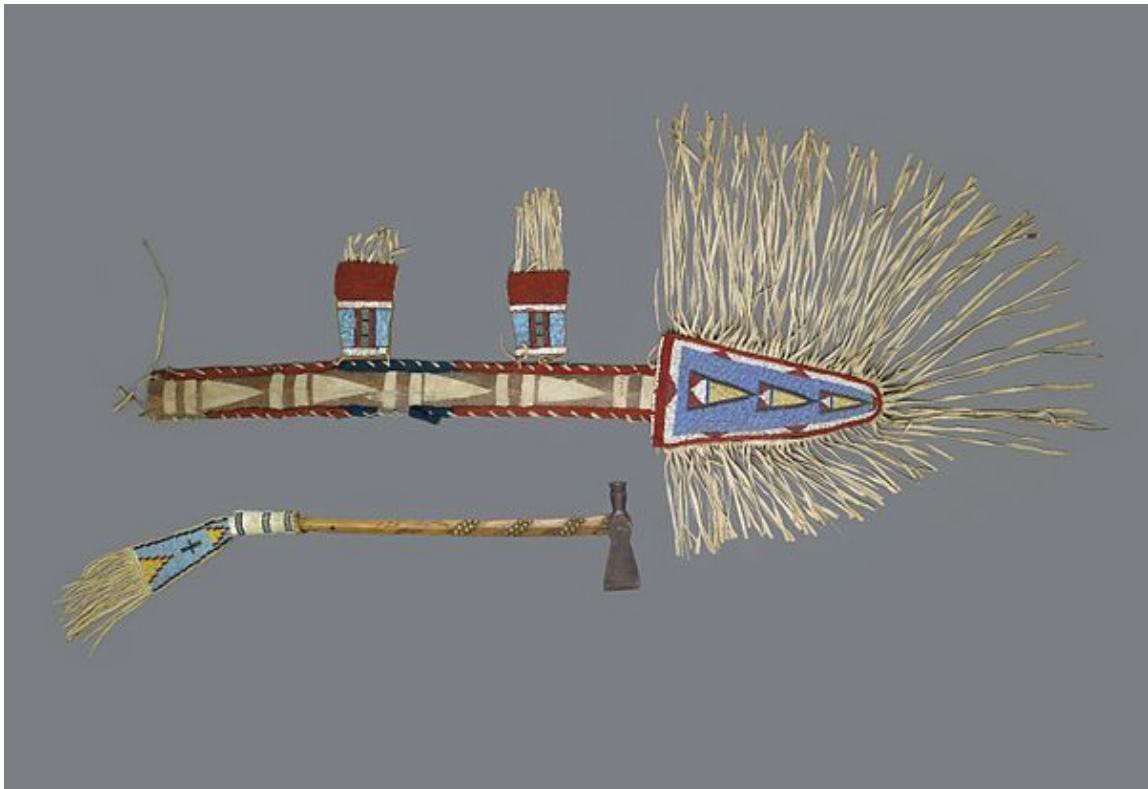
A Filipino warrior holding a Sibat (spear) in the Boxer Codex.



Dong Son spear heads



A photograph of an American native, a *Hupa* man with his spear – by Edward Sheriff Curtis, dated 1923



Spear Case, Crow (Native American), late 19th century, Brooklyn Museum



Peruvian fisherman spearfishing with a multi-pronged spear



The Norse god Odin, carrying the spear Gungnir on his ride to Hel



The Japanese ronin Miyamoto Musashi killing a giant nue – print by Utagawa Kuniyoshi, nineteenth century

Chapter 2

Pole weapon



A selection of polearms, mostly halberds.

A **pole weapon** or **polearm** is a close combat **weapon** in which the main fighting part of the weapon is fitted to the end of a long shaft, typically of **wood**, thereby extending the user's effective range. **Glaives**, **poleaxes**, **halberds**, and **naginata** are all varieties of polearms.

The purpose of using pole weapons is either to extend reach or to increase **angular momentum**—and thus striking power—when the weapon is swung. Because they contain relatively little metal, polearms are cheap to make. This has made them the favored weapon of peasant levies and peasants in rebellion the world over. Many are adapted from farm implements, or other tools.

Polearms were common weapons on medieval European battlefields. Their range and impact force made them effective weapons against armored warriors on horseback, because they could penetrate armor. The Renaissance saw a plethora of different varieties. Polearms in modern times are largely constrained to ceremonial military units such as the Papal **Swiss Guard** or **Yeomen of the Guard** or traditional **martial arts**. **Chinese Martial Arts** in particular have

preserved a wide variety of weapons and techniques.

2.1 Classification difficulties

The classification of pole weapons can be difficult, and European weapon classifications in particular can be confusing. This can be due to a number of factors, including uncertainty in original descriptions, changes in weapons or nomenclature through time, mistranslation of terms, and the well-meaning inventiveness of later experts. For example, the word 'halberd' is also used to translate the Chinese *ji* and also a range of medieval **Scandinavian** weapons as described in *sagas*, such as the *atgeir*.

In the words of the arms expert **Ewart Oakeshott**,

Staff-weapons in Medieval or Renaissance England were lumped together under the generic term “staves” but when dealing with them in detail we are faced with terminological difficulty. There never seems to have been a clear definition of what was what; there were apparently far fewer staff-weapons in use than there were names to call them by; and contemporary writers up to the seventeenth century use these names with abandon, calling different weapons by the same name and similar weapons by different names. To add to this, we have various nineteenth century terminologies used by scholars. We must remember too that any particular weapon ... had everywhere a different name.^[1]

2.2 List of pole weapons

2.2.1 Ancient

- **Falx**
- **Rhomphaia**
- **Kontos (weapon)**

2.2.2 Dark Ages/Medieval Europe

Danish axe

The **Danish Axe** (also **Broad Axe**, **Dane-axe**) is a weapon with a heavy crescent-shaped head mounted on a haft 4 ft. to 6 ft. (1.2-1.8 m.) in length. Originally a **Viking** weapon, it was adopted by the **Anglo-Saxons** and **Normans** in the 11th century, spreading through Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries.^[2] Variants of this basic weapon continued in use in Scotland and Ireland into the 16th century.^[3] A form of 'Long Axe'.

Sparth axe

In the 13th century, variants on the Danish axe are seen. Described in English as a *sparth* (from the Old Norse *sparðr*)^[4] or *pale-axe*,^[5] the weapon featured a larger head with broader blade, the rearward part of the crescent sweeping up to contact (or even be attached to) the haft.

In Ireland, this axe was known as a *Sparr Axe*. Originating in either Western Scotland or Ireland, the *sparr* was widely used by the **galloglass**.^[6] Although sometimes said to derive from the Irish for a joist or beam,^[7] a more likely definition is as a variant of *sparth*.^[8] Although attempts have been made to suggest that the *sparr* had a distinctive shaped head, illustrations and surviving weapons show there was considerable variation and the distinctive feature of the weapon was its long haft.^[9]

Fauchard

A **fauchard** is a type of polearm which was used in medieval **Europe** from the 11th through the 14th centuries. The design consisted of a curved blade put atop a 6-to-7-foot-long (1.8 to 2.1 m) pole. The blade bore a moderate to



A selection of pole weapons in the Međimurje County Museum, Croatia.

strong curve along its length; however, unlike a glaive, the cutting edge was on the concave side (similar to a scythe or sickle). Later variants had one or more spear points attached to the back or top of the blade for stabbing. The later variant can easily be confused with the guisarme or bill-guisarme, since it superficially appears to have a “hook”.

Guisarme

A **guisarme** (sometimes **gisarme**, **giserne** or **bisarme**) was a pole weapon used in Europe primarily between 1000–1400. It was used primarily to dismount knights and horsemen. Like most polearms it was developed by **peasants** by combining hand tools with long poles, in this case by putting a pruning hook onto a **spear** shaft. While hooks are fine for dismounting horsemen from mounts, they lack the **stopping power** of a spear especially when dealing with static opponents. While early designs were simply a hook on the end of a long pole, later designs implemented a small reverse spike on the back of the blade. Eventually weapon makers incorporated the usefulness of the hook in a variety of different polearms and *guisarme* became a catch-all for any weapon that included a hook on the blade. Ewart Oakeshott has proposed an alternative description of the weapon as a crescent shaped socketed axe.^[10]

Glaive

A **glaive** is a polearm consisting of a single-edged tapering **blade** similar in shape to a modern **kitchen knife** on the end of a pole. The blade was around 18 inches (55 cm) long, on the end of a pole 6 or 7 feet (180–210 cm) long^[11] However, instead of having a **tang** like a sword or naginata, the blade is affixed in a socket-shaft configuration similar to an axe head, both the blade and shaft varying in length. Illustrations in the 13th century Maciejowski Bible show a short staffed weapon with a long blade used by both infantry and cavalry.^[12] Occasionally glaive blades were created with a small hook or spike on the reverse side.^[13] Such glaives are named **glaive-guisarme**.

Voulge

A **voulge** (occasionally called a **pole cleaver**) is a curved blade attached to a pole by binding the lower 2/3 of the blade to the side of the pole, to form a sort of axe. Looks very similar to a **glaive**. Similar to the Sparth Ax(?).

Svärdstav

A **svärdstav** (literally **sword-staff**) is a **Swedish** medieval polearm that consists of a two-edged sword blade attached to a 2 metre staff. The illustrations often show the weapon being equipped with sword-like **quillons**.^[14] The illustrations sometimes show a socket mount and reinforcing langets being used, but sometimes they are missing; it is possible this weapon was sometimes manufactured by simply attaching an old sword blade onto a long pole on its tang, not unlike the naginata.

2.2.3 Renaissance Europe

See Pike (weapon)

Corseque

A **corseque** has a three-bladed head on a 6–8 ft. (1.8m-2.5m.) haft which, like the **partisan**, similar to the **winged spear** or **spetum** in the later Middle Ages.^[15] It was popular in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. Surviving examples have a variety of head forms but there are two main variants, one with the side blades (known as flukes or wings) branching from the neck of the central blade at 45 degrees, the other with hooked blades curving back towards the haft. The corseque is usually associated with the **rawcon**, **ranseur** and **runka**. Another possible association is with the “three-grayned staff”^[16] listed as being in the armoury of Henry VIII in 1547^[17] (though the same list also features 84 rawcons, suggesting the weapons were not identical in 16th century English eyes). Another modern term used for particularly ornate-bladed corseques is the *chauve-souris*.^[18]

Halberd

A **halberd** (or **Swiss voulge**) is a two-handed pole weapon that came to prominent use during the 14th and 15th centuries but has continued in use as a ceremonial weapon to the present day.^[19] First recorded as “hellembart” in 1279, the word *halberd* possibly comes from the **German** words *Halm* (staff) or *Helm* (helmet), and *Barte* (axe). The halberd consists of an axe blade topped with a spike mounted on a long shaft. It always has a hook or thorn on the back

side of the axe blade for grappling mounted combatants. Early forms are very similar in many ways to certain forms of **voulge**, while 16th century and later forms are similar to the **pollaxe**. The Swiss were famous users of the halberd in the medieval and renaissance eras,^[20] with various **cantons** evolving regional variations of the basic form.^[21]

Poleaxe

In the 14th century, the basic long axe gained an armour piercing spike on the back and another on the end of the haft for thrusting. This is similar to the **pollaxe** of 15th century. The poleaxe emerged in response to the need for a weapon that could penetrate **plate armour** and featured various combinations of an axe-blade, a back-spike and a hammer. It was the favoured weapon for men-at-arms fighting on foot into the sixteenth century.^[22]

See also **Bec de corbin**, **lucerne hammer**

Other

- Bardiche
- Bec de Corbin
- Bohemian ear spoon
- Bill
- Brandistock
- Lochaber axe
- Partisan
- Ranseur
- Scottish polearms
- Sovnya
- Spetum
- Viking halberd
- War scythe
- Military fork

2.2.4 Asia





A selection of Chinese pole weapons

Dagger-axe

The **dagger-axe**, or *gee* (Chinese: 戟; pinyin: gē; Wade–Giles: ko; sometimes confusingly translated “halberd”) is a type of weapon that was in use from Shang dynasty until at least Han dynasty China. It consists of a dagger-shaped blade made of bronze (or later iron) mounted by the tang perpendicular wooden shaft. A common Bronze Age infantry weapon. Also used by charioteers. Some dagger axes include a spear-point. There is a (rare) variant type with a divided two-part head, consisting of the usual straight blade and a scythe-like blade. Other rarities include archaeology findings with 2 or sometimes 3 blades stacked in line on top of a pole, but were generally thought as ceremonial polearms. Though the weapon saw frequent use in ancient China, the use of the dagger-axe decreased dramatically after the Qin and Han dynasties. By the medieval Chinese dynasties, with the decline of chariot warfare, the use of the dagger-axe was almost nonexistent.

Guan dao

A **Guan dao** or **Kwan tou** is a type of Chinese pole weapon. In Chinese it is properly called a **Yanyue dao** (弯月刀) which translates as *reclining moon blade*. Some believed it comes from the late Han Era and supposedly used by the late Eastern Han Dynasty general Guan Yu, but archaeological findings so far showed that Han dynasty armies were generally using straight single-edged blades, as curved blades came several centuries later. There is no reason to believe their polearms had curved-blades on them. Besides, historical accounts of the Three Kingdoms era had several specific records of Guan Yu thrusting his opponents down (probably with a spear-like polearm) in battles, instead of cutting them down with a curved-blade. Alternatively the guan dao is also known as *Chun Qiu Da Dao* (“Spring Autumn Great Knife”), again probably related to Guan Yu’s loyal image depicted in the Ming dynasty novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, but possibly a Ming author’s invention. It consists of a heavy blade mounted atop a 5-to-6-foot-long (1.5 to 1.8 m) wooden or metal pole with a pointed metal counter weight used for striking and stabbing on the opposite end.

The blade is very deep and curved on its face; this resembles a Chinese Sabre or Dao. Used by cavalry. Supposed to take great physical prowess to wield in combat due to great weight. Variants include having rings along the length of the straight back edge as found in the nine-ring guan dao for use as distractions or entanglements for incoming enemy weapons, having the tip curl into a rounded spiral as in the elephant guan dao, or featuring a more ornate design as exemplified by the dragon head guan dao.

Pu Dao Chinese polearm, a 'long-handled sabre', also known as the **zhan ma dao** (horsecutter sabre) which has a lighter blade and a ring at the end in that it. A pu dao is an infantryman’s weapon mainly used for cutting the legs off oncoming charging horses to bring down the riders.

Ji

Ji (Chinese: 戟), the Chinese halberd, was used as a military weapon in one form or another from at least as early as the Shang dynasty until the end of the Qing dynasty. The ji resembles a Chinese spear with a crescent blade

attached to the head, as sort of an axe blade. Sometimes double-bladed with 2 crescent blades on opposing sides of the spearhead.(refer to the right most weapons in the 2 Chinese polearm pictures)

Naginata

A **naginata** (薙切刀 or 薙切) is a Japanese polearm that was traditionally used by members of the **samurai** class. A naginata consists of a wood shaft with a curved blade on the end; it is descended from the Chinese guan dao. Usually it also had a sword-like guard (**tsuba**) between the blade and shaft. It was mounted with a tang and held in place with a pin or pins, rather than going over the shaft using a socket.

Nagamaki

A **nagamaki** is a pole weapon that was traditionally used in **Japan** by members of the **samurai** class, typically against mounted opponents. It had a much shorter grip and longer blade than the naginata, and was developed later. Unlike most Japanese weapons, there were no specific rules about exact measurements and proportions for nagamaki. It varies from typical European construction of polearms in that, like most Japanese weapons, it was mounted with a tang and held in place with a pin or pins, rather than going over the shaft using a socket. It may have been manufactured using a remounted sword blade.

Woldo

The Korean **woldo** was a variation of the Chinese guan dao. It was originally used by the medieval **Shilla** warriors. Wielding the woldo took time due to its weight, but in the hands of a trained soldier, the woldo was a fearsome, agile weapon famous for enabling a single soldier to cut down ranks of infantrymen. The woldo was continually in use for the military in Korea with various modifications made over the decades. Unlike the Chinese with the guan dao, the Koreans found the woldo unwieldy on horseback, and thus, it was specifically tailored to the needs of infantrymen. The **Joseon** government implemented rigorous training regimens requiring soldiers to be proficient with swordsmanship, and the use of the woldo. Though it was never widely used as a standard weapon, the woldo saw action on many fronts and was considered by many Korean troops to be a versatile weapon. Recently, a contemporary revival in various martial arts in Korea has brought interest into the application of the woldo and its history.

Ngao

The ngao or ngau (ง้าว, ท้องง้าว) is a **Thai** polearm that was traditionally used by elephant-riding infantry and is still used by practitioners of **krabi krabong**. Known in **Malay** as a *dap*, it consists of a wooden shaft with a curved blade fashioned onto the end, and is similar in design to the Korean woldo. Usually, it also had a hook (ขอ) between the blade and shaft used for commanding the elephant. The elephant warrior used the ngao like a blade from atop an elephant or horse during battle.

