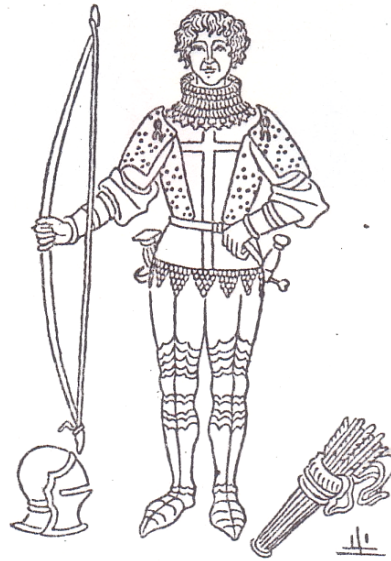


War Archery and Social Status

By

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Over my years in the S.C.A., I have heard and read, far too many times, statements to the effect of: “Nobles and gentry never used archery in battle.” And “Only peasants and serfs used archery in battle.”

As with most blanket statements, this is incorrect. This misconception has been used both as a reason to deny peerage recognition to archers who otherwise have all the peerage level qualifications and to attempt to ban the use of combat archery at our wars. I will attempt to refute these misconceptions with historical examples of where European non-serfs, non-peasants, sometimes even kings, and other nobles used bows in battle and with the opinions of various authors on the subject.

Not all nobles had titles, such as king, duke, earl, etc. You could be of noble family without having a peerage or a knighthood. One example of this is from the Garter King of Arms of England in 1602.

And who so can make prooffe, that his Ancestors or himselfe, have had Armes, or can procure them by purchase, may be called Armiger or Esquier.

It is true that in some times and places; particularly in Northern France and in Germany, some European nobility would disdain the use of archery in battle. Nevertheless, by no means did the members of the nobility never make use of it.

I was limited in my research mainly to sources in English. I am sure that there are a great many more sources in other languages that would also show the use of archery in battle by nobles of greater and lesser degree and non-serfs and non-peasants, that I was unable to locate and read. If you should know of any sources in other languages that support this and could translate those parts into English, I would be most grateful to see them and may include them in any update of this article.

There are four very interesting period books that I read for this, which I think are worth reading by others with a general interest in the middle ages. You may find them complete on Google Books: [The Kings Mirror](#), [Richard of Holy Trinity: Itinerary of Richard I and others to the Holy Land](#), [Cannon Pietro Casol's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the year 1494](#), [The Memoirs of the Conquistador Bernal Diaz del Castillo](#).

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1: Scandinavian Countries

The “Speculum Regale” or “King’s Mirror” was written in Norway in the 1200s. Its purpose was to teach young men the knowledge that they would need in the future. The sections below could be the words of many medieval warrior fathers to their sons. They cover the basic duties of the housecarls.

Weapons of many sorts may be used to advantage on shipboard, which one has no occasion to use on land, except in a fortress or castle. Longhandled scythes and long-shafted broadaxes. "war-beams " and staff slings, darts, and missiles of every sort are serviceable on ships. Crossbows and longbows are useful as well as all other forms of shooting weapons; but coal and sulfur are, however, the most effective munitions of all that I have named. ¹

Now it seems needless to speak further about the equipment of men who fight on horseback; there are, however, other weapons which a mounted warrior may use, if he wishes; among these are the "horn bow" and the weaker crossbow, which a man can easily draw even when on horseback, and certain other weapons, too, if he should want them. ²

Those who have to defend a castle may also make use of these weapons which I have now enumerated and many more: trebuckets both large and small, hand slings and staff slings. They will find crossbows and other bows, too, very effective, as well as every other type of shooting weapons, such as spears and javelins both light and heavy. ³

There are many tales from the north of kings and earls and others using hand-bows in battle. One of the better known is that of Einar Tambaskelfer, an 11th century Norwegian noble who borrowed a bow from his king.

Einar Tambaskelfer, one of the sharpest of bow shooters, stood by the mast, and shot with his bow. Einar shot an arrow at Earl Eirik, which hit the tiller-end just above the earl's head so hard that it entered the wood up to the arrow-shaft. The earl looked that way, and asked if they knew who had shot; and at the same moment another arrow flew between his hand and his side, and into the stuffing of the chief's

stool, so that the barb stood far out on the other side. Then said the earl to a man called Fin,—but some say he was of Fin (Laplander) race, and was a superior archer,—" Shoot that tall man by the mast." Fin shot; and the arrow hit the middle of Einar's bow just at the moment that Einar was drawing it, and the bow was split in two parts.

"What is that," cried King Olaf, "that broke with such a noise?"

"Norway, king, from thy hands," cried Einar.

"No! not quite so much as that," says the king; "take my bow, and shoot," flinging the bow to him. Einar took the bow, and drew it over the head of the arrow. "Too weak, too weak," said he, "for the bow of a mighty king!" and, throwing the bow aside, he took sword and shield, and fought valiantly. ⁴

Another 11th century Norwegian noble by name of Nikolas Hranason, a grandson of King Magnus Barefoot, used his bow with less success than his grandfather.

The meat was scarcely put on the table, when a man came into the house to tell Nikolas that the Birkebeins were rowing up the river. Then Nikolas called to his men to take their weapons. When they were armed Nikolas ordered them to go up into the loft. But that was a most imprudent step; for if they had remained in the yard, the townspeople might have come to their assistance; but now the Birkebeins filled the whole yard, and from thence scrambled from all sides up to the loft. They called to Nikolas, and offered him quarter, but he refused it. Then they attacked the loft. Nikolas and his men defended themselves with bow-shot, hand-shot, and stones of the chimney; but the Birkebeins hewed down the houses, broke up the loft, and returned shot for shot from bow or hand. Nikolas had a red shield in which were gilt nails, and about it was a border of stars. The Birkebeins shot so that the arrows went in up to the arrow feather. Then said Nikolas, "My shield deceives me." Nikolas and a number of his people fell, and his death was greatly lamented. The Birkebeins gave all the townspeople their lives. ⁵

King Magnus Barefoot is recorded as slaying an Earl with an excellent shot from his bow. The range of the shot was not given.

