

# ARMS AND THE MAN

## ANTIQUÉ ORIENTAL AND ARAB WEAPONS AND ARMOUR - THE STRESHINSKIY COLLECTION

REENA ABRAHAM

ANY RESEARCHER OF ARMS AND ARMOR WHO WORKS ON A COLLECTION BE IT A ROYAL COLLECTION OF KINGS HOUSED IN A MUSEUM, A MUSEUM COLLECTION OR A PRIVATE COLLECTION DOES NOT ONLY ANALYZE THE PIECES BUT HE STARTS TO GET CLOSE TO EACH ITEM. BY ANALYZING DIFFERENT DECORATION METHODS, FORGING TECHNIQUES AND WAYS OF ASSEMBLY, A RESEARCHER STARTS TO LISTEN TO THE INNER VOICE OF EACH ARTIFACT. THIS VOICE GROWS IN SIGNIFICANCE WHEN A PIECE HAS INSCRIPTIONS.

DR. MANOUCHEHR MOSHTAGH KHORASANI

01 Omani khanjar dagger from the 19th century with the typical shape of the handle with a flat top and an L-shaped scabbard.

02 Persian Tabar-E Dosar (Double-Headed Axe) from the 19th century. The axehead is made of plain steel and beautifully etched with four different scenes.





03

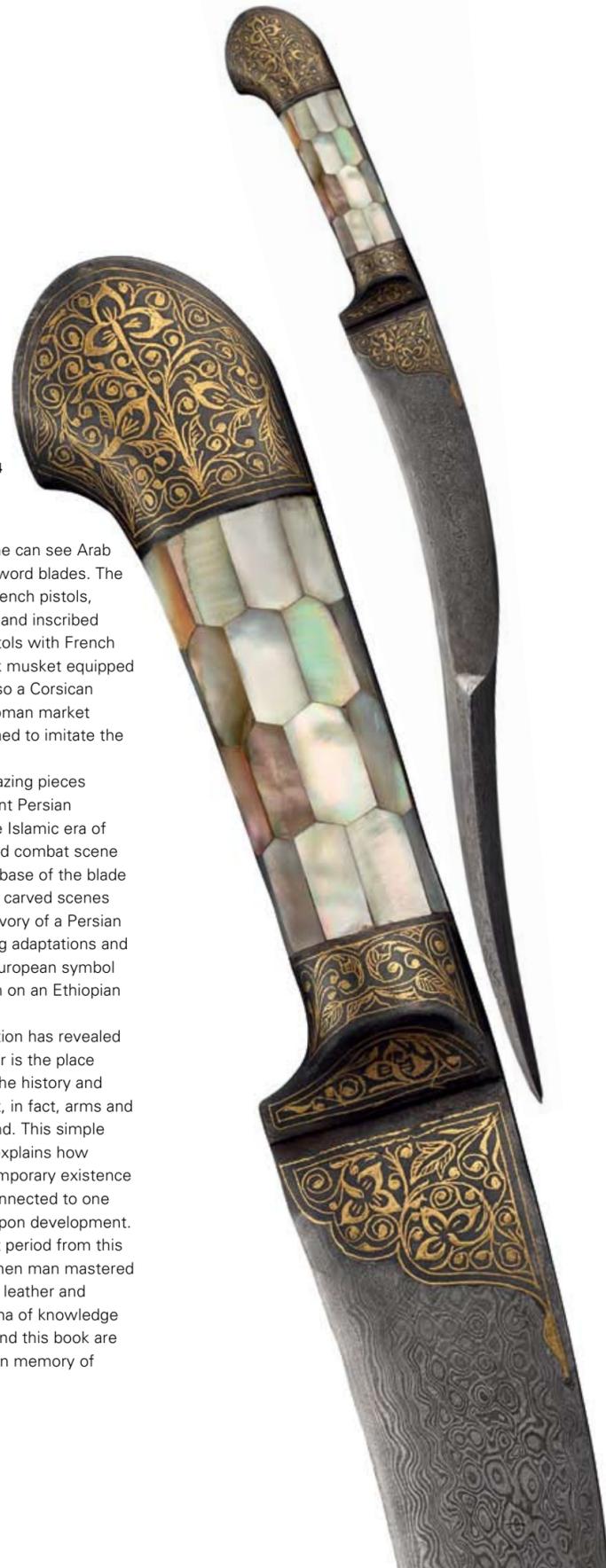
**D**imitry and Suzana Streshinskiy, noted Russian antique weapons and armor collectors launched a unique book, *Antique Oriental and Arab Weapons and Armour - The Streshinskiy Collection*, in collaboration with Abu Dhabi Publisher Antiga Arabia, at the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition - Adihex 2010. The unprecedented event unveiled for the first time 140 pieces of a collection of amazing blades, pistols and flintlock muskets dating as far back as 400 years. Written by world renowned expert on oriental blades and weapons, Author Dr. Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani, and pictured by the Moscow-based internationally acclaimed photographer Andrej Bronnikov the book has a limited Royal Edition, of only 100 pieces, signed and guaranteed by the publisher and by Mr. Streshinskiy in palm green leather bound, with a 800 Ct. silver Jambiya reproduction encrusted in the cover. A Luxury Edition will be released later in the year for worldwide distribution.

