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AN INTRODUCTION TO ARMS AND ARMOUR FROM THE ISLAMIC WORLD AND INDIA.

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Islamic arms cannot be properly understood without some knowledge of early Islam and the life of the Prophet because the precepts of early Islam continued to infuse Islamic society and shape attitudes to arms as late as end of the nineteenth century.

The Muslim community was established at Mecca by the Prophet Muhammad who was the recipient of Divine instructions beginning in about 610AD. These instructions were written down by his scribes in the form of verses or Sūra and after his death the Caliph ‘Uthmān (23-35AH / 644-56), in an effort to preserve the teachings of this remarkable man, collected the Sūra together in a book, the Qur’ān. These revelations provided guidance to deal with the economic, political and social tensions affecting the community or umma. The Meccans had defeated their neighbours to take control of the caravan route parallel to the Red Sea coast in western Arabia that connected Yemen in the south and Damascus and Ghaza in the north. From the Yemen the trade routes continued to the rich products of Ethiopia and India; while to the north the eastern

Roman or Byzantine Empire was hungry for their scarce and exotic products. The long war between the two great civilisations of the time in the Near East, the Byzantines and the Persians, which lasted for more than half a century had exhausted both empires and effectively closed the alternative route to India from Syria via the Euphrates and the Persian Gulf. The Meccan merchants had a stranglehold on the lucrative trade between East and West and were extremely prosperous and their behaviour was increasingly at odds with the old nomadic tribal traditions, breaking tribal solidarity and equality into new divisive categories of rich and poor. The Qur'ān addressed these social concerns, uniting religious and social duty. At a certain point the social conflict caused the Prophet to move his followers two hundred miles across the desert to the neighbouring oasis of Medina on the 16th July 622AD, a flight known as the hijra, henceforth the start of the Islamic year and chronology.

Within Arabia raiding was a normal part of Bedouin life from the pre-Islamic period, an admired sport with minimal casualties on both sides. The Qur'ān refers to it with approval: 'By the snorting war steeds, which strike fire with their hoofs as they gallop to the raid at dawn and with a trail of dust split the foe in two: man is ungrateful to his Lord.'¹ This traditional activity lasted unchanged into the early 20th century, a great example being 'Auda abu Tāyy of the Huwaitāt who had killed 75 Arabs with his own hand in battle and kept no tally of Turks. He was described by Lawrence of Arabia as 'careful to be at enmity with nearly all the tribes of the desert, that he might have proper scope for raids'.²

From Medina the Prophet began to send out raiding parties to intercept the Meccan caravans. In due course war between the two communities resulted in a decisive battle at Badr in 2AH/624AD at which the Muslims were victorious. Meccan counter attacks were unsuccessful,

¹ Qur'ān Sura 100. The War Steeds.

² Lawrence 1941, p. 230. In thirty years the fighting men of his tribe had been reduced from 1200 to 500.

one being defeated when the Muslims constructing a trench to counter the powerful Meccan cavalry, a revolutionary idea in Arabia believed to have been suggested by a Persian convert. Having established themselves the Muslims developed the concept of jihād, essentially the traditional razzia but conducted solely against non-Muslims, and as the number of these shrank so the raiders were obliged to travel further. A refinement developed where non-Muslims who submitted were permitted to obtain protection on payment of a tax. By 630AD the Prophet was able to lead his army back to Mecca and take control, his treatment of the Meccans being so generous that many joined his forces when danger threatened from the East from a neighbouring tribe. The latter years of the Prophets life were spent dealing with the consequences of his successes and spreading Islam, one manifestation of which was the establishment of the great pilgrimage or Hajj to Mecca which incorporated into Islam a number of pre Islamic pagan Arabian traditions. When he died in 11AH/632AD the Islamic state might have broken up and a number of tribes broke away but the situation was saved by the actions of ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb and the appointment of Abū Bakr as khalīfat Rasūl Allāh [Successor (Caliph) of the Messenger of God], the beginning of the Caliphate.

Having re-established control the new Caliph began sending Arab armies against the Byzantines and the Sasanian Persians. Because of the prosperity of Arabia there had been considerable population growth and many Arabs had gone north to Syria and Iraq where they joined the indigenous people of Semitic origin. These Arabs, subject to Byzantine and Sasanian rulers, felt themselves bound to those who made up the comparatively small Muslim armies that now invaded Syria and Iraq and fought beside them. The concept of jihad or holy war stated that death in such a cause ensured Paradise and that booty was the reward of God to His soldiers. Whenever a large army arrived to deal with these invaders the Arabs vanished into expanses of the desert from whence they came. The Persians were defeated in Iraq at Qādisiyya in

15AH/636AD, the Muslims following up their victory by occupying the Jazīra. After a decisive battle near Nihāvand in 21AH/642AD, called by Muslims the ‘Victory of Victories’ the army pursued the Persian king, Yazdigird III, who fell back via Isfahān to Khurāsān where, abandoned by his subject, he was assassinated by a local satrap in 31AH/651-2AD.

