



Before the era of Egypt's "New Kingdom," the Egyptian army had a principal weapon: the bow and arrow. During the "New Kingdom," the bow and arrow remained important but new models gave the army better tools.

With the Hyksos composite bow—made of wood, horn and sinews—Egypt's military men were able to better attack from a distance. Coupling those weapons with war chariots, they could also attack more quickly.

What did New-Kingdom infantrymen do when their arrows were gone? They turned to other weapons (such as spears, axes and daggers). They also began to use scimitars, like the weapon depicted in this image.

History tells us that the scimitar did not originate in Egypt. Instead, it came to Egypt via Syria where a Pharaoh known as Tuthmosis III first used it. Surviving New-Kingdom artwork includes depictions of Egyptian gods giving the Pharaoh this weapon. It wasn't long before the scimitar became a key part of the infantry's relied-upon equipment.

Alexander the Great also used scimitars during the battle at the Hydaspes River (then part of India, now part of Pakistan and known as the Jhelum) during July of 326. Facing around 200 elephants, who could effectively charge Alexander's men, 3,000 Shield-Bearer veterans used their scimitars to slash-at the elephants' trunks.

Ever the effective leader, Alexander had studied the potential weaknesses of elephants-in-battle after seeing them, for the first time, at Gaugamela. He equipped his men accordingly. Robin Lane Fox describes what happened at the Hydaspes:

While archers and Agrianian javelin-men aimed at the mahouts [elephant riders] themselves, the 3,000 veterans of the Shield Bearers swung axes at the elephants' legs and daringly slashed at their trunks with curved scimitars. Alexander knew the weak points of an elephant and had equipped his men accordingly. (Alexander the Great, by Robin Lane Fox, at pages 359-360.)

Like so many other Alexander-opponents, the Hydaspes defenders lost the battle.

Credits:

Image of a scimitar, and the information on which this description is based, is online via [TourEgypt.net](http://www.touregypt.net).

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Scimitars in Battle

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