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The Evolution of Curved Swords: A Comparative Study of China and Iran

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Abstract

This article delves into the intricate evolution of swords and sabers in China and Iran, shedding light on the craftsmanship that shaped these formidable weapons. The article begins by exploring the genesis and progression of sword shapes in China, focusing on the distinct forms that emerged over time. It particularly highlights the stark differences between the straight-edged jian and the various types of dao, which are characterized by their single-edged design. The discourse then shifts to the Persian context, unraveling the true essence of the term 'shamshir'. Contrary to the common misconception held by numerous scholars and collectors in the West, 'shamshir' is not confined to highly curved sabers. Instead, it is a broad term used in Persian to denote any kind of sword, irrespective of its shape. The article further delves into the historical period when curved swords began to gain prominence in both China and Iran. This exploration not only provides a deeper understanding of the evolution of these weapons but also offers insights into the cultural and historical contexts that influenced their development.

Keywords: Shamshir, Dao, Jian, Sword, China, Iran, Saber, Sasanians, Ming Dynasty, Central Asia, Yuan Dynasty, Peidao, Zhibeidao.

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Introduction

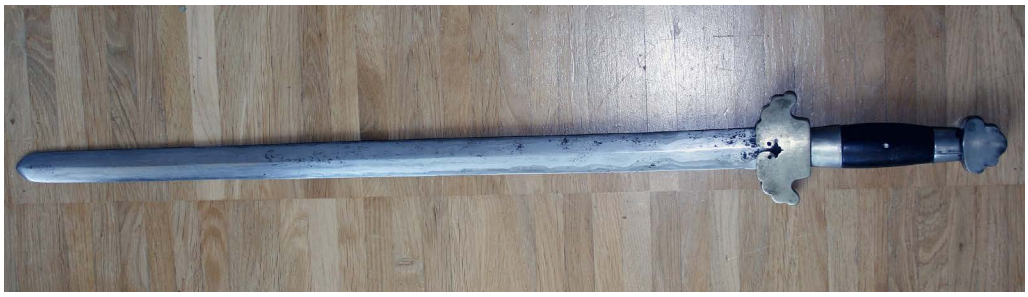
This article delves into the fascinating evolution of sword shapes, tracing the journey from straight to curved blades. It particularly focuses on the transformation of sword designs in China and Iran, two civilizations renowned for their martial prowess and metallurgical advancements. In ancient China, the primary weapons of choice were the straight double-edged swords, known as 'jian', and the straight single-edged swords, referred to as 'zhibeidao'. However, the Mongol conquests brought about a significant shift in Chinese swordsmanship. The Central Asian horsemen in the Mongol army predominantly wielded single-edged curved swords, a design that was soon adopted by the Chinese, leading to the emergence of the 'peidao' in China. Simultaneously, in ancient Iran, the dominant sword design was the straight, double-edged blade. It was only during military confrontations with Central Asian tribes, who wielded slightly curved single-edged swords, that this design was introduced into Iran via Khorasani warriors. Over time, the curvature of the blade increased, culminating in the highly-curved 'shamshir' of the Safavid period. This study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the introduction and development of curved swords in China and Iran. It explores the factors that influenced these changes and the impact on martial techniques.

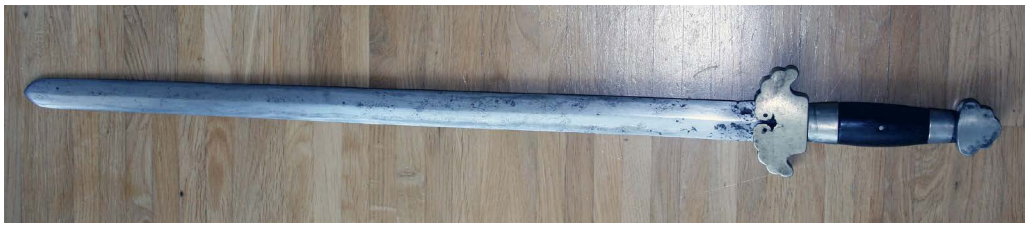
The evolution of shapes of swords in China

The rich tradition of Chinese swords can be categorized into two broad classes: the jian (sword) and the dao (knife). The jian, a symbol of elegance and precision, is a straight, double-edged sword, designed for swift, direct attacks. Its dual edges allow for versatile combat techniques, making it a formidable weapon in the hands of a skilled warrior. On the other hand, the dao, a single-edged blade, is a testament to the diversity and adaptability of Chinese swords. Single-edged swords designed for use with one or two hands during the last six centuries of China's imperial era were called dao (knife). Therefore, the entire class of single-edged blades is called dao (knife) regardless of length, shape or guard configuration. It differs from the family of other bladed weapons known as jian (sword), which are straight and double-edged. The dao is not confined to a single form as it takes a variety of shapes and sizes. Some dao are straight. Others are long and curved, their sweeping arcs designed for wide, powerful cuts. There are also dao that are short and compact, designed for close-quarters combat where agility and speed are paramount. Lastly, there are broad dao with angular points, their unique design making them ideal for both slashing and thrusting attacks (see Tom, 