

II.

ON THE SCYTHIAN BOWS, AND BOWS OF THE ANCIENTS, COMPARED WITH THOSE OF INDIA. BY GEORGE BUIST, LL.D., &c.

The present bow of Affghanistan, the Punjaub, and Northern India, is made, Dr Buist said, of stripes of green bamboo and buffalo horns cemented by glue, tightly bound around with muslin, and lacquered, gilt, and varnished. The form they present is very elegant when bent; when unstrung, they twist around in the opposite direction altogether, their curvature losing all resemblance to that which it usually possesses. They are, in a great measure, destroyed by wet weather; and when softened by moisture, are apt to be eaten by rats or other vermin.

Dr Buist alluded to the article "Bow," in the latest edition of the Encyclo-
VOL. I. PART III. q

pædia Britannica, noticing the designations and peculiarities of the bows of the Greeks and of the Scythians, and made some remarks as to its supposed origin or invention, &c. He said it was very clear the writer in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* took his notions from the bows used in England, made of a single piece of even-grained lancewood, or of a straight yew. A bow of this kind, when bent, could only assume the form of a simple and regular curve, approaching to the arch of a circle. The bows of India were precisely of the form of those represented on Trajan's Pillar, as used by the Romans on their invasion of England, and so were much the greater part of those represented on the Greek and Roman sculptures. The letter Σ, as representing the ancient letter C, to which the writer referred as being the form of the Scythian bow, was not of semicircular form like the letter C, as he supposed it to be, till nearly the commencement of the fourth century of our era. The Cadmean sigma was almost exactly the form of the Scythian bow, or as nearly so as the combination of four straight lines into a zigzag could resemble a double curve. With the exception of the Pelasgean sigma, which was of the form of the common S reversed (S), and the Delian, which was similar to it, but direct, in the whole of the ten alphabets given by Fosbroke,¹ the sigma was of the shape in which the capital letter is at present always written and printed.

He referred at length to the excellent description of the Scythian and Parthian bows, given by Ammianus Marcellinus, as quoted by Fosbroke.² It is interesting to observe, that this exactly corresponds with the bows now in use amongst the Sikhs, Affghans, and Persians. They measure, when strung, four feet from tip to tip, and are probably uniform in length and in thickness; they vary from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in circumference in the middle; and weigh from a pound to twenty ounces; the arrow weighs about an ounce. The string is of catgut. The arrow is made of young bamboo; it has three feathers at the upper extremity, and the notch is protected, and prevented from splitting, by a piece of wood inserted and made fast by a thread. The whole is a singularly warlike and elegant implement. It discharges the arrow very easily, and will carry 200 yards. The head of the arrow is armed by an iron point, sometimes square, sometimes round. Bows of this sort sell for from one to two rupees (2s. to 4s.); their arrows are from two to four annas (3d. to 6d.) each. It is perfectly convenient for use on horseback, and is commonly represented in the hands of the Centaur turning round and shooting on its enemies as it retired. It is the same in all likelihood as that which made the Parthians of old so dangerous on their retreat.

Dr Buist stated, that some writers, as in the article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, before alluded to, had erred in supposing that the epithet, *Αεγυροστος*,

¹ *Encyclopædia of Antiquities*, vol. ii. p. 355.

² *Ibid.* p. 611.

bestowed on Apollo, referred to metallic ornaments of gold or silver on the bow, which would interfere with its elasticity; but he believed that merely gilding, lacquering, or ornamenting with foil, was what it referred to, a style of ornament also still in use in the bows of India; and this explanation exactly corresponded with the descriptions of the ancient writers, and would in no way interfere with the best construction of the bow itself. No wonder a bow of this peculiar form should, in every way, be a favourite with people like the Greeks, remarkable for their perception of what was exquisite in regard to symmetry and beauty. Besides its excellencies in the way already mentioned, each of its two extremities represented the sigma, or double curve of beauty, so constantly recurring in all the ornaments of their architecture, the grace of which is obvious to every eye. A long straight piece of the male or solid bamboo forms the most common bow of India, and throws an arrow with prodigious force. The robbers of the upper country lie nearly flat on their backs, which admits of their concealing themselves from their victims, and shoot from off their right foot with prodigious force and wonderful precision. The old English bow was yew, the modern one is of lancewood, both about six feet in length; the arrows varying from two to three in length. The English cloth-yard-shaft, which the bowman could draw to its stretch, must have been of not very frequent use; this would bend a bow into a curve greater than a semicircle. The oldest bows represented on the Saxon illuminations are all nearly of the simplest form. The Egyptian bows represented in Wilkinson's drawings seem all about four feet in length; they are obviously made of a single piece of wood gradually thinned away at both extremities. The bows represented on the Nimroud Marbles are, like the English and Egyptian, perfectly plain; they are from three to four feet in length, those used in chariots being the shortest. They are sometimes represented as drawn nearly into a semicircle.