2.3 References

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- [7] Marsden (2003), p.82
- [8] OED

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- [10] Ewart Oakeshott (1980), p.53
- [11] Oakeshott (1980), p.53
- [12] The Morgan Library & Museum Online Exhibitions - The Morgan Picture Bible
- [13] media:Bannockburn.jpg
- [14] media:Dolstein 1.gif
- [15] Norman, A. V. B.; Wilson, G. M. (1982). *Treasures from the Tower of London : Arms and Armour*. London: Lund Humphries. p. 67. ISBN 0-946009-01-5.
- [16] **Grayned** meaning **bladed**
- [17] Norman & Wilson (1982), p.67
- [18] Oakeshott (1980), p.51.
- [19] Oakeshott (1980), pp.47-48
- [20] Douglas Miller : The Swiss at War 1300-1500, Osprey MAA 94, 1979
- [21] Oakeshott (1980), p.47, fig 6
- [22] Miles & Paddock, p.127-8

2.4 External links

- **Spotlight: The Medieval Poleaxe** by Alexi Goranov
- Fine, Tom (2001). “A summary of polearms”. (as used in *NetHack*). Accessed on 8 June 2006.

Chapter 3

Pollaxe

For other uses, see [Pollaxe \(disambiguation\)](#).

The **pollaxe** is a type of [European polearm](#) which was widely used by medieval [infantry](#). It is also known by the names **poleaxe**, **pole-axe**, **pole axe**, **polax**, and *Hache* ([French](#) meaning *axe*).

The term has become synonymous with felling or striking down with delivery of a blow.

3.1 Etymology

Sometimes weapons such as the [halberd](#), the [bardiche](#) or the [Danish axe](#) are mistakenly called pollaxes as they are indeed axes mounted on poles, but many etymological authorities consider the *poll-* prefix historically unrelated to “pole”, instead meaning “head”.^[1]

There are however some etymologists, such as [Eric Partridge](#), who do believe that the word is derived from “pole”.^[2]

3.2 Types of pollaxe

The pollaxe design arose from the need to breach the plate [armour](#) of [men at arms](#) during the 14th and 15th centuries. Generally, the form consisted of a wooden [haft](#) some 4–6.5 feet (1.2–2.0 m) long, mounted with a steel head. It seems most schools of combat suggested a haft length comparable to the height of the wielder, but in some cases hafts appear to have been created up to 8 feet (2.4 m) in length.

The design of the head varied greatly with a variety of interchangeable parts and rivets. Generally, the head bore an [axe](#) or [hammer](#) upon the damaging 'face', with a spike, hammer, or fluke on the reverse. In addition, there was a projection from the top (often square in cross section) built somewhat like a [dagger](#). The head was attached to the squared-off wooden pole by long flat strips of metal, which were riveted in place on either two or four of its sides, called *langets*. Also, a round hilt-like disc called a *rondelle* was placed just below the head. They also appear to have borne one or two rings along the pole's length as places to prevent hands from slipping. Also of note is that the 'butt end' of the staff, which did not contain the weapon's 'head', bore a spike.

On quick glance, the pollaxe is often confused with the similar looking halberd. However, the 'axe blade' on a pollaxe seems to have been consistently smaller than that of a halberd. A smaller head concentrates the [kinetic energy](#) of the blow on smaller area, enabling the impact to defeat armour, while broader halberd heads are better against lesser armoured opponents. Furthermore, many halberds had their heads forged as a single piece, while the pollaxe was always modular in design.

3.3 Fighting with pollaxe

The pollaxe was usually used by [knights](#) and other men-at-arms while fighting on foot. The pollaxe has a sophisticated fighting technique, which is based on [quarterstaff](#) fighting. The blade of the pollaxe can be used, not only for simply hacking down the opponent, but also tripping him, blocking his weapon, disarming him, slicing him and blocking his



Warrior holding a pollaxe in the coat of arms of Alytus County, Lithuania

blows. Both the head spike and butt spike can be used for thrusting attacks. The haft can be used on blocking the enemy's blows (the langets help reinforce the head to extend the life of the pole shaft), "cross-checking" and tripping him.

Both Sigmund Ringeck and Hans Talhoffer have treatises on the pollaxe in their Medieval fighting manuals. Pollaxe fighting techniques have been rediscovered with the increasing interest in historical European martial arts.

Today the pollaxe is a weapon of choice of many medieval re-enactors. Rubber pollaxe heads designed for safe combat are available commercially.

3.4 Popular usage

The poleaxe in that spelling, refers to an animal culling device of similar appearance. It was swung so the spike struck the animal, normally cattle, in the forehead. Hence also the phrase 'to be poleaxed' referring to being stunned. This term does not seem to appear before the 19th century.

3.5 See also

- *Bec de corbin*
- Bill (weapon)
- War hammer

3.6 References

[1] The Oxford English Dictionary gives the following etymology, s.v. **Poleaxe**:

[ME. *pollax*, *polax*, Sc. *powax* = MDu. *polaex*, *pollaex*, MLG. and LG. *polaxe*, *pollexe* (whence MSw. 15th c. *polyxe*, *pulyxe*, MDa. *polöxe*), f. *pol*, POLL n.1, Sc. *pow*, MDu., MLG. *polle*, *pol* head + AXE: cf. MDu. *polhamer* = poll-hammer, also a weapon of war. It does not appear whether the combination denoted an axe with a special kind of head, or one for cutting off or splitting the head of an enemy. In the 16th c. the word began to be written by some *pole-axe* (which after 1625 became the usual spelling), as if an axe upon a *pole* or long handle. This may have been connected with the rise of sense 2. Similarly, mod.Sw. *pålyxa* and Westphalian dial. *pålexe* have their first element = pole. Sense 3 may be a substitute for the earlier *bole-axe*, which was applied to a butcher's axe.]

[2] For instance, Eric Partridge gives the following etymology:

L *Palus*, stake becomes OE *pal*, whence ME *pol*, *pole*, E *Pole*, the ME cpd *pollax*, *polax* becomes *poleaxe*, AE *poleaxe*: cf AX (E)

3.7 Further reading

- Schulze, André (Hrsg.): *Mittelalterliche Kampfweisen*. Band 2: Kriegshammer, Schild und Kolben. - Mainz am Rhein. : Zabern, 2007. - ISBN 3-8053-3736-1

3.8 External links

- *Le Jeu de la Hache*
- Spotlight: The Medieval Poleaxe (myArmoury.com article)



Godfrey of Bouillon holds a short Lucerne hammer. Anachronistic fresco dated 1420.

Chapter 4

Bardiche

This article is about the “long poleaxe”. For the regular poleaxe, see [Pollaxe \(Polearm\)](#). For the Berdysh pistol, see [OTs-27 Berdysh](#).

A **bardiche** /bɑːrˈdiːʃ/ or **berdiche** (“long poleaxe”) is a type of [glaive polearm](#) known in the 16th and 17th centuries in Eastern Europe. Ultimately a descendant of the medieval [sparth \(Danish axe\)](#), the bardiche proper appears after 1500, but there are numerous medieval manuscripts that depict very similar weapons beginning ca. 1250. The bardiche differs from the [halberd](#) in having neither a hook at the back nor a spear point at the top.^[1]

Use of bardiches started in early 15th century Russia (some sources name the late 14th century), and in Scandinavia in the late 15th century. In the 16th century the bardiche became a weapon associated with [streltsy](#) (Russian guardsmen armed with [firearms](#)).^[2]

4.1 Description

The blade varied greatly in shape, but was most often a long, cleaver type blade. The distinction was in how the blade was attached to the pole. The bardiche blade was attached to the pole either via two sockets (one at the top of the pole and one lower, at the base of the blade) or one socket at the top and one surface mount at the base, effectively mounting the heavy blade to the wooden shaft. This construction is also seen in Scottish polearms, such as the [Lochaber axe](#) and [Jeddart staff](#), and bardiches are known to have been imported into Scotland in the 16th and 17th centuries^[3] Depending on the design of the particular weapons in question, at times a bardiche may greatly resemble a [voulge](#).

While the blade was often very long for an [axe](#) (usually exceeding 2 feet (60 cm)) the shaft was one of the shortest of all polearms; rarely did it exceed 5 feet (1.5 m) in length. It relied more on the weight of its heavy blade to do the damage than a swing from a long pole. This makes the bardiche more similar to the [Danish axe](#), in some respects, than to a true polearm.

4.2 Use

In Russia and in Poland this weapon was used to rest handguns upon when firing. It was standard equipment for the [Streltsy](#) (literally “shooters”) corps (foot, mounted and [dragoons](#)) and also for the Polish infantry (shorter version invented by King [Jan III Sobieski](#)).^[4] Another use of the bardiche was for execution.

4.3 References

- [1] R. E. Oakeshott, *European weapons and armour: From the Renaissance to the industrial revolution* (1980), 48–49.
- [2] Кирпичников А. Н., «Военное дело на Руси в XIII—XV вв.» Л., 1976 / Kirpichnikov A.N. Warfare in Russia in the 13th–15th centuries. Leningrad, 1976. (Russian)
- [3] Caldwell, David (1981). “Some Notes on Scottish Axes and Long Shafted Weapons”. In Caldwell, David. *Scottish Weapons and Fortifications 1100–1800*. Edinburgh: John Donald. pp. 253–314. ISBN 0-85976-047-2.

- [4] Besala, Jerzy (1983). *Wielcy Hetmani Rzeczypospolitej* (in Polish). Warszawa: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza. p. 72. ISBN 83-03-00160-4.

4.4 External links

- The Pitt Rivers Berdiche (catalogue reference 1884.21.53)





17th. century Streltsy with musket and bardiche

Chapter 5

Bill (weapon)

The **bill** is a **polearm** weapon used by infantry in medieval Europe. The bill is similar in size, function and appearance to the **halberd**, differing mainly in the hooked blade form. Other terms for the bill include **English bill**, **bill hook** or **bill-guisarme**.

5.1 Design

Derived originally from the agricultural **billhook**, the bill consisted of a hooked chopping blade with several pointed projections mounted on a staff. The end of the cutting blade curves forward to form a hook, which is the bill's distinguishing characteristic. In addition, the blade almost universally had one pronounced spike straight off the top like a spear head, and also a hook or spike mounted on the 'reverse' side of the blade. There were many types of bill. English bills tended to be relatively short, with broad chopping heads, while Italian bills (*ronche*) often had very long thrusting points. The English distinguished between several varieties of bill, including the black, brown and forest bills, but the differences between them are currently not fully understood.

George Silver, writing in 1599, stated that the (military) black bill should be 5 or 6 feet (1.5 or 1.8 m) long, while the (possibly civilian) forest bill should be 8 or 9 feet (2.4 or 2.7 m) long.^[1]

One advantage that it had over other polearms was that while it had the **stopping power** of a spear and the power of an axe, it also had the addition of a pronounced hook. If the sheer power of a swing did not fell the horse or its rider, the bill's hook was excellent at finding a chink in the plate armour of cavalrymen at the time, dragging the unlucky horseman off his mount to be finished off with either a sword, spear or the bill itself. These characteristics also made it effective against heavily armoured infantry, dragging them into the melee or exploiting the weak points in their armour. The small point found on the trailing edge of some bills was useful for puncturing armour as well—concentrating the force of the blow onto the point.

During the 16th century when most European states were adopting the **pike** and **arquebus**, the English preferred to stick with the combination of bill and **English longbow**. Even in the Elizabethan period, bills were still common with levies sent to fight the Scots. The **Battle of Flodden** (1513) was a classic match between Continental-style Pikes formations (Scots) and Billmen (English).

Along with the pike, the bill is mentioned as being one of the main weapons of the Irish rebels in **Ulster** during the 1798 rebellion.^[2]

5.2 Variants

The shorthanded bills were used by the army of historic India as well, mainly by infantrymen of Bengal. Nowadays smaller versions are used as agricultural tools and as kitchen appliances.

An agricultural version, commonly known as either a **brush-ax** or bush-ax, is readily available in rural hardware and farm-supply stores in the United States today. It has a 4-foot-long (1.2 m) handle, and a 16-inch (41 cm) head. It is extremely useful for clearing undergrowth and unwanted hedgerows. Both the concave and convex edges may be sharpened edges, but spear-points and back-hooks are not available. Expertly used, the brush-ax can fell a 3-inch

(7.6 cm) tree with a single blow. Inexpertly used, it can pose a grave danger of accidental maiming to those standing nearby.

5.3 See also

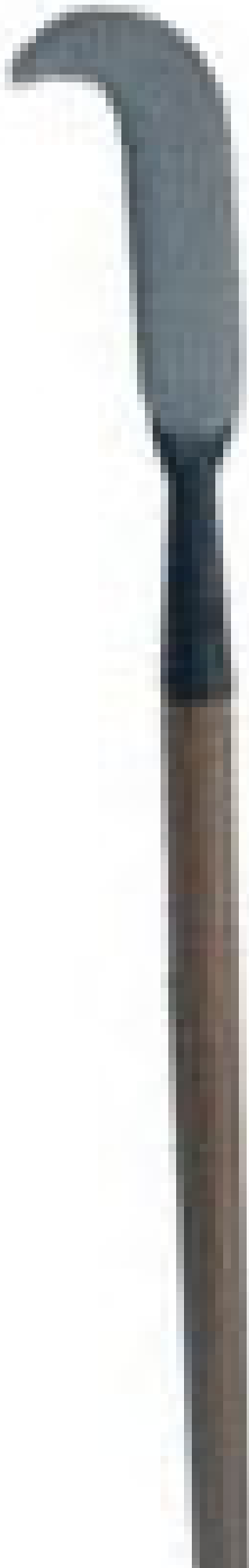
- Pole weapon
- Falx
- Siege hook

5.4 Footnotes

- [1] George Silver : Paradoxes of Defence, 1599
- [2] A.T.Q Stewart, The Summer Soldiers, pg 215

5.5 References

- Stewart, A.T.Q (November 1995). *The Summer Soldiers: 1798 Rebellion in Antrim and Down* (paperback). Blackstaff Press Ltd. p. 294. ISBN 0-85640-558-2.





A group of 15th century re-enactors with Italian and English bill-hooks during a display at Cardiff Castle.

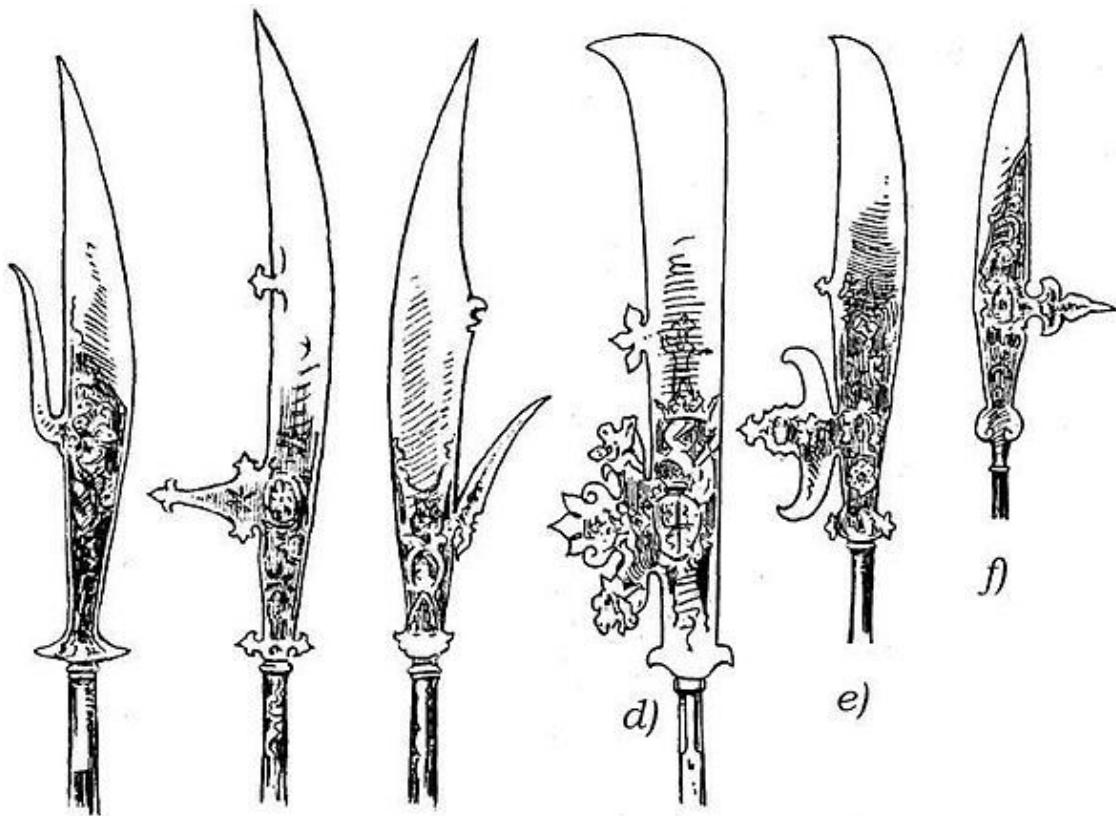
Chapter 6

Glaive

For the fictional weapon called “The Glaive”, see [Krull \(film\)](#).

