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TO THE MEMORY OF OSTAD HAJ HOSSEIN FARAJIAN BY MANOUCHEHR MOSHTAGH KHORASANI

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It was couple of years ago when I last met Mr. Haj Hossein Farajian in his shop in Zanjan. I still remember that it was a hot afternoon. The sun was shining, and we drove all the way through the highway between Tehran and Zanjan. I can still remember all those hills, the landscape, the dust, and the nature of my country, passing by. The journey reminded me of my childhood. I turned and looked at my father, who was happily driving the car. He has been always a major help and support for all my research. I remembered those days back in my childhood when my sister and I were sitting on the backseat of the car, impatiently asking for the arrival time, and my father kept telling us the stories of bears that had different colors, not only black and brown but also blue, orange, and all those fanciful colors! And we used to believe those stories and tried to use our imagination to have a clear picture of those bears in our minds. Then, I was back again in my country as an adult, looking at my father happily driving.

I can still remember the very moment when we arrived in Zanjan and headed for the shop of Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian. When we stopped the car, Mr. Mohammad Reza Farajian, his son, ran towards us, shook our hands, and welcomed us to their shop. How friendly and hospitable, I thought. We entered the shop and saw Haj Hossein Farajian, who welcomed us with a big smile. He had an aura of a very wise man. I was mesmerized to see the pieces of art he had made that happened to be swords and daggers. An award from the Cultural Heritage of Iran was hanging on the wall, entitled *Dasthaye Mehrabani Ke Chaguhaye Tiz Misazand* (The kind hands that make sharp knives). And I immediately understood what the statement meant as I wondered how such a gentle and nice man could pound steel. During the following days, we had very interesting discussions. He explained his philosophy, his love for the Achaemenian Empire, and his true dedication and love for his native country Iran. He was born in Zanjan as all his ancestors and followed the tradition of swordmaking. He also told me how much he adored Molana and how much he loved the poems of Saadi and Hafez. I could still remember the countless hours where we sat in front of his forge, staring at the fire there, and marveled at the beauty of the fire and its different colors. I can still remember his hands that always had traces of the color of steel.

For years, I had a dream to have a reconstruction of a royal *akenakes* (the Achaemenian short sword). There are different types of *akenakes*. Some of them that were given as royal presents by the king to his satraps and high military commanders were made of pure gold (see Moshtagh Khorasani, 2006:406-407, plate 49). The majority of them had blades made of iron (see Moshtagh Khorasani, 2006:408, plate 50). However, there are still examples that were cast from bronze (one of these examples is kept in the Museum of Cultural Institute of Bonyad). I designed the whole *akenakes* on a piece of paper and based it on the prototypes made of gold. Then, I copied the royal inscriptions of King Xerxes in Persepolis and glued the sentences on the paper model. I knew that the only artisan who could fulfill such a complicated project was Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian. I still remember the day when I showed him the design on paper. He smiled and said that he always respected King Xerxes a lot, and he was a figure who had been always misrepresented. I thought how intelligent Ostad Farajian was as the distinguished professor Wiesehöfer stressed that point clearly in his book *Das antike Persien*.



The making of the blade was a hard process. The blade needed to be fullered, and the casting had become a difficult process. However, Ostad Farajian cast the blade of the *akenakes* from bronze, and the final result was a breathtaking beauty. He, then, filed the corners to give it smooth lines and chiseled the royal inscriptions of King Xerxes in Persepolis on both sides of the blade. The chiseling was a painstaking process, and it was very difficult as the inscriptions needed to be written in cuneiform. The final result was a breathtaking beauty. The inscriptions in Old Persian in Cuneiform read:

[1-6] *A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created heaven, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Xerxes king, one king of many kings, commander of many commanders.*

[6-11] *I am Xerxes, the great king, the king of kings, the king of all countries and many men, the king in this great earth far and wide, the the son of Darius, an Achaemenian.*

[11-17] *King Xerxes says: by the favor of Ahuramazda this Gate of All Nations I built. Much else that is beautiful was built in this Persepolis (Pârsâ), which I built and my father built. Whatever has been built and seems beautiful - all that we built by the favor of Ahuramazda.*

[17-20] *King Xerxes says: may Ahuramazda preserve me, my kingdom, what has been built by me, and what has been built by my father. That, indeed, may Ahuramazda preserve.*



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In the next step, Haj Hossein Farajian made the handle scales of buffalo horn and filed them into the shapes of two lion heads. That was also a very difficult process. The eyes were made of bronze, and the teeth were made of horse bone. The scabbard was made of maple wood. The scabbard mouth and the scabbard chape were made of brass. Then, Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian chiseled the

scabbard mouth and the chape with images from Persepolis and Apadana. The surface of the wooden parts between the scabbard mouth and chape parts were carved in and later filled in with figures of ibexes that were made of a light-colored wood. These figures were also based on Persepolis prototypes. The end result is a sword with a mesmerizing beauty.

Unfortunately, I was so busy giving lectures and interviews during my last visit to Iran and, therefore, could not go to see Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian. After the conference *Acquaintance with Nanotechnology during Safavid Period*, many students of the University of Cultural Heritage came to me and kindly offered their help for my further research. One of them was Ms. Shadi Taherkhani, a student of Ms. Etezadi, who kindly offered to interview and take pictures of new pieces of Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian. When I came back to Germany, I received an email from Ms. Taherkhani, who wrote:

Dear Mr. Moshtagh,

Thanks for contacting me. I do not know whether you have been informed about the sad news as it really made me sad. Yesterday on Sunday when I went to see Mr. Farajian, I saw an announcement informing that he has passed away on Saturday 26 of Esfand [17 March 2007]. I am extremely sorry to inform you about this. The destiny did not want me to meet Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian. I am really sorry. The funeral service will be held in the Masjed Chagusazan (Mosque of Knifemakers). I hope you are O.K. and will pursue your precious work. I am not sure whether I can take pictures at this moment. If you need anything else, let me know please.

Kind regards

Shadi Taherkhani

First I felt so bad for Ms. Taherkhani, who took all her camera equipment to take pictures for my new articles because I could not visit Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian during my last trip. I felt very bad for her as I could imagine and feel the shock she must have gone through, standing in front of the shop of Ostad Farajian, seeing the announcement of his death. I still remember that I felt my hands were getting colder and colder, and I could not believe that our country had lost such an important cultural asset. I could not believe that I could not see the nice and gentle smile of Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian anymore. I knew that I was not going to sit in front of his forge and watch the games of fire when he told me the stories about ancient Iranians, ancient cities, and all those proud warriors who had defended the national integrity of Iran. I knew that I was not going to hear how he pounded steel to shape anymore. I knew that I could not see him shaping silver threads into filigree anymore. I was aware that I could not listen to his stories about *javanmardi*, about love, about friendship, and about values anymore. I still remember that I had a sore throat. I felt as if someone was strangling me. I thought how brutal it was when someone died during Nowruz time. Then, I remembered what Ostad Farajian had told me once. He said that life was like climbing up a ladder, and we climb it up, going one rung after the other, only to meet God (*Pelle pelle ta molaghat ba Khoda*). And climbing up the last rung can happen any time. I looked up at the big picture of the *akenakes* he made, which was hanging on the wall, and I could swear that the blade was shining very bright, much brighter than it used to. It looked as if the spirit of Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian was transferred into it.

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<http://www.livius.org/aa-ac/achaemenians/XPa.html>

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Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani writes for PersianMirror from Germany. He is the author of the book "[Arms and Armor from Iran - The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period](#)".

More information is at www.legat-verlag.de/e/programm_e.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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