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Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian

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I do not know why Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian was so fascinated by the story of Ramses II fighting the Hittites at the Battle of Kadesh. Certainly, there was significant interaction and trade between ancient Egypt and ancient Iran during the Late Bronze Age; some artifacts in the National Museum of Iran have inscriptions in both Old Persian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs. But when I look back, I hardly think that this kind of historical interaction was the true reason for the admiration that Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian held for Ramses II.

For Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian, Ramses II represented more than just a historical figure. He was a symbol of bravery and kingship. Perhaps the figure of Ramses even symbolized something to him that he never explained to me. Perhaps words alone were not enough to describe his deep-seated fascination for Ramses II. Maybe that was the reason that he decided, one day, to make an Egyptian *kopesh*, to demonstrate that, at times, words are not enough to show one's true feelings and that, at certain times, one must take action. So Ostad Haj Hossein took action to show his admiration for Ramses. I remember that day when I first showed him the sketches of the Egyptian *kopesh* sword that I had designed. I copied and pasted parts of the hieroglyphs describing the battle of Rameses II from the inscriptions at Abu Simbel temple.

I still remember the glitter in his eyes when I read the translation to him. He looked at me and said, "That is beautiful, my son. I am honored to make such a sword." I also remember that he was not a man of many words. He decided to listen and to watch the world surrounding him, only coming back to ask questions from time to time. I remember those hot afternoons when he was sitting in front of his small shop, watching the sparrows, cutting bread, making small pieces of it, and throwing the crumbs to the birds. He really loved watching those small birds searching for crumbs on the ground. I can still remember the gentle smile on his face and how attentively he observed them.

I knew that Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian was more interested in hammering steel than casting bronze. But from time to time, he cast magnificent bronze swords as well. I still vividly remember those days at his forge when I was looking into the furnace while the fire was getting red and white and watching Haj Hossein put the billets of steel in the furnace. It was a transformational experience for me. I had been reading about swords for a while, but this was the first time that I could watch an Iranian smith during the forging process. He was staring at the fire and was not looking at me. I was wondering how that gentleman in his older days could still move his hands with such dexterity. All of a sudden, I could feel more energy around him as if he were younger. I could clearly see that he loved his craft as he was staring at the fire and shifting the steel bars from side to side. The steel was mixed with black coal, and the whole fanfare of colors and noises was an overwhelming experience. He grabbed some hay in the corner and threw it in the furnace right on the steel and coal. His movements were agile, and it reminded me of the legendary bird *ghognos* from Persian mythology and literature.

In Persian mythology, there is only one *ghognos* at any given period of



time. One day when the *ghognos* gets old and cannot fly as high as it should, it gathers hay and branches and sets them on fire. Then, it sits just in the middle of the fire until it burns and dies. After the bird dies, a very small *ghognos* rises from the middle of the ashes; this is the next *ghognos* that will reign during the next period on the planet. To me, Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian went through a transformational process each time that he made a sword. I remember when the steel bar was hot enough and Ostad Haj Hossein liked the color, he took it out by using a big set of tongs. He, then, put it on the anvil and took a big hammer and hammered the first strike, which sounded like a big "pang."

Each time, I turned back and looked at the red-hot piece of steel that was changing colors and looked into the Haj Hossein's eyes. He was not really there with me at that moment and looked very pensive as if he was carried away by deep thoughts. I never knew that transforming a piece of steel into a sword would have such a tremendous effect on my soul. I had the feeling that the conversations with Ostad Haj Hossein were transforming my soul. I knew, then, that he could not only forge steel but also, above all, could forge souls, at least my soul. After pounding for hours and days during different intervals, Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian took out a *ghognos*, that happened to be the blade of a beautiful sword from the heart of the fire.

Each time that I met Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian, it reminded me of the days of my childhood. I could not help my feelings, which were pulling me back to my past. One time, sitting in front of his forge, I remembered that my biggest dream as a child was to fly. I tried my best to do so, by jumping from chairs and tables, but I never managed to do that. Then one day, I hurt my leg and gave up my dream of flying! But this unhappy incident did not eradicate my fascination with the birds that could fly above us and the way I cherish the heights of their freedom.