For software, see [GLAVE \(software\)](#).

A **glaive** is a European **polearm** weapon, consisting of a single-edged **blade** on the end of a **pole**. It is similar to the



Glaives

Japanese *naginata*, the Chinese *guandao*, Russian *sovnya* and Siberian *palma* .

Typically, the blade was around 45 cm (18 inches) long, on the end of a pole 2 m (6 or 7 feet) long, and the blade was affixed in a socket-shaft configuration similar to an axe head, rather than having a **tang** like a *sword* or *naginata*. Occasionally glaive blades were created with a small hook on the reverse side to better catch riders. Such blades are called **glaive-guisarmes**.

According to the 1599 treatise *Paradoxes of Defence* by the English gentleman [George Silver](#), the glaive is used in the same general manner as the *quarterstaff*, *half pike*, *bill*, *halberd*, *voulge*, or *partisan*. Silver rates this class of **polearms** above all other individual hand-to-hand combat weapons.

The *Maciejowski Bible* (*Morgan Bible*) depicts an example of a two-handed glaive used on horseback.



Image taken from the Morgan Bible (Folio 10 Verso - top). Notice the Warbrand in the forefront slicing into a mounted soldier.

The contemporary term for this weapon may have been *faussart*, which was used for a variety of single-edged weapons seen as related to the *scythe* (along with terms such as *falchion* or *falcata* derived from *falx*, the Latin term for “scythe”).

6.1 Other uses of the word

The word “glaive” has historically been given to several very different types of weapons.

- The word “glaive” originated from French. Almost all etymologists derive it from either the Latin (*gladius*) or Celtic (**cladivos*, cf. *claymore*) word for sword. Nevertheless, all the earliest attestations in both French and English refer to *spears*.^[1] It is attested in this meaning in English roughly from the 14th century to the 16th.^[2]
- In the 15th century, it acquired the meaning described above.^[3]
- Around the same time it also began being used as a poetic word for sword (this is the main use of the word in Modern French).^[4]
- The term “glaive” is frequently misapplied in modern fantasy fiction, films and video games to various thrown weapons, similar to the *chakram* or *hunga munga*, which can mystically return to the thrower (as in popular myths surrounding the *boomerang*). These objects are fictional, and are not in any way related to the historical glaive.
- Champagne saucers are often colloquially termed glaives. The name refers to the traditional wine glass being ‘glaived’, resulting in a shorter than normal glass.

6.2 References

- [1] **OED** s.v. **Glaive**: “Hatz-Darm. regard OF. glaive as an adapted form of L. *gladius* (through the stages *gladie*, *glaie*, *glavie*). Ascoli supposes it to represent a Celtic **cladivo-* (OIr. *claideb* sword, Gael. *claidheamh*). Neither view, however, accounts for the earliest meaning of the word in OF., which is also that of MHG. *glavîe*, *glævîn*, MDu. *glavie*, *glaye*, Sw. *glaven*.”
- [2] **OED** s.v., section 1, lists examples in this meaning from 1297–1592.
- [3] **OED** s.v., section 2, lists examples in this meaning from ca. 1450–1678.
- [4] **OED** s.v., section 3, lists examples in this meaning from ca. 1470–1887.

Chapter 7

Guisarme

A **guisarme** (sometimes **gisarme**, **giserne** or **bisarme**) is a **pole weapon** used in **Europe** primarily between 1000-1400. Like many medieval polearms, the exact form of the weapon is hard to define from literary references and the identification of surviving weapons can be speculative. Two main modern schools of thought exist:

1. Like most **polearms** the guisarme was developed by **peasants** by combining hand tools with long poles: in this case by putting a pruning hook onto a **spear** shaft. While hooks are fine for unsaddling horsemen from their mounts, they lack the stopping power of a spear especially when dealing with static opponents. While early designs were simply a hook on the end of a long pole, later designs implemented a small reverse spike on the back of the blade. Eventually weapon makers incorporated the usefulness of the hook in a variety of different polearms, and *guisarme* became a catch-all for any weapon that included a hook on the blade. This is exemplified by the terms **bill-guisarmes**, **voulge-guisarmes**, and **glaive-guisarmes**.
1. An alternative definition is given by **Ewart Oakeshott** in his book *European Weapons and Armour*.^[1] He sees the guisarme as a “crescent shaped double socketed axe” on a long shaft. His primary reason is the use of the term “giserne” and axe interchangeably for the same weapon in the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Strengthening his view are the illustrations in the original manuscript which clearly show Sir Gawain with a long crescent shaped axe (see right). In his novel *Knight in Anarchy*, **George Shipway** describes the process of training for a judicial duel using the guisarme, where he favours the double-socketed axe interpretation of the weapon.^[2]

7.1 References

[1] Ewart Oakeshott : European Weapons and Armour Lutterworth Press 1980 p. 53

[2] *Knight in Anarchy* (1969), in the time of Stephen & Matilda. ISBN 0-432-14751-9; American title *The Knight*





Illustration of a scene from Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, showing an axe-shaped "giserne".

Chapter 8

Halberd

“Halbert” redirects here. For other uses, see [Halbert \(disambiguation\)](#).

A **halberd** (also called **halbard**, **halbert** or **Swiss voulge**) is a two-handed **pole weapon** that came to prominent use during the 14th and 15th centuries. The word *halberd* may come from the German words *Halm* (staff), and *Barte* (axe). In modern-day **German**, the weapon is called a *Hellebarde*. The halberd consists of an **axe** blade topped with a spike mounted on a long shaft. It always has a hook or thorn on the back side of the axe blade for grappling **mounted combatants**.^[1] It is very similar to certain forms of the **voulge** in design and usage. The halberd was usually 1.5 to 1.8 metres (5 to 6 feet) long.^[2]

8.1 History

The halberd was inexpensive to produce and very versatile in battle. As the halberd was eventually refined, its point was more fully developed to allow it to better deal with **spears** and **pikes** (also able to push back approaching horsemen), as was the hook opposite the axe head, which could be used to pull horsemen to the ground.^[3] Expert halberdiers were as deadly as any other weapon masters. A Swiss peasant used a halberd^[4] to kill **Charles the Bold**, the Duke of Burgundy—decisively ending the **Burgundian Wars**, literally in a single stroke.^[5] Researchers suspect that a halberd or a **bill** sliced through the back of **King Richard III**'s skull at the **battle of Bosworth**.^[6]

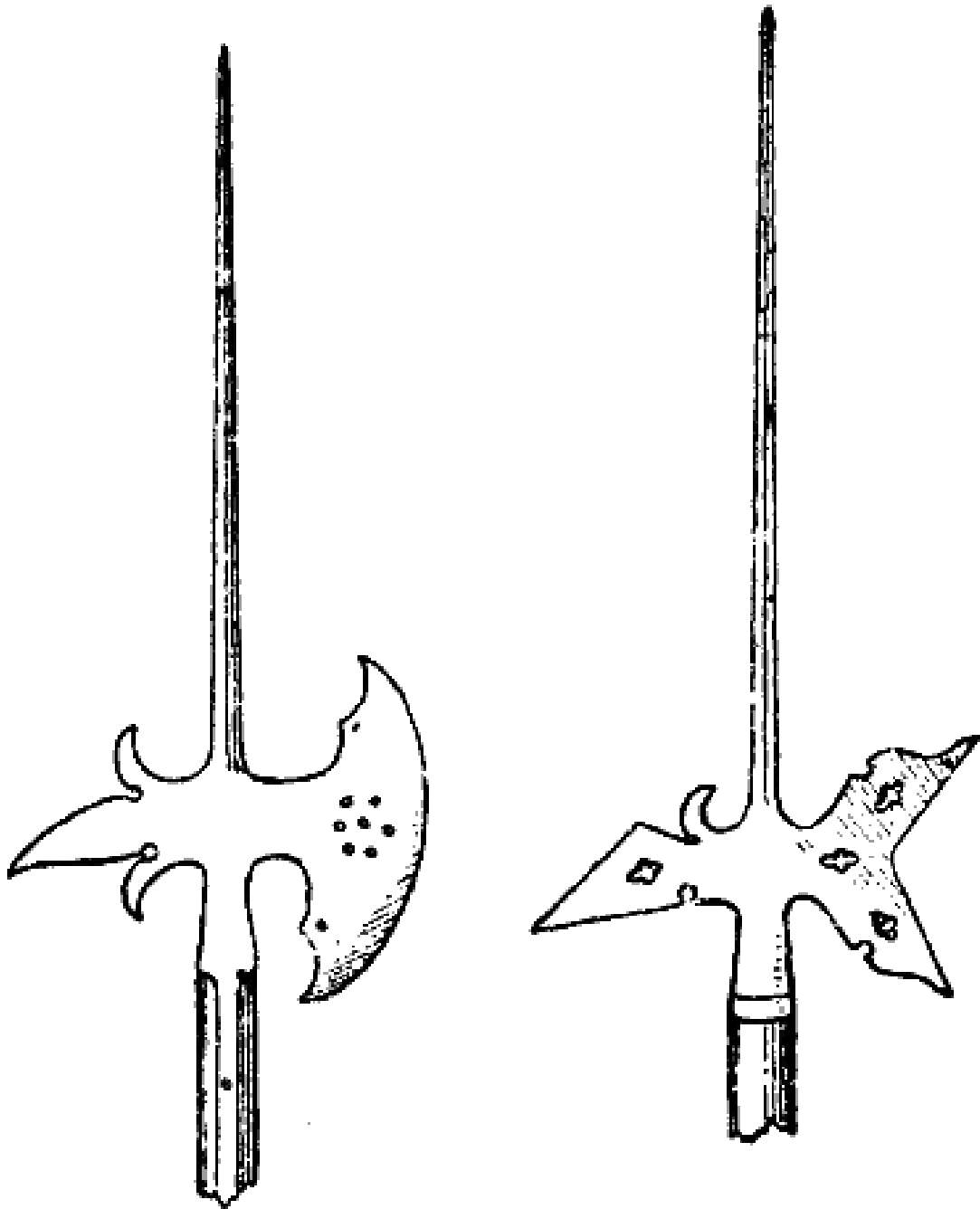
The halberd was the primary weapon of the early **Swiss** armies in the 14th and early 15th centuries.^[3] Later, the Swiss added the **pike** to better repel **knightly** attacks and roll over enemy infantry formations, with the halberd, **hand-and-a-half sword**, or the **dagger** known as the *Schweizerdolch* used for closer combat. The German *Landsknechte*, who imitated Swiss warfare methods, also used the pike, supplemented by the halberd—but their **side arm** of choice was a **short sword** called the *Katzbalger*.

As long as pikemen fought other pikemen, the halberd remained a useful supplemental weapon for *push of pike*, but when their position became more defensive, to protect the slow-loading **arquebusiers** and **matchlock** musketeers from sudden attacks by **cavalry**, the percentage of halberdiers in the pike units steadily decreased. The halberd all but disappeared as a rank-and-file weapon in these formations by the middle of the sixteenth century.

The halberd has been used as a court bodyguard weapon for centuries, and is still the **ceremonial weapon** of the **Swiss Guard** in the **Vatican**^[7] and the **Spanish Royal Halberd Guards**.^[8] The halberd was one of the polearms sometimes carried by lower-ranking officers in European infantry units in the 16th through 18th centuries. In the British army, sergeants continued to carry halberds until 1793, when they were replaced by pikes with cross bars.^[9] The 18th century halberd had, however, become simply a symbol of rank with no sharpened edge and insufficient strength to use as a weapon.^[10] It did, however, ensure that infantrymen drawn up in ranks stood correctly aligned with each other.

8.2 Types

- Hippe (Bill)
- Ji (^{[?})



Swedish halberd heads from the 16th century

- Scorpion

8.3 Related polearms

- **Bardiche**, a type of two-handed battle axe known in the 16th and 17th centuries in Eastern Europe
- **Bill**, similar to a halberd but with a hooked blade form
- **Bisento**, a pole weapon with a large blade from feudal Japan



Halberdiers from a modern day reenactor troupe.



A member of the Swiss Guard with a halberd in the Vatican.

- **Dagger-axe**, a Chinese weapon in use from the Shang Dynasty (est. 1500BC) that had a dagger-shaped blade mounted perpendicular to a spear
- **Fauchard**, a curved blade atop a 2 metres (6 ft 7 in) pole that was used in Europe between the 11th and 14th centuries

- **Guisarme**, a medieval bladed weapon on the end of a long pole; later designs implemented a small reverse spike on the back of the blade
- **Glaive**, a large blade, up to 45 cm (18 in) long, on the end of a 2 metres (6 ft 7 in) pole
- **Guandao**, a Chinese polearm from the 3rd century AD that had a heavy blade with a spike at the back
- **Kamayari**, a Japanese spear with blade offshoots.
- **Lochaber axe**, a Scottish weapon that had a heavy blade attached to a pole in a similar fashion to a **voulge**
- **Naginata**, a Japanese weapon that had a 30 cm (12 in) – 60 cm (24 in) long blade attached by a sword guard to a wooden shaft
- **Partisan**, a large double-bladed spearhead mounted on a long shaft that had protrusions on either side for parrying sword thrusts
- **Pollaxe**, an axe or **hammer** mounted on a long shaft—developed in the 14th century to breach the **plate armour** worn increasingly by European **men-at-arms**
- **Ranseur**, a pole weapon consisting of a spear-tip affixed with a cross hilt at its base derived from the earlier **spetum**
- **Spontoon**, a 17th-century weapon that consisted of a large blade with two side blades mounted on a long 2 m (6 ft 7 in) pole, considered a more elaborate **pike**
- **Voulge**, a crude single-edged blade bound to a wooden shaft
- **War scythe**, an improvised weapon that consisted of a blade from a **scythe** attached vertically to a shaft
- **Woldo**, a crescent-shaped blade mounted to a long wooden handle, used by various Korean armies in the past but primarily served as a symbol of the Royal Guard (construction is similar to a Chinese **Guan dao**)

8.4 Gallery

- Different sorts of halberds and halberd-like pole weapons in Switzerland
- Citizens of **Zurich** on 1 May 1351 are read the Federal Charter as they swear allegiance to representatives of Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden and Lucerne. The person on the right side is a scribe reading the text. One of the representatives carries a typical Swiss Halberd of the period depicted (as opposed to the time the image was made, 1515).
- **Saint Wiborada** is often (anachronistically) depicted with a halberd to indicate the means of her martyrdom.
- Halberds: A) 1450 ; B) 1384 and C) 1500. These are not halberds but often are mistaken for halberds.
- Halberd-axe head with the head of a mouflon. late 2nd millennium–early 1st millennium BC. From **Amlash**, **Gilan**, Iran.

8.5 References

- [1] John F. Guilmartin, Jr. “military technology – Britannica Online Encyclopedia”. Britannica.com. Retrieved 2013-06-13.
- [2] “halberd – Britannica Online Encyclopedia”. Britannica.com. Retrieved 2013-06-13.
- [3] “History of WARFARE – LAND”. Historyworld.net. Retrieved 2013-06-13.
- [4] Klaus Schelle, *Charles le Téméraire* (Arthème Fayard, 1979), p. 316
- [5] Gilbert, Adrian (2003) [2002]. “Medieval Warfare”. *The Encyclopedia of Warfare: From Earliest Times to the Present Day*. Guildford, CT: The Lyons Press. p. 71. ISBN 1-59228-027-7. At Nancy, it was a halberd that brought down Charles the Bold with a single blow that split his skull open.
- [6] Richard III dig: Grim clues to the death of a king By Greig Watson, BBC News, 4 February 2013

- [7] Beam, Christopher (2007-06-06). "What does the Swiss Guard actually do?". Slate.com. Retrieved 2014-03-04.
- [8] <http://www.guardiareal.org/>
- [9] David Fraser, page 33 "The Grenadier Guards", ISBN 0850452848
- [10] Robin May, page 33 "Wolfe's Army", Osprey Publishing Ltd 1974

- O'Flaherty, Ronan; *The Early Bronze Age halberd: a history of research and a brief guide to the sources*, pp. 74–94, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, Vol.128 (1998).
- Brandtherm, Dirk & O'Flaherty, Ronan; *Prodigal sons: two 'halberds' in the Hunt Museum, Limerick, from Cuenca, Spain and Beyrūt, Syria*, pp. 56–60, *JRSAI* Vol.131 (2001). .
- R. E. Oakeshott, *European weapons and armour: From the Renaissance to the industrial revolution* (1980), 44–48.

8.6 See also

- Viking halberd

Chapter 9

Lance

For other uses, see [Lance \(disambiguation\)](#).

