



# Arms and Armor from Iran

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

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**PUBLICITY** | **drs. Babak Rezvani** is a researcher at Universitet von Amsterdam, Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies (AMIDST). He works in the research group Territories, Identities and Representations (TIR) (Political and Cultural Geography)

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A Book review by : Babak Rezvani

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A blend of paper and color portray a world of iron, gold and silver and brings you deep into history. A history, in which sounds of clashes of metal on metal or on flesh, the screams of the martyrs as well as the joyous music and epics, are echoed. *Arms and Armor from Iran; the Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period*, is the title of a great book which deserves the name and fame of an Encyclopedia. Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani, the author of *Arms and Armor from Iran*, has done a valuable and time-consuming effort by cataloguing and describing the objects in 10 Iranian museums' collections. The author gives extensive descriptions of the artifacts, provides us with sketches and pictures, and gives references to the location and the number of objects in different museums' collections one can easily find the artifacts. Therefore, there is all reason to believe the reliability and validity of the given information.

The author gives a historical description of consecutive periods in the Iranian history, from the Bronze Age until the end of Qajar period. He does this accurately, and refers to many sources. He also discusses many issues by providing arguments both for and against each position. By this, he places the discussion and description of artifacts in a broader social historical context, which is helpful for both experts on weapons and historians. This book can indeed be regarded as an educative source too. The book teaches the lay persons a lot about the art of weapon production, in a vast time span and a large territory. The specialist and expert terms can be consulted in the book itself.

This book is not only restricted to arms and armor, but it also has chapters on martial arts and the art of recitation of epics and performative arts such as *Ta'ziye*.

This book is very comprehensive and also shows, that there is a continuity visible in the history of Iranian weaponry and arts in general, and that certain old elements (from both the Islamic and pre-Islamic periods,) return and come back to the fore, though with a new meaning and in a different context.

One strong character of this book is the abundance of discussions in which there exist many different and contradicting views, but in which the author remains neutral and objective. This testifies indeed the academic ability of the author and the quality of his work. Khorasani is not biased on favor of one or the other explanations. He cites many authors and their different arguments and in addition tries to gather more evidences without claiming the absolute truth. The best example is his discussion on the Lion and Sun emblem.

One of the issues discussed in the book (chapter 22, especially pp. 320-1) is that of the national Iranian symbol "The Lion and the Sun" (Shir-o Khorshid). Although there are evidences that this symbol has pre-Islamic origin, the lion and the son as a unitary symbol and emblem is used widely since the Saljuq era onwards. As the zodiac lion rests upon the sun in astrology, it raises the question: "why a double emphasis on sun"? It is my own hypothesis that sun represented a female entity, and the male lion clearly symbolized the male counterpart. This claim can be supported by two arguments. First, as the ancient Iranian philosophy has been dualistic in nature, it is very well possible that the coinage of this sign has had a dualistic connotation too. Second, although the modern Persian does not recognize gender in nouns, it is obvious that sun is regarded as a female entity, in contrast to its pre-Islamic male gender.

This hypothesis could be clearly in accordance with the claim that the (female) sun was added to the lion, because a Saljuq king wanted to portray his wife, but it was not ordinary to do so according to religious beliefs, so he chose to portray instead a sun.

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Very interesting is Khorassani's effort to identify the origins of type of weapons. Khorasani traces, many times in his book, the origins of weapon and weaponry, and gives descriptions in that regard, i.e. the Caucasian origins of Iranian Qame which is similar to the Georgian Kindjali is evident, but he does it for more sophisticated issues too; e.g. the influence of the art of weaponry in India and among Turkic and non-Turkic tribes to the north of Central Asia, on the Iranian weapons. In fact he is giving descriptions of which art of weaponry, in which period is introduced from where, by which people! In this sense this, book connects the art and techniques of making weapons to ethnography, history and geography.

The book is recommendable not only for the experts and collectors of arms and armor, and for the archaeologists and historians, but also for the regional experts on this part of the world, geographers and social scientists. The nice pictorial collection in the book is also another reason which invites this book to the personal and professional bookshelves.

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