While the Persian campaign was being fought the Arab armies were also engaged in Syria and Palestine where the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius had a large army. The great Arab commander Khālīd b. al-Walīd defeated Heraclius and occupied Damascus. A newly raised Byzantine army was decisively defeated at the River Yarmūk in a pitched battle in 636AD which gave the Arabs most of Syria though the towns took time to be reduced. Jerusalem was occupied on generous terms in 17AH/638AD. Arab armies also occupied Egypt and began the process of raids, conquests and assimilations that was to give them control of North Africa by 86AH/705. They then crossed the straits and defeated the Visigoth King Roderick and took the capital Toledo. Another Muslim army conquered parts of the Indus valley in 91-4AH/710-13 while a large Islamic army besieged Byzantium for a year in 99-100AH/ 717-718. In 706AH a Muslim army set out for Transoxania and Farghānā and may have reached Kashgar in Chinese Turkestan while in 99AH/717 a Muslim army crossed the Pyrenees and invaded France. After capturing Narbonne they were heavily defeated at Toulouse. Later Muslim armies reached near Tours in central France before being turned back.

Arabia itself had limited human resources and a key factor in the success of the early Muslim armies was their ability to attract recruits from the people they overran. These people came with their established military traditions and local weapons. As a result we find pre Islamic weapons and their direct linear descendants in the hands of new Muslim converts. The consequence is a large variety of weapons types all nominally Muslim. In some areas like India the Muslims were

unable to convert or assimilate the indigenous population, the greater part of which remained Hindu. However the cultural dominance of the Mughal court with its strong Persian culture and gradual assimilation of indigenous Hindu culture including arms lead to a synthesis which can legitimately be referred to as Indo Muslim arms. The terms used to describe arms and armour in the areas dominated by Islamic and Indian culture may be used specifically or generally but weaponry and nomenclature travel vast distances from their place of construction and are often adopted in other regions and languages. Not surprisingly, across this vast region a weapon may have more than one linguistic name; or the name may remain constant but the form changes.

Weapons transfer from one society to another generally as result of trade or war. Elite military raw materials were also traded extensively. The extent and sophistication of trade links is well recorded. In the ninth century an Arab in Baghdād wrote a treatise entitled ‘A Clear look at Trade’, discoursing on the products of various commodities and their origin. Besides the Islamic world he lists four other regions from outside, the lands of the Khazars from the Eurasian steppe, India, China and Byzantium, all of which traded with Iraq. The Khazars traded in ‘armour, helmets and hoods of mail’.³ The first dated reference to mail in Chinese documents occurs in 718AD when a gift of ‘link armour’ arrived from Samarkand. Later in the century the Tibetans who dominated the western marches of China clothed their knights and horses in fine mail leaving only their eyes free. A Korean 9th century tradition held that a suit of mail had fallen from Heaven long ago, east of the city of Liao.⁴

European or ‘Frankish’ weapons are frequently mentioned for their excellence in early Arab writings. The Persian writer Ibn Khurradādhbeh describes in the mid ninth century the Jewish merchants who bring swords from West to East.⁵ In the thirteenth century we find Arab

³ Lewis, 1982, p.185.

⁴ See Schafer p.261.

⁵ Lewis, 1982, p.138.

geographers comparing Frankish and Indian swords, to the latter's disadvantage: 'The Swords of Frank lands are keener.'⁶ Rather harder to establish than the existence of foreign arms in the regions under consideration is the extent of the trade.

Because the Turkish Empire was so large it both borrowed words from the local culture and gave from its own linguistic stock. Many of the Turkish weapons were adopted in these occupied territories and in due course acquired regionalised pronunciation, ultimately reflected in the spelling. The Turks recruited widely and garrisoned their troops across the empire as the situation demanded, the Albanians being a good example of this. Albania has three main linguistic forms, Gheg in northern Albania, Tosk in southern Albania, and Arberesh in southern Italy and Sicily where over the centuries many Albanians settled as refugees from the Turks. There are of course subsidiary dialects. The result is that a weapon may have several different names in different parts of this region; but in addition the Albanian serving in some place distant from his home is likely to have his arms decorated by the local craftsman so we find considerable variation in the ornamentation of certain types of guns. In the same manner the Arabs from Hadramaut in southern Arabia served as mercenaries in India, the ruler of the Emirate of al Shihr and Mukalla usually being married to a sister of the Nizam of Hyderabad to ensure his loyalty, and one finds Arab forms of swords, daggers and guns which are clearly made or decorated in southern or coastal India. Arab mercenaries were paid higher wages and were considered less likely to accept bribes than Indian troops and were extremely tenacious in defence of towns and forts.

