



Arms and Armor from Iran

The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period

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One Scholar's Personal View

Forewords

By Dr. Ann Feuerbach

Acknowledgement

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The book, Arms and Armor from Iran: The Bronze Age to the Qajar Period, by Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani, is, in one word, inspirational. As an academic whose work is referred to in the text, is undertaking active research in the subject area, and is teaching University courses in the archaeology and history of the Middle East and

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Central Asia, my knowledge of this vast field is strong (yet ever growing). I have no affiliations with the book. I was not consulted by the author or anyone affiliated with the book in any way. This is my personal opinion. As the foreword by Richard Dellar states, it "is a work that will immensely increase our knowledge and understanding of the arms and armour of Iran throughout the ages" (Khorasani, 2006, 13). I know it increased my knowledge greatly and I have not yet studied the contents of the book in great depth!

Mr. Cooksey's contribution discussing the relationship between art, technology and long term cultural change is very important and a topic I am heavily involved with researching. Iranian and Persian weapons often fall under the topics of either Sasanian or Islamic arms. In Islamic studies, the Middle East and Arab influence is often stressed, whereas the influence of pre-Islamic Iranian and Central Asian lands is often ignored by scholars. Coorsey (p14) correctly states that the Arab conquest "did not swallow or overpower native culture and artistic traditions". The book illustrates that and, although the arrival of Islam influenced the art of Iran, it did not eradicate traditional artistic themes and styles. For example, the use of images of people and animal for decoration remain after the arrival of Islam particularly in the artwork of the people of Iran and Central Asia.

I find Dr. Farrokh's section "Iran's Silent Legacy" to be an accurate short summary of the very complex situation of Persian history. It is well known that there are cultural connections between the early people of Iran and those of India. This is exemplified by the fact that Zoroastrianism (the religion of the Persian before Islam) and Hinduism (the religion of India) have the same roots. Although, I would have left out the suggestion that the so-called Aryan warriors of Iran "invaded" India, as the evidence of an "Aryan invasion" is a hot topic for debate. However, the influence of proto Indo-Europeans on India's culture is evident from the archaeological and historical literature. Furthermore, the influence of the Persian Empires (Achaemenids, Parthians, Sasanians, in the sense of people who lived in that area under their rule, not an ethnic group) on world history has been downplayed in European scholarship. If it was not for the Persian Empires, much of the knowledge of "The Classical World" would have been lost.

A large part of scholarly research is reliant on the accuracy of work of others. I admire that the author does not reiterate all the myths and misinformation regarding "Damascus steel", but rather takes an objective and scholarly presentation of the available evidence. Too many publications state the same generalizations but do not provide the evidence or the sources of the information. In my view this is one of the great strengths of the book...it concentrates on primary sources of information, texts and objects. For an academic like me, this is wonderful and it is what makes the book inspirational. It inspires me to undertake new paths of research. Even a book this size does not answer all the questions about the Arms and Armor of Iran. Indeed it would be sad if it did... it would leave no room for new insights and debate. In one passage, the author states that one of my research statements is not entirely correct (p 102). Does this upset me? Does it make me less of a scholar, no. Quite the opposite. It shows that my research has been read, considered, and built upon!

Are all the dates of manufacture of the objects correct? Perhaps yes, perhaps no. Dating blades can be tremendously difficult; blades were reused, new grips, new styles, old "revival" styles etc. Unless an object has an unquestionable provenance, the date is debatable from an academic standpoint. Those who find fault with any information present in the book should research where the author gathered that information from, and prove the information wrong, rather than basing your judgment on your opinion, rather than on hard evidence and facts. No true scholar minds being proven incorrect, provided they did the best they could with the information that was available to them. Research is all about challenging existing ideas, assumptions and preconceptions.

Unfortunately, many of us will not be able to visit Iran and see the objects for ourselves. Apart from the production of a CD where I could enlarge the photos to see small details, the author gives us the next best thing. While some of the photographs may not be perfect, I am glad they are given. Having taken photographs of swords in foreign museums myself, I am well aware that time is often at a premium. (Once, I had one hour to document, photograph and sample 18 blades!). One takes as many photographs as one can for documentation, because one is well aware that the opportunity may never arise again. The result can be often be "less than perfect"

photographs, however, I would much rather see a imperfect photograph than none at all or, the ever frustrating and almost useless, single photograph of the overall object with no close-ups!

Personally, I do not like the use of the term “wootz” in many of the descriptions of the blades metal. The term implies an Indian origin for the steel. The text gives many examples of the production of crucible steel (pulad) in Iran and neighboring regions. The term crucible steel should have been consistently used until more research allows us to confidently state where the steel was made.

As a person who does most of her reading on public transportation I do feel the book may have benefited for being in two volumes. However, the use of a Table Mate II (“as seen on TV”) eliminated the weight issue and allowed me to take notes without having to balance the book on my legs. Perhaps, if the publishers mistook the book as a “coffee table book” the size would be justified, but it is a scholarly publication which will be *used* by all those interested in the Arms and Armor of Iran, for many years to come. My only protest is the book leaves me wanting more (like a good meal or a visit from an old friend). The early Persian and Sasanian blades beg me to analyses them to determine if they are crucible “Damascus steel”. I want the complete translation of Omar Khayyam Neishaburi, not a teaser! It inspires me by highlighting avenues of research which I want undertake. The book provides a strong reliable foundation upon which further scholarly research can be built.

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