The official launch of the publication in Abu Dhabi was held alongside an exhibition of a few of the historical pieces from the collection. The complete Streshinskiy Collection holds incredible pieces from the Islamic and Oriental cultures, ranging from North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Caucasus, India and Indonesia. A closer investigation and analysis of the pieces show the international trade and exchange that has been taking place among nations for centuries. Persian crucible steel blades were highly regarded so there is no surprise to find Indian swords with tulwar handles fitted with magnificent Persian shamshir blades made of crucible steel. Many Arab warriors also sought the quality of Frankish

(European) swords and hence one can see Arab swords with European military sword blades. The collection also bears imported French pistols, adjusted for the Algerian market and inscribed with Arabic scripts, Ottoman pistols with French designs and a Caucasian flintlock musket equipped with a Persian barrel. There is also a Corsican vendetta knife made for the Ottoman market with the surface of its blade etched to imitate the pattern of welded steel.

This collection has some amazing pieces revealing themes from the ancient Persian culture being depicted during the Islamic era of Persia (Iran), such as the chiselled combat scene between a lion and a bull on the base of the blade of a Persian khanjar (dagger) and carved scenes of the *Shâhnâme* on the walrus ivory of a Persian khanjar. There are also interesting adaptations and grafting of images such as the European symbol of Saint George fighting a dragon on an Ethiopian camel saddle.

What the Streshinskiy collection has revealed more than anything else however is the place that they have in encapsulating the history and development of civilizations, that, in fact, arms and armor are the essence of mankind. This simple statement is a profound one. It explains how every single aspect of the contemporary existence of mankind, is due and tightly connected to one million years of hunting and weapon development. The collection represents a short period from this fascinating history: the period when man mastered metal and stone, bone and ivory, leather and wood, uniting them all in a summa of knowledge and experience. This collection and this book are an effort to preserve the common memory of mankind for future generations.



04



05



06



07

**03** This Indian kârd features magnificent enameled handles with intricate detailing of pink flowers and green branches, from the early 20th century.

**04** Indian pishqabz with a typical S-shaped blade. This weapon was tucked under the belt in front of the body.

**05** Algerian Flintlock Holster Pistol decorated with silver mounts and shaped corals set in zigzag design.

**06** Ottoman Turkish kılıç with a wide blade from the 1800s.

**07** The Royal Edition of the Streshinskiy Collection Book.

08



08 This Ottoman-Turkish bıçak knife blade is made of crucible steel and is gold-inlaid and gilded in floral design. The faceted handle is made of agate onyx.

09 The handle of this Caucasian kindjal is made of silver chased in floral and arabesque design - dated 1876.

10 Corsican Knife made for the Ottoman market. The rounded pommel is made of brass and the handle is made of different sections of mother of pearl.

09



10



11



12



13



11 Persian pishqabz (پیشقابز) dagger from the late Safavid Period. This type of dagger has a double-curved blade, and the edge is initially concave, ending in a convex shape.

12 A different view of the pishqabz dagger.

13 Arabic Jambiya (jambiyā) from Yemen. The handle is made of one solid piece of walrus ivory. It has gilded inscriptions on the obverse side of the blade and on both sides of the midrib.

14



## DURRAH TALKS TO THE COLLECTOR, DIMITRY STRESHINSKIY ABOUT HIS PASSION

THE STRESHINSKIY COLLECTION IS SAID TO BE THE LARGEST PRIVATE COLLECTION OF ORIENTAL AND ISLAMIC BLADES. CAN YOU TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR PASSION? WHERE DID IT BEGIN?

Since I was child I have always been fascinated with firearms and weapons of all kind. Later in life, coming closer to ancient weaponry became natural during my extensive traveling in the Middle East and former Persia and in the Caucasus countries before and after the end of the Soviet Union. I started studying and reading, understanding the value of the blades for the Arab and Oriental warriors and the Islamic and Oriental cultures in general. Later, I started collecting beautiful objects, also reaching as far as Japan.