Afterwards King Magnus sailed to Wales; and when he came to the sound of Anglesey there came against him an army from Wales,

which was led by two earls— Hugo the brave, and Hugo the Stout. They began immediately to give battle, and there was a severe conflict. King Magnus shot with the bow; but Hugo the Brave was all over in armour, so that nothing was bare about him excepting one eye. King Magnus let fly an arrow at him, as also did a Halogaland man who was beside the king. They both shot at once. The one shaft hit the nose-screen of the helmet, which was bent by it to one side, and the other arrow hit the earl's eye, and went through his head; and that was found to be the king's. Earl Hugo fell, and the Britons fled with the loss of many people. So says Bjorn Krephende:—

“The swinger of the sword
Stood by Anglesey's ford;
His quick shaft flew,
And Hugo slew.
His sword gleamed a while
O'er Anglesey Isle,
And his Norsemen's band
Scoured the Anglesey land.” ⁶

The son of a Danish chieftain from the 12th century, Esbjorn Snare lacked the patience that a good archer needs.

Like Richard the Lion-Heart, princes and distinguished soldiers in Denmark and Norway often carried crossbows during the 12th and 13th centuries. Thus, for example, Saxo says that Esbjorn Snare used such a weapon in a battle with the Esthonians and Courlanders on Oland in 1170. He shot three bolts at the enemy, but, as none of them hit the target he smashed the bow in a rage. ⁷

King Sverre himself, and his Earl Philip, shot with ‘lock-bows’ at a battle in the Trondheim Fjord in 1199. ... There is no specific evidence about Swedish crossbows from the 12th and 13th centuries. However, we may assume that at this time these weapons were quite commonly used in the royal army, by the high nobility, and also in the cities where German influence predominated. ⁸

King Harald Hardrade of Norway and 1066 fame used his bow to good effect against the Danish king and his fleet in a battle on the Nissa River.

It was late in the day when the battle began, and it continued the whole night. King Harald shot for a long time with his bow. So says Thiodolf: --

"The Upland king was all the night
Speeding the arrows' deadly flight.
All in the dark his bow-string's twang
Was answered; for some white shield rang,
Or yelling shriek gave certain note
The shaft had pierced some ring-mail coat,
The foemen's shields and bulwarks bore
A Lapland arrow-scat or more."⁹

2: Charlemagne

The emperor Charlemagne built a famous empire. His outstanding ability to plan in detail helped with this. In addition, he knew the value of archery.

Charlemagne wrote in a letter to one of his vassals in 806.

You shall come to the Wesser with your men prepared to go on warlike service to any part of our realm that we may point out; that is, you shall come with the arms and gear and all warlike equipment of clothing and victuals. Every horseman shall have shield, lance, sword, dagger, a bow and a quiver.¹⁰

In addition, three years earlier, the horsemen were required to have a helm and a breastplate.

... each man was to come and the count was to see that each was prepared with a lance, shield, bow with two strings and twelve arrows, breastplate and helmet.¹¹

The nobility had early training in archery.

For the nobility, archery was important, and boys grew up practicing archery as a sport in preparation for warfare.¹²

The more land you owned, the greater your wealth and the greater the requirements for the equipment you were to bring to war.

Beyond the determination of select levy service by ownership of land, the wealth of the individual might determine what equipment he was expected to provide. The poorest provided merely a short sword and a shield, while the wealthier might be required to provide a long sword, a lance, even a bow and arrows, mail armor, a helmet, and a horse as well as the short sword and shield.¹³

It would seem that archery was just one of the many skills a warrior needed to have.

Someone who was going to make a career out of fighting or who was a member of the classes for whom regular participation in warfare was an accepted and expected part of life, would need training in a variety of skills. As we shall see, such a warrior was expected to be able to fight on horseback or on foot, and to be competent with a number of different weapons: sword and shield (use of a shield needs just as much training as that of offensive weapons), throwing and thrusting spears, bow and so on.¹⁴

The expense of the arms and armor and horse, as well as the training required, were not within the budget of serfs or peasants.

3: The Crusades, King Richard and others

King Richard and other nobles made use of the hand-bow and crossbow during the Crusades, usually at the Saracens and sometimes at each other.

King Philip II of France and King Richard I of England used crossbows during the siege of Acre.¹⁵

Knights fought by whatever means was available; William the Conqueror and Robert Curthose were excellent archers, while Godfrey de Bouillon wielded a crossbow at the siege of Jerusalem in 1099, a weapon that Richard I would use to great effect. Illustrations of knights mounted and using bows do exist, including one at Bouvines,

while in 1150 Humphrey of Toron is recorded as pursuing Muslim mounted archers with his bow.¹⁶

Knights were familiar with all types of weapons and could use whatever weapon was appropriate for the battle conditions.

The offensive arms are equally well known. In the eleventh century, knights were wholly familiar with the use of the bow or crossbow, which so impressed the Greek princess Anna Comnena when the crusaders reached Constantinople. But the process of specialization referred to above led to the formation of troops of archers who were footsoldiers (pedites), whose role was to overwhelm the enemy lines with their arrows before moving aside to make way for the massive cavalry charge of the knights. The latter only used the bow when they were themselves pedites, for example during sieges.¹⁷

King Richard I is well known for both his tactical and personal use of the crossbow. King Richard was ill during the siege of Acre. So he had a framework covered with tightly woven branches for protection from arrows from archers on the walls.

For this purpose, he caused to be made a hurdle, commonly called a circleia, put together firmly with a complication of interweaving, and made with the most subtle workmanship. This the king intended to be used for crossing over the trench outside the city. Under it he placed his most experienced arbalesters, and he caused himself to be carried thither on a silken bed, to honour the Saracens with his presence, and animate his men to fight; and from it, by using his arbalest, in which he was skilled, he slew many with darts and arrows.¹⁸

King Phillip's Marshal, Alberic Clements, was killed on the walls of Acre and his armor striped from him. One of the Saracens put on his mail and was boasting from the wall to the crusaders below but did not pay enough attention to King Richard.