Most of the technical words used in military and scientific Persian are derived from Arabic or Turkish. A great many words exist which are descriptive of the object, such as 'sharp' or 'bright' of a sword. The association of these qualities with swords is such that the adjective is

⁶ Lewis, 1982, p.146.

sufficient on its own to indicate the noun. For example, Persian ‘palārak’ meaning ‘excellent steel’ also means a sword.⁷

The Turkish words relating to firearms are widely followed by other nations in the Islamic world because the Turks were more advanced than their neighbours in this technology. From the late sixteenth century the Turks used the word *karanfil* to mean a gun, a term they certainly would not have borrowed from the Greek word for gun *καριοφίλι* (*kariophili*) as the Greeks were disarmed after the Ottoman occupation. Turkish *karanfil* also means a carnation as it does with minor variations in Albanian and Serbo-Croat. The flower was popular on Isnik pottery and on textiles from the sixteenth century. The carnation, *Dianthus caryophyllus*, is native to the Mediterranean region and was named by Theophrastus, Θεόφραστος; c. 371 – c. 287 BC., a Greek from Eressos in Lesbos. He was Aristotle’s successor in the Peripatetic school and two of his important botanical works survive, *Enquiry into Plants* and *On the Causes of Plants* which were of great importance in Medieval Europe. *Dianthus* means ‘the Flower of God’ from *dios* meaning Zeus and *anthos* flower. From the classical Greek *καρυόφυλλον* (*karyophyllon*) the word passes to Arabic *قرمفل* (*qaranful*) and so to Turkish *karanfil*, also meaning a clove. Modern Greeks use the word *γαρύφαλλο* (*garyphallo*) meaning carnation or clove from Venitian *garofolo* which also comes from ancient Greek *καρυόφυλλον* (*karyophyllon*). Sixteenth and early seventeenth century Turkish gun barrels have swollen muzzles resembling the carnation in bud (or a clove). Some even have carnations chiselled in relief or inlaid in brass at the muzzle as on a Stibbert example.⁸ [**Karanfil illustration.**] Turkish gun names in the Balkans are usually descriptive and this is the probable origin of the word *kariofili* which passes from Turkish back to Greek.⁹ No doubt it was military black humour at the time, similar to the *zanbūrak* or *zambūrak*, (Arabic, Turkish and Persian), ‘literally a little bee’, originally a crossbow and

⁷ Steingass p.239.

⁸ See Elgood forthcoming publication 2009, illustration 214)

⁹ See Elgood 2009 op. cit.

subsequently a small cannon carried on the back of a camel, the joke relating to the sound of the missile and its 'sting'.

The importance given to weapons in the Qur'ān is clear and the Prophet Muhammad who had considerable military experience as was the case with most of his contemporaries in Arabia was also very clear in his instructions regarding their importance. To him is attributed the admonition; 'Learn to shoot, for what lies between the two marks is one of the gardens of Paradise.' Also ascribed to the Prophet by al-Muttaqī is the statement that 'Swords are the keys to Paradise' and the faithful are urged to: 'Know that Paradise is under the protection of swords.' The Prophet's words on military matters have had a powerful effect on Muslim societies in the Dar al Islam and in some cases resulted in their taking a very conservative attitude to new weapons and warfare developed in the Dār al Harb. For example his teaching on the religious merit of practicing with the bow and the supremacy of the sword were a major factor in the defeat by the Ottomans of the Mamluks and the overthrow of their kingdom in 1517. The Ottoman use of firearms at Marj Dābiq and at Raydānīya was decisive and the traditional Muslim attitude was eloquently put by the Mamluk Emir Kurtbāy to Sultan Selim after the battle. 'Had we chosen to employ this weapon, you would not have preceded us in its use. But we are the people who do not discard the sunna of our prophet Muhammad which is the jihād for the sake of Allah, with sword and lance. And woe to thee! How darest thou shoot with firearms at Muslims...' ¹⁰ This attitude remained as late as the 1870s when the Blunts offered their friend Fāris, Shaikh of the Northern Shammar, a generous gift of a modern rifle and pistol that he had greatly enjoyed using. He rejected them, saying: 'I am better as my fathers were, without firearms.' ¹¹ Despite their success with firearms Ottoman Sultans continued to practice with the bow in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

¹⁰ Ayalon, 1956, p.94.

