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# Out of the Fiery Furnace: The Impact of Metals on the History of Mankind

*By Robert Raymond*



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By Robert Raymond

What were the discoveries that enabled mankind to leave the Stone Age and enter the Age of Metals? How did early man divine the existence of metals, locked up in the rocks? What was the first metal that he learned to use? Where and when did these momentous advances take place and how did metals change the way we live? Such questions embody one of the most extraordinary aspects of the rise of civilization. The human race has existed as a species for perhaps two or three million years, but we have known about metals for only the last ten thousand years. In that short span, however, we have become an utterly metal-dependent society. Our cities, transport, communications, entertainment - every aspect of our daily lives depends upon the copious use of gold, silver, iron and steel, copper, aluminum, lead, and a score of other metals. In these pages Robert Raymond follows the fascinating route from the earliest known metal smelting site, in the arid Sinai Desert of Israel; to the flood-plain of the Yellow River in China, to discover the secrets of the exquisite Shang bronzes, and to reveal newly-discovered iron-casting techniques which were 1500 years ahead of the West; to the stronghold of the Hittites in Anatolia, where the Iron Age may be said to have begun; to villages in India where metal-working techniques have hardly changed in 5000 years; to the misty peaks of the Andes in Peru, in the steps of the conquistadors' savage treasure-hunt for gold; to the gaunt ruins of the Industrial Revolution in England; to the world of mechanical robots in Japan; and to the desert sands of Alamogordo in the United States, where the unstable metal uranium was made to produce the world's first atomic explosion. Metals played a vital role in the rise and fall of empires, and the broad historical shifts of power and influence from one part of the world to another. Metals were a critical factor in all of mankind's most significant advances: the introduction of coinage, the invention of printing, the harnessing of steam, the discovery of electricity, the achievement of flight. And a small but critical group of radio-active metals, which are both consumed and created in that last and most fiery furnace, now present us with a deadly dilemma and an awesome choice. This is the story of man the metalsmith, through all his amazing creations, from the most sublime works of art to the most devastating of weapons, and of his raw materials, the metals which run like shining threads through the whole tapestry of human history. This book sets down the sweeping history of man's use of metals, as captured for the first time on television in the seven-part series narrated by Michael Chariton. It is written by Robert Raymond, the producer and principal author of that series.

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What were the discoveries that enabled mankind to leave the Stone Age and enter the Age of Metals? How did early man divine the existence of metals, locked up in the rocks? What was the first metal that he learned to use? Where and when did these momentous advances take place and how did metals change the way we live? Such questions embody one of the most extraordinary aspects of the rise of civilization. The human race has existed as a species for perhaps two or three million years, but we have known about metals for only the last ten thousand years. In that short span, however, we have become an utterly metal-dependent society. Our cities, transport, communications, entertainment - every aspect of our daily lives depends upon the copious use of gold, silver, iron and steel, copper, aluminum, lead, and a score of other metals. In these pages Robert Raymond follows the fascinating route from the earliest known metal smelting site, in the arid Sinai Desert of Israel; to the flood-plain of the Yellow River in China, to discover the secrets of the exquisite Shang bronzes, and to reveal newly-discovered iron-casting techniques which were 1500 years ahead of the West; to the stronghold of the Hittites in Anatolia, where the Iron Age may be said to have begun; to villages in India where metal-working techniques have hardly changed in 5000 years; to the misty peaks of the Andes in Peru, in the steps of the conquistadors' savage treasure-hunt for gold; to the gaunt ruins of the Industrial Revolution in England; to the world of mechanical robots in Japan; and to the desert sands of Alamogordo in the United States, where the unstable metal uranium was made to produce the world's first atomic explosion. Metals played a vital role in the rise and fall of empires, and the broad historical shifts of power and influence from one part of the world to another. Metals were a critical factor in all of mankind's most significant advances: the introduction of coinage, the invention of printing, the harnessing of steam, the discovery of electricity, the achievement of flight. And a small but critical group of radio-active metals, which are both consumed and created in that last and most fiery furnace, now present us with a deadly dilemma and an awesome choice. This is the story of man the metalsmith, through all his amazing creations, from the most sublime works of art to the most devastating of weapons, and of his raw materials, the metals which run like shining threads through the whole tapestry of human history. This book sets down the sweeping history of man's use of metals, as captured for the first time on television in the seven-part series narrated by Michael Chariton. It is written by Robert Raymond, the producer and principal author of that series.

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### **Editorial Review**

#### **About the Author**

Robert Raymond was educated in Australia and in England where he first worked as a journalist on Fleet Street, later covering the European theatre as a war correspondent. He started making films in Africa in the 1950s and documentaries for Australian television in the 1960s, later becoming an independent film producer. He has written several bestselling Australian books as well as the long-running newspaper strip feature Frontiers of Science which is syndicated internationally. Raymond lives in Sydney, Australia.

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