



Arms and Armor from Iran

The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period

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Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani comes with impeccable qualifications both of mind and body, a very rare combination indeed. He has majored in English and Business Administration and minored in Spanish from the University of Giessen (Germany), University of Wisconsin (USA), and the Universidad de Salamanca. (Spain). He also is an instructor in Iaido and Kenjutsu. He holds a black belt in full contact karate and a black belt in Nam Wa Pai.

Please refer to Khorasani's excellent article in an equally excellent issue of Summer 2006 of the Fezana Journal under the title "Arms and Armor of Achaemenians and Sassanians". The article reproduced many of the illustrations in the book under review. In fact, the front cover has a beautiful picture of a bronze sword with "Ohrmazd" engraved in Old Persian. The sword dates back to about 1000 B.C. and is housed in the National Museum of Iran. Apart from the very beautiful reproductions of arms and armor, the book contains various historic pictures: for example, the statue of King Darius originally placed at the entrance of the royal palace in Susa now kept in the National Museum of Iran. The picture shows Darius wearing an akenakes under his belt. The akenakes is a short double-edged sword.

Iran has been affected by several conquests of its territory throughout its history.

[...]

Small wonder that over the period of years Iran developed a warrior tradition. What is noteworthy is that despite all of these incursions, Iran retained its national identity and culture, particularly its language. This is in stark contrast with advanced civilizations such as Egypt and Syria which both adopted Arabic as their national language.

[...]

"Iran was a Zoroastrian country 2000 years before it became Islamic. Zoroastrianism is still ingrained in the Iranian psyche even though it goes by different labels these days," Kriwaczek said to me when I called him in London to discuss his book ["In Search Zarathustra"]. "When you walk into gift stores in Tehran you don't see little replicas of mosques like you see in Pakistan or Egypt. What you see are carvings of Faohars and other Zoroastrian themes. As one Iranian proudly said to me "When the Arabs went to Egypt they Arabized Egypt, but when they got to Persia, they got Persianized".

[...]

"Just as in Europe the Holy Roman Empire – 'neither holy, nor Roman, nor or an empire,' as Voltaire said – was actually a way for baptized German warlords to repackage their pagan traditions, so Iranian Islam came to incorporate Iranian national consciousness, Iranian national pride and, yes Iranian Zoroastrian beliefs," Kriwaczek writes.

In other words, both Khorasani and Kriwaczek assert the same proposition, that despite all of the conquests, Iran has retained its national identity and culture, including its language and religious beliefs.

It is interesting to note that the Avesta contains many accounts of arms and armor testifying to the long warrior tradition of Iran. A very popular martial art in Iran over the centuries has been wrestling which played an important role in preparing the warriors. The

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art of wrestling is so deeply rooted in Iran that its origins reach back to the beginning of Zoroastrian religion. The kusti, which a Zoroastrian child wears after formal initiation into the religion, was called kustic in Pahlavi but in Farsi Dari was called kusti. The term kusti which was later called koshti was the belt used by wrestlers and grabbed during wrestling matches. The book devotes an entire chapter to koshti wrestling.

This book reminds me of the good books by Mark Kurlansky, "Salt: A World History" and "the Cod's Tale". Although Kurlansky subjects are salt and cod, the reader acquires a unique understanding of several countries in which cod and salt played important roles. In the same way, Khorsani, whilst writing on the subject of arms and armor of Iran enlightens the reader by scanning different periods of Iranian history.

[...]

The reader will acquire a valuable insight in the history of our original madar vatan (motherland) by reading this book.

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