One of the Turks, vaunting in the armour of the aforesaid Alberic Clements, which he had put on, was shewing himself, to the annoyance of our men, on the highest part of the wall, in a boastful manner, but King Richard inflicted on him a deadly wound, piercing him

through the heart with a cast of his arbalest, the Turks, grieving at his fall ran together in crowds to avenge his death, ...¹⁹

King Richard had sailed from Acre to the relief of the city of Joppa, where he landed on the beach.

Next to the king landed Geoffrey du Bois and Peter des Proaux; and all the others followed, leaping into the sea with the intention of proceeding afoot. They boldly set upon the Turks who were lining the beach.

The King laid the enemy low everywhere with a crossbow he had in his hands ... and carried on the pursuit till the whole shore was cleared ...²⁰

After returning from the crusade, King Richard was besieging Prince John's men at Nottingham. And he again shot a defender on the wall.

In 1194 at the siege of Nottingham, held against him by the forces of his rebellious brother John, Richard personally slew a defending knight with a bow, after the archers in the garrison had shot a knight standing next to the king, and he ordered 4,000 arrows to be sent to the besieging army in addition to shields and bolts.²¹

Duke Godfrey of Bouillon, who later became king of Jerusalem, during the siege of Nice, is also recorded as shooting an opponent off the wall.

.... and one Saracen of gigantic proportions particularly distinguished himself during the siege. He seldom missed his aim; and with arrows, javelins, and stones, he was equally successful. One day when thus engaged, he stood up and defied the bravest Christians, and loaded them with abuse. A hundred arrows were immediately directed against him; but he seemed to bear a charmed life. At length Godfrey of Bouillon seized a crossbow and took aim. In another moment the huge carcass of the Saracen rolled into the ditch, shot through the heart.²²

Then in 1196 at the siege of Gaillon, Richard was wounded by a crossbow bolt in the knee. The identity of the shooter of the bolt that later struck him

in the neck and caused his death is uncertain. It may have been the son of a knight or a cook at the castle. The stories vary on this point.

Even army leaders did not disdain their use. At the siege of Gaillon, the routier captain Cadoc wounded Richard Coeur de Lion with a crossbow bolt and in 1218, at the siege of Toulouse, the count of Comminges grievously injured Guy de Montfort with a crossbow.²³

In 1229 at the siege of Mallorca, King James of Aragon used his crossbow in the final attack.

However, the king acquitted himself well in what seems to have been a confused battle, apparently winning it with a charge uphill. This gallantry, and the death of the influential Moncada brothers, enabled James to take a more active role in the siege of Mallorca. When he stayed in the dangerous camp with his personal following wielding a crossbow in the final assault.²⁴

In “The World of the Troubadours” Professor Paterson gives some insight into the society and works of the troubadours in the south of France in the 12th through 14th centuries.

In the “Song of the Albigensian Crusade” a crossbowman is rewarded with a horse. Later records show that in 1268 a simple mounted crossbowman, Giraud de Marseille, became a castellan and was an armed knight. There is certainly never any suggestion that a crossbow was ‘not proper to Christians’.²⁵

In the “Song of the Albigensian Crusade” at least, what seems to have concerned poet and audience was whether the knights were properly equipped for the job of fighting, not the prestige value of particular arms such as sword and lance. Here, where the poet evokes the realities of a bitter fight for survival on the part of protagonists intensely familiar to poet and audience, the poet has no qualms about showing knights fighting with maces or firing a crossbow bolt. These might not be the usual weapons for a knight, but there is no loss of face attached to using what was to hand.²⁶

In the “Song of the Albigensian Crusade”, there is certainly no question of such ethical niceties. The object of fighting is to survive and

win, and if a knight splits an archer through the kidneys with his lance and pennant, this is a cause for pride and satisfaction. This attitude is consistent with the pragmatic view of armour whereby knights wield a mace or crossbow if convenient.²⁷

Jim Bradbury argues that ‘the medieval archer was not always given the respect he deserved in his own age’, since ‘the bow was seen as a weapon not proper to Christians and gentlemen’; ‘early medieval chronicles and literature take little notice of archery’. Northern French and German literature reveals a ‘noble prejudice’ against archery and the use of missile weaponry’. Here again Occitania marks itself off from the north.²⁸

In “Aigar et Maurin” and the “Song of the Albigensian Crusade”, specialized archers and crossbowmen are clearly regarded as important adjuncts to knights.²⁹

4: Knightly Orders

Some of the knightly orders such as the Knights Hospitaller, Knights Templar and the Teutonic Knights made use of the crossbow in warfare.

The rules of the Knights Hospitaller show that they trained in the use of the crossbow.

In Western Europe their work largely revolved around farming, charitable or medical duties, but in the Middle East military training probably took up much of the brothers’ remaining time and was mostly carried out in the afternoon, probably because of the heat.³⁰

Crossbows could only be used against targets – in other words in military training – and there are plenty of references to knights using them.³¹

The afternoon was given up to work, recreation, and to those military exercises so essential to military efficiency. From later Statutes and regulations we learn that the military brethren had to attend not less than three afternoons a week for gymnastics, wrestling, drill, exercises

in arms, and shooting with the crossbow and there was a prize for marksmanship every two months.³²

All the Knights Hospitaller were required to keep their arms and armor and their horse prepared to ride out upon orders. They were also required to practice all their weapons, including their crossbow. If they did not do this, the treasury stopped their allowance and pension.³³

The Knights Templar used bows in battle, but there is little to be found on how they practiced with them.

