

Traditional Archery from Six Continents: The Charles E. Grayson Collection.
Charles E. Grayson, Mary French, and Michael J. O'Brien. Columbia, MO:
University of Missouri Press, 2007. 256 pp.*

Reviewed by Alison Petch

The University of Missouri Museum of Anthropology is the home of the Charles E. Grayson Archery Collection, which it considers to be “one of the largest and most comprehensive assemblages of archery-related material in the world” (p. vii). Grayson was born in 1910 in Iowa and his interest in archery began at the age of nine when his family moved to California. He later worked as a radiologist but continued his interest, and collecting, in archery throughout his long life (he is now over 97 years of age). Grayson was a keen archer himself, winning many medals in competition. In short, he was the very definition of a toxophilite.

Grayson began donating material to the museum in the early 1990s and this practice continues until today. When the book was written there were more than five thousand pieces of archery-related equipment and memorabilia from various cultures and time periods in the museum’s collections. The book makes it clear that Grayson obtained the majority of these artifacts from second or third-hand (that is, from dealers, friends and fellow collectors) rather than from the original owners or archers.

Some three hundred of Grayson’s collections are described in the book. The items include bows, arrows, quivers, thumb rings and books. They are all organized by region of the world; East Asia, what the book describes as the “Islamic Crescent,” “tribal” (*sic*) Asia and Oceania, Africa, the Americas and finally Europe. Each section is preceded by a short essay that positions the artifact in its historical, cultural, and technological context. Each object is described fully, but it is apparent that many of them were poorly documented because assignments of time period or culture of origin had often to be gauged by detailed analysis and research.

The book is lavishly illustrated and these may prove almost as useful to the reader as the text itself. The photographs were taken by Daniel Glover who works at the museum. In general most artifacts are shown both in full and in close-up detail. This will allow close comparison with the artifacts in one’s own collections. Some contextual images are also included, showing for example a “Qing archer ca. 1900, with typical Manchu equipment” (p. 12).

The book begins with an overview of “traditional” archery. This gives a good introduction to the uses of bows and arrows as hunting tools and weapons, their beginnings (poorly documented because of the perishable nature of the materials they were made from) and developmental history. The introduction also contains a guide to archery terminology and techniques that are very clearly explained, this would be useful for anyone who is preparing an archery display at their museum but does not have expert knowledge of all types of bows and arrows. The bibliography will also prove useful in this regard as it includes both early ethnographic accounts, such as one by the first Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum (Henry

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Balfour) and more recent analyses, though it is not comprehensive as several very relevant UK-published texts are omitted, for example.

The organization of the book shows the global nature of the collection. In most cases the authors have chosen a wide range of items from the region to show the different styles associated with different countries or peoples. In the case of Europe, however, it is pleasing, to this English author at least, to see how dominated that section of the collection is by English items, indeed the introductory essay also concentrates on these. The bow and arrow was a key weapon in the history of England, supposedly (and famously) responsible for the defeat of the French at Agincourt in 1415. In the 19th century a new interest in sporting (or hobby) archery grew up and many examples of this type of weapon are included.

Works such as this are excellent reference and research tools. It is often hard to find information about comparable artifacts when documenting or preparing a global museum collection for display, this will prove a useful resource for anyone preparing an archery display. The Pitt Rivers Museum has some 16,308 archery related items in its own collections from all over the world and all time periods. Its archery displays in the Upper Gallery were opened in the early 1990s and I am sure that the researcher, who worked on the information for that display, would have been delighted if this book had been available then. The University of Missouri Museum of Anthropology is lucky to have such a generous donor and such an excellent and wide-ranging set of archery artifacts.

Alison Petch is the Registrar at the Pitt Rivers Museum and is currently a researcher on the ESRC-funded "The Other Within: Analysing the English Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum" project. She is a regular contributor to a number of journals, including Museum Anthropology, Journal of Museum Ethnography and the Journal of the History of Collections.