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THE EVERLASTING SPIRIT OF IRAN BY MANOUCHEHR MOSHTAGH KHORASANI

The Spirit of Karim Khan Zand

When our plane landed in Shiraz, I was really excited. I knew that I was in a very important region of our country, where Persepolis and Pasargad were located. The magnificent ancient places testified to the glorious past of the Persian Empire. I took a cab to take me to the hotel. The driver spoke with me in the soft and poetic dialect of Shiraz. And I realized again how much I loved that dialect. The driver was smiling the whole time, asking me about my life and whether I liked Shiraz.

I was looking at him, wondering about his spontaneity. How lovely it was to listen to him, talking about his life and explaining the history of Iran. He asked me whether I wanted to see Persepolis. I thought my answer "no" was a big shock to him. He kept looking at me for a while and then asking about the purpose of my journey. I told him that I came here to see two museums, the Military Museum of Shiraz and Pars Museum.

He was a bit irritated and told me that I should definitely go to Persepolis. Then I suggested that he could give me a ride to the museums instead the following day. He happily agreed. We agreed on a time, I paid and left the taxi. I went into the hotel and checked in. . . I looked around the room and saw all those lovely posters of Persepolis and Pasargard. As usual, the pictures of Achaemenian soldiers started to come to my mind. Those proud warriors depicted on the stone reliefs were carrying *akenakes* and long spears. I thought that it was like an addiction, and somehow scary.

After so many years being into research of the military history of my country, I ended up classifying everything in terms of arms and armor. I sat down on the bed, still tired of countless hours working in the museums and endless flights across Iran. I did not realize when I fell sleep . . .

The next day, I was sitting in the taxi with the same cab driver, heading to the Pars Museum. When I arrived there, and after handing in the papers and written permission to the museum curator, he kindly accompanied me to the *shamshir* of Karim Khan Zand. The curator was a true gentleman, as usual very educated, and friendly. He explained that many Iranians loved to come to the Pars Museum as Karim Khan Zand was buried there. His *shamshir* was stored in a glass case positioned above his grave.

I put on my gloves, and they opened the vitrine and handed in his sword to me. My hands were shaking. I felt so proud to be able to handle the sword of a ruler of Iran, who did not even want to be called a king. A ruler who considered himself a representative of his people, a true *jawanmard*.

At the same time, I knew that Karim Khan Zand was one of the best swordsmen in Iranian history. I kept his sword in my right hand, looking at the marvelous steel pattern on it. The gold-inlaid inscriptions on its blade were marvelously executed. I could feel his presence and I had tears in my eyes. I could feel the power of Karim Khan Zand in my hand.

The curator was looking at me and asked me whether everything was fine. I answered yes, and I knelt down and touched the grave of Karim Khan Zand with my left hand, still holding his sword in my right hand.

I still remember that I prayed and talked to him, saying that I wished and hoped that his spirit would transfer power and prosperity to all Iranians, and asking for his permission to analyze his sword, as I knew how dear his sword was to him.

Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani is a guest contributor for PersianMirror from Germany. He is the author of the new book "Arms and Armor from Iran - The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period" (available May 2006), please visit

www.legat-verlag.de/e/programm_e.html and www.legat-verlag.de/e/Swords1.html

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, Asia and Africa. For more visit: forums.swordforum.com/index.php?s=

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