



# Arms and Armor from Iran

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

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### Wisdom of weapons

The Sassanian noblemen were known to carry three weapons; a short sword or *tour* attached to the right side of the sword belt, a long sword or *sousser* on the left side, and a dagger or *nran*, attached to the thigh, covered by the folds of the pants. The reverence for the sword among the Iranians surfaces distinctly in Manouchehr Khorasani's work and as mentioned in the foreword by executive editor Richard Dellar, an expert in the history of European military swords, "They were considered heirlooms and passed down from generation to generation. Often bejeweled and with their ivory handles and precious metal fittings, these swords are works of art in themselves.... Yet despite this beauty they were also formidable weapons of war and we have accounts of their fearsome effectiveness." Perceiving a significant lacuna in the market with regard to the history and development of Iranian arms, Iranborn Khorasani, with a strong sense of his own heritage and that of his mother country, set on his research mission. "This book has been the result of eight years of painstaking research and an analysis of over 600 primary sources of Iranian arms and armor as well as many secondary sources....It is a work of epic proportion," writes Dellar. As notes an introduction to the author, Khorasani had analyzed the inventories of 10 Iranian arms and armor museums and is considered a specialist in the weaponry of the Middle East with a special emphasis on Iranian arms and armor. With extensive experience in international martial arts competitions, he is an instructor in Judo and Kenjutsu as also kungfu Taekwondo, and is the holder of second dan black belt in contact karate and Nam Wai Pai. He has been conducting seminars in executive coaching, leadership and intercultural training in the banking industry and has taught across Europe in English, German and Spanish.

Khorasani's 776-page book has been edited by 17 editors – one chief executive editor, three executive editors, 112 technical editors and one copy editor – from USA, Canada, UK, Iran, Australia, New Zealand. Explains the author, "I set up a team of 17 specialists to edit my book. Each one of them was assigned to the field in which he or she expertise." "The reader will find that this book thoroughly explores the history of the Persian Empire, replete with socioeconomic, archeological, military, martial and photographic evidence," commends chief executive editor Doug Mullane when commenting on this "monumental work".

"Iran has always managed to significantly "Iranify" its conquerors and its neighbors...with a strong linguistic and cultural tradition that tends to assimilate and enculturate invading and neighboring groups with ease so that today's foreign conqueror ends up being tomorrow's proud native. Indeed the influence of Iranian culture on the world in the fields of artistic expression and military development has been both enormous and difficult to quantify precisely," writes another editor John Cocksey, a specialist and scholar on ancient Iranian history and Zoroastrian religion.

Adding to the easy comprehension of this fact-filled tome is the map of Iran and a full page devoted to the ages and dynasties starting with 3000 BC and ending with the Qajar Dynasty in 1907 AD. The first half of the heavy compendium is loaded with information on the evolution of the different tools of warfare in Iran. Avestan references to the weapons would be of particular interest to Zoroastrians.

Khorasani quotes scholar Pur Davood as stating that the spear or *arshti* is the first weapon mentioned in Avesta and a spearman was one of the highest ranks in the Achaemenian army. The main weapon of attack of the Savaran (Sassanian heavy cavalry unit) from the early Sassanian period was the lance. "The Sassanian cataphracts, armed with lances, mounted their horses and were as stable sitting in their saddles as if they had been chained there. They made up the first ranks of Sassanian battle formation like walls, behind them were positioned the bowmen and behind the archers came the war elephants," explains the author.

According to Pur Davood, the *Mihr Yasht* refers to a weapon called *chakush*, a two edged axe that was thrown at the enemy. An axe has been an efficient weapon on the battlefield for centuries in Iran.

Yet another symbol of kingship and sovereignty was the bow. It displayed the warriors' martial abilities and courage during combat and also served as a status symbol. Skill in archery, regarded as one of the most important attributes along with horsemanship, was required of both sexes of the upper classes. According to Pur Davood, the *Avesta* refers to the bow as *chanvanat*, while the *Vendidad* mentions *thanvan* or *thanvare*. The arrow which is cited even more often in the *Avesta* is known as *ishu* or *ishoash*. Mehr the Zoroastrian solar deity was said to have 1,000 bows in his *ghardune* (wagon). Since the sun gives light and heat and provides food, the ancient Zoroastrians called a person. Mehr if he was generous and treated all equally. "One of the roles of the sun was to purify, and another role was to serve as the symbol of the Iranian kingdom and its power." The image of the sun adorned the King's crown as also some helmets, armor and steel shields. The term Tir has its origin in *Avesta* where there is reference to Tishra, the Zoroastrian deity who is the guardian of the rain.

A bull-headed mace carried by the young Zoroastrian priest initiate owes its origins to the

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legendary king Fereydun who loved the cow that suckled him so much that he used a bull-headed mace in battle to fight the evil Zahak who was subsequently chained and imprisoned in Mount Damavand. The cow remains a very important element in Persian mythology. According to the *Bondahesh*, the first creature made by Ahura Mazda was the bull, *varzav*. One of the major ceremonies of Mithraism was sacrificing a bull, so that its blood shed on the ground could help plants to grow. Iranian kings and heroes in the *Shaname* written by Ferdowsi, use an ox-headed mace in crucial times. This weapon was later used as a prestigious, symbolic weapon, an attribute of kings in Iran. The *bande din* (belt of the religion) called *kustik* in Pahlavi and *kusti* in Farsi Dari, finds a detailed explanation in the section titled "Koshti wrestling and other martial practises and their role in prepaing the warriors fot the battlefield." The term *kosti* was later called *koshti* to represent the waist band used by wrestlers an grabbed during wrestling matches. Wrestling was considered one of the important arts to prepare a warrior. The visual treat, commencing from page 373 onwards and ending at page 748, all in color, presents a catalog of arms and armor from Iran. The detailed photographs with the accompanying narrative stating the physical features of the weapon, ist method of making, excavation site, current location and other features gives this book an almost encyclopedic aura.