The Templars' regulations also refer to their using crossbows, which could be fired from horseback or on foot. The Templars would have learned how to use these weapons before they joined the Order. Again, if they were to use them effectively in military action they would have had to practice in peacetime, but the Order's regulations say nothing about arrangements for such practice, only that the brothers used to bet "on the draw of a crossbow". Perhaps they were shooting at targets and betting on the outcome. The regulations tried to limit what they could wager, rather than forbidding them to bet altogether, implying that an outright ban would have been impossible to enforce.³⁴

It is reasonable to assume that the knight-brothers and the sergeant-brothers would operate crossbows in siege situations or when they had to fight on foot.³⁵

In the Baltic Crusades against the local tribes, the Teutonic Knights made extensive use of crossbows.

Siege warfare, both offensive and defensive, was so important in the Baltic Crusades that the Sword Brethren were specifically trained in it. It was, in fact, the Crusaders' use of small castles, together with their crossbows and heavy body armour, which gave them their military edge.³⁶

Long before gunpowder weapons were available, the crusader castle defensive system depended upon the combination of timber and stone from which protruded numerous crossbows, the brothers' favorite weapons.³⁷

The Order provided better quality crossbows for the Brothers of the order. Others made do with bows of lesser quality.

Financial accounts not only distinguished between new and old, large and small crossbows, but also between “gemeine” (ordinary), “knullel” (perhaps composite), “diener” (servants), “gessellen (for members of the Order) and “schutzen” (target) types. Meanwhile, “Holmische Armbruste”, imported from Stockholm, were highly prized amongst the Teutonic Knights in the late 14th century.³⁸

In Pisa, Italy, in 1562 the Order of Saint Stephen was created. Its main purpose was to destroy pirates attacking Christian shipping in the Mediterranean. The idea of creating the Order was Duke Cosimo I's of the de Medici family, the Pope then made him the Grand Master of the Order. The training of Order reflected the Renaissance more than the Medieval. The convent of St. Stephen was built as the center for the Order and its training. To be accepted in the Order one had to pay an annual membership fee of 300 scudi, be of noble birth and not descended from heretics and be at least eighteen years old.³⁹

In the convent all the knights lived for three years of apprenticeship during which they would have learned the basics of mathematics, geometry, cosmography, history, geography, and land and naval tactics, besides which they would have been trained in gymnastic, wrestling, swimming, fencing, and the use of the crossbow, arc and portable fire weapons.⁴⁰

5: Archery Guilds

Archery guilds or confraternities, which included both hand-bow and crossbow (foot-bow) archers were to be found from northern France and the Low Land countries up to the Germanic areas of Central Europe and up to the Baltic Sea by the start of the 16th century. Moreover, many had been established earlier than that. The guilds were formed for the defense of their cities and the charters of some of the Flemish guilds required their service outside of their city if ordered by their Duke or Count. At the siege of Calais, they fought for the Duke of Burgundy.

In some cities, all men under the age of sixty had to attend shooting practice and drills once a week as part of the city militia. This was separate from the guild members who also had their required practices and would be fined for non-attendance. The membership in the guilds was limited and selective. They were not paid and had to provide their own equipment. The guild members sometimes had exemptions from some taxes. The hand-bow guilds usually had Saint Sebastian for a patron and the crossbow guilds had Saint George. Though most of the members were well-to-do townsmen, the guilds also included some members of the gentry and nobles as well.

A register for the Saint George confraternity begins in 1468, but it rarely reveals the occupations of the persons it lists, though it places members under such general categories as “clerics,” “patricians,” and “dukes, counts, knights, and nobles.”⁴¹

The Burgundian lords’ select patronage of the archers and crossbowmen indicates the extent to which their confraternities were social bodies of privileged patricians, rich guildsmen, and merchants; ...⁴²

The archers and crossbowmen were privileged men and skilled fighters with both cultural and political significance in their cities.⁴³

Handbow guilds were given a few privileges by municipal councils, but special honours were reserved for the guilds of the “Noble Footbow”, such as a place of honour in processions and high offices in towns and boroughs. It may be said, that the members of the handbow guilds represented the “Middle Class” citizens, whereas the St. George’s footbow guilds were the elite groups of municipal patricians.

Even so, a man had to have a certain standing to belong to a handbow guild, because the so-called “have-nots” (havelozen) were not given any weapons. ... Although not much is known about the handbow shooters, it can be presumed that, in the 15th century, they played an important part now and then as light infantry in defense and sorties.⁴⁴

6: Robert the Bruce and William Wallace

Two of Scotland's greatest heroes, King Robert the Bruce and Sir William Wallace were noted for their skill with the bow in battle.

Bruce was approached by three Scots who intended to ambush and slay him.

When he saw the three approaching, he said to his page, as Barbour relates: 'What weapon do you have, for I fear that these men wish to kill us?' 'I have but a bow and arrow.' 'Then give them to me quickly and stand far back, for if I win you shall have weapons enough, but if I die make haste away.' As the three men approached, the father with a sword in his hand, one son with a sword and an axe and one with a sword and a spear, Bruce called on them to halt but they still advanced saying that they had come to help him with fresh news of the English. Bruce raised his bow and when they did not stop let fly with an arrow that pierced the father through the eye with such force that he fell backward. When the elder son saw his father fall he sprang at Bruce with his axe but Bruce, who wherever he went carried his great sword hanging from his neck, had it ready drawn and cut him down with a single blow. He then turned on the younger son who was running at him with a spear, sliced off its point and dispatched him before he could draw his sword.⁴⁵

The English in one of their many invasions of Scotland, this under the Earl of Pembroke, had located Bruce's camp at the head of Glen Trool. He had a select force of 1,500 knights, which he had dismount, so they could approach Bruce's camp unseen through the woods.

However, a female spy that had been sent by Pembroke to count their numbers warned Bruce of their approach. Bruce being forewarned, was ready for them. Then the English knights fled back to their camp.

