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EVENTS | BUSINESS DIRECTORY | ARCHIVES | CONTRIBUTORS

Feature ▼
Interview ▼
GO

Feature > Interview > MANOUCHEHR KHORASANI: WRITING FOR IRAN BY SHABNAM REZAEI
Talking With Iranian Author

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09/27: Poetry
San Francisco
09/30: Concert
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This month, the arrival of the much anticipated book *Arms and Armor from Iran: The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period* by Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani has readers and fans very happy. Already having received rave reviews by experts in the field, the book promises to capture a part of Iran that truly defines a culture like never before. More than 800 pages are dedicated to explain fascinating stories, and details about Iran's military, arms, and weaponry. While the topics may seem dry at first hand, the book does the exact opposite by using colorful stories, and interesting imagery from Persian history. Meant for scholars and lovers of Persian culture alike, this is a book that Mr. Khorasani has written for Iran.

PersianMirror: *When did you start to write about arms and armor from Iran?*

Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani: I started to do the research in this field almost ten years ago. Back then I started to read articles and books written on Middle Eastern, Persian, Arab, Indian, and Turkish arms and armor. I was able to read old manuscripts written in Persian and follow the historical approach used by Iranian scholars. From the beginning I knew that I needed to read both international and Iranian sources to get a comprehensive understanding of the field of Iranian arms and armor.

PM: *How did you conduct your research in Iran and around the world?*

MMK: I approached the Iranian army and Iranian Cultural Heritage to obtain a permission to analyze the military museums and museums under the auspices of Cultural Heritage very well. I introduced myself as an expert in the historical arms and armor, everyone was a bit surprised first. But I have to say that both the Iranian Army and Iranian Cultural Heritage helped me a lot to realize and finish my project. They provided me with all the required permissions and papers to start the work.

I will never forget how the curators and experts of the Saabad Palace and the soldiers of the Iranian army helped me for weeks to measure, photograph, and classify the artifacts in the Military Museum of Tehran. One of my best experiences there was when I wanted to measure a *shamshir* attributed to Shah Ismail I and had a soldier holding it in his hand. It was really a moving experience when the soldier told me that his dream had come true as he had the honor to hold that sword once in his life. I have also made the same experience in other museums where all people were very helpful, and I would like to thank all people in the Cultural Heritage and Iranian army who have helped me so much. For all of us it was a labor of love: love for our country Iran and for our ancestors.

PM: *What was your motivation behind writing this monumental book?*

MMK: I would like to stress the fact that my motivation was, of course, to write a comprehensive book, which analyzes Iranian arms and armor within their cultural and historical perspective. It was extremely important for me to take a cultural perspective into consideration. Of course, I needed to take the influences of both Zoroastrianism and Islam into account as well. One also needs a deep understanding of the holy texts of the *Avesta* and the *Qur'an* to fully understand the meaning of symbols and inscriptions which appear on some pieces of arms and armor. Also the representation of the figures depicted on arms and armor needs a thorough understanding of the Persian culture.

PM: *What is your routine when you sit down to write?*

MMK: I did and finished my research and my book next to my daily job in the banking industry. So I knew that I needed discipline. I think as a martial artist, I have been always been drilled to be disciplined; especially when you learn it as an *iaidoka* and *kenjutsuka*. I often worked in the evenings, early mornings, and weekends. I would break to train in martial arts and physical training, as I needed to have a strong body to maintain that speed. I am really thankful to my wife, who has been supporting me through all these years. For three years, I used my vacation to analyze the inventory of Iranian museums.

PM: *What areas of arms and armor and what topics do you cover?*

MMK: My book covers all types of arms and armor from the whole eras of the Bronze Age starting with the civilizations in Luristan and Marlik. Of course all types of arms and armor are analyzed and discussed. Of course, the whole aspects of arms and armor used during the Achaemenian, Parthian, and Sassanian periods are also discussed and analyzed. I describe each particular arm or armor from the Bronze Age to the end of the Qajar period, and analyze the changes and developments it has gone through.



