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Arms and Armor from Iran

The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period



RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND ANCIENT ERA

This book is the result of years of research in the field of Iranian arms and armor, illustrating for the first time a selected array of Iranian arms and armor from ten Iranian museums: the Military Museum Tehran, the Military Museum Shiraz, the Military Museum Bandar Anzali, the National Museum of Iran in Tehran, the Museum Reza Abbasi in Tehran, the Niavaran Palace in Tehran, the Melat Museum in Tehran, the Sabz Museum in Tehran, the Pars Museum in Shiraz, and the Naderi Museum in Mashad. One of the important features of these artifacts is that many bronze items come from controlled excavations, yet some are items confiscated from smugglers on illegal excavations. In addition, much of the swords, arms and armor have been handed down from one generation to the next and thus are in excellent condition. The book also contains some selected items from private collections in Europe and the USA. Each artifact is meticulously studied and cross referenced with other existing pieces. The basic tenet of the research is to examine the weapons within their cultural settings. The reader is introduced to the topic with a general overview of Iranian history with particular emphasis on Iranian military history. The research has been extensive with over 500 sources consulted. The sources are not only based on international publications on the development of arms and armor in Iran but also the research of Iranian scholars in the field of military history and arms and armor. Many secondary Iranian sources on art, history, and military history are also included as well as the primary period sources. Included is an overview of the development of copper and bronze weapons from northern, western, and southwestern parts of Iran, featuring pieces from Marlik, Amarlu, and Meshkinshahr. In addition to the pictures, many line drawings accompany the text, giving a comprehensive overview of the development of bronze weapons in Iran. After the intrusion of Aryan tribes into Iran, new types of weapons were introduced into the country. The book presents a number of archeological examples of weapons used by the Achaemenians, Parthians, and Sassanians. The archeological examples are compared to swords depicted on corresponding rock reliefs.



Fig. 1: An excavated bronze sword from Marlik



Fig. 2: Bronze mace head with human heads from Marlik



Fig. 3: A bronze sword from Luristan



Fig. 4: A bronze sword with the engraved inscription, "Aburamazda"



Fig. 5: A golden akenakes from Achaemenian period



Fig. 6: An excavated Parthian sword



Fig. 7: A Sassanian sword with P-shaped scabbard fittings



Fig. 8: A shamsbir attributed to Timur

Fig. 9: Gold-inlaid cartouche "Amir Timur Gurkbani"



Fig. 10: Handguard (bolchaq) of a sword attributed to Shab Ismail Safavid



Fig. 11: A dated, gold-inlaid cartouche "Amale Assadollah Isfabani 1092" on a shamshir with serrated blade attributed to Shab Suleiman Safavid



Fig. 12: A dated, gold-inlaid cartouche "Amale Kalbali Isfabani 191"



Fig. 13: A gold-inlaid cartouche "Amale Assadollah Isfabani" and dated, gold-inlaid cartouche "Bandeye Shab Velayat Abbas Saneye 113"



Fig. 14: Shamshir attributed to Karim Khan Zand



Fig. 15: An engraved axe (tabar)



WATERED STEEL

The book contains information with regard to the classification of watered steel by al Kindi, Beiruni, Ibn Sina, etc. and a comparative analysis of the research in this field. For the first time, the classification of watered steel in *Noroozname* by Omar ibn Khayyam Neishaburi, the renowned Persian poet and mathematician from the 11th century, is examined. The development of swords from double-edged blades into single-edged sabers encompasses an important part of this text. Many valuable primary sources, such as *Adab al Harb va Shojae* by Mobarakshah ben Mansur, *Noroozname* by Khayyam Neishaburi, and secondary Iranian sources, are consulted to establish a solid cultural foundation for the development of edged weapons. Beautiful examples of Iranian *shamshirs* (swords) attributed to Iranian kings and rulers are illustrated. Included are powerful images of *shamshirs* without fullers (*shamshir* attributed to Shah Ismail Safavid), with fullers (*shamshir* attributed to Shah Safi), highly curved blades (*shamshir* attributed to Karim Khan Zand), and slightly curved and serrated blades (*shamshir* attributed to Shah Suleiman Safavid), proving that different styles of swords coexisted with each other. One of the hallmarks of the text is the analysis of three *shamshirs* that are attributed to Timur. Additionally disclosed is some proof that the highly curved Iranian sword (*shamshir*) was known for a long time before Shah Abbas Safavid's rise to power. Two of these blades show separate gold-inlay with different datings and names. This, of course, is an indication that these swords were used as hereditary swords from one generation to the next.