Hastily he armed and summoned his 300 men. They hardly formed up when the English broke out of the nearby wood. Bruce, seizing a bow and arrow from an archer by his side, let loose the shaft at the enemy leader, transfixing him through the throat. His followers, already aghast at finding the Scots armed and waiting for them instead of unaware in their camp, came to an abrupt halt.⁴⁶

William Wallace's personal seal, which was attached to the Lubeck letter sent by him in 1296 after the battle of Stirling Bridge, shows a rampant Scottish lion on the front and on the back a bow with a nocked arrow. ⁴⁷

William Wallace in 1296 had a skirmish in Shortwood Forest with English troops under Sir John Butler. Wallace had killed Sir James Butler, Sir John's father. Wallace had twenty archers to the one hundred and forty of the English.

Wallace carried a bold and fierce shield. He also bore a large and well-equipped bow as well as arrows that were long and sharp. There was no man who could draw Wallace's bow. Wallace was very strong and with this trusty gear boldly shot among those men of war. He drew a barbed-headed arrow up to the hook and slew the foremost son with one shot. ⁴⁸

The English forces drove Wallace and his men into a retreat.

A wounded archer lay in wait for Wallace at an opening where he frequently went. At him he drew a sure and painful shot under the chin through a collar of steel on the left side and hurt Wallace's neck somewhat. Wallace was astonished but not greatly aghast; he went out from his men who followed him quickly. In turning he shot the English archer in the neck so that the bone split asunder. ⁴⁹

7: The Scots Guard of Archers

The Scots Guard was a famous and elite fighting force renowned throughout Europe. It served the kings of France for about 400 years, possibly longer. The history of this military regiment and its link to the kings of France dates back to perhaps 882 AD, when a group of Scottish "gentlemen" formed a guard for Charles III of France; some historical references indicate this tradition dating as far back as King Charlemagne. This military exchange of troops was part of the "Auld Alliance" and continued through the Jacobite rebellions. ⁵⁰

Many of the Scots Archers served as personal body guard (Gardes de la Manche) to the king of France in close attendance on him, twenty-four hours a day. They also fought as his personal guard in battle.

In his introduction to The Scots Men-At-Arms and Life Guards in France, William Forbes comments on the social standing of the forces sent to France.

The documents here introduced illustrate the diplomatic negotiations between Scotland and France in 1418 and the following years, which ended in the landing of Scottish troops in France, and prove that this intervention was effected on a larger scale than has been supposed by our historians; while a glance at the "Muster Rolls" will show that the contingents sent to France were composed of the flower of Scottish families.⁵¹

The men-at-arms were always of good lineage, as Chevalier Bayard affirmed to the Emperor Maximilian at the siege of Padua, which that sovereign and the French were then attacking. Maximilian proposed to the French commander to let his men-at-arms co-operate with the German lansquenets. Bayard objected to the proposal, inasmuch as no one could serve in the royal ordnance companies without being well born. "If," said he, "the Emperor wished the men-at-arms of the ordnance companies to assault the town, let them fight by the side of their equals, and not with the lansquenets."

Marshal de Montluc, in his Commentaries, says that he served his first campaign as archer in the company of men-at-arms commanded by Marshal de Foix, and that many of the nobility served as archers. We see, moreover, by several ancient muster rolls, that among the archers serving with the men-at-arms there were many of gentle blood, and by a decree issued in 1575, Henry III ordered that all the archers should be of noble family."⁵²

Such adult but undubbed noblemen were known at first by a variety of titles, including *valet* and *damoisel* (later *damoiseau*. Occitan *donse*). In northern regions, all other titles were entirely replaced ca. 1250 by *escuier*, which gave rise to the English equivalent "esquire" and its shortened form "squire" by 1300, a substantial majority of the male members of the knightly nobility of France never received knight-

hood, and, according to region, *valet*, *damoiseau*, or *escuier* had come to be used by these men as a title of nobiliary rank on the model of chevalier, in the form N de X, *valet/damoiseau/escuier*. At first, these three equivalent titles designated the lowest grade of the nobility, below that of simple knight,⁵³

With the exception of the period around 1420, there was no representative of the titled nobility (dukes, earls, etc.); even knights are the exception. On the other hand, the all-encompassing term esquire occurs frequently in our source materials in the context of men-at-arms or even ordinary archers.⁵⁴

The Guard had a mixture of longbows and crossbows until handguns replaced the crossbows.

Until 1455, the Scots Guard contained a certain number of crossbowmen, called “Cranequiniers”. The “Cranequin” was an improved crossbow. Charles VII prided himself on his dexterity in its use, and always had one carried at his side when in the field.⁵⁵

8: Spanish Crossbowmen

The Continental crossbow had become such a costly weapon and one of such importance in warfare that in Spain, as early as the close of the fourteenth century, the crossbowman was even granted the rank of knight. The position of “Master of the Crossbowmen” was one of great honor in France, Italy and Spain, and was only bestowed on persons of high consequence and title.⁵⁶

It has been remarked that shooting with the crossbow was more followed, brought to greater perfection, and attended with higher honours in Spain, than in any other European country. In the time James I, King of Aragon early in the thirteenth century, the cross-bows were so elaborate and costly the crossbow men were considered to be on a level in rank with knights, and it was enacted that “no knight’s son who is not a knight or a cross-bow man shall sit at table with knights or their ladies.” In the time of Henry V of England, they were sometimes carried by sons of knights themselves.⁵⁷

In the kingdom of Navarre in northern Spain in the thirteenth century, “noble privileges” were granted to a company of crossbowmen for their defense of their town.

In the summer of 1280, after a serious dispute between the towns of Alfaro and Corella (regarding water sharing of the Alhama River), Corella residents while harvesting their fields, being afraid of the Alfarians, were protected by at least thirty-five crossbowmen. They were paid for serving thirty days the amount of 2093 pounds. That service was very appreciated, and distinguished with tax exemptions and even with noble privileges.⁵⁸

The “Noble Company of Knights Arballisters of Saint Philip and Saint James” was created in Spain in the fourteenth century for defending the fortress of Alfaro and the courts of Castilla officially recognized their privileges.