PM: *Could you please tell us a bit about the editorial process and the production and design of your book?*

MMK: I set up a team of experts for editing my book, as I knew I needed highly qualified people. I have a number of published authors in my editorial team of 17 members, Mr. Richard Dellar who has published many articles on European Military swords and Mr. Stephen Selby who has published two valuable books on archery. A number of other scholars also joined my team for the editorial process. Mr. John Cooksey with his deep knowledge of ancient Iranian history and Zoroastrianism made very useful contributions to my book, as well as Mr. Russell Mitchell, who has a very good grasp of military history. A very important point is that I also have editors with practical experience on board. It is not enough to do research on arms and armor from a theoretical point of view. In this respect, I am really thankful to Mr. Greg Thomas Obach, who has not only written his thesis on forging wootz blades, but is also a smith, reviving the art of forging these blades. Another smith, Mr. Peter Lyon, who made swords for the movie *Lord of the Rings*, also made very useful contributions to my book. Mr. Adam Karpowicz, as a museum expert and also as a composite bowmaker, contributed. We also have an archer and maker of arrows and quivers on the team, in Mr. Bede Dwyer. I have also a number of martial artists on the editorial board who edited the corresponding parts and I need to say that all translated parts of the *Avesta* and the suras from the *Qu'ran* are double checked. My editors come from different countries, such as Iran, Canada, UK, New Zealand, USA, and Australia. I am really thankful for all their input and for their love for my country and the history and culture of Iran.

PM: *What would you say is function and importance of your book?*

MMK: My book is not only about the history of arms and armor from Iran, the way they were made, and their function. My book analyzes the martial spirit of Iran as well as her rich culture. Weapons are only products of a cultural setting and environment. For the first time, scholars from all around the world can not only see over 500 artifacts from Iranian museums, artifacts which have never been examined before, but they can also read about the martial heritage of Iran.

PM: *What are your future projects?*

MMK: My next book *Lexicon of Arms and Armor from Iran: A Study of Symbols and Terminology* describes all the related terms of arms and armor, which appear in different manuscripts. The book also describes in detail all types of weapons, which appear in the *Shahnameh*. Additionally, all symbols that appear on the shields, armor, and edged weapons are analyzed in detail. The book will contain a catalogue, which will show further unpublished artefacts. Another book will be *Persian Swordsmanship and Traditional Wrestling Arts: A Comparative Study*. The book will be based on the interpretation of the fighting moves of warriors depicted on Iranian miniatures and historical manuals. I will establish and revive the ancient art of Persian swordsmanship. As you know the Japanese and the Chinese have kept their ancient art of swordsmanship. There are many arts of *Kenjutsu* and *iaido* that are based on the ancient art of samurais. The Europeans have revived their ancient art of swordsmanship based on historical manuals written by masters, such as Talhoffer. I will be reviving and establishing the ancient art of Persian swordsmanship and warrior arts. I think this will be very important for our country, as important as *Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu* is for Japan, which is considered as an intangible cultural asset. Additionally, the book will also provide a detailed description of different traditional wrestling arts in Iran and their related techniques.

As an instructor of Japanese and Chinese martial arts, I thought it was time that I needed to pay attention to my own culture and revive the historical Persian swordsmanship and martial arts. It is not only practicing martial arts and fighting, as we know from Asian martial arts, any fighting requires a set of rules and codes of behavior, which warriors followed. Without these codes and rules, a warrior turns into an animal. Similar to the Japanese *bushido*, Iranian warriors followed the principles of *javanmardi*, helping the poor and the needy people, and showing politeness. This is really refreshing to read and research these things, especially in our modern times when one feels a big rift between traditional values and the spiritual emptiness of modern times.

[Visit the website](#) of the new book *Arms and Armor from Iran: The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period* or [order your copy](#).



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Shabnam Rezaei is the founder and Editor-In-Chief of [PersianMirror](#).

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She was born in Tehran, and grew up in Vienna.

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This article was contributed by **SHABNAM REZAEI**, **Senior Contributor** for PersianMirror.



[Back](#) to Homepage