

ARQUEBUS (also called harquebus, hackbut, &c.), a firearm of the 16th century, the immediate predecessor of the musket. The word itself is certainly to be derived from the German *Hakenbüchse* (mod. *Hakenbüchse*, cf. Eng. *hackbut* and *hackbush*), "hook gun." The "hook" is often supposed to refer to the bent shape of the butt, which differentiated it from the straight-stocked hand gun, but it has also been suggested that the original arquebus had a metal hook near the muzzle, which was used to grip the wall (or other fixed object) so as to steady the aim and take up the force of recoil, that from this II. 21 the name *Hakenbüchse* spread till it became the generic name for small arms, and that the original form of the weapon then took the name of *arquebus a croc*. The French form *arquebuse* and Italian *arcobugio*, *archibugio*, often and wrongly supposed to indicate the hackbut's affinity with the crossbow ("hollow bow" or "mouthed bow"), are popular corruptions, the Italian being apparently the earlier of the two and supplanting the first and purest French form *haquebut*. Previous to the French wars in Italy, hand-gun men and even arbalisters seem to have been called arquebusiers, but in the course of these wars the arquebus or hackbut came into prominence as a distinct type of weapon. The Spanish arquebusiers, who used it with the greatest effect in the Italian wars, notably at Bicocca (1522) and Pavia (1525), are the originators of modern infantry fire action. Filippo Strozzi made many improvements in the arquebus about 1530, and his weapons were effective up to four and five hundred paces. He also standardized the calibres of the arquebuses of the French army, and from this characteristic feature of the improved weapon arose the English term "caliver." In the latter part of the 16th century (c. 1570) the arquebus began to be displaced by the musket.

As low-velocity firearms, they were used against enemies that were often partially or fully protected by steel-plate armour. Plate armour was standard in European combat from about 1400 until the middle of the 17th century. This was essentially the era of the arquebus. Good suits of plate would usually stop an arquebus ball at long range. It was a common practice to "proof" (test) armour by firing a pistol or arquebus at a new breastplate. The small dent would be circled by engraving, to call attention to it. However, at close range, it was possible to pierce even the armor of knights and other heavy cavalry. This led to changes in plate design like three-quarter plate and finally the retirement of plate armor altogether.

By 1553, there were more guns per capita in Japan than in any other country^[4]. In the Battle of Nagashino in 1575, Lord Oda Nobunaga placed three lines of ashigaru armed with these weapons behind wooden palisades and prepared for the cavalry charge of his opponent. The three-line method allowed two lines to reload while the other would fire. Such tactics allowed a balance of mass firepower to compensate for poor accuracy with a reasonable rate of fire. In 1600, the Japanese guns were the best of the world^[4]. However, the use of arquebuses and other firearms was halted in Japan during and until the end of the Tokugawa shogunate by decree of the shogun. It is one of the most effective examples of disarmament and voluntary renunciation of technology.