The **lance** is a pole weapon or spear designed to be used by a mounted warrior. During the periods of Classical



Norman cavalry attacks the Anglo-Saxon shield wall at the Battle of Hastings as depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry. The lances are held with a one-handed over-the-head grip.

and Medieval warfare it evolved into being the leading weapon in [cavalry charges](#), and was unsuited for throwing or for repeated thrusting, unlike similar weapons of the [spear/javelin/pike](#) family typically used by [infantry](#). Lances were often equipped with a [vamplate](#) – a small circular plate to prevent the hand sliding up the shaft upon impact. Though best known as a military and sporting weapon carried by [European knights](#), the use of lances was widespread throughout Asia, the Middle East and North Africa wherever suitable mounts were available. As a secondary weapon, lancers of the Medieval period also bore [swords](#) or [maces](#) for [hand-to-hand combat](#), since the lance was often a one-use-per-engagement weapon; assuming the lance survived the initial impact intact, it was (depending on the lance) usually too long, heavy and slow to be effectively used against opponents in a [melee](#).^[1]

9.1 Etymology

The name is derived from the word *lancea* - the [Roman auxiliaries'](#) [javelin](#) or throwing knife; although according to the [OED](#), the word may be of [Iberian](#) origin. Also compare *longche*, a Greek term for lance.

A lance in the original sense is a light throwing spear, or javelin. The English verb *to launch* “fling, hurl, throw” is derived from the term (via [Old French](#) *lancier*), as well as the rarer or poetic *to lance*. The term from the 17th

century came to refer specifically to spears not thrown, used for thrusting by heavy cavalry, and especially in jousting. A thrusting spear which is used by infantry is usually referred to as a pike.

9.2 History of use

9.2.1 Antiquity

The first use of the lance in this sense was made by the Assyrians, Sarmatian and Parthian cataphracts from around the 3rd century BC. Long thrusting cavalry spears was especially popular among the Hellenistic armies' agema and line cavalry.



Assyrian cavalry with lances.

One of the most effective ancient lanced cavalry units was Alexander the Great's Companion cavalry, who were successful against both heavy infantry and cavalry units.

The Roman cavalry long thrusting spear was called a *contus* (from the Greek *kontos*, barge-pole). It was usually 3 to 4m long, and grasped with both hands. It was employed by *equites contariorum* and *equites cataphractarii*, fully armed and armoured cataphracts.

9.2.2 Middle Ages

The Byzantine cavalry used lances (*kontos* or *kontarion*) almost exclusively, often in mixed lancer and mounted archer formations (*cursores et defensores*). The Byzantines used lance both overarm and underarm, couched.

The best known usage of military lances was that of the full-gallop closed-ranks charge of a group of knights with underarm-couched lances, against lines of infantry, archery regiments, defensive embankments, and opposition cavalry. Two variants on the couched lance charge developed, the French method, *en haie*, with lancers in a double line and the German method, with lancers drawn up in a deeper formation which was often wedge-shaped. It is commonly believed that this became the dominant European cavalry tactic in the 11th century after the development of the cantled saddle and stirrups (the Great Stirrup Controversy), and of rowel spurs (which enabled better control

of the mount). Cavalry thus outfitted and deployed had a tremendous collective force in their charge, and could shatter most contemporary infantry lines. Recent evidence has suggested, however, that the lance charge was effective without the benefit of stirrups.^[2]



Vargas Swamp Lancers memorial in Colombia.

Because of the extreme stopping power of a thrusting spear, it quickly became a popular weapon of infantry in the **Late Middle Ages**. These eventually led to the rise of the longest type of spears, the **pike**. This adaptation of the cavalry lance to infantry use was largely tasked with stopping lance-armed cavalry charges. During the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, these weapons, both mounted and unmounted, were so effective that lancers and pikemen not only became a staple of every Western army, but also became highly sought-after mercenaries. (However, the pike had already been used by **Philip II of Macedon** in antiquity to great effect, in the form of the **sarissa**.)

In Europe, a **jousting lance** was a variation of the knight's lance which was modified from its original war design. In jousting, the lance tips would usually be blunt, often spread out like a cup or furniture foot, to provide a wider impact surface designed to unseat the opposing rider without spearing him through. The centre of the shaft of such lances could be designed to be hollow, in order for it to break on impact, as a further safeguard against impalement. They were often at least 4m long, and had hand guards built into the lance, often tapering for a considerable portion of the weapon's length. These are the versions that can most often be seen at **medieval** reenactment festivals. In war, lances were much more like stout spears, long and balanced for one-handed use, and with sharpened tips.

Lance (unit organization)

Main article: **Lances fournies**

As a small unit that surrounded a knight when he went into battle during the 14th and 15th centuries, a lance might have consisted of one or two squires, the knight himself, one to three men-at-arms, and possibly an archer. Lances were often combined under the banner of a higher-ranking nobleman to form companies of knights that would act as an ad-hoc unit.

9.2.3 16th century decline in Western Europe

The advent of **wheellock** technology spelled the end of the heavy knightly lance in Western Europe, with newer types of heavy cavalry such as **reiters** and **cuirassiers** spurning the old one-use weapon and increasingly supplanting the older **gendarme** type Medieval cavalry. While many **Renaissance** captains such as Sir **Roger Williams** continued to espouse the virtues of the lance, many such as **François de la Noue** openly encouraged its abandonment in the face of the pistol's greater armor piecing power, handiness and greater general utility. At the same time the adoption of **pike and shot** tactic by most infantry forces would neuter much of the power of the lancer's breakneck charge, making them a non-cost effective type of military unit due to their expensive horses in comparison to cuirassiers and reiters, who usually charging only at a trot could make do with lower quality mounts. After the success of pistol-armed **Huguenot** heavy horse against their Royalist counterparts during the **French Wars of Religion**, most **Western European** powers started rearming their lancers with pistols, initially as an adjunct weapon and eventually as a replacement, with the Spanish retaining the lance the longest.^[3]

Only the **Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth** with its far greater emphasis on cavalry warfare, large population of **Szlachta** nobility and general lower military technology level among its foes retained the lance to a large degree, with the famous winged **Polish hussars** having their glory period during the 16th and 17th century against a wide variety of enemy forces.^[3]

9.2.4 18th century

The mounted lancer experienced a renaissance in the 18th and especially in the 19th century. This followed on the demise of the pike and of body armor during the 17th century, with the reintroduction of lances coming from **Poland** and **Hungary**. In both countries formations of lance-armed cavalry has been retained when they disappeared elsewhere in Europe. Lancers became especially prevalent during and after the **Napoleonic Wars**: a period when almost all the major European powers reintroduced the lance into their respective cavalry arsenals. Formations of **uhlands** and later other types of cavalry used 2 to 3 m lances as their main weapons. The lance was usually employed in initial **charges** in close formation, with sabers being used in the **melees** that followed.

9.2.5 Decline

The **Crimean War** saw the use of the lance in the **Charge of the Light Brigade**. One of the four British regiments involved in the charge, plus the Russian **cossacks** who counter-attacked, were armed with this weapon.

After the **Western** introduction of the horse to **Native Americans**, the **Plains Indians** also took up the lance, probably independently, as American cavalry of the time were **sabre-** and **pistol-**armed, firing forward at full gallop. The natural adaptation of the throwing spear to a stouter thrusting and charging spear appears to be an evolutionary trend in the military use of the horse.

During the **War of the Triple Alliance** 1864-70, the Paraguayan cavalry made effective use of locally manufactured lances both of conventional design and of an antique pattern used by **gauchos** for cattle herding.^[4]

The **Franco-Prussian War** of 1870 saw the extensive deployment of cavalry armed with lances on both sides. However the opportunities for using this antique weapon effectively proved infrequent.

During the **Second Boer War**, British troops successfully used the lance on one occasion - against retreating **Boers** at the **Battle of Elands-laagte** (21 October 1899).^[5] However the Boers made effective use of **trench warfare**, **field artillery** and **long range rifles** from the beginning of the war. The combined effect was devastating, so that much of the British cavalry was deployed as mounted infantry, dismounting to fight on foot. For some years after the Boer War British lancer regiments carried the lance only for parades. However in 1908 the weapon was readopted for active service.

The Russian cavalry (except for Cossacks) discarded the lance in the late 19th century but in 1907 it was reissued for use by the front line of each squadron when charging in open formation. In its final form the Russian lance took the form of a long metal tube with a steel head and leather arm strap. It was intended as a shock weapon in the charge, to be dropped after impact and replaced by the sword for close combat in a **melee**. While demoralizing to an opponent, the lance was recognized as being an awkward encumbrance in forested regions.^[6]

The relative effectiveness of the lance and the sword as a principal weapon for mounted troops was an issue of dispute in the years immediately preceding World War I. Opponents of the lance argued that the weapon was clumsy, conspicuous, easily deflected and of no use at close quarters in a **melee**.^[7]



A lance tip from the re-enactment of the Eglinton Tournament (1839)

9.2.6 World War I

Lances were still in use by the British, French, Russian, Belgian, Turkish, Italian and German armies at the outbreak of World War I. In initial cavalry skirmishes in France this antique weapon proved ineffective, German uhlans being “hampered by their long lances and a good many threw them away”.^[8] With the advent of trench warfare, lances and the cavalry that carried them ceased to play a significant role.^[9]

Those armies which still retained lances as a service weapon at the end of World War I generally discarded them for all but ceremonial occasions during the 1920s. An exception was the Polish cavalry which retained the lance until 1936 but contrary to popular legend did not make use of it in World War II.

9.3 Use as flagstaff

United States Cavalry and Canadian North-West Mounted Police used a lance-like shaft as a flagstaff. In 1886, the first official musical ride was performed in Regina, with this fine ceremonial lance playing a significant role in the choreography. The world’s oldest continuous mounted police unit in the world, being the New South Wales Mounted Police, housed at Redfern Barracks, Sydney, Australia, carries a lance with a navy blue and white pennant in all ceremonial occasions.

9.4 Other weapons

“Lance” is also the name given by some anthropologists to the light flexible javelins (technically, darts) thrown by atlats (spear-throwing sticks), but these are usually called “atlatl javelins”. Some were not much larger than arrows, and were typically feather-fletched like an arrow, and unlike the vast majority of spears and javelins (one exception would be several instances of the many types of ballista bolt, a mechanically-thrown spear).

9.5 See also

- Tent pegging

9.6 References

- [1] Ian Heath, page 33 “Armies of Feudal Europe 1066-1300”, Wargames Research Group 1978”
- [2] “Saddle, Lance and Stirrup”
- [3] Frye, Gordon. “From Lance to Pistol: The Evolution of Mounted Soldiers from 1550 to 1600”. *myArmoury.com*. Retrieved 21 July 2014.
- [4] Esposito, Gabriele. *Armies of the War of the Triple Alliance 1864-70*. pp. 33 & 44. ISBN 978-1-4728-0725-0.
- [5] Thomas Pakenham, pages 139-140, “The Boer War”, ISBN 0-7474-0976-5
- [6] Vladimir Littauer, pages 115-116, “Russian Hussar”, ISBN 1-59048-256-5
- [7] Encyclopaedia Britannica Eleventh Addition, Volume XVI, page 150
- [8] Barbara W. Tuchman, page 280, *The Guns of August*, Four Square Edition 1964
- [9] A British officer writing in 1917 referred to lancers as “our marvellous medieval regiments”

9.7 Further reading

- Delbrück, Hans. *History of the Art of War*, originally published in 1920; University of Nebraska Press (reprint), 1990 (trans. J. Renfro Walter). Volume III: *Medieval Warfare*.

9.8 External links

- From Lance to Pistol: The Evolution of Mounted Soldiers from 1550 to 1600 (myArmoury.com article)

Chapter 10

Lochaber axe

The **Lochaber axe** is a type of halberd. The weapon was employed by the Scottish highlanders. The axe itself is similar to tools used with crops, such as the **scythe**, which is designed for **reaping**. The hook on the back bears a passing resemblance to a **shepherd's** crook, although within agriculture a smaller hook such as this may have been used in order to lift and carry tied bundles of a harvested crop or pull down tree branches. Early Lochaber axes, like the **billhook**, served a dual purpose as both building instruments and farming tools.

10.1 Specifics of the weapon

The Lochaber axe took many incarnations, although all of them had a few elements in common. It was a heavy weapon, used by infantry for a defence against cavalry and as a **pike** against **infantry**. Like most other **polearms** of the time, it consisted of two parts: shaft and blade. The shaft was usually some five or six feet (1.5 or 1.8 m) long, and mounted with a blade of about 18 inches (45 cm) in length which usually resembled a **bardiche** or **voulge** in design. The blade might be attached in two places and often had a sharp point coming off the top. In addition a hook (or *cleek*) was attached to the back of the blade. A butt spike was included as a counterweight to the heavy axe head. Langets were incorporated down each side of the shaft to prevent the head from being cut off.

Another idea is that the Lochaber is just the Scottish name for the weapon known as a **bardiche**; these also occasionally had a backspike or hook too.

10.2 Use

In hand-to-hand combat, the axe, in common with other polearms such as the **halberd**, has a spike on the end, to be used on close combat in a thrusting motion. The axe on the side, coupled with the long pole, delivered a powerful blow to infantry or dismounted cavalry.

Finally, the hook on the back allowed infantry to hook the cavalry off their horses. To accomplish this, as the cavalry charged, the highlanders would suddenly change formation from a large body into smaller bodies of men with clear channels between them. The horses would naturally go into these channels, and the foot soldiers would hook the cavalry off their horses, then use their axes on them with devastating effect. The hook supposedly could also be used for scaling walls.

10.3 In history

In about 1570, during the **Battle of Bun Garbhain** between **Clan Cameron** and **Clan Mackintosh**, the Lochaber axe was used by the Camerons. **Donald 'Black Taylor of the Axe'**, son of the 14th chief of Clan Cameron, became notable for his fighting prowess with the axe and became a hero for felling the chief of Clan Mackintosh with it.^[1]

Before the **Jacobite Rising of 1745** or, simply, “the '45,” Lochaber axes were relegated to the Scottish constabulary, and were somewhat viewed as the police baton of the day. In 1745, Prince Charles Stewart raised an army of Scots



Polearms and basket-hilted swords in the Great Hall of Edinburgh Castle. The polearm on the right is a Lochaber axe; the other two are halberds.

to oust the Hanoverian King George from the Throne of England and place his father, James VIII of Scotland, on the throne. Many of the Prince's army equipped themselves with Lochaber axes, until such a time they could discard the axes for captured muskets and bayonets or arms supplied by the French.

By around 1767, the Lochaber axe was used mainly as a ceremonial weapon by the town guard of Edinburgh, Scotland.

10.4 References

- [1] “The Battle of BUN GARBHAIN”. clan-cameron.org. Retrieved 2008-02-02.



Chapter 11

Lucerne hammer

The **Lucerne hammer** is a type of **polearm** which was popular in Switzerland during the 15th to 17th centuries. It was a combination of the **bec de corbin** with the blunt **war hammer**.

The name comes from a discovery of many of these weapons in **Lucerne, Switzerland**.^[1] The 'hammer' was actually a three- to four-pronged head mounted atop a 2m-long (7 foot) polearm stick. It bore a long spike on its reverse, and an even longer spike extending from the very top. It proved effective at puncturing or smashing **armor**, and much like a **man catcher** was used for dismounting riders.

11.1 References

- [1] Oakeshott, Ewart (1980). *European Weapons and Armour*. Guildford and London: Lutterworth Press. p. 51. ISBN 0-7188-2126-2.

11.2 External links

- **Spotlight: The Medieval Poleaxe**, by Alexi Goranov



Man with Lucerne hammer, 18th century.

Chapter 12

Man catcher

A **man catcher** is an esoteric type of **pole weapon** which was used in Europe as late as the 18th century. It consisted of a pole mounted with a two pronged head. Each prong was semi-circular in shape with a spring-loaded “door” on the front. This created an effective valve that would allow the ring to pass around a man-sized cylinder and keep it trapped. The man catcher was used primarily to pull a person from horseback and drag them to the ground where they could be helplessly pinned. This is one of the few examples of non-lethal polearms.