MAKERS' SIGNATURES ON SWORD BLADES

Illustrated within the treatise are different swords with the signature of Assadollah. Each signature is meticulously scrutinized, and a careful analysis of royal pieces shows that there are different styles of handwriting and dates that accompany these cartouches. The same is true with the signature of Kalbeali and the different styles of Kalbeali cartouches that are presented. The volume explores the meaning of each one of these names in its cultural setting and concludes that these names would have been used as honorary titles. Other smiths, such as Askari Isfahani signed, their blades



Fig. 16: Carved elephant ivory handles of Iranian daggers (*khanjar*) from the Qajar period

Fig. 17: Enamelled handle of a straight sword from Nassereldin Shah Qajar period

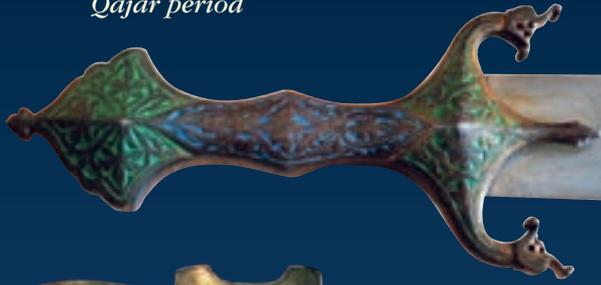


Fig. 18: Armor (*chabr ayne* or four mirrors) attributed to Shah Ismail Safavid

Fig. 19: Painted and laquered surface of a composite bow (*Kaman*)



Fig. 20: A laquered and enamelled rhino hide shield (*separ*) from the Zand period

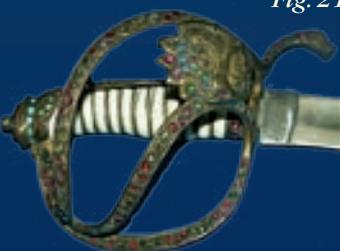


Fig. 21: A bejewelled handle of a military sword (*shamsbir nezami*) from the Qajar period

with their own names. The research shows that double-edged swords were not abandoned after the introduction of curved swords; rather, they coexisted together into the Qajar period. However, the curved swords were generally favored. A beautiful, double-edged sword with a watered blade, enameled handle, and gold-inlaid cartouche from Nassereldin Shah Qajar shows the beauty of these swords. A chapter of this book is dedicated to the meaning of dragons, which appear on the ends of the quillons of many of these straight swords. Another important topic dealt with are the images of the lion and the sun and its meaning for Iranian dynasties. As it will be shown, the emblem of the lion and the sun has a long tradition, going back to the Saljug times. The image also appears on some coins from the Safavid era, known as “folus.” The engraved forte of a *shamsbir* with the symbol of the lion and the sun from the Safavid period is photographed. Contrary to the popular belief, the symbol existed before the Qajar era and not only appeared on coins but also on sword blades.

ANCIENT IRANIAN IMAGES

Many ancient Iranian images continued to be used into the Qajar period. One of the most famous that appears as a decorative motif on some arms is the fighting scene between a lion and a bull. The meaning of this emblem is investigated and based on references, an explanation of its significance is presented. The emblem appears on the forte of double-edged, curved daggers (*khanjar*). A number of Iranian *khanjar* with carved ivory handles are also illustrated. The carved images show an interesting variety of ancient heroes such as *Shahname*, Sassanian kings, and some Europeanized images (*farangisazi*). Other types of Iranian small arms, such as the *kard* (knife) and *pishqabz* (a dagger with a single-edged, double-curved blade), are shown, and the different styles of these weapons are discussed. Included are discussions of other types of weapons, such as maces (*gorz*), axes (*tabar*), spears (*neyze*), and shields (*separ*). The developmental chronology of each weapon is analyzed from the bronze era up to the end of the Qajar era. For example, the significance of the bull-headed mace is considered. Similar examples from Marlik are shown and the general relevance of the cow and bull in Zoroastrianism are examined. One chapter is dedicated to the martial arts and warrior training in Iran. Included in this chapter is the training of ancient warriors, traces of which are still evident in *varzesh bastani* (the ancient sport) that is practiced in *zurkhane* (house of strength). Based on historical manuals and chronicles, some techniques of Persian swordsmanship are also discussed.

Arms and Armor from Iran: the Bronze age to the End of the Qajar Period

The developmental chronology of arms and armor in Iran from pre-historic times to the end of the Qajar era

by *Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani*

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