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[List Your Business](#)**REVIVING THE ANCIENT WARRIOR SPIRIT OF IRAN BY MANOUCHEHR MOSHTAGH KHORASANI**

In recent years, many European and North American scholars and martial artists have started to revive the traditional martial arts of Europe. This noble endeavor, which seemed an impossible task in the beginning, now is an established martial art system.

The interesting point about the European martial arts is that they are all based on historical manuals, such as Flos Duellatorum written by the Italian swordmaster Fiore de Liberi in early 1409 A.D., and the manuals on combat written by the German swordmaster Talhoffer in 1443, 1459, and 1467 A.D. The books reveal a tremendous amount of information regarding the techniques in the western martial art system.

The manuals not only describe different techniques, but also provide illustrations showing how these techniques were applied in real combat situations. Admittedly, European and American scholars, and martial artists active in this field were faced with a big challenge to translate the texts, as they were written in older form of Italian and German.

This, of course, required not only scholars who could translate the texts accordingly, but also martial artists and swordsmen who understood the mechanics of real combat. Through this active and close cooperation, European and American scholars and martial artists were able to revive the traditional martial arts of their ancestors. The medieval manuals not only provide different techniques of using one-handed sword and shield, hand-and-a-half swords, two-handed swords, maces, axes, and daggers, but they also provide a number of empty-handed techniques.

Many books have been published in recent years on the authentic Medieval and Renaissance swordsmanship. To reach their goals, one of the major challenges of European and American scholars, and martial artists was to show that contrary to the popular belief, medieval European swordsmanship was a sophisticated combat system and not a crude way of sword bashing.

Due to the Renaissance school of thought, which looked down at everything from Medieval Europe as backward including the medieval swordsmanship, this belief took root and is still very widespread among modern sport fencers. Based on historical manuals, European and American scholars and martial artists proved that the European swordsmanship was an intricate and sophisticated form of combat.

One of the major requirements of reviving the art involved forging authentic swords for the



martial artists. The demand for blades gave rise to a whole industry of dedicated swordmakers who forge European swords and other pieces of arms and armor. With the cooperation of different museums and detailed measuring of artifacts, a number of swordsmiths from Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and other countries have been forging authentic European swords,

which are fully equal to their antique counterparts. From year to year, the modern swordsmiths are growing with experience and as a result have been forging better swords.

This again has helped the martial artists to have a better understanding of the mechanics of these weapons. Many of the European martial arts experts and swordsmiths have been advising the directors of movies made in Hollywood on how to improve their combat scenes, weapons, and historical accuracy.

The movies, which have been made in recent years, show that these efforts have ended up in excellent results. The swordfighting scenes are more realistic in today's movies and the weapons are much more historically correct.

To name some authentic weapons used in movies, one can look at the swords featured in the movie Braveheart made by the Italian swordmaker Mr. Fulvio del Tin, or the swords featured in

the trilogy Lord of the Rings made by Mr. Peter Lyon from New Zealand [even though they are not strictly historical].

I have always admired how the Japanese have kept their traditions of swordmaking and swordsmanship. Different schools of Bushido specialized in training the bushi (samurai) have survived up to our day. Many schools such as Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu have kept their traditional techniques through the centuries. All participants are trained in the school for their mind and body to reach a perfect harmony. Forging traditional Japanese blades is still practised in Japan, where the Japanese swordsmiths can reach the level of intangible cultural asset in person. A number of traditional schools of Chinese swordsmanship have also survived up to our day, where practitioners train with *jian* (double-edged sword) and *dao* (one-edged saber). Although Iranian craftsmen produced some of the best swords and steel, and enjoyed a high reputation in the region, this fact is not commonly known to the majority of Iranians.

The art of making wootz steel was lost in at the end of the 19th century. However, after years of trial and error, and based on ancient manuals, some modern smiths began to make this wonderful steel and forge weapons made of it. A number of smiths have already proved their skills in making wootz steel in modern times. Any scholar, especially smith who has practical experience in forging swords, knows that making wootz steel is an extremely difficult task. Even more difficult is extending wootz ingots into steel bars, which involves hours of heating, hammering, and pounding wootz cakes.

The steel is hammered at cherry red temperatures and not bright yellow temperatures. The low temperature means that it is much harder to extend wootz cakes at lower temperatures (cherry-red). Any attempt at heating the wootz cakes to a bright yellow temperature would result in the wootz cakes cracking into different pieces. This of course was a bitter experience learned by European smiths who tried to emulate and forge the legendary Middle Eastern blades after getting access to ancient wootz cakes.