Man catchers played a role in the medieval custom of capturing noble opponents for **ransom**. The design assumes that the captured person wears armor to protect him against the metal prongs, which could easily hurt the neck of a person without armor. The man catcher was also used to trap and contain violent prisoners.^[1]

In Papua New Guinea, a different weapon existed that was also identified as a man catcher. It consisted of a hoop attached to a spear - the hoop would be placed over an enemy’s head to capture them, and then they could be speared in the back of the neck.^[2]

Similarly, the Japanese **sodegarami**, **tsukubō**, and **sasumata** were used by Edo era law enforcement for apprehending suspects. However, the **sasumata** was most like a man catcher in usage as its forked head was designed to pin the suspect’s neck, legs, arms, or joints against a wall or the ground. While other man catchers are no longer in use, the **sasumata** currently has modern variants that are semi-flexible, with padding, blunt endpoints, and other slightly modified geometry, designed to significantly reduce the chance of injury to restrained civilians. These variants are designed for use by non-soldiers -- specifically, they are intended for use by a Japanese **riot police** mounted on horseback. In such a case, the mounted riot police would typically be arranged in formation line abreast, and would use a row of raised **sasumata** to hold back large crowds. These mounted riot police answer to the **National Police Agency (Japan)**. Since the outbreak of serious **riots** is uncommon in Japan, the modern **sasumata** is only used rarely. Nevertheless, the necessary training is kept up to date.^[3]

12.1 References

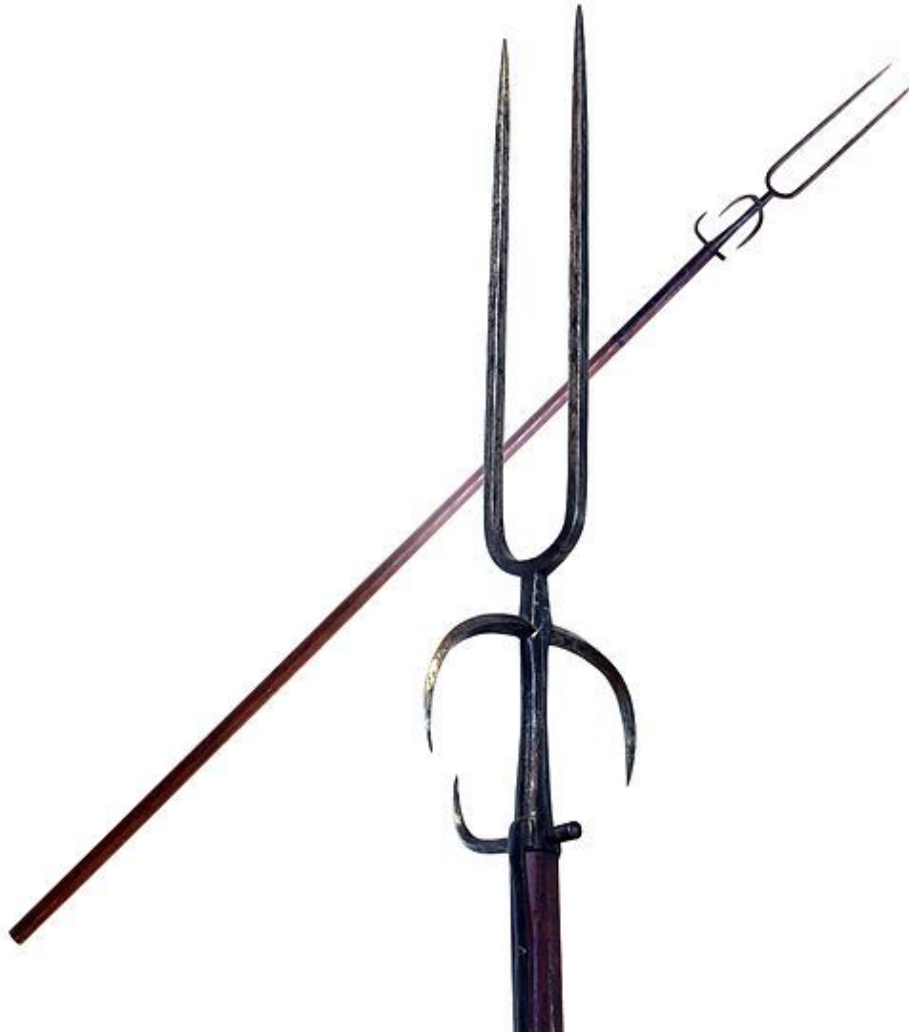
[1] http://www.makingthemodernworld.org.uk/everyday_life/control/1750-1820/TL.0151/

[2] <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/collectors/txt/s1411700.htm>

[3] Cunningham, Don. *Taiho-jutsu: Law and Order in the Age of the Samurai*. Boston; Rutland, Vermont; Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2004.

Chapter 13

Military fork



Military fork, ca. late 16th - early 17th century. About 2.5 metres overall. On display at Morges military museum.

A **fork** is a **pole weapon** which was used in war in **Europe** between the 15th and 19th centuries. Like many polearms, the military fork traces its lineage to an agricultural tool, in this case the **pitchfork**. Unlike a **trident** used for **fishing**, the military fork was rarely barbed and normally only consisted of two tines (prongs) which were straight compared

to the original pitchfork. The pair of tines usually ran parallel or slightly flared. This weapon was relatively easy to use compared to a sword, which could take years to learn how to wield effectively. It was usually used in absence of a spear.

Chapter 14

Pitchfork

For other uses, see [Pitchfork \(disambiguation\)](#).

A **pitchfork** is an agricultural tool with a long handle and long, thick, widely separated pointed **tines** (also called prongs) used to lift and pitch (throw) loose material, such as **hay**, straw or **leaves**. Pitchforks typically have only two, three or four tines while dung forks have four or five, other types of fork even up to ten tines with different lengths and spacing depending on purpose. They are usually made of steel with a long wooden handle, but may also be made from wood, **wrought iron**, **bamboo**, **alloy**, etc. In some parts of England a pitchfork is known as a *prong*^[1] and, in parts of Ireland, a *sprong* refers to a 4-pronged pitchfork.^[2] The pitchfork is similar to the shorter and sturdier **garden fork**.

Pitchforks and scythes have frequently been used as **weapons** by those who couldn't afford or didn't have access to more expensive weapons such as **swords**, or, later, **guns**.^[3] As a result, pitchforks and scythes are stereotypically carried by angry **mobs** or gangs of enraged peasants.

In Europe, the pitchfork was first used in the early **Middle Ages**, at about the same time as the **harrow**. The pitchfork was originally made entirely of wood; today, the tines are usually made of hard metal.

14.1 Symbolism, literary and artistic references

14.1.1 Artistic usage

A notable American artistic display of a three-pronged pitchfork is in *American Gothic*, the painting by **Grant Wood**. In this painting it symbolizes hard labor. There are other paintings by various artists which depict a wide variety of pitchforks and other tools in use and at rest.^[4]

14.1.2 Political usage

Because of its association with peasantry, the pitchfork is often a **populist** symbol and part of the nickname of populist leaders, thus:

- “Pitchfork Ben” (**Benjamin Tillman**)
- “Pitchfork Pat” (**Pat Buchanan**)

The Gangster Disciples, a street gang in the midwestern United States, use a **three-pointed pitchfork** as one of their symbols.

14.1.3 Religious symbolism

The pitchfork is often used in satire of **Christian demonology** in popular media, especially in early humorous cartoons where a popular joke was a caricature of an angel and a pitchfork-wielding devil sitting on the **shoulders** of the



A pitchfork next to a compost bin

protagonist.

The Hellenistic deity Pluto wields a bident, a two-pronged weapon strikingly similar in form to a pitchfork.



Pitching hay

14.2 See also

- [Trident](#)
- [Fork \(disambiguation\)](#)

14.3 References

- [1] Copper, Bob, *A Song for Every Season: a hundred years of a Sussex farming family*. London: Heinemann, 1971; p. 112
- [2] Joyce, P. W. *English as We Speak it in Ireland*, p. 832. Talbot Press - via Google Books, 1920.
- [3] “[Medieval Men](#)”. Medieval-Period.com. Retrieved 2014-02-13.
- [4] Ritch, Alan (2006-02-06). “[Resting in the hay \(1592-1900\)](#)”. Hay In Art. Retrieved 2014-02-13.

14.4 External links

Media related to [Pitchfork](#) at Wikimedia Commons



Farmer with a pitchfork, by *Winslow Homer*, 1874

Chapter 15

Partisan (weapon)

A **partisan** (also **partizan**) is a type of **polearm** that was used in Europe in the Middle Ages.^{[1][2][3]} It consisted of a spearhead mounted on a long shaft, usually wooden, with protrusions on the sides which aided in **parrying** sword thrusts. Like the **halberd**, it quickly became obsolete with the arrival of practical firearms, although it stayed in use for many years as a **ceremonial weapon**. In profile, the head of a partisan may look similar to that of a **ranseur**, **ox tongue**, or **spetum**, however, unlike a ranseur, the lower parts of the head have a sharpened edge.

15.1 References

- [1] “Melee weapons: Partisan”. *All Things Medieval*. Retrieved 28 October 2014.
- [2] “Medieval polearms”. *Weapons Universe*. Retrieved 28 October 2014.
- [3] “Definition of partisan (weapon)”. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Retrieved 28 October 2014.



Yeomen of the Guard with Partisans



An officer's partisan from 1655

Chapter 16

Pike (weapon)



A modern recreation of a mid-17th century company of pikemen. By that period, pikemen would primarily defend their unit's musketeers from enemy cavalry.

A **pike** is a **pole weapon**, a very long thrusting **spear** formerly used extensively by **infantry**. Unlike many similar weapons, the pike is not intended to be thrown. Pikes were used regularly in European warfare from the early Middle Ages^[1] until around 1700, and wielded by foot soldiers deployed in close quarters. The pike found extensive use with **Landsknecht** armies and **Swiss mercenaries**, who employed it as their main weapon and used it in **pike square** formations. A similar weapon, the **sarissa**, was also used by **Alexander the Great's** **Macedonian phalanx** infantry to great effect. Generally, a spear becomes a pike when it is long enough that it cannot be wielded with one hand in combat.



Re-enactment during the 2009 Escalade in Geneva.

16.1 Design

The pike was a long weapon, varying considerably in size, from 3 to 7.5 metres (10 to 25 feet) long. It was approximately 2.5–6 kg (5.5–13.2 lb) in weight, with sixteenth-century military writer Sir John Smythe recommending lighter rather than heavier pikes.^[2] It had a wooden shaft with an iron or steel spearhead affixed. The shaft near the head was often reinforced with metal strips called “cheeks” or langets. When the troops of opposing armies both carried the pike, it often grew in a sort of *arms race*, getting longer in both shaft and head length to give one side’s pikemen an edge in the combat. The extreme length of such weapons required a strong wood such as well-seasoned ash for the pole, which was tapered towards the point to prevent the pike from sagging on the ends, although this was always a problem in pike handling. It is a common mistake to refer to a bladed polearm as a pike. Such weapons are more generally *halberds*, *glaives* or *voulges*.

The great length of the pikes allowed a great concentration of spearheads to be presented to the enemy, with their wielders at a greater distance, but also made pikes unwieldy in close combat. This meant that pikemen had to be equipped with a shorter weapon such as a *sword*, *mace*, or *dagger* in order to defend themselves should the fighting degenerate into a melee. In general, however, pikemen attempted to avoid such disorganized combat, at which they were at a disadvantage. To compound their difficulties in a melee, the pikeman often did not have a shield or had only a small shield of limited use in close-quarters fighting.

16.2 Tactics



First rank with pikes at “charge for horse” static defensive posture, ready to draw swords if needed. Second rank holding their pikes at “charge” for delivering thrusts.

The pike, due to its unwieldy nature, was always intended to be used in a deliberate, defensive manner, often in conjunction with other missile and melee weapons. However, better-trained troops were capable of using the pike in an aggressive attack with each rank of pikemen being trained to hold their pikes so that they presented enemy infantry with four or five layers of spearheads bristling from the front of the formation.

As long as it kept good order, such a formation could roll right over enemy infantry but it did have weaknesses. The men were all moving forward facing in a single direction and could not turn quickly or efficiently to protect the vulnerable flanks or rear of the formation. The huge block of men carrying such unwieldy spears could be difficult to maneuver in any way other than straightforward movement.

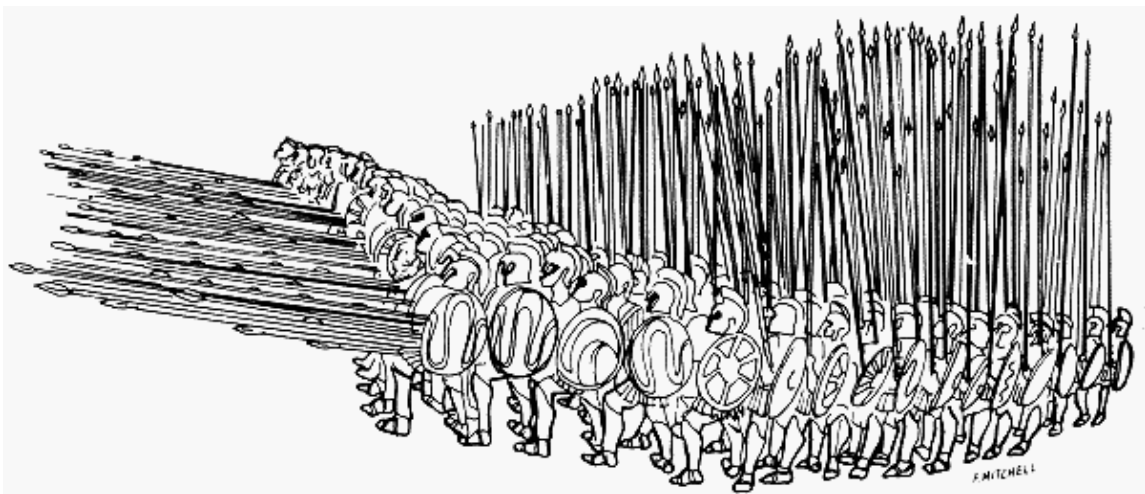
As a result, such mobile pike formations sought to have supporting troops protect their flanks or would maneuver to smash the enemy before they could be outflanked themselves. There was also the risk that the formation would become disordered, leading to a confused melee in which pikemen had the vulnerabilities mentioned above.

According to Sir John Smythe, there were two ways for two opposing pike formations to confront one another: cautious or aggressive. The cautious approach involved fencing at the length of the pike, while the aggressive approach involved quickly closing distance, with each of the first five ranks giving a single powerful thrust. In the aggressive approach, the first rank would then immediately resort to swords and daggers if the thrusts from the first five ranks failed to break the opposing pike formation. Smythe considered the cautious approach laughable.^[3]

Although primarily a military weapon, the pike could be surprisingly effective in single combat and a number of 16th-century sources explain how it was to be used in a dueling situation; fencers of the time often practiced with and competed against each other with long staves in place of pikes. George Silver considered the 18 ft pike one of the more advantageous weapons for single combat in the open, giving it odds over all weapons shorter than 8 ft or the sword and dagger/shield combination.^[4]



First rank with pikes at “charge”, second rank holding pikes at “port”. In real action first 3 - 4 ranks will hold their pikes at “charge” (their points projecting forward from the formation front), and those behind will hold weapons at “port” (to avoid injuring front rank friends with their points).



Macedonian phalanx

16.3 Ancient use

Main article: Sarissa

Although very long spears had been used since the dawn of organized warfare (notably illustrated in art showing Sumerian and Minoan warriors and hunters), the earliest recorded use of a pike-like weapon in the tactical method described above involved the **Macedonian** sarissa, used by the troops of **Alexander the Great's** father, **Philip II of Macedon**, and successive dynasties, which dominated warfare for several centuries in many countries.

After the fall of the last successor of Macedon, the pike largely fell out of use for the next 1000 or so years. The one

exception to this appears to have been in Germany, where **Tacitus** recorded Germanic tribesmen in the 2nd century AD as using “over-long spears”. He consistently refers to the spears used by the Germans as being “massive” and “very long” suggesting that he is describing in essence a pike. **Caesar**, in his *De Bello Gallico*, describes the **Helvetii** as fighting in a tight, phalanx-like formation with spears jutting out over their shields. Caesar was probably describing an early form of the **shieldwall** so popular in later times.

16.4 Medieval revival

In the **Middle Ages**, the principal users of the pike were urban militia troops such as the **Flemings** or the peasant array of the lowland **Scots**. For example, the Scots used a spear formation known as the ***schiltron*** in several battles during the **Wars of Scottish Independence** including the **Battle of Bannockburn** in 1314, and the Flemings used their ***geldon*** long spear to absorb the attack of French knights at the **Battle of the Golden Spurs** in 1302, before other troops in the Flemish formation counterattacked the stalled knights with **Goedendags**. Both battles were seen by contemporaries as stunning victories of commoners over superbly equipped, mounted, military professionals, where victory was owed to the use of the pike and the brave resistance of the commoners who wielded them.

These formations were essentially immune to the attacks of mounted men-at-arms as long as the knights obligingly threw themselves on the spear wall and the foot soldiers remained steady under the morale challenge of facing a cavalry charge, but the closely packed nature of pike formations rendered them vulnerable to enemy archers and crossbowmen who could shoot them down with impunity, especially when the pikemen did not have adequate armor. Many defeats, such as at **Roosebeke** and **Halidon Hill**, were suffered by the militia pike armies when faced by cunning foes who employed their archers and crossbowmen to thin the ranks of the pike blocks before charging in with their (often dismounted) men-at-arms.