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Unfortunately, I did not watch Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian cast bronze, but I remember our countless telephone calls and letters in which he described how difficult it was to cast the blade of a *kopesh* as his first attempts resulted in a cracked blade. I think Ostad Haj Hossein was able to cast the blade successfully in the third attempt. The result is a beautifully shaped blade based on historical models. The handle is made of ebony. The whole blade is engraved with hieroglyphs from the temple of Abu Simbel. The scabbard is made of maple wood and covered with sheets of brass. Some battle scenes of the Battle of Kadesh at Abu Simbel temple are engraved on the brass sheets. The inscriptions on the blade read:

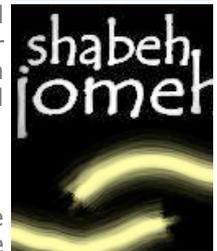
"It was the ninth day of the third month of the inundation season in the



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fifth year under the majesty of Rameses II, given life. And His Majesty was in Syria with his second victorious military expedition.

There was a perfect awakening with life, prosperity, and health in the tent of his Majesty on the ridge south of Kadesh, and His Majesty appeared in splendor like Ra rising. He assumed the panoply of his father Mont and the Lord set out, proceeding northwards. His Majesty approached the south of the town of Shabtwn.

Two Bedouins came to say to His Majesty from those brethren who were great men in the household of the land of Khatti: We are sent to say to His Majesty "We will act as the servants of Pharaoh (alive, prosperous and healthy) and when we do we will depart from The Enemy of Khatti. Further, The Enemy of Khatti is sitting in Khyrbw to the north of Twni and he is too afraid of Pharaoh (alive, prosperous and healthy) to come southwards.

But the Bedouin falsely spoke those words they spoke to His Majesty, for He of Khatti had caused them to come to see where His Majesty was and to prevent the preparation of His Majesty's soldiers for fighting against The Enemy of Khatti. In fact, The Enemy of Khatti had come with all the nobles of all the foreign lands, and all the infantry and chariotry he had brought with him in strength and stood drawn up and and prepared behind Kadesh the Evil. And His Majesty did not know they were there."

Now when I look back at it, I realize how time flies. Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian is not among us anymore. He departed forever, close to Nowruz time. It is very sad to say that the city of Zanjan has lost one of its major assets, and it looks empty now. But, then again, when I think about it, I realize that the spirit of Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian is everywhere in the heart of people who were fortunate enough to meet him in person, to hold the blades he made, and to appreciate his art. This way, Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian has become an eternal figure for his country of Iran. He was an eternal figure who rose from ashes, lived his glorious life, and departed, leaving his pieces of art for generations to come. He was a gentleman who was as much interested in feeding sparrows as in pounding steel, he was a kind man who was as much fond of the story of *ghognos* as he was interested in gold inlaying, and he was a good man who loved the story of the legendary bird *simorgh* as much as he loved the stories of Iranian *pahlavanan*.

References:

For the translation of inscriptions, see:

<http://www.sydgram.nsw.edu.au/CollegeSt/extension/may01/Kadesh.pdf>

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Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani writes for PersianMirror from Germany. He is the author of the book "[Arms and Armor from Iran](#) - The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period".

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Manouchehr is also the moderator of the American organization of Swordforum International, where he answers questions on Middle Eastern Swords. He is considered the specialist on Middle Eastern Arms and Armor and responsible for the forum Edged Weapon from the Middle East, India and Africa (MEIA). For more visit: forums.swordforum.com/index.php?s= Manouchehr is also the moderator of the Chinese organization of HFSword.com Forums, where he is responsible for European and Islamic Sword Forum.

This article was contributed by **MANOUCHEHR MOSHTAGH KHORASANI**, *Senior Contributor* for PersianMirror.



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