I am happy to announce that the Canadian scholar and swordsmith Mr. Greg Thomas Obach was able to make wootz cakes and forge wootz blades from them. Mr. Obach has spent years in doing research on Iranian *Pulad-e Johardar* (wootz steel), and has done tremendous research in this field. I am proud that he was able to help with the revival of making wootz crucible steel, extending them into bars, and forging them into blades. Once the blades are nearing finish, they need to be polished and then etched with an etchant. As all scholars in the field are aware, not only the art of making wootz cakes was kept secret, but also the ingredients of the etchant.

I am specially proud to mention that Mr. Greg Thomas Obach has found an etching solution, which etches his blade to a perfect appearance. The appearance of the surface waterings on his blades resemble fully those wonderful ancient Iranian blades. This is, of course, a major step towards the revival of making wootz blades. Our next step would be the transportation of this technique back to its native home Iran. Taking the very fact into consideration that many excellent Iranian smiths and craftsmen still practice their trade at high levels and with the generous support and help of Mr. Greg Thomas Obach, I am sure that we would be able to revive this art in Iran again.

Another excellent Iranian art was the construction of composite bows. The core of the Iranian composite bows consisted of maple wood. Using natural glue, the back of the bow (the side under tension) was covered with sinew, whereas the belly (the compression side facing the archer) was covered with strips of horn. This process was repeated a couple of times and then the bow was painted and lacquered. The bow was then left in a cellar for a long time, so that it could dry fully and cure. The power of composite bows in shooting arrows was legendary.

I am also proud to announce that the Canadian scholar and bowmaker Mr. Adam Karpowicz was able to revive this complicated art. He can make magnificent Iranian bows, which would have made our ancestors proud to possess one of his bows. I am sure that with the help of Mr. Karpowicz, we would also revive the art of making composite bows in Iran. To revive the historical Persian/Iranian swordsmanship, we need to dedicate our time to the study of Iranian weapons and ancient manuals, which reveal not only how these weapons were made, but also how these were used. Historical manuals, such as *Adab-al Harb Va Shojae* (The Customs of War and Bravery) by Fakhr al-Modabbar, and *Noroozname* by Khayyam Neishaburi contain interesting information about different weapons and how they were made. The story of *Hossein Kord-e Shabestari*, which was written during the era of Shah Abbas Safavid, describes many techniques of swordsmanship.

Through the interpretation of these techniques and their application to martial arts training, one can revive and build up a revival of Iranian swordsmanship. As all Iranians know, the traces of warrior training and true Iranian martial arts can be traced back to the *Varzesh Bastani*. Historical sources show that this martial art was extensively trained during the Safavid period for preparing the warriors for the battlefield. The traces of this martial art go back to the Parthian period.

The whole system is based on *jawanmardi*, again a principle which goes back to *ayyaran* from the Sassanian period. I am very happy that this art is still practiced and different schools of *varzesh bastani* are practiced in today Iran. This art needs our support and help. I wish that we

would one day support the practitioners of *varzesh bastani* in the same way as the Japanese value and support the practitioners of traditional Japanese martial arts. To revive the traditional Iranian swordsmanship, archery, and other combat arts, we need the help of fellow Iranians.

I would like to ask all Iranian scholars to help contribute in this great endeavor. There are still lots of open research questions in this field. I would like to ask all Iranian film directors to help making movies about the heroic battle of Aryobarzan, the Parthian horse archers and the battle of Chaldaran, just to name few events, where Iranians could contribute to the proud military history of their ancestors and country. I would be happy to assist in any way in designing arms and armor or any historically accurate weapons. Let us join forces and bring back the wonderful arms culture of our ancestors, where the principles of *jawanmardi* ruled. Let us start a series of publications and research on the military heritage of our country and revive the art of making artistic weapons, where each piece of arms and armor represents a true piece of art and handicraft.

Let us revive this dynamic art, where the training of the mind and body ruled supreme. This dynamic art can be transferred to our modern days, helping us to build up strong corporate cultures, and does not need to be necessarily a relic of the past. Let us not forget that the principles of *jawanmardi* included helping the poor, protecting the children and the weak, respecting the elderly, being a good citizen, and being interested in literature and poetry.

Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani is a Editorial Contributor for PersianMirror from Germany. He is the author of the new book "[Arms and Armor from Iran - The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period](#)" (available May 2006), please visit

www.legat-verlag.de/e/programm_e.html and www.legat-verlag.de/e/Swords1.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 of his writing, visit his [home page](#).

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