IS THIS PART OF A LARGER COLLECTION OF WEAPONRY? HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO ACQUIRE AND BUILD UP THIS COLLECTION?

Well, yes: nobody knows, but I also have a Japanese collection of blades and Edo and Meiji period bronze, lacquer, ivory porcelain of more than 250 pieces. All together, it took me the best part of twenty years, as I started collecting when I was relatively young. But this is a continuing story, once you get the bug of collecting, you cannot stop.

IT MUST BE A FASCINATING SUBJECT TO RESEARCH AND STUDY. HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT IT? DO YOU FOLLOW A LEAD OR A STORY? OR DO THE OBJECTS FIND THEIR WAY TO YOU BECAUSE OF YOUR REPUTATION AS AN EXPERT AND A COLLECTOR?

It is more the first case, although some of the "inner circles" do relate to me for special pieces. The point is that you simply do not find these kinds of weapons lying around: when one appears, it inevitably ends up at an auction in London or Paris. You very rarely find these high quality Oriental blades and armor at "flea markets".

WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO SHOWCASE YOUR COLLECTION IN THE FORM OF A BOOK?

How else? To take this collection around the world for exhibitions poses insurance and transport issues which are both very expensive and problematic on the logistic and organizational side. This does not mean that we are not considering a couple of serious exhibitions somewhere in the Middle East and in Europe: I am getting a lot of pressure from friends, fellow collectors and museums to do so, but we need to organize something that can last a few months, both to optimize the logistic effort and to allow the largest amount of people to share the collection with us.

So, to answer your question, a high quality book came to me as a very good immediate action to make the collection known to the world. My very good friend, publisher Nicola Bandini in Abu Dhabi, suggested this book and I must say I am very happy and proud of (the outcome) of listening to his advice.

HOW DID THE CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH DR. MANOUCHEHR MOSHTAGH KHORASANI COME ABOUT?

We know all the top names in the world of authors in the subject of Oriental and Islamic blades and of course Professor Khorasani is today considered the highest authority in the world for this very specific and wide-ranging group of blades, weapons and armor... So the choice was easy and I am very happy that he accepted the challenge.

YOU MENTION THAT SOME OF THE ITEMS ARE SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERIES. CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THAT?

Well, yes, a couple of items are truly unique. For instance Item n° 33, an Arabic Jambiya from Asir, Saudi Arabia, made in the first part of 1800: this piece has no other match in any private collection or museum of the world, as it bears a

15



watered steel (crucible steel) blade made certainly in Persia. As Arab and Persians were fighting each other during those times and as this dagger-Jambiya is clearly made for a prince originally and not assembled later, it is a unique object which will make a lot of history books to reconsider things.

DO MANY OF THE PIECES HAVE A HISTORY OF THEIR OWN?

I would say most of them, especially those with inscriptions and engraving. A lot of the blades in the collections, and the helmets or shields, tell beautiful stories. The discovery of the story behind each new piece is what amazes me most every time I come across a new item for the collection.

HAS ADIHEX BEEN A GOOD PLATFORM AS A LAUNCHING PAD FOR THE COLLECTION AND THE BOOK? WAS THERE A LOT OF INTEREST AMONG COLLECTORS AND WEAPONS AFICIONADOS?

Over all it has been a very good visibility stand and launch of the book, although I think that the

14 Caucasian Miquelet stocked in the Persian style with a Persian barrel, from the 19th Century.

15 Mr. Dmitry Streshinskiy, noted antique weapons and armor collector.

16 Marvelous filigree techniques on the scabbard and handle of an Arabic Jambiya (jambiyya) dagger from Asir, Saudi Arabia.



best time for an in-depth presentation and debate about both the collection and the book, would be an exhibition in the Gulf region or in Europe.

WILL YOU BE DISPLAYING THE COLLECTION IN OTHER COUNTRIES OF THE GCC?

I think so. Actually when the time comes, we will display it for the first time to the whole world. In Abu Dhabi we took only three demonstrative pieces. The collection holds 140 and it will fill various halls indeed...

WHAT HAS BEEN THE PUBLIC RESPONSE?

Excellent. We were totally swept away by (the) waves of visitors, leaving no time to rest really, for the four days of the show. We also had a lot of press and VIP attention and this gives us the sense of how rare and important for the heritage of the Middle East something like this can and must be. Original things like this collection simply are unique and I believe should be shared with as many people as possible. ■

16