



# Arms and Armor from Iran

## The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period

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Forewords

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**PUBLICITY** | Dr. Robert Dohrenwend [The Journal of Asian Martial Art](#)

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Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani has combined his extensive research with a thorough knowledge of the literature and the editorial assistance of numerous authorities in the field to produce a book that will remain the definitive work of Iranian (Persian) edged weapons and armor for a very long time. In addition, the book is beautifully made and an impressive work of art in its own right. Virtually half the book is devoted to a section of magnificent color photographs cataloging and profusely illustrating the weapons discussed in the text. These photographs alone are worth the price of the book.

Although the text deals mainly with swords and other hilted weapons, other weapons and armor are given considerable space. The sword types are arranged chronologically by historical period with emphasis on the weapons themselves, their provenance, their features, their manufacture, and the materials from which they are made. These descriptions are seasoned with comments on their history and use. The chapters are logically organized, and they are all well illustrated with clear references to the weapons portrayed in the color catalog section. The detailed table of contents and indexes (both name and subject) make the book easy to use as a research tool. The bibliography contains a large number of useful sources for additional research.

At the outset the author makes the points that Persia occupies a pivotal position in weapons history, and that in this field, it is important to treat Persia separately from the rest of the Islamic world. He supports these contentions by providing a brief overview of Persian history to place Iranian weapons in their proper context. This survey is very useful to western readers, who are mostly unfamiliar with that history.

[...]

The justly famous Iranian shamshir is described in great detail, and the reader might find it useful first to skip to page 145 in this chapter to acquaint himself with the terminology, measurements and construction of the shamshir before reading the rest of the chapter. The chapter begins with an interesting discussion of the shamshir's origins and those of the curved blade saber. The issue of saber origins and spread is still obscure, but the author does shed some light on it. Raising the possibility that slightly curved sabers may have been produced in Iran at least as early as the late 9th century CE. The comments in the previous chapter (page 117 ff.) referring to curved khisrawani swords are of particular interest.

The shamshir chapter is followed by several shorter chapters describing other Iranian hilted weapons (straight swords, European military swords, qame, qaddare, khanjar, kard and pishqabz; a very fine chapter on Iranian archery tackle; and chapters on shields and defensive armor, spears, and other arms used during the periods covered by this book. Although relatively short, these chapters are extremely informative and the constant reference to specific weapons ensures a high standard of historical accuracy.

The book concludes with several brief chapters on aspects of Iranian culture strongly influenced by their national weapons, including chapters on symbology and on Iranian military treatises. Although interesting, the single chapter on Iranian martial arts is mostly an all-inclusive historical survey of those martial arts, stressing Iranian wrestling and providing some anecdotal accounts of the use of the various weapons. A more detailed technical treatment of training and fighting with the weapons cataloged would have been helpful, especially on the mechanics of draw cutting with the shamshir and the tactics of fighting with shamshir and shield. But frankly the description of fighting technique is not the purpose of the book.

The author quite rightly states that more books need to be written on this subject, but this book has not only set the standard for all future work in the field, that work will have to use it as a starting point. Unfortunately, the book's impressive size and somewhat daunting price ensure that few expect for a relatively small number of specialists will ever really read it. But that in no way detracts from its exceptional value as a reference work and

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research tool.

This review necessarily provides only a superficial coverage of a massive book dealing with a vast subject. The important thing ist that *Arms and Armor from Iran : The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period* is an indispensable source for anyone interested in hopoligy and the history of human warfare. If you are seriously involved in the study of edged weapons, you should make every effort to acquire a copy of this book while it is still in print. You can not afford to be without it.

 [Top](#)