The crossbowmen were noblemen and were married to the same quality women. In any other case the crossbowman was immediately fired out of the Noble Company. To belong to the Noble Company was proof of nobility. All knights were obligated to assist in the corporate and municipal ceremonies and over to guard the communal fields.⁵⁹

In 1571, Cardinal Alessandrino, nephew of Pope Pius V, was on a special mission to Spain and King Phillip II on behalf of the Pope. Don John of Austria met him outside of Madrid before meeting with the king.

Don John meanwhile proceeded to the palace, where he mounted his horse and joined the King, who was setting forth, with his hundred noble archers and German and Spanish guards, to meet the Legate.⁶⁰

One of Hernando Cortes’s men in the conquest of Mexico was Diego de Ordas. At one time, he was the major domo and steward for Don Diego Velazquez, governor of Cuba. The conquistador Bernal Diaz del Castillo mentions him in his memoirs. Cortez and his men were preparing for a battle with the Indians. Castillo mentions those who were fighting on horseback, who would be leading them, and who would command the artillery and the remaining troops.

Then comes Cortes, who placed himself at their head. Mesa had charge of the artillery, while the rest of our men were commanded by Diego de Ordas, who though he knew nothing of the cavalry, excelled as a crossbow-man and musketeer.”⁶¹

9: Venetian noble archers

Venice, like many medieval cities, maintained a militia for defense of the city. The government of Venice also needed protection for their shipping fleet, which carried the trade that was the lifeblood of the city. The government required that each galley carried crossbowmen.

In 1301 the government instructed that each galley carry 30 such crossbowmen, who would also row on the inner benches. Shooting practice was compulsory in Venice, citizens training at the butts in groups of 12. They also competed in three annual competitions where the government offered rich prizes: ... One group of crossbow men known as the “noble bowmen” were recruited from the aristocracy and served aboard both war galleys and armed merchantmen from the late 14th century onwards, having the privilege of living in the captain’s cabin. Such service could also be the first step in a military or political career.⁶²

The first proposal made in the Grand Council for the appointment of young Venetian patricians as arbalast officers on board the merchant galley dates from 26 February 1375.⁶³

The 150 “noble Bowmen” were selected from a larger pool of noble crossbowmen and had to prove their skill with the crossbow.

Efforts were made to ensure that the 150 nobles who went each year as archers on the galleys were suitably skilled in the use of the crossbow.⁶⁴

A tradition of individual training for defense of the state and its fleets was deeply ingrained in Venetians. All male citizens had been expected to practice with the crossbow since the thirteenth century.

Targets were regularly set up in many of the main campi for the practice under the tuition of master archers, and regular competitions were held on the Lido to stimulate enthusiasm and confirm skills.⁶⁵

All young men without distinction of caste were required to keep themselves in practice, and were eligible for appointment to a particular ship after attaining the age of eighteen. Targets were established on the Lido, and at various other places in Venice, and young men were expected to go there once a week if they belonged to the better classes, and on all great holidays if they were of poorer condition. Each armed galley or other ship carried a certain proportion of patriicians among the Crossbowmen,⁶⁶

In the major naval battle of Lepanto against the Turks in 1571, even old age (75) did not keep a Venetian from using his crossbow.

The Venetian captain general Sebastiano Venier fought in support of Don John at the center of the line. Already in his seventies, Venier fired bolt after bolt from his crossbow (which a soldier standing by had to crank into the cocked position, since Venier was no longer strong enough to do it).⁶⁷

10: Archers of the Hundred Years War

The Hundred Years War saw mounted archers as of higher social status than in earlier times. To be able to provide the required arms, armor, and a horse required a higher income.

War could be a means for rapid social advancement, and just as some of the minor gentry enriched and ennobled themselves by distinguished service in the French wars, so archers of yeoman status might themselves gain preferment through military service and its perquisites. As Sir Thomas Gray noted in his *Scalacronica*, by the 1350s there were many ‘young fellows who hitherto had been of small account, who became exceeding rich and skilful in this war.... Many of them beginning as archers and then becoming knights, some captains’. It was reputed that Sir John Hawkwood and Sir Robert Knollys began their military careers as archers.⁶⁸

.... Nor was the bow always the weapon of yeoman and commoners alone. An ordinance of 1425 issued by Jean, fifth Duke of Brittany, ordered that “.... nobles of less stature are to furnish themselves with the habiliments of archers in brigandines, if they know how to use the bow, otherwise they are to be furnished with good guisarmes and good salades and leg harness and each have a coustilleur and two good horses.”⁶⁹

Many of the infantry archers in Edward I’s armies had been drawn from the poorer sort, yet the mounted archers of Edward III’s armies were increasingly raised from the more prosperous yeoman classes. The social category covered by the term yeoman was a broad one, but usually denoted a reasonably well-to-do freeholder or tenant, who might still cultivate his own land, and was distinct from poorer husbandmen and laborers, and still more so from unfree villains and bondmen. It was such men, some of whom might possess considerable standing in local society, who now served as mounted archers, drawing the considerable pay of 6d a day double that of a foot-archer. A writ of arms issued by the king in October 1344 or January 1345 stated that all men with £5 of land were to be ranked as mounted archers, those owning £10 as hobelars with more extensive equipment, and those owning land valued at over £25 as men-at-arms.⁷⁰

Richard II’s Ordinances of War of 1385 provide a particularly graphic indication of the greater social status of the mounted archer and the perceived gulf between him and the archer on foot. If a man-at-arms or mounted archer in the host raised the unauthorized cry to mount or any other ‘escry’ by which the cohesion of the army could be put at risk, he was to forfeit his best horse – if he was a foot-archer or a valet he was to lose his right ear. No doubt precisely because of the mixed backgrounds, mounted archers thus now enjoyed the exemption from mutilation shared by gentlemen.⁷¹

In Scotland under James the First in 1429:

