



Medieval Arms and Armor

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Weapons of some type have existed as long as men have walked the earth. What we classify here and for the purposes of this magazine as ARMS are arbitrarily defined as the weapons of Medieval times and forward. Historians have never quite agreed upon the definition of Medieval or Middle Ages. Some say it started as early as the fall of the Roman Empire in 5th Century ACE. For our purposes, however, we will use the more specifically accepted definition-- starting around the Battle of Hastings in 1066 and ending with the death of King Richard III in 1485.

Since our magazine strives to deal with all phases of our Arms Heritage, we feel it is appropriate to initiate this column on the weapons and defenses of the Medieval period and the ensuing Renaissance period-- all of which led us to where we are today.

The Ancestor To Your Modern Handgun



Figure 1 - An excavated, very early hand cannon showing the coiled construction (authors collection)

Barrel of a European wrought iron hand-cannon late 14th century.

Description: Made in tubular form with a gently constricted breech. A hollowed powder-pan in front of the low moulding that forms the junction of the breech with the remainder of the barrel is pierced with

a circular vent. A later square hole has been pierced at the muzzle.

The barrel is in excavated condition, with overall pitting. As a result of corrosion, it can be seen that the barrel is formed of a spiral of wrought iron bars united by hammer-welding under intense heat.

Dimensions: Overall Length 10 in (25.8 cm)
Bore 1½ in (3.7 cm)
Weight: 7½ lb (3.40 kg)

The barrel described above can be identified, from its short, relatively stout proportions, as an early example of its kind.

The earliest unequivocal evidence



Figure 2 - Another view of the piece shown in Figure 2 showing the pan and touch hole.(authors collection)



Figure 3 - A rather fanciful image of an armored horse man using a hand cannon.

for the existence of guns dates from 1326 when the Council of Florence passed a decree authorising the appointment of two men to make metal cannon (cannonnes de metallo) for the defence of the Republic (C. Blair, *European and American Arms*, London, 1962, p. 37; and H. L. Blackmore, *Guns and Rifles of the World*, London, 1965, p. 4).

The introduction of the hand-cannon very likely followed closely upon that of the cannon itself. The English Royal Privy Wardrobe Accounts for 1346, for example, refer to guns with tillers (cum telariis), probably meaning hand-guns, while the accounts of the Italian commune of Perugia for 1364 specifically refer to “500 bombards of a span in length, which can be carried in the hand” (Blair, *op. cit.*, p. 40; and Blackmore, *op. cit.*, p. 5). The earliest reference to the handgun by name occurs in the English Royal Privy Wardrobe accounts for 1388, which refer to canones paruos vocatos handgunnes (Blair, *op. cit.*, p. 40; and Blackmore, *op. cit.*, p. 6, where the date of the document is correctly rendered).



Figure 4 - A modern reproduction showing how the hand cannon might have been mounted.



Figure 5 - Another early piece, this one forged around a mandrel.

What is generally regarded as the earliest surviving hand-cannon is one of bronze in the National Historical Museum, Stockholm, Inv. No. 2891, found at Loshult (Skåne), Sweden, in 1861.

The barrel under discussion must have been secured to its stock by means of iron bands. It almost certainly post-dates the vase-shaped Loshult example, probably made in the first half of the 14th century, but is unlikely, from its short length, to have been made after the first quarter of the 15th century. It comes closest in form, and is therefore likely to be contemporary with that of the gun at Bern which is thought to date from the late 14th century.

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