¹¹ Elgood 1994 p.59.

The Prophet's awareness of the importance of weapons as political symbols is demonstrated by his choice of the broken sword known as Dhu-l-faqār formerly the property of the slain heathen champion 'As ibn Munabbih as his share of the booty from the battle of Badr in 624 AD. The influence the Prophet had after his death on sword design can be seen in his attributed comments on the merits of gold or silver for hilts. The Qur'an (IX, 34) urges Believers not to hoard gold and silver but rather to spend it in the furtherance of the true faith. The traditions regarding the Prophet's disdain for gold and silver objects such as drinking cups and jewelry come from isnads¹² dating from after his death, roughly 100-150 AH. No doubt they reflected his views and in some cases his actual words. The use of gold jewelry was severely restricted for men and sword hilts were to be made of silver. The person who spread the presumably very early saying permitting this was Qatāda ibn Di'āma from Basra, who died in 117/735.' An attempt to soften this position, probably because of the large numbers of desirable captured objects within the expanding Islamic empire which did not meet this rule, is ascribed to Mālik ibn Anas (d.179/795) who argued that when a copy of the Qur'ān, mushaf, a sword or a ring is sold in which there is gold or silver, these may change hands if the value of the precious metal does not exceed one third of the overall value of the object. Another probably later, attempt to allow hilts to be made of silver and gold apparently never caught on: the saying is thought to be doubtful and the person responsible for it is identified as one Tālib ibn Hujayr who flourished in the early ninth century.¹³ These rules regarding hilts are still followed to this day in parts of the Arabian peninsula though not in Oman. [**Muscat sword – illus 1**] However, the absorption by Islamic society of a vast number of converts from the conquered territories resulted in the

¹² Isnād literally means a chain in Arabic but in this instance it means a statement attributed to the Prophet which has passed down by a succession or chain of people to the person recording it. The Qur'ān as the word of God was immutable but the Islamic conquests produced social and judicial problems not hitherto encountered by the Arabs and the isnād allowed the various Islamic schools of jurisprudence the possibility of some flexibility in the creation of sharī'a [religious law].

¹³ See Juynboll, 1986, p.111ff. from which these isnads are taken.

adoption of other standards in different parts of the Islamic world in such matters so that there is little consistency.

The influence of the Islamic world on Europe can be seen in the adoption of Near Eastern words in arms nomenclature, particularly in Spain and through the Crusades. On other occasions the nationality and form of the weapon rather than its name is taken. One thinks of the Old French 'coif turcoise', 'masse turcoise' or the 'arc turcoise'. Gifts between Christendom and the Dār al Islām, including arms, are often recorded. For example, in the year 293 (906AD) Bertha, Queen of Lorraine sent gifts, via a eunuch in the service of the Aghlabid ruler of the Magrib, to the Caliph al-Muktafi comprising fifty swords, fifty shields (turs), fifty Frankish (rumh) spears and other valuables.¹⁴ The eunuch who had been captured by the Franks during a naval raid on their territory duly delivered the gifts to the Caliph whom he found hunting near Samarra. These exchanges were sufficiently common for a writer like al Qazwīnī in the thirteenth century to be able to compare the swords of the Franks with those of India: 'They forge very sharp swords there, and the swords of the Frank-land are keener than the swords of India.'¹⁵ Magnificent weapons also came from the Byzantine Court. In the year 326 (983AD) the Byzantine Emperor Romanos sent the Caliph al-Rādi some remarkable gifts including two bezoar hilted daggers caged with gold wires, inlaid with precious stones and with gold and emeralds pommels; two other knives whose hilts were made of precious stones profusely adorned with pearls and other precious stones; and 'a battle axe (tabarzīn) with a heavy head made of gilded silver set with precious stones and pearls, the haft decorated with silver latticework profusely adorned with gilded silver.'¹⁶ The bezoar stone, in medieval Arabic bādizahr or bāzahr, old French and Spanish bezar, was the calculus or concretion built up round some alien substance, found in the

¹⁴Al-Zubayr para 69. Also sent were 'beads that painlessly extract arrow heads (nusul) and spear heads (azzijah) when the flesh has swollen up around them'.

¹⁵ Al Qazwīnī, *Āthār al-bilād*, p. 498.