...Parliament laid down that men worth £20 per annum, or holding £100 worth of goods, were to serve in the army as mounted men-at-arms, while those worth £10 were to have a helmet, gorget, breast-plate, rerebraces, vambraces and gloves of plate, together with leg ar-

mor – presumably to swell the ranks of the men-at-arms with well-equipped spearmen. Yeomen worth £20 were to have ‘a good doublet of defense, or a haubergeon, a war hat, with bow, sheaf, sword and buckler’ while those worth £10 were to be armed with bows, arrows, sword, buckler and knife, or, if not archers were to have an axe or a ‘groggit [sharp-pointed] staff’. The social status of archers was thus far higher than it had been in King Robert’s 1318 assize of arms, when qualification for this weapon was merely the possession of a cow; as in England, archers were now men of some substance.⁷²

In addition, in France, under Charles VII there was the ordinance of 1448:

.... That in time of war all parishes in the kingdom were to provide archers or crossbowmen in the ratio of one archer from every 120, 80 or 50 hearths. The archer was to be well equipped with ‘a sallet, dagger, sword, bow, sheaf, jack and a short coat of mail’. These men were to be of some standing, to be selected by the regional royal officials (*prévôts*) ‘from among the better endowed and more prosperous as may be found in each parish’.... In return, the bowmen gained freedom from the majority of taxation, and were not obligated to provide billeting for troops or to perform guard duty – hence the name Franc-archer (‘free-archer’).⁷³

11: The Ban and Arrière-Ban in France

The Ban and Arrière-Ban were a summons from the king of France to his vassals and to their vassals as well, to serve in his army, or for those vassals to send warriors to serve in his army. The Ban was for those in direct fealty to the king. The Arrière-Ban was for those in indirect fealty. Some of the lists of those summoned on various occasions still survive. The information in the lists varies. Along with their names and information on their arms and armor, their rank or status is sometimes noted. The lists seem to be actual reports of who showed up with what gear.

What is pertinent to this study is the rank of those who attended with bows. In a work by Gilles André de La Roque, Lord of La Lontière, the section on "Traité du Ban & Arrière-Ban" has lists starting in 1214 for some of the musters and those summoned to them for several regions. These lists were

transcribed from the originals. Those summoned were to appear at the muster with required arms and armor or to send an acceptable substitute for themselves.

In a summons from King Louis XI from December 1470, we have the following information on the 427 persons listed. Twenty of them are listed as archers. Five examples follow.

Here follows the account of the muster of the Nobles and noble tenants from the Bailiwicks of Caux and Gyfors, and the form of the outfits, in which the under-mentioned mustered.

Martin Ponchin armed with brigandine, sallet, crossbow, and with him a Page.

Henry Duras armed with brigandine, sallet, bow and quiver, with him a Page.

Guillaume de Pelletot armed with brigandine, bow and quiver, with him a Page with two horses.

Pierre de Foville armed with brigandine, sallet, bow and quiver

Regnault de Baudrebosc armed with brigandine, sallet, bow and quiver.⁷⁴

Then in a summons from King Henry II in May of 1557 held at Poitiers, we have a list of two hundred and thirty-three nobles who were exempted from the summons, and of those exempted, twenty-seven nobles were archers. Five examples follow.

This is the list of the Chevaux Legiers [a body of cavalry guarding the King], retained and received at the general muster of the Ban and Arrière-Ban of this Region of Poitou....

Here is the list of the Nobles who claim exemption from the Ban and Arrière-Ban of this Region of Poitou....

Micheau Geoffroy, Lord de Bouchaulx, was declared to be exempt, because he is Archer of the Company of the Lord de Pansac.

Pierre de Tryom Squire, Lord de la Tallonniere, was declared to be exempt, because he is in the service of Reverend the Abbé de Cormery, and he is Archer in the Company of the Lord Duke de Lorraine.

Loys de Charlanes Squire, was declared to be exempt, because he is Archer of the French Bodyguard [of the king] under the command of the Lord de Chavigny.

Jehan Hesse Squire, Lord de Brillac, was declared to be exempt, because he is Archer of the Morte-payé [Garrison] in the City and Fortress of Blaye, under the command of Gaspart de Polignac.

Leon Chabot Squire, Lord de Chasteau and de Puy [and de] Randan, was declared to be exempt, because he is Archer of the Company of Milord the Prince de la Roche-sur-Yon.⁷⁵

Then we have the Muster of the Bishopric of Cornouailles in September of 1481. Of the six hundred and thirty-seven nobles on the list, three hundred and seventy-four came with missile weapons. There were 352 with hand-bow, 9 with crossbow, 12 with javelins and 1 with a firearm. About 59 percent had missile weapons. Five examples follow.

The present book is the record and report of the general muster of the men at arms, of archers and crossbowmen and other men of war, nobles and ennobled [created nobles], and other tenants of fiefs and noble inheritances and armed subjects of the bishopric of Cornouailles....⁷⁶

The nobles of [the parish of] Pestivien.

Henry Floch, archer in brigandine.

Jehan Mengoret, archer in brigandine.

Jacques de Botilyau, archer in brigandine, ordered [to bring] another archer in his company.

The nobles of [the parish of] Plusquellec.

Pierre de la Boessiere, [represented] by his brother Charles, cross-bowman in brigandine.

Henry de la Boessiere, for himself and his mother Jehanne de Beau-cour, archer in brigandine. ⁷⁷

In 1480 in Brittany at Saint-Brieuc seventy-three nobles were summoned. Of these seventy-three nobles: Three appeared as men at arms. Twenty appeared with one variety or another of polearm. Twenty-nine appeared as archers. One appeared as a crossbowman. Nine were excused (typically they already served in a military unit). Nine failed to show up. Of the fifty-three that appeared, thirty of them were bowmen. ⁷⁸

In 1480, near St. Malo in Normandy, fifty-eight nobles were summoned. Of those that appeared: Two appeared as men at arms. Eighteen appeared with one variety or another of polearm. One appeared with his brigandine only. One appeared with no armour. Sixteen appeared as archers. One was excused. Sixteen failed to show up. Three were unspecified. Of the thirty-six that showed up with weapons, sixteen were archers. ⁷⁹

At a muster at Tréguier in 1503, twenty-eight nobles were commanded to show up at the next summons equipped with bow and quiver. ⁸⁰

The translation of these sources was done by Master Thorvald Grimsson of An Tir (James Prescott). His essay on this subject, “French Noble Archers: from the lists of those appearing in response to royal summons” will be found on the web shortly.

