

# Deadly weapons : morning star, halberd and crossbow

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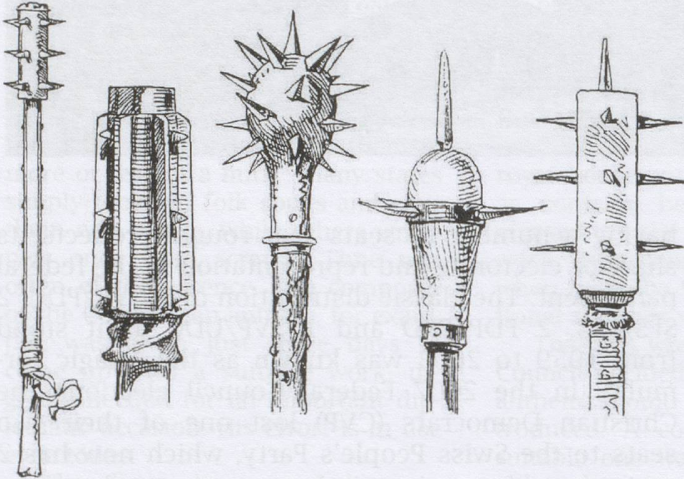
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## Deadly weapons: Morning star, halberd and crossbow

The **morning star** is a medieval weapon consisting of a spiked club, usually with a long spike extending straight from the top and many smaller spikes around the part of the head. It was used by both infantry and cavalry; the horseman's weapon had a shorter shaft.



The morning star first came into widespread use around the beginning of the fourteenth century. They were often hand cut by peasant militiamen, rather than turned on a lathe, from wood they had gathered themselves and fitted with nails and spikes by the local blacksmith. The shaft and head were usually of one piece but sometimes reinforced at the top with an iron band.

### Halberd

A **halberd** (also called halbert or Swiss voulge) is a two-handed pole weapon that came to prominent use during the 14th and 15th centuries. Possibly the word halberd comes from the German words Halm (staff), and Barte (axe) - in modern-day German, the weapon is called 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. The halberd

was 1.5 to 1.8 metres long. The halberd was cheap 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, as was the hook opposite the axe head, which could be used to pull horsemen to the ground.

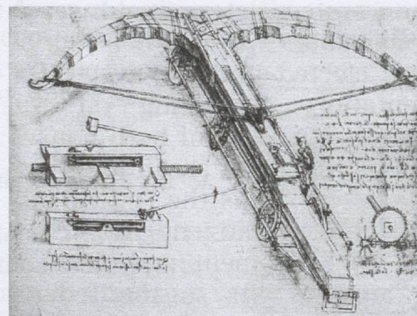
Additionally, halberds were reinforced with metal rims over the shaft, thus making effective weapons for blocking other weapons like swords. This capability increased its effectiveness in battle, and expert halberdiers were as deadly as any other weapon masters. A halberd in the hands of a Swiss peasant was the weapon which killed the Duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, decisively ending the Burgundian Wars, literally in a single stroke.

The halberd was the primary weapon of the early Swiss armies in the 14th and early 15th centuries. Later on, the Swiss added the pike to better repel knightly attacks and roll over enemy infantry formations, with the halberd being used for closer combat.]

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.

### Crossbow

A crossbow is a weapon consisting of a bow mounted on a stock that shoots projectiles, often called bolts or quarrels. Crossbows played a significant role in the warfare of East Asia since the 4th century B.C., as well as Europe and the Mediterranean and of course in Swiss folklore. Today, they are used primarily for target shooting and hunting.



Sketch by Leonardo da Vinci, c. 1500

The bow of early crossbows was made of a single piece of wood, usually ash or yew. Composite bows are made from layers of different material—often wood, horn and sinew—glued together and bound with

animal tendon. These composite bows, made of several layers, are much stronger and more efficient in releasing energy than simple wooden bows.

The strings for a crossbow are typically made of strong fibres that would not tend to fray. Whipcord was very common; however linen, hemp, and sinew were used as well. In wet conditions, twisted mulberry root was occasionally used.

Very light crossbows can be drawn by hand, but heavier types need the help of mechanical devices. The simplest version of mechanical cocking device is a hook attached to a belt, drawing the bow by straightening the legs.