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Short Stories

MOSHTAGH KHORASANI  
Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian and Ostad Mohammad Reza Farajian, the Contemporary Iranian Smiths

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For years, I had been looking for traces of sword making in Iran, and everyone was telling me in Europe and the USA that the art of making edged weapons was dead in Iran. Back then, I could not believe this as I knew that the Iranian handicraft was still being practiced in many different fields, and as a matter of fact, many swords that were made in the late-Qajar period were not meant for the battlefield, where guns and artillery had dominated. This meant that many people were buying these items as symbols of authority or pieces of art. Taking the fact into consideration that the field of carpet making was still at its height in Iran with many new designs, I thought that there should be still some smiths in Iran who were making swords.

As an Iranian, I knew that the city of Zanzan was famous for the quality of its hand-made knives that were sold in different parts of Iran. My father travelled to that city shortly afterwards and was told that the best smith of the city was called Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian, who forged edged weapons together with his son Ostad Mohammad Reza Farajian.

It was around 2:00 p.m. when my father and I arrived in Zanzan. I remember that it was summer, and the sun was shining. Zanzan is a small town, not affected as much by the modern world. When we arrived there, I had the feeling as if the time had stood still. This was a very different lifestyle in comparison to the hectic life in Tehran. It was really a mesmerizing experience. My father parked the car in the main street and got out of the car. I was truly surprised to see so many shops, selling handcrafted knives, many types such as pocket knives, kitchen knives, and hunting knives. Some knives carried the makers' names, but the majority did not have any marks on them. Some of them had the mark *Sakht-e Zanzan* (Made in Zanzan). I inspected some knives; they were, indeed, hand made with well-tempered, high-carbon steel. There were also some knives that were obviously of inferior quality with shiny scabbards, and one could tell that they were not meant for the local market, which always looked for well-tempered steel. The prices were also very different. Good knives were at least 4-5 times more expensive as the average ones. I knew that the sellers there knew about the quality of good steel. We entered a shop, and I asked a shopkeeper whether he had hand-crafted swords. He looked at me and asked whether I was looking for ones with well-tempered steel. I looked at him and said that this was my intention. He said that the only ones who were making good swords were Haj Hossein Farajian and Mohammad Reza Farajian. Then, we headed for the shop of Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian and his son Ostad Mohammad Hossein Farajian.

I was happy that I could confirm the information provided by my father. When we entered the shop, we were warmly welcomed by both gentlemen. I looked at them and saw their smiling faces and was really surprised to hear their soft and friendly voices. It was hard to believe that these gentlemen were smiths who pounded steel for the living. They told me that the majority of edged weapons they make are *qames* and *qaddares*. They make *khanjars* and *shamshirs* as well but very seldom as their bulk orders are *qames* and *qaddares*. They told me that the inhabitants of Ardabil and Western Azarbaijan preferred *qaddares*, whereas the inhabitants from Zanzan, Isfahan, Tabriz, and Hamedan preferred *qames*. They also emphasized that their customers from Khuzestan preferred

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*shamshirs.*

They had also customers from other countries in the region. They explained that they are very careful with the heat treatment of their blades as people from Zanjan and Ardabil test the efficiency of their blades by making a pile of fell and hit them from different angles. Therefore, they are very careful in hardening and heat treating their blades. For hardening their blades, they use *naft* (crude oil). They also have eight students whom they teach in the art of blade-making.

The true mastery of father and son becomes evident when one inspects the blades they made in one's hands. The blades are extremely well tempered and sturdy. Following the traditions of making *qames* and *qaddares*, Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian and his son heat up and hammer forge the billets of steel and iron into shape. They use different blade decoration techniques from gold-inlaid inscriptions, chiseled inscriptions, and etched inscriptions from the holy *Qur'an* and Persian poems. These gentlemen are also capable of making bronze blades. As shown below, they also made pieces with chiselled, ancient Persian script cuneiform on a bronze *akenakes*. They also inscribed the Egyptian hieroglyphs on a bronze *kopesh* sword they made. Additionally, they are familiar with making excellent filigree and work with enamellers from Isfahan to have their sword fittings enameled as shown below.

It is important to know that the pieces made by Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian and Ostad Mohammad Reza Farajian are displayed in the Muzeye Sanaye Dasti Iran (The Museum of Handicraft) in Tehran. Many artisans from different fields present their items for display in this important museum, and few can pass the strict requirements of this museum to present their items there. Next to an Isfahani smith, Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian and Ostad Mohammad Reza Farajian are the only smiths who could fulfill these requirements so far.

I would like to add that I am extremely proud and happy to see that the ancient art of blade making is not dead in Iran and still followed by some smiths there. Enjoy the masterwork done by these smiths:

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Figure 1: Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian in front of his forge.



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Figure 2: Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian and Ostad Mohammad Reza Farajian.

Figure 3: The shop of Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian, and Ostad Mohammad Reza Farajian.

Figure 4a), 4b), and 4c): An akenakes made by Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian, and c) a close-up of the bronze blade: the blade is chiseled and inscribed on both sides in the old Persian cuneiform script. On this akenakes, the script is taken from the edict of Khashayarshah (Xerxes).

Figure 5a), 5b), and 5c): An Egyptian kopesh with chiseled inscriptions in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, based on the text by Ramses.

Figure 6: A shamshir with gold-inlaid and etched inscriptions of the poem "Rostam and Esfandiar" in the Shahname, made by Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian and Ostad Mohammad Reza Farajian.

Figure 7a), 7b) and 7c): A shamshir with the blade with rolling pearls (pearls of the wounded) and enameled fittings, made by Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian; the enameling was completed in Isfahan by a master enamelist as a custom job.

Figure 8: Different games made by Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian and Ostad Mohammad Reza Farajian.

Figure 9: A qaddare made by Ostad Mohammad Reza Farajian.

Figure 10: Different khanjars made by Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian and Ostad Mohammad Reza Farajian.

Figure 11a) and 11b): A game with filigree work, and b) a close-up of the filigree.

Figure 12: Different types of shamshirs and kilijs made by Ostad Haj Hossein Farajian and Ostad Mohammad Reza Farajian.

Figure 13a) and 13b): A Sassanian sword

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#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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](http://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=](http://forums.swordforum.com/index.php?s=)

This article was contributed by **MANOUCHEHR MOSHTAGH KHORASANI**, **Special Contributor** for PersianMirror.



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