12: Polish Cavalry

Most nobles in Eastern Europe preferred to fight in battle as cavalry rather than on foot. The nobles of Poland, *Szlachta*, were no exception to this. Moreover, they often used the bow on horseback.

Since the end of the 10th c., we can learn about the realm of the Piast dynasty from written records. German, Czech, Russian, and even Arab sources give us a lot of information about the organization and weapons of the Polish army. A bow was one of the basic harassing weapons used by foot archers and undoubtedly served as a projectile weapon of the cavalry.⁸¹

Their heavy cavalry, the Husaria, which came from their wealthier higher nobility, along with their heavy armor and several other weapons carried bows even into the age of handguns.

The pride and glory of the Polish cavalry, its mailed fist, was the Husaria, the winged cavalry. This operated in regiments of about three hundred men highly skilled and armed to the teeth. The companions of the front rank carried an astonishing lance of up to twenty feet in length, which outreached infantry pikes, allowing the Husaria to cut straight through a square. Having planted his lance in the chest of an enemy pikeman, the companion then drew either his saber or another weapon peculiar to the Poles, a rapier with a six-foot blade which doubled as a short lance. Each companion also carried a pair of pistols, a short carbine; a bow and arrows; and a variety of other weapons, The bow they carried was the small, curved eastern type, more quick-firing than any musket, accurate at longer ranges and easier to fire from a moving horse.⁸²

Their Medium cavalry, the Pancerni, which came from their middle to lower level nobility, wore mainly mail and used both sword and bow.

They were called *Pancerni* and resembled heavily armed mounted Turkish *spaltis* wearing mail shirts and mail caps, carrying *kalkans* (circular shields woven of fig wands and silk) and fighting with short lances and with sabers but at the same time armed with bows and light firearms.

Their Light Cavalry came from the “Grey Nobility” or knights of little or no wealth. For them, their bow was a primary weapon.⁸³

There were also light horse regiments akin to Walachian mounted troops, without armor or shields but carrying sabers, lances, and bows.

Whether you were Husaria, Pancerni or Light, depended upon your wealth and what gear you could afford.

In the Polish nobility, all knights (szlachta) were equal, all nobles were knights, and all knights were noble.

A Polish knight may have had vast estates and carried his sword on a jewel encrusted belt, but he was only the equal of the poor knight who had his sword tied to his waist with a piece of rope and owned a few acres.⁸⁵

13: Byzantine Warrior Saints

In the book, *A Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour*, there is a series of illustrations (IX-14 to IX-43) showing fully armed and armored Byzantine and Eastern Mediterranean warrior saints. Many of them also carry a bow and quiver or a crossbow in addition to their sword or spear. It would appear that the Byzantines felt that the bow and crossbow were appropriate weapons for some warriors (in these cases warriors who became saints) and not just for the lower classes. There are some examples of Serbian illustrations on the web at:

http://www.atarn.org/letters/ltr_jun04.htm .

14: Company of Liege Bowmen of the Queen

The royal Artillery Company of London owed its origin to a number of noblemen of the court who formed themselves into a body-guard for the protection of Queen Elizabeth subsequent to the defeat of the Spanish Armada. These elite bowmen feared that the king of Spain would, out of revenge, send an emissary to attempt the life of the Queen. They were styled the Companie of Liege Bow-men of the Queene, and Dudley, Earl of Leicester, was their captain. This exclusive corps, which had many privileges, was distinguished by the splendour of its uniform and accoutrements.⁸⁶

15: Conclusion

Professional warriors, be they nobles, knights or men-at-arms, used the weapons appropriate to the situation. If you are attacking a castle, you do not charge it on horseback with lance and shield (despite what you may have seen in the movies). If you are defending a castle, you use weapons that let you take out the attackers before they are climbing over your battlements. When they are on your walls, you use your sword and shield. In ship-to-ship combat, you shoot the warriors on the other ship before they board and you have to draw your sword. If it is a field battle, then you may make use of the power of a heavy cavalry charge, in full armor with lance, sword, shield and trained warhorse. Or if engaged in close on foot, you make full use of your sword, axe, mace, etc. and your armor and shield.

If you are dealing with nomadic horse archers, you adapt and learn to use the bow from horseback to defeat them. You still used your other weapons as well, but when appropriate you used the bow.

Nobility of all degrees used archery in the hunt and for sport. Therefore, if they decided to use it in battle, they already knew how to shoot.

Although you may find instances of nobles disapproving of using the bow in battle, this was by no means a universal belief.

There are many examples of Kings and other greater nobles as well as knights using archery in battle. In the Scandinavian kingdoms, all classes used war archery. There are examples of archery guilds with nobles, both greater and lesser, and gentry practicing to defend their cities and ships or go into battle for their overlord. Re-

cords show that some knightly orders used and practiced archery for battle. There were even knightly orders for crossbowmen in Spain. The mounted yeomen archers of the Hundred Years War were of higher social status in their community than those of earlier years. Scottish gentry served with bows in France in battle and as bodyguards to the king. In France, after having learned the value of the bow from fighting the English, some of the lesser nobility showed up to musters with bow and arrows. In Poland the heavy, medium and light cavalry used the bow. Paintings show Byzantine warrior saints carrying bows. There were even great English noblemen willing to defend their queen with their bows.

All of this makes it extremely unlikely that only peasants and serfs ever used archery in war, and that nobles never did.

NOTES

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