¹⁶Al-Zubayr para 73.

digestive tract of some ruminants, particularly Persian wild goats. This rare substance was much sought after as it was believed to give protection against poison as the Persian word *pādzahr* demonstrates, *pād* meaning protector plus *zahr* poison. The widespread use of the word in similar form indicates the universal trade in this rare substance and its use on knife hilts was because they were used for eating, a time when poisoned food might be encountered. ‘In the year 217 (832AD) Al-Hasan b. Sahl offered (Prince) al-Mu’tasim bi-Allah, during the reign of his brother al-Ma’mūn bi-Allah ... good knives (*sakakin*) [with handles] of rhinoceros horn (*khatu*),¹⁷ and other enormous knives with handles of bezoar (*bazahr*).’¹⁸

The scale of the great armouries of the time is remarkable. The contents of the storehouses of the Caliph Hārūn al Rashīd were listed on his death in 193/809 on the orders of his son, a process that took four months, and amongst many items contained 10,000 decorated swords, 50,000 swords for *ghulāms* (household troops), 150,000 lances, 100,000 bows, 1000 special suits of armour, 50,000 common suits of armour, 10,000 helmets, 20,000 breast plates, 150,000 shields.¹⁹ The list does not appear to contain the late Caliph’s person arms and the numbers are suspiciously round but the scale is probably an accurate guide.

Weapons were always very acceptable as gifts to rulers and we find the great Arab traveller Ibn Battuta presenting the Indian ruler Muhammad bin Tughluq with a gift of a camel load of arrows.²⁰ The author of the *Adab al harb* is insistent that any envoy being sent to another court should always be provided with large numbers of valuable gifts which should include swords, spears, daggers, bows, arrows and other weapons. Some arrangements between Christians and

¹⁷ *Khutū* means walrus ivory and this is a mistake by the translator. The word for rhino horn is usually *bishan* and this substance too has magical properties ascribed to it. See Ettinghausen, Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers, Vol. 1, No. 3, Washington.

¹⁸ Al-Zubair, p.83 : 42.

¹⁹ Ibn al-Zubayr, *Kitāb al Dhakhā’ir wa’l-Tuhaf*, pp. 214-218.

²⁰ Gibb, III, p.596.

Muslims are surprising. Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor, in 1226 moved his rebellious Muslim subjects from western Sicily to Lucera in northern Apulia, Italy where he settled them, converting the local Christian churches to mosques. Their swordsmiths produced swords for him, said to be of exceptional quality, second only to Toledo. The Emperor who spoke fluent Arabic built for himself an Islamic palace in which he kept a harem of Muslim girls and eunuchs and had a personal bodyguard of Muslims.²¹

In 1481 the members of an embassy sent by the Deccani Bahmani ruler Shams al-Din Muhammad Shah were arrested at Jeddah by the local Mamluk governor while en route to the Ottoman Sultan Bayzid II with gifts that included a diamond studded dagger. The gifts were confiscated and this so scandalised the Ottomans that contemporary Ottoman chronicles attribute to this incident the Ottoman-Mamluk war of 1485-91.²² The importance of state gifts which very frequently included weapons could not be clearer. Gifts were given for commercial and diplomatic reasons such as the gift to the Maratha ruler Sivaji from the East India Co. in 1670 of ‘sword blades, knives etc...’²³ A British Military Mission was in Persia 1834 – 1838, seeking to improve relations with Shāh Muhammad (1835-48). The Foreign Office sent Lieut. Richard Wilbraham, Adjutant of the 1/95th and four serjeants from the Rifle Brigade with 2000 pattern 1823 Baker rifles and bayonets as a present for the Shāh. For nearly three years they instructed the Persian Army but when the Shāh advanced on the city of Herat and besieged it the British forced him to abandon the operation and good relations with the British Government were broken. The Military Mission was obliged to leave, carefully removing the locks from the rifles and taking them with them.²⁴

²¹ Norwich 2006, p. 159.

²² The episode is considered in detail in Shai Har-El, 1995, pp. 113-4. The gifts finally reached the Ottoman court

²³ See Fawcett 1936, p. 197.

²⁴ For more detail on these rifles see De Witt Bailey, 2008.