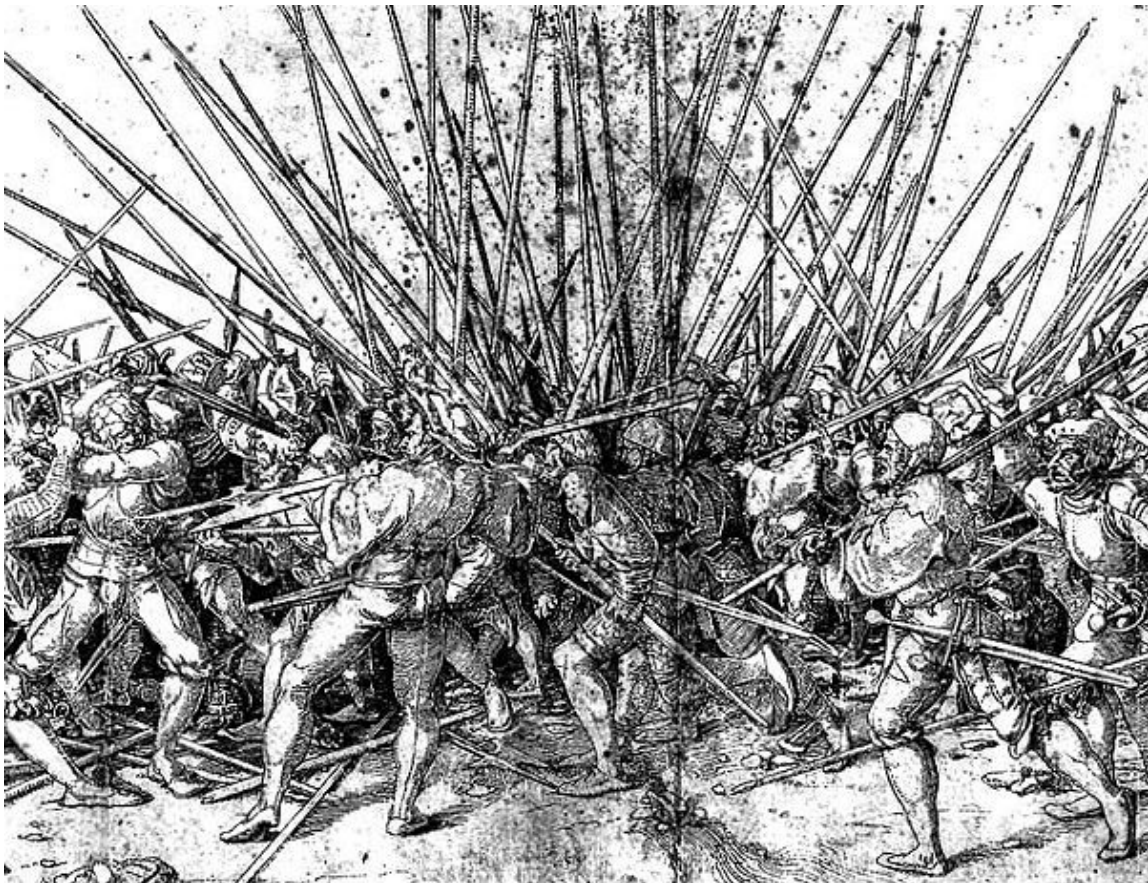


Contemporary woodcut of the Battle of Dornach.

Medieval pike formations tended to have better success when they operated in an aggressive fashion. The Scots at the **Battle of Stirling Bridge** (1297), for example, utilized the momentum of their charge to overrun an English army while the Englishmen were crossing a narrow bridge. At the **Battle of Laupen** (1339), **Bernese** pikemen overwhelmed the infantry forces of the opposing Habsburg/Burgundian army with a massive charge before wheeling over to strike and rout the Austro-Burgundian horsemen as well. At the same time however such aggressive action required considerable tactical cohesiveness or suitable terrain to protect the vulnerable flanks of the pike formations especially from the attack of mounted **man-at-arms**, when these features not available Medieval militia pikes often suffered costly failures such as at Battles of Mons-en-Pevele (1304), Cassel (1328), Roosebeke (1382) and Othee (1408). The constant success of the **Swiss mercenaries** in the later period was attributed to their extreme discipline and tactical unity due to semi-professional nature, allowing a pike block to somewhat alleviate the threat presented by flanking attacks.

It was not uncommon for aggressive pike formations to be composed of dismounted **men-at-arms**, as at the **Battle of Sempach** (1386), where the dismounted Austrian vanguard, using their lances as pikes, had some initial success against their predominantly **halberd**-equipped Swiss adversaries. Dismounted Italian men-at-arms also used the same method to defeat the Swiss at the **Battle of Arbedo** (1422). Equally, well-armored Scottish nobles (accompanied even by King **James IV**) were recorded as forming the leading ranks of Scottish pike blocks at the **Battle of Flodden**, incidentally rendering the whole formation resistant to English archery.

16.5 Renaissance heyday



Swiss and Landsknecht pikemen fight at “push of pike” during the Italian Wars.

The **Swiss** solved the pike’s earlier problems and brought a renaissance to pike warfare in the 15th century, establishing strong training regimens to ensure they were masters of handling of the *Spiess* (The German term for “skewer”) on maneuvers and in combat, the Swiss having also introduced marching to drums for this purpose. This meant that the pike blocks could rise to the attack, making them less passive and more aggressive formations, but sufficiently well trained that they could go on the defensive when attacked by cavalry. German soldiers known as **Landsknechts** later adopted Swiss methods of pike handling.



Pikemen exercising during the Battle for Groll.

The Scots predominantly used shorter spears in their *schiltron* formation; their attempt to adapt the longer Continental pike was dropped in masses after ineffective use led to a humiliating defeat at the Battle of Flodden.

Such Swiss and Landsknecht phalanxes also contained men armed with two-handed swords, or *Zweihänder*, and *halberdiers* for close combat against both infantry and attacking cavalry.

The Swiss were confronted with the German *Landsknecht* who used similar tactics as the Swiss, but more pikes in the more difficult *deutschen Stoss* (holding a pike that had its weight in the lower 1/3 at the end with two hands), which was utilized in a more flexible attacking column.

The high military reputation of the Swiss and the *Landsknecht* again led to the employment of mercenary units across Europe in order to train other armies in their tactics. These two and others, who had adopted their tactics, faced off in several wars leading to a series of developments as a result of these confrontations.^[5]

These formations had great successes on the battlefield, starting with the astonishing battlefield victories of the Swiss cantons against Charles the Bold of Burgundy in the Burgundian Wars, in which the Swiss participated in 1476 and 1477. In the battles of Grandson, Morat and Nancy, the Swiss not only successfully resisted the attacks of knightly foes, as the relatively passive Scottish and Flemish infantry squares had done in the earlier Middle Ages, but also marched to the attack with great speed and in good formation, their attack columns steamrolling the Burgundian forces, sometimes with great massacre.

The deep pike attack column remained the primary form of effective infantry combat for the next forty years, and the Swabian War saw the first conflict in which both sides had large formations of well-trained pikemen. After that war, its combatants—the Swiss (thereafter generally serving as mercenaries) and their Landsknecht imitators—would often face each other again in the Italian Wars, which would become in many ways the military proving ground of the Renaissance.

Contemporary Japan experienced a parallel evolution of pole weapons. The Japanese style of warfare was, however, generally fast-moving and aggressive with far shallower formations than their European equivalents. The *naginata* and *yari* became common weapons for Japanese *ashigaru* foot soldiers (who sometimes used extremely long *yari*) and dismounted *samurai* due to the greater reach than swords, which *samurai* also carried. *Naginata*, first used around

750 AD, had a curved sword-like blade on a wood shaft with a metal counterweight, often spiked; it was used more with a slashing action and forced the introduction of **sune-ate** (shin guards) as cavalry battles became more important. Yari were spears of varying lengths; the straight blade usually had sharpened edges, sometimes protrusions from the central blade, and fitted to a hollowed shaft with an extremely long tang. Around later half of 16th century, pikemen holding pikes with length of 4.5 to 6.5 m (15 to 22 feet) or sometimes 10 m became main forces in armies. They formed lines, combined with arquebusiers and short spearmen. Pikemen formed two or three rows of line, and were forced to move up and down their pikes in unison under the command.

Finally, the rise of **firearms** and **artillery** in the 16th century made the large formations consisting entirely of pikemen vulnerable to being shot down despite their awesome close-combat power. The decline of the combat column of pikemen was starkly displayed at the terrible **Battle of Bicocca** in 1522, for instance, where **arquebusiers** contributed to the heavy defeat of a force of Swiss pikemen.

16.6 Pike and shot



A re-enactment of the Thirty Years' War with Pikiner training at the Bourtange star fort.

In the aftermath of the Italian Wars, from the end of the 15th century to the late 16th century, most European armies adopted the use of the pike, often in conjunction with primitive firearms such as the **arquebus** and **caliver** to form large pike and shot formations.

The quintessential example of this development was the Spanish **Tercio**, which consisted of a large square of pikemen with small, mobile squadrons of arquebusiers moving along its perimeter, as well as traditional men-at-arms. These three elements formed a mutually supportive combination of tactical roles: the arquebusiers harried the enemy line, the pikemen protected the arquebusiers from enemy cavalry charges, and the men-at-arms, typically armed with swords and javelins, fought off enemy pikemen when two opposing squares made contact. The Tercio deployed smaller numbers of pikemen than the huge Swiss and Landsknecht columns, and their formation ultimately proved to be much more flexible on the battlefield.

Mixed formations of men quickly became the norm for European infantrymen, with many, but not all, seeking to imitate the Tercio; in England, a combination of **billmen**, **longbowmen**, and men-at-arms remained the norm, though this changed when the supply of **yew** on the island dwindled.

The percentage of men who were armed with firearms in Tercio-like formations steadily increased as firearms advanced in technology. This advance is believed to be the demise of cavalry when in fact it revived it. In the late sixteenth into the 17th century, smaller pike formations were used, invariably defending attached musketeers, often as a central block with two sub-units of shooters, called “sleeves of shot”, on either side of the pikes. Although the cheaper and versatile infantry increasingly adopted firearms, cavalry’s proportion in the army remained high.

During this period the pike was typically 4.5 to 5.5 metres (15 to 18 feet) in length. The pike was also said to be 10 to 14 feet long.

16.7 End of the pike era



The Battle of Rocroi (1643) marked the end of the supremacy of the Spanish Tercios, painting by Augusto Ferrer-Dalmau picture.

During the 17th century, improvements to the portability of the musket, combined with the invention of the bayonet, saw the obsolescence of the pike in most European armies. Furthermore, improvements in artillery caused most European armies to abandon large formations in favor of multiple staggered lines, both to minimize casualties and to present a larger frontage for volley fire.

Thick hedges of bayonets proved to be an effective anti-cavalry solution, and the musket's firepower was now so deadly that combat was often decided by shooting alone. Throughout the Napoleonic era, the spontoon, a kind of shortened pike with side-wings, was retained as a symbol by some NCOs; in practice it was probably more useful for gesturing and signaling than as a weapon.

In such an environment, pikemen grew to intensely dislike their own weapon, as they were forced to stand inactive as the combat went on around them as the opposing musketeers duelled, feeling that they were mere targets rather than soldiers, and that they were adding nothing to the battle raging around them. There are examples of pikemen throwing their weapons down and seizing muskets from fallen comrades, a sign that the pike was on the wane as a weapon.

A common end date for the use of the pike in infantry formations is 1700, although such armies as the Prussian and Austrian had already abandoned the pike by that date. Other armies, such as the Swedish and the Russian, continued to use it for several decades afterward (the Swedes of King Charles XII in particular using it to great effect until the 1720s). During the American Revolution, pikes called "trench spears" made by local blacksmiths saw limited use until enough bayonets could be procured for general use by both Continental Army and attached militia units.

As late as Poland's Kościuszko Uprising in 1794, the pike reappeared as a child of necessity which became, for a short period, a surprisingly effective weapon on the battlefield. In this case, General Thaddeus Kosciuszko, facing a shortage of firearms and bayonets to arm landless serf partisans recruited straight from the wheat fields, had their sickles and scythes heated and straightened out into something resembling crude "war scythes". These weaponized agricultural accouterments were then used in battle as both slicing weapons, as well as makeshift pikes. The peasant "pikemen" armed with these crude instruments played a pivotal role in securing a near impossible victory against a far larger and better equipped Russian army at the Battle of Raclawice on April 4 of that year.

Civilian pikeman played a similar role, though outnumbered and outgunned, in the 1798 Rising in Ireland four years later. Here, especially in the Wexford Rebellion and in Dublin, the pike was useful mainly as a weapon by men and women fighting on foot against cavalry armed with guns. The hook was used to sever the reins so that the rider could not control the horse, and then the rider could be piked with the spear.

Improvised pikes, made from bayonets on poles, were used by escaped convicts during the Castle Hill rebellion of 1804.

Indeed, as late as the Napoleonic Wars, at the dawning of the 19th century, even the Russian militia (mostly landless peasants, like the Polish partisans before them) could be found carrying shortened pikes into battle. As the 19th century progressed, the obsolete pike would still find a use in such countries as Ireland, Russia, China and Australia, generally in the hands of (as usual) desperate peasant rebels who did not have access to firearms. John Brown planned to arm a rebel slave army in America largely with pikes.

One attempt to resurrect the pike as a primary infantry weapon occurred during the American Civil War when the Confederate States of America planned to recruit twenty regiments of pikemen in 1862. In April 1862 it was authorised that every Confederate infantry regiment would include two companies of pikemen, a plan supported by Robert E. Lee. Many pikes were produced but were never used in battle and the plan to include pikemen in the army was abandoned.

Shorter versions of pikes called *boarding pikes* were also used on warships—typically to repel boarding parties—as late as the third quarter of the 19th century.

The great Hawaiian warrior king Kamehameha I had an elite force of men armed with very long spears who seem to have fought in a manner identical to European pikemen, despite the usual conception of his people's general disposition for individualistic dueling as their method of close combat. It is not known whether Kamehameha himself introduced this tactic or if it was taken from the use of traditional Hawaiian weapons.

The pike was issued as a British Home Guard weapon in 1942 after the War Office acted on a letter from Winston Churchill saying “every man must have a weapon of some kind, be it only a mace or pike”. However, these hand-held weapons never left the stores after the pikes had “generated an almost universal feeling of anger and disgust from the ranks of the Home Guard, demoralised the men and led to questions being asked in both Houses of Parliament”.^[6] The pikes, made from obsolete Lee-Enfield rifle bayonet blades welded to a steel tube, took the name of “Croft's Pikes” after Henry Page Croft, the Under-Secretary of State for War who attempted to defend the fiasco by stating that they were a “silent and effective weapon”.^[7]

In Spain, in the cities, beginning in the 18th century and ending about 1980, there were night guards called *serenos* (es:Sereno (oficio)) who carried a short pike (about 1.5 m) called *chuzo* (es:chuzo).

Pikes live on today only in traditional roles, being used to carry the colours of an infantry regiment and with the Company of Pikemen and Musketeers of the Honourable Artillery Company, or by some of the infantry units on duty during their rotation as guard^[8] for the President of the Italian Republic at the Quirinale, in Rome.

16.8 See also

- Pike square
- Lance

16.9 Notes

[1] Verbruggen, *Art of Warfare*, 151

[2] “Everything you ever wanted to know about Pikes but were afraid to ask...”. Retrieved 4 August 2014.

[3] “On Push of the Pike”. Retrieved 4 August 2014.

[4] Silver, George (1599). “Paradoxes of Defense”. Retrieved 4 August 2014.

[5] W. Schaufelberger, *Der alte Schweizer und sein Krieg* ISBN 978-3-7193-0980-0

[6] “Home Guard Pike”. *The Home Guard*.

- [7] MacKenzie, S.P. (1995). *The Home Guard: A Military and Political History*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-820577-5 (pp.97-100)
- [8] Cambio della guardia al Quirinale - Infantry Passing out Parade 8:41

16.10 References

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Chapter 17

Plançon a picot

The **plançon à picot**, or simply **plançon** (also spelled **planson**), was a medieval infantry weapon designed for smashing and thrusting. It consisted of a stout iron-shod baseball-bat-like shaft (length 1-1.5 m) with a steel spike attached on top. It was cheap and easy to make plus it was extremely efficient against heavily armoured opponents. The weapon was a relative of the goedendag, a popular weapon of Flemish militias of the 14th century. Given that the plançon à picot was recorded at several times as being carried alongside the goedendag, they may not be identical.^[1]

17.1 Notes

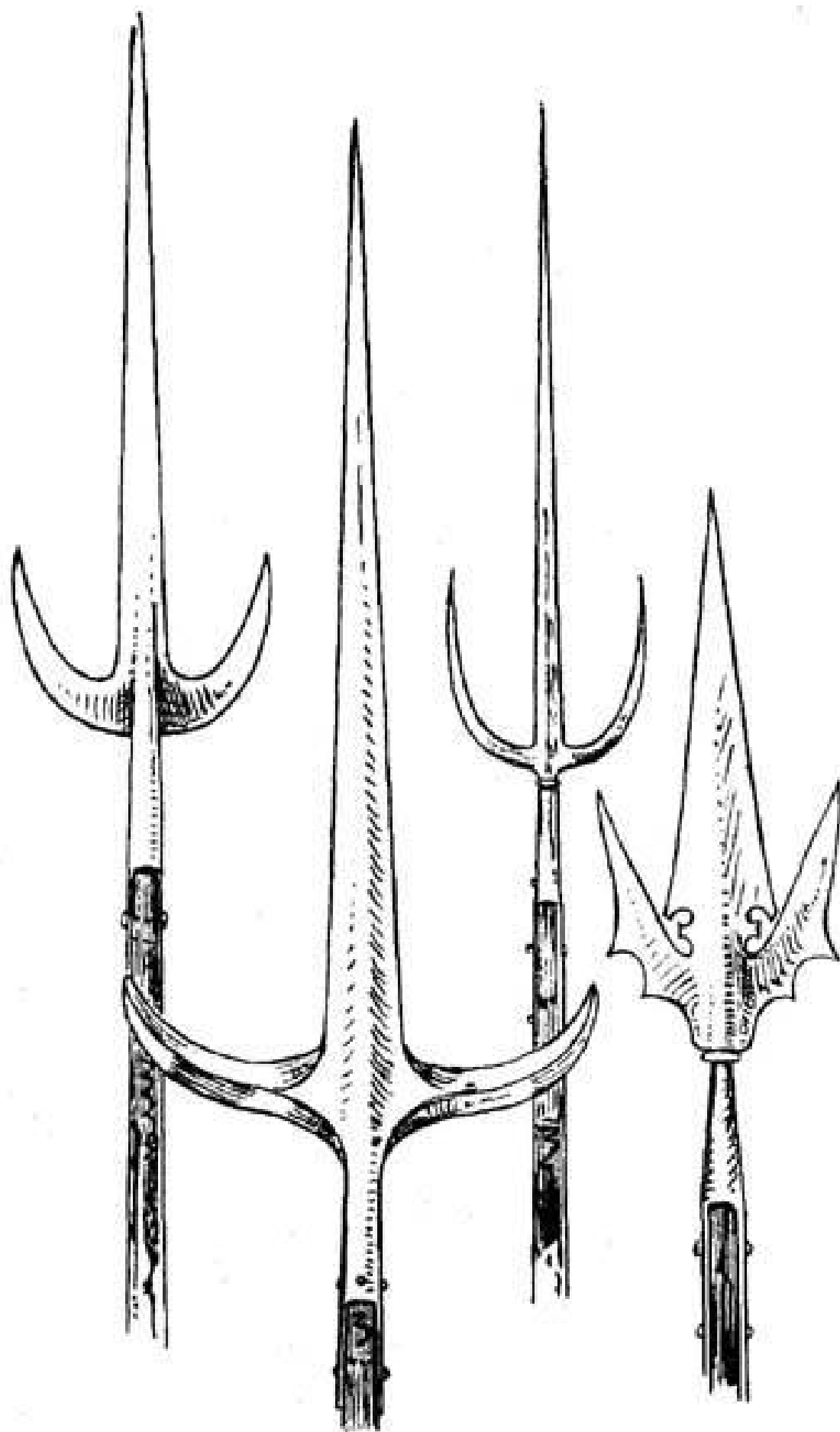
[1] Paul Martin : Armour and Weapons, Herbert Jenkins, London, 1968, p.245

Chapter 18

Ranseur

A **ranseur** (also called a **runkah** or a **rawcon** [sometimes incorrectly referred to as **rawcuer**]) was a type of **polearm** used across **Europe** up to the 15th century. It was still seen in court as a ceremonial weapon through the 17th century. Often thought to be a derivation of the earlier **spetum**, the head of a ranseur consisted of a **spear**-tip affixed with a cross **hilt** at its base. Often this hilt was crescent-shaped, giving it an appearance similar to that of a **trident**. Generally, the hilts did not have a cutting edge, unlike the double-edged **partisan**. Thus, Ranseurs resemble a **sai** mounted on a staff. Ranseurs are generally 6 feet or longer.

The spearing function of the weapon is apparent but not always effective against armor of great protection, and the deflection includes the trapping of opponent weapons in the space below the main blade, where a twist of the shaft would apply pressure from that moment on at long range and of pulling mounted opponents from the saddle.



Types of ranseur, 16th century

Chapter 19

Sovnya



Head of a sovnya

A **sovnya** (**Russian**: совня) is a traditional weapon used in **Russia**, much like the Japanese **naginata**, resembling a curved sword on the end of a long pole. This was a popular weapon with late-medieval Muscovite cavalry and retained use until the mid-17th century.

19.1 See also

- [List and Timeline of Russian inventions](#)

19.2 References

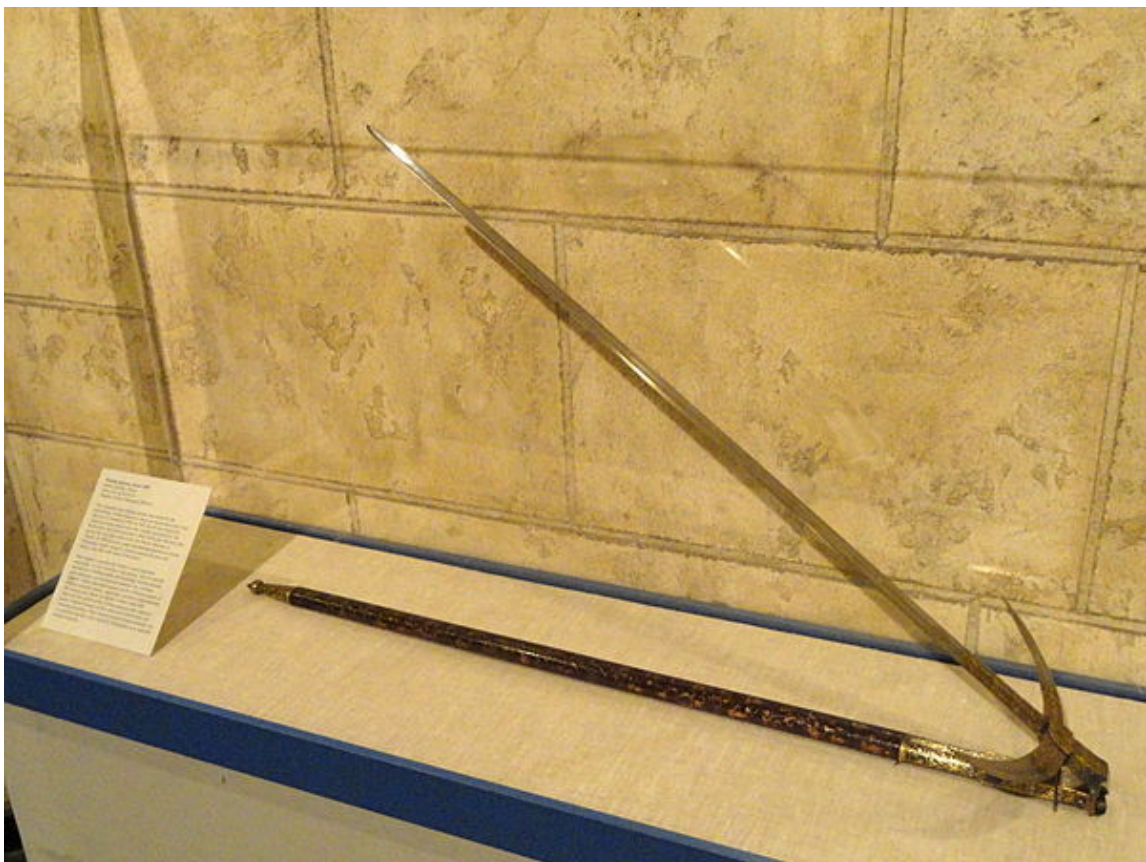
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19.3 Images

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Chapter 20

Spetum



Italian folding spetum, c. 1550

A **spetum** was a pole weapon of Europe during the 13th century. It consisted of a long pole some 6–8 feet long on which was mounted a **spear** head with two projections at its base. Many variations of this design flourished over time; some feel that the **ranseur** is a variation of the spetum. Other names include *chauve souris*, *corseca*, *corsèsque*, *korseke*, *runka*, and *rawcon*. The spetum is usually distinguished from the **ranseur** and **partisan** by its “prongs” being single edged and used for slashing. The main blade was 12–14 inches long, and the side blades were only about half that length and were set at acute angles.

The design of a spetum is very efficient for combat. The main blade is long enough to destroy any significant organ in the human body with one quick thrust. The blunt backs of the side blades make the spetum extremely useful for a variety of uses such as tripping and knocking aside shields, but more importantly they provide far more strength to the sharpened side and points than is possible with any dual-edged construction. The sharpened front ends are useful for piercing or chopping in situations where precision is difficult. For example, one quick thrust of a spetum can easily remove the lower foreleg, ankle, and foot of an opponent with a side blade. Trying to do this with only a



Detail of folding spetum

single spear point is incomparably more difficult. Similarly throat-level thrusts with a spetum can miss a direct hit by a huge distance and still completely impale the victim's neck.

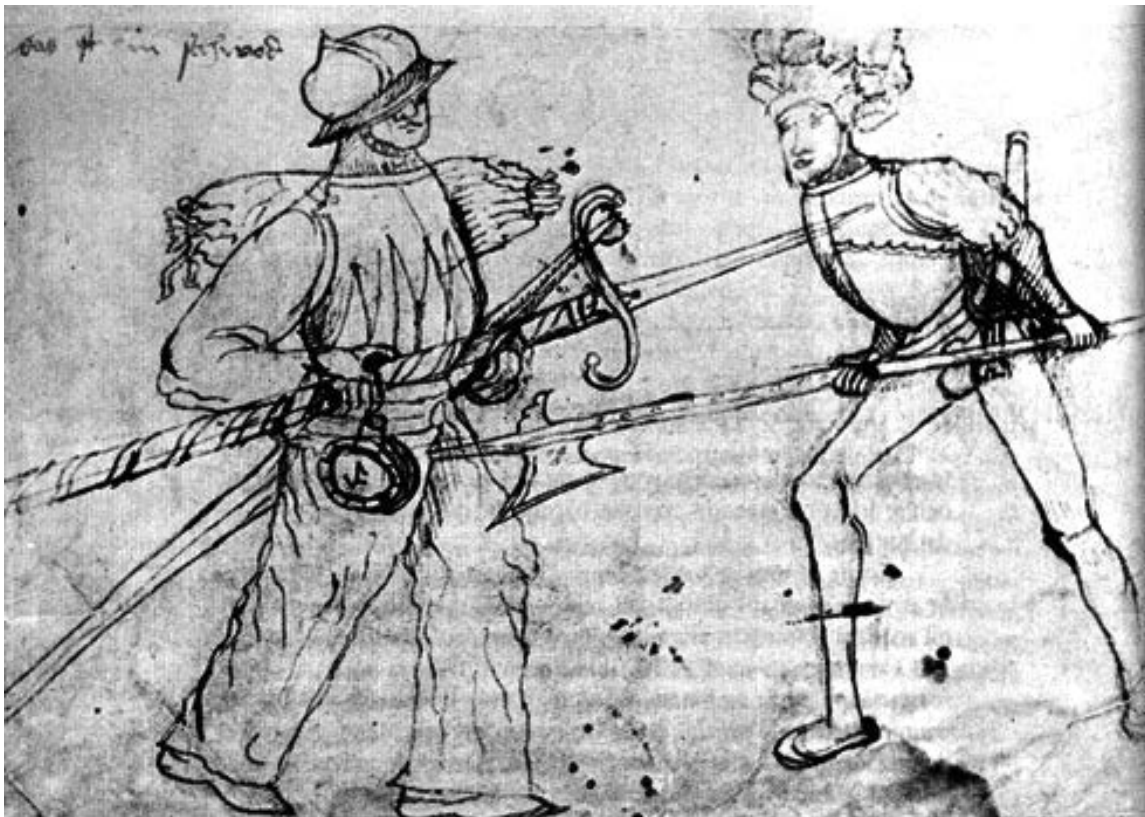
Chapter 21

Swordstaff

A **Swordstaff** (Svärdstav) is a Scandinavian polearm, used in the medieval ages. It is made by placing a blade at the end of a staff, thus giving the same benefits of a sword with the range of a **spear** or **polearm**. This helps the soldier fighting enemies both on foot and mounted.

The length of the weapon makes it easier to fight mounted opponents, while the blade is still handy enough to use in close combat, as opposed to using a spear which is ineffective at close range because only the tip can be used to attack with, or a **sword** which makes hurting mounted enemies significantly harder. The greater length of the weapon would also help when fighting more heavily armed opponents, since an attack can be executed with considerably more force due to the length of the weapon.

Evidence of the weapon in use at the Battle of Elfsborg (Alvesborg) 1502 is provided by Paul Dolstein, a **landsknecht** mercenary who fought in the battle, who refers to the Swedes carrying “good pikes made from swords”. He also provides sketches of the weapon.^[1]



Paul Dolstein's sketch of a Swedish militiaman with swordstaff in combat with a landsknecht

Although Dolstein believed the weapon was made from swords, there is no independent confirmation of this.

21.1 Origins

The weapon has visual similarities to the **partisan** and **Langue de boeuf** and may share common origins. However, Scandinavian Sagas make references to a number of pole weapons, usually translated as **halberd** or **bill**.^[2] These weapons are used to cut and to stab but their names suggest they were derived from the spear rather than a cutting weapon e.g. the Hewing Spear (**höggspjót**) and the **atgeir**. While clearly identifiable artistic or archaeological evidence of the form of these weapons is lacking, it is possible that the swordstaff may be a late derivative of this family of weapons.

21.2 Notes

[1] John Richards : Landsknecht Soldier 1486-1560, Osprey Warrior 49, 2002 pp51-52. [media:dolstein 2.gif](#)

[2] For list of saga references to these weapons, see

21.3 External links

For discussion, contemporary illustrations and reconstruction see

Chapter 22

Voulge

A **voulge** (occasionally called a **pole cleaver**) is a type of **polearm** that existed alongside the similar **glaive** in medieval Europe. ^[1] Superficially, a voulge might strongly resemble a glaive, but there are some notable differences in construction. ^[2] First, the attachment of the voulge blade to the shaft was usually done by binding the lower two thirds of the blade to the side of the pole; the glaive would often have a socket built into the blade itself and was mounted on top of the pole. In addition, while both had curved blades, that of the voulge was broad and meant for hacking, while that of the glaive was narrow and meant more for cutting. A voulge thus looks something like a squashed **bardiche**, or just a **meat cleaver** attached to a long pole.

In early designs it consisted solely of a cutting edge, but in time voulges often had a 'pointed-top' blade for stabbing. Hooks were also incorporated onto the back of the blade, in which case they are referred to as "voulge-**guisarmes**".

The voulge was commonly used by the French. The **Hundred Years War** provided many opportunities to prove its utility. It is commonly believed that this was the base design used in the creation of the **bayonet**, also credited to the French.

22.1 References

- [1] "Medieval polearm weapons - Voulge". *Arthur's Armoury*.
- [2] "Voulge - Polearm". *Military Factory*. Retrieved 28 October 2014.

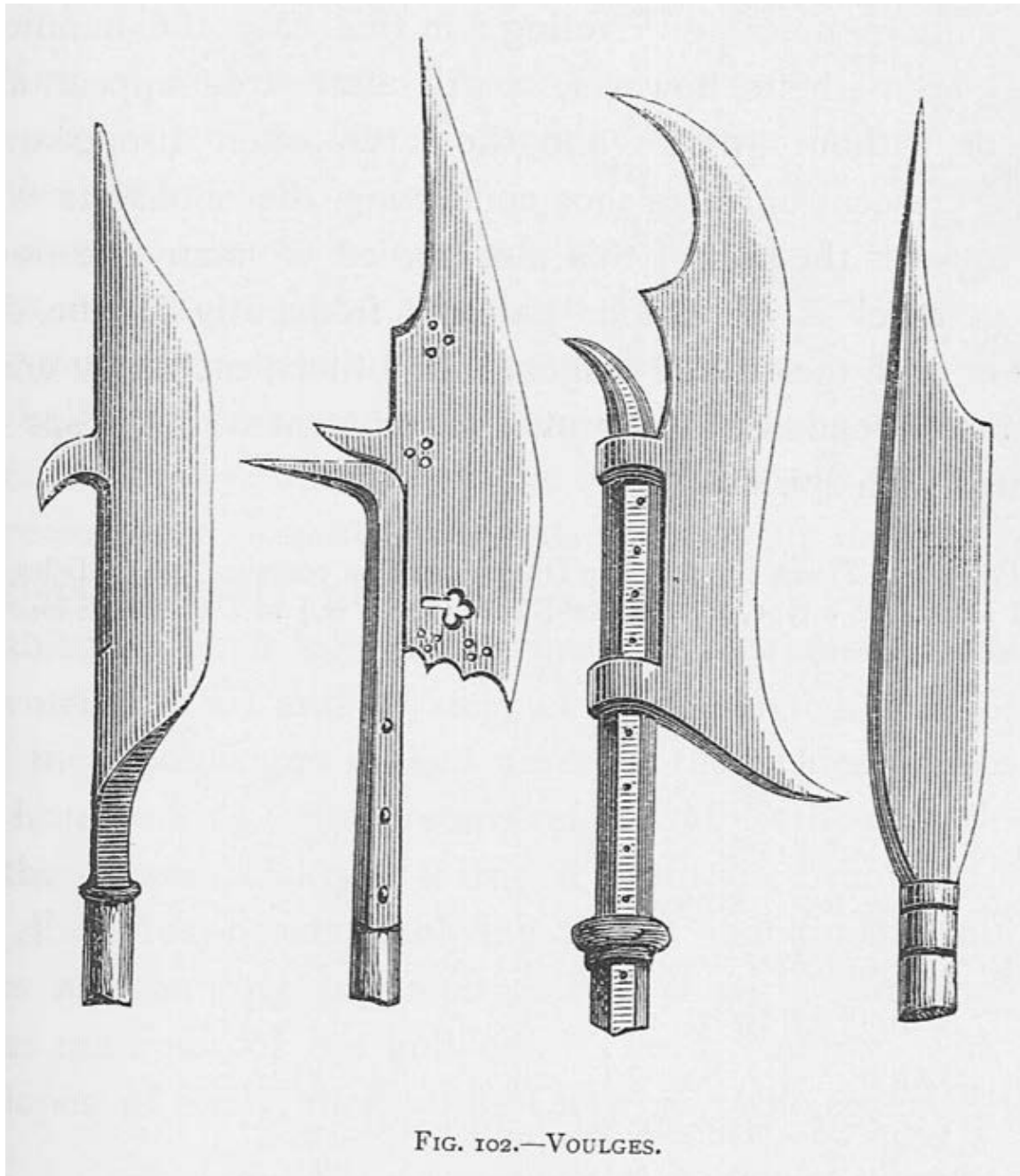


FIG. 102.—VOULGES.

Vouldges

Chapter 23

War scythe

A **war scythe** is a kind of improvised **pole weapon**, similar to a **fauchard**, usually created from standard **scythes**. The blade of the scythe is rotated so as to extend upright from the pole, thus forming an infantry weapon more practical both in offensive actions against enemy infantry and as a defensive measure against enemy **cavalry**.

23.1 History

The scythe and pitchfork, **farming** tools, have frequently been used as a weapon by those who couldn't afford or didn't have access to more expensive weapons such as pikes, swords, or later, guns. Scythes and pitchforks were stereotypically carried by angry mobs or gangs of enraged peasants.^[1] The process usually involved reforging the blade of a scythe at a 90 degree angle, strengthening the joint between the blade and the shaft with an additional metal pipe or bolts and reinforcing the shaft to better protect it against cuts from enemy blades. At times, instead of a scythe blade, a blade from a hand-operated **chaff cutter** was used.

War scythes were a popular weapon of choice and opportunity of many **peasant uprisings** throughout history. The ancient Greek historian **Xenophon** describes in his work (*Anabasis*) the **chariots** of **Artaxerxes II**, which had projecting scythes fitted. Later, **Jan Žižka's** Hussite warriors, recruited mostly from peasantry, used modified scythes. Called originally 'kůsa -scythe' and later "sudlice," it doubled as both a stabbing and cutting weapon, developing later into the "ušatá sudlice"—**Bohemian earspoon**, more suitable for combat—thanks to side spikes (ears), acting as end stops, it did not penetrate too deep, and so was easier to draw from fallen foes. War scythes were widely used by Polish and **Lithuanian** peasants during revolts in the 18th and 19th centuries. Polish peasants used war scythes during the 17th-century Swedish invasion (**The Deluge**). In the 1685 battle of Sedgemoor, **James Scott, 1st Duke of Monmouth**, fielded a 5000 strong peasant unit armed with war scythes. They were used in the 1784 **Transylvanian peasants' Revolt** of **Horea, Cloșca and Crișan**, in the war in the **Vendée** by royalist peasant troops, in the 1st War of Schleswig in 1848 in **Denmark**, and again in various Polish uprisings: the **Kościuszko Uprising** in 1794 and the battle of **Raclawice**, in which scythe wielders successfully charged and captured **Russian artillery**. In that year **Chrystian Piotr Aigner** published a field manual, *Short Treatise on Pikes and Scythes*, detailing the training and operation of scythe-equipped forces, the first and probably only such book in the history of warfare. War scythes were later used in the **November Uprising** in 1831, **January Uprising** in 1863, and **Silesian Uprising** in 1921. The description of a fighting unit as "scythemmen" was used in Poland as late as 1939; however, the **Gdynia "kosynierzy"** were armed with hunting guns rather than scythes.

23.2 Specifics

As a **pole weapon**, the war scythe is characterised by long range and powerful force (due to **leverage**): there are documented instances where a scythe cut through a metal helmet. They could be used, depending on construction and tactics, to make slashing or stabbing attacks, and with their uncommon appearance and considerable strength could have a psychological impact on an unprepared enemy. However, like most pole weapons, their disadvantages were weight (which could quickly exhaust the user) and slow speed. After the **German Peasants' War** during 1524–1525, a fencing book edited by **Paulus Hector Mair** described in 1542 techniques how to fence using a scythe.^[2]



Mort de Bara by *Jean-Joseph Weerts* (1883), illustrating the use of the scythe

23.3 See also

- Fauchard



Scythemen during Poland's January 1863 Uprising

- **Kama** – Japanese hand scythe, sometimes also adapted to combat
- **Falx** – A sword with an inward curved blade
- **Rhomphaia** – larger variant of the falx, much more similar to the war scythe

23.4 References

- [1] "Medieval Men". Medieval-Period.com. Retrieved 2014-02-13.
- [2] Mair, Paul Hector (c. 1542). "Sichelfechten (Sickle Fencing)". *De arte athletica I* (in German/Latin). Augsburg. pp. 204r–208r. Duæ incisiones supernæ falcis foe

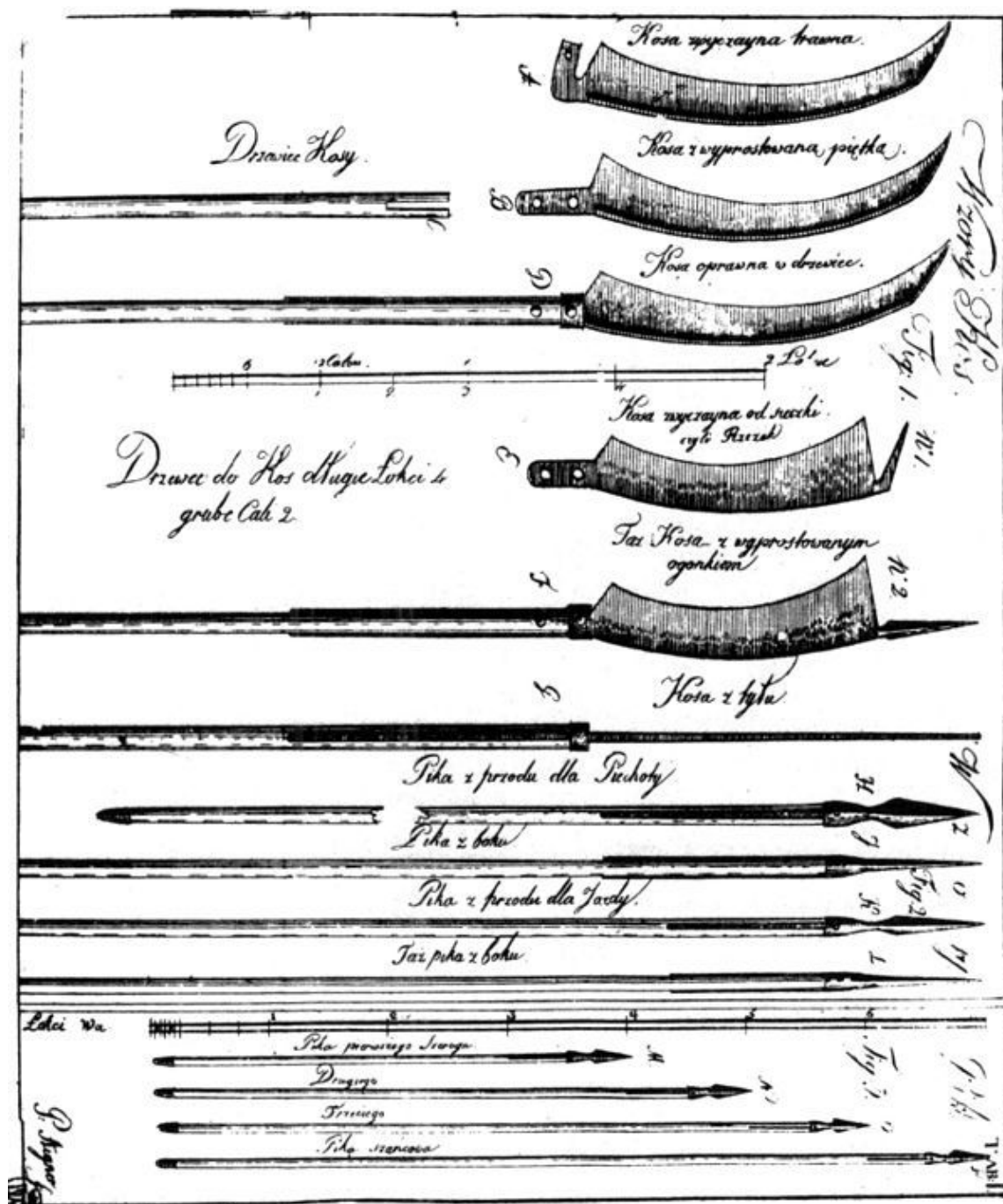
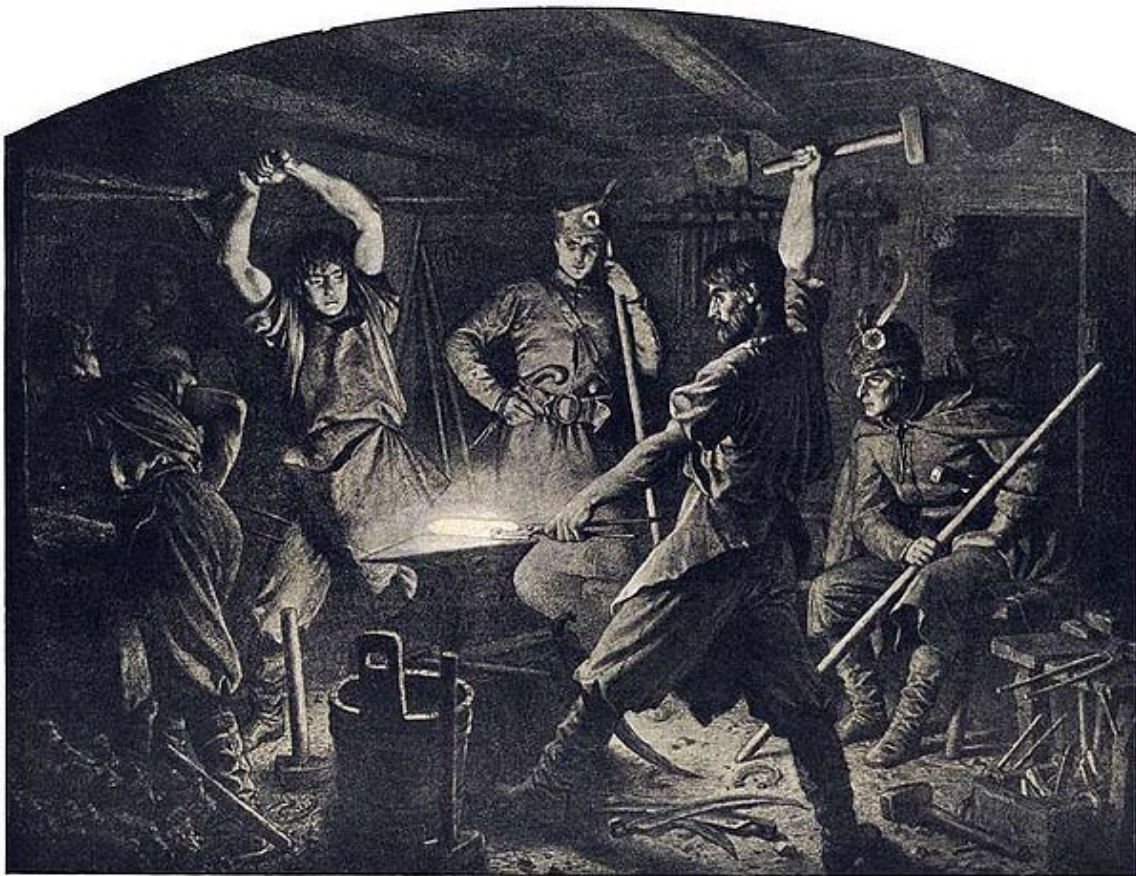


Illustration from Chrystian Piotr Aigner's "Krótka nauka o kosach i pikach" ("A Brief Treatise on Scythes and Pikes"), 1794



Artur Grottger, "Kucie kos" ("Forging of Scythes") during January Uprising



Roundel of the Polish 7th Air Escadrille, featuring crossed war scythes

Chapter 24

War hammer

For games, see [Warhammer](#).

A **war hammer** is a late [medieval weapon](#) of [war](#) intended for close combat action, whose design resembles the [hammer](#). Its appearance is similar to that of an [ice axe](#).

24.1 Design



Detail of the head of a war hammer

The war hammer consists of a handle and a head. The handle may be of different lengths, the longest being roughly equivalent to the [halberd](#), and the shortest about the same as a [mace](#). Long war hammers were [pole weapons](#) (polearms) meant for use against riders, whereas short ones were used in closer quarters and from horseback.

War hammers were developed as a consequence of the prevalence of [surface-hardened steel](#) surfacing of wrought iron [armours](#) of the late medieval battlefields during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The surface of the armour was now as hard as the edge of a blade, so a blade tended to ricochet. Swords and battleaxes were likely to only give

a glancing blow, losing much of the impact, especially on the high curvature of the helmet. The war hammer could deliver the full force to the target.

War hammers, especially when mounted on a pole, could damage without penetrating the armour. In particular, they transmitted the impact through even the thickest helmet and caused concussions. Later war hammers often had a spike on one side of the head, making them more versatile weapons. A blade or spike tended to be used not against helmets but against other parts of the body where the armour was thinner and penetration was easier. The spike end could be used for grappling the target's armour, **reins**, or **shield**, or could be turned in the direction of the blow to pierce even heavy armour. Against mounted opponents, the weapon could also be directed at the legs of the horse, toppling the armoured foe to the ground where he could be more easily attacked.

24.2 Maul

The maul is a long-handled hammer with a heavy metal head, either of lead or iron. Similar in appearance and function to a modern **sledgehammer**, it is sometimes shown as having a spear-like spike on the fore-end of the haft.

The use of the maul as a weapon seems to date from the later 14th century. In 1382, rebellious citizens of Paris seized 3,000 mauls (French: *maillet*) from the city armoury, leading to the rebels being dubbed **Maillotins**.^[1] Later in the same year, Froissart records French men-at-arms using mauls at the **Battle of Roosebeke**, demonstrating they were not simply weapons of the lower classes.^[2]

A particular use of the maul was by archers in the 15th and 16th centuries. At the **Battle of Agincourt**, English longbowmen are recorded as using lead mauls, initially as a tool to drive in stakes but later as an improvised weapon.^[3] Other references during the century (for example, in Charles the Bold's 1472 Ordinance) suggest continued use.^[4] They are recorded as a weapon of Tudor archers as late as 1562.^[5]

24.3 Related weapons

- **Bec de corbin**
- **Horseman's pick**
- **Lucerne hammer**

24.4 Gallery

- **Bec de Corbin**
- **Maurice, Elector of Saxony** wields a war hammer on a posthumous portrait
- **Knight with war hammer** (painting by Paolo Uccello)
- **War hammer.**
- **This is a Raven's Beak or warhammer**, exhibited in the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin.
- **Indian war hammer**, 19th century, hard wood shaft with full length metal strip for re-enforcement, silver koft-gari decoration.

24.5 In popular culture

- Marvel Comics' **Thor** uses a gray square-headed war hammer named ***Mjolnir***, which enhances his divine might, provides a variety of nature related powers and can only be lifted by whoever is worthy of the power of Thor. Anyone unworthy, no matter their level of strength, cannot lift it.^[6]
- **Shao Khan** and **Raiden** of the ***Mortal Kombat*** video game series have both used a type of war hammer in battle. Shao Khan has a type of maul called the **Wrath Hammer** which he has used extensively since his **debut**. Raiden, the God of Thunder, uses the mystical weapon sparingly and it is simply titled **War Hammer**.^[7]

- Robert Baratheon of *A Song of Ice and Fire* was known for using a war hammer in battles, with which he killed Prince Rhaegar in the Battle of the Trident.^[8]
- Dwalin the dwarf from *The Hobbit* films wields a very large war hammer.

24.6 References

- [1] Tuchman, Barbara (1979). *A distant Mirror*. London: Penguin. p. 380. ISBN 0140054073.
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- [3] Strickland, Matthew; Hardy, Robert (2005). *The Great Warbow*. Stroud: Sutton. p. 337. ISBN 0750931671.
- [4] Strickland & Hardy (2005), p.364
- [5] Strickland & Hardy (2005), p337
- [6] *Journey Into Mystery* #83 (August 1962)
- [7] *Mortal Kombat: Deception*
- [8] Martin, George R. R. *A Game of Thrones*.

24.7 External links

- Skull from Battle of Towton (1461) showing war hammer wound
- Spotlight: The Medieval Poleaxe, by Alexi Goranov

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