The nomenclature for arms and armour in India has been dominated in European writings by north Indian terminology, Persian, Urdu, Arabic, Hindi and Rajasthani. Other Indian languages such as Sanskrit, Kannada, Telugu, Tamil or Marathi also alternative names for these objects. The names used by tribal people adds a further variant. A linguistic survey in 1901 found that some 225 languages and dialects existed in the subcontinent. The names of specific objects are sometimes transferred as loan words from other languages. The Vijayanagara and Nayaka rulers frequently employed troops from outside south India who brought their own weaponry and nomenclature and within Arabic and Persian there are many loan words and these were carried over into the Indian languages. As Goetz wrote: ‘The terminology of Indian arms still is chaotic and needs a critical examination. Many terms are of purely local character and become intelligible only in the light of local history.’²⁵ The large extent of the Mughal Empire and its successor Maratha Empire resulted in a wide distribution of weapons types and names which would originally have been regional. **[chilta – illus.]** It should be noted that throughout the subcontinent there are usually Hindu and Muslim forms of the same weapon, the differences being evident in such details as the form of the hilt and the decoration. Widespread knowledge of Sanskrit in Hindu India also results in the ancient Sanskrit generic word for a weapon such as lance, spear, club etc being applied on a local basis to a specific type of contemporary weapon; the practice being applied to differing contemporary weapons across the subcontinent, all of which have the characteristics of the origin Sanskrit word. The link is not merely linguistic but often reflects the weapons attribution to a particular god or goddess. It should be noted that the gods who have their own personalised weapons often present these to other gods, sometimes incarnations of themselves. The weapon transferred retains it’s generic and individual name. This leads to confusion as to which god owned what well known weapon. Krishna owned Sudarsana, the chakra; Sārnga, the bow (dhanus); Kaumodaki, the mace (gada); Nandaka, the sword (khadga); all of which are regarded as belonging to Vishnu but the Pancajanya, the conch

²⁵ See Goetz

(sankha) is particularly Krishna's. Other Sanskrit names of weapons like those given in Kautilya's Arthashastra can no longer with certainty be attributed to specific forms beyond the generic listing given in the text. There are also a large number of early Tamil weapons names from the Sangam age.²⁶

In transliteration the names in any single language may be spelt in a variety of forms. Some are more familiar to collectors than others. In any society the same object may be known by a multiplicity of names. However Islamic belief, the Arabic language of the Qur'an, and tradition also has a unifying effect. The Arabic word for a sword, saif, covers a wide variety of swords of different shapes from various countries. **[Saif illustration]**The ability of Islamic tradition to cross boundaries and appeal to men of many nations can be seen in the case of an iconic sword owned by the Prophet Muhammed, called by him Dhu'l-faqār. The name is generally taken to mean 'the cloven blade' but can be translated to have other meanings. There are several differing traditions concerning the origin of this sword, Sunni and Shi'ite.

The Shi'ite tradition is that the sword was carried by Adam from the Garden of Eden; that it was a gift from the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon; and/or that the Angel Gabriel gave it to the Prophet. Having by these associations given the sword an illustrious past in a society that venerated tradition, Shi'ite tradition comes close to Sunni in attributing ownership of the sword to Munabbih b. al Hajjaj whose son al-'As' inherited it. The Sunni belief is that the Prophet Muhammad took the sword as booty from 'As ibn Munabbih, a heathen champion slain at the battle of Badr in 624AD. It has been argued by western historians that faqāra and mufaqqār are

²⁶A good selection of these can be found in P.T.Srinivasa Aiyangar's Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture, p.39-40. A list of the weapons associated with the iconography of the northern Hindu gods can be seen in the Aparajita-praccha cited by Shukla p. 135. This provides a good means of linking Sanskrit term with sculptural representation. A list of works on Dhanurveda can be found in E.D.Kulkani, 'The Dhanurveda and its contribution to Lexicography' in Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute. Vol.3, 1952.

indicative of a blade ‘having a spine’ or having grooves incised in the blade. However the words also imply a notched or battle-worn blade, the result of combat usage and this is clearly how the Islamic world has envisaged the sword, (for the importance of this see Elgood 1994) and the early iconography emphasises this by showing the sword as twin pointed, a unique feature at that time indicative of damage.

Sunni and Shi’ite tradition agrees that the sword was bequeathed by the Prophet to his son in law ‘Ali, the fourth Caliph and the personification of Arab chivalry, known as ‘the victorious lion of God (asad-allah ul-ghālib).²⁷ From ‘Ali it descended to his son Husayn who was martyred in 680AD. The chain of ownership of the sword from this moment ceases and the sword itself disappeared though various groups claimed possession and the authority this gave them. According to Schwarzlose (p. 152), the sword passed by inheritance within the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty for a long time. Twelver Shi’ites claim the sword remained in the ‘Alid family until 873AD when the twelfth Imam vanished.

The blade was copied by devout Shias but in two forms since the appearance of the original is not known, type one with a swallow tail double point and type two with two parallel blades, joined towards the hilt, like a laminated blade that has parted down its full length. An early surviving example of the former type traditionally attributed to the Caliph ‘Uthmān²⁸ (reigned 23-35AH / 644-656AD) is included amongst the twenty two swords piously believed to have belonged to the Prophet David, the Prophet Muhammad, the Rāshidūn or first four Caliphs and the Sahāba or Companions) known as the Suyūf-l Mubāreke or Sacred Swords, in the Reliquary in Istanbul. The original Dhu’l-Fiqār owned by ‘Ali was considered unique, so the attribution of

²⁷ This is the source of the lion motif carved on the forte of Persian swords in the 19th century, intended to strengthen the user.

²⁸ Topkapi Saray Museum, 21/136. There is also a fifteenth century Mamluk cloven blade. See Yücel, reference 1/215.

a similar blade in the Reliquary to the Caliph ‘Uthmān, his contemporary, is improbable. Furthermore, al-Tabarī describes when and where the original was lost.²⁹ Nevertheless the Fātimids, a dynasty in Egypt³⁰ claiming Alid descent through Fātima, daughter of the Prophet and wife of the fourth caliph ‘Ali, publically claimed to wear Dhu’l-Fiqār in the fourth century after the hijra; and a sword given this provenance was exhibited by Ismā’il al-Mansūr to his warriors to inspire them against Abū Yazīd and his rebel army.³¹ There are therefore good historical reasons for doubting that the sword in Istanbul is ‘Uthman’s but the blade is of early form and has possibly been altered at a later date for doctrinal reasons. The second Dhu-l-faqār twin parallel blade type appears in miniature paintings from at least the late 15th century but surviving examples appear to be invariably of eighteenth or nineteenth century date. An elaborate example from the Zlatoustovsk Arms factory was presented to Prince Alexander Nicholayevitch in 1837 and is now in the Tzarskoye Selo Museum and a good late 18th century Turkish example is in the Musée de l’Armée, Paris.³²

Some Sunnis while not doubting the order of succession nevertheless practice tafzīl and give ‘Ali a place above the other early Caliphs while Shi’ites see him as the actual successor of the Prophet and the founder of all Sufi orders except the Naqshbandiya. All invoke his name as the perfect fatā or warrior for the faith. A good historical example of the devotion to all that ‘Ali represents to this day is the orthodox Sunni Tipu Sultan of Mysore who inscribed invocations to ‘Ali on all his arms and took a personal interest in emulating ‘the victorious lion of God’. [**Tipu Sultan sword illustration**]. In early Twelver Shi’ism the issue of who possessed his sword became part of the larger issue of claims for divinely sanctioned authority. For this reason the Ottoman Sultans who on their accession to the throne were girded with a historic sword or

²⁹ al-Tabarī III, p.247.

³⁰ The Fatimids ruled from 297-567 AH / 909-1171 AD.

³¹ Journal Asiatique 1852, II,p.481. See Schwarzlose, p.152 for the Abbasid ownership of this sword.

³² Illustrated by Jacob, 1985, p. 20.

swords believed to have been owned by the Prophet or the Rāshidūn, usually in the Eyub Mosque on the Golden Horn, pointedly omitted any reference to Ali and Dhu'l-Fiḳār. The sword is frequently used as an iconographic element in Sufi art being the ultimate Alid symbol. Frequently the name Ali has the tail of the last letter forked at the end like the sword, appropriately because 'Ali is regarded by Sunnis and Shi'ites as the founder of calligraphy and the creator of Kufic, the oldest and most important style of Qur'anic calligraphy. For Bektashis and Alevis, Dhu'l-faḳār is the symbolic representation of Ali's supreme power, expressed in the slogan *lā fatā illā 'Alī, lā sayf illā Dhu'l-fiḳār* -There is no hero like 'Ali, there is no sword like Dhu'l-fiḳār. The utterance of this for Bektashis is the equivalent of the Sunni shahada as a statement of faith.

It would be quite wrong to see devotion to Dhu'l-fiḳār as a Shi'ite monopoly as the development of the craft guilds in the Islamic world demonstrates. The Sufi / Dervish brotherhood merged with the *esnafs* or guilds, 'Ali being both the *bāb ul 'ilm* or 'gate of knowledge' and also the patron of all craftsmen's guilds: and also with the Futuwwa movement which appeared all over the Islamic world in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Futuwwa comprised bands of young men bound together by an ethical and religious code of duties and an elaborate ceremonial. They were, and are, under obligation to practice certain virtues and to provide military service to Islam. The Futuwwa has been compared to the Christian concept of chivalry. The Persian Safavid army was 'Alid but its great rival the Ottoman army too was deeply permeated by Sufi orders, the Ottoman banners bore the symbol of Dhu'l-fiḳār. Retired Ottoman soldiers took their beliefs into the *esnafs* in the Balkans and across the empire, wherever they served Dhu'l-fiḳār is and has always been the inspirational symbol of all branches of militant Islam.³³

³³ For a wider discussion of the sword and its symbolism see Zaky 1965; *E.I.2.* ; Alexander 1984; Elgood 1994 p.32, n.38; Hathaway 2003.

As we have briefly seen the teaching and example of the Prophet and his Companions had a considerable influence on the development of weapons and the conservatism inherent in Islam ensured that these views were respected. In many parts of the Dar al-Islam warfare was very much as it had been fifteen hundred years earlier. Lawrence took photos of his attack on Akaba in the First World War which show a force almost indistinguishable from the Arab armies that defeated the Byzantines and Sasanians in the seventh century. Other societies managed to maintain their religious orthodoxy while modernising their armies, particularly those that were in close contact with European armies like the Turks. Knowledge of the owner of a weapon and his role and status in society and in history can go a long way towards explaining the design of a weapon; and adds greatly to the enjoyment of collecting.

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Captions in sequence.

[Page 4]. The swollen muzzle of a late sixteenth or early seventeenth karanfil or 'carnation' Ottoman matchlock.

Private Collection.

[Page 5] Shamshir from Muscat. C. 1800. Persian style single edged watered steel blade with ladder pattern. Persian style hilt with gold mounts embossed and chased, with filigree. The gold mounts on this sword are Muscat work. French import stamp on the quillon. Persian style black shagreen scabbard with raised (string) decoration. The sewn seam is unusual being down the back of the scabbard. French import mark of an eagle's head on the hanging ring, the other ring broken off.

Overall length: 98.4 cms.

Blade 85 cms.

Wallace Collection OA2002.

[Page 7] A chihal'ta hazar māshā abbreviated as chilta from chihal meaning forty, a reference to the layers of cloth that comprise the base of this studded textile armour reinforced with steel plates. Rajput early nineteenth century.

Abu'l Fazl writing in Persian describes the hazār mīkhī or 'Coat of a Thousand Nails' as an armour worn by chiefs in Rajasthan. The chihalqad was another quilted coat of cotton or velvet, this being worn over armour and the Persians also used the word dagla for a quilted coat worn over armour. Dagla are described in court use in Bikaner in the nineteenth century. The poet Amir Khusrau (1253-1325) had the misfortune to be captured by a Mongol soldier near Multan and later wrote in the Diwan called Wasat-ul-Hayat a lengthy and contemptuous account of their uncouthness, 'the wearers of quilted vests [dagla posh] as under armour'. However, it is argued that the leaf shaped shoulder flaps found on the Rajput chilta and elsewhere in India are the direct descendants of thirteenth/fourteenth century Mongol armour, a relic of their invasions of north India.

Wallace Collection OA 1763.

Page 8. Arab saif or nimcha with silver and silver gilt hilt. The seventeenth century single edged blade has fullers and a false edge and is of Italian export form. The blade has been burnished but traces of pattern welding are present indicating it is made in the East. The wooden scabbard is covered with green velvet with silver and silver gilt mounts, cast and chased. Stamps on the silver scabbard have been tentatively attributed to Rabat which with the neighboring town of Salé united to form the Republic of Bou Regreg in 1627, a Barbary pirate base on the Atlantic coast. The Alaouite Dynasty which united Morocco in 1666 failed to subdue them and Rabat remained a pirate base until the nineteenth century.

Overall length: 100 cms.

Blade 85.5 cms.

Wallace Collection OA 1787.

[Page 9] Shamshir attributed to Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore, the tulwar hilt of jade set with precious stones; 18th century Persian blade with the original inscriptions in cartouches at the forte picked out and replaced with bubris and inscriptions. The ‘bubri’ or tiger stripe was adopted in about 1780, two years before the death of Tipu’s father Haidar Ali, and is found on Tipu’s personal possessions and state property. The attribution to Tipu other than the characteristic iconographic details is on the basis of a nineteenth century French auction sale catalogue when it was bought by Richard Seymour-Conway, the 4th Marquess of Hertford, (1800-1870).³⁴ It is also unusual to find a Tipu object where the inscription is on a cross-hatched ground rather than inlaid.

Wallace Collection OA 1402.

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Photographer Cassandra Parsons.

³⁴ The receipt for this piece is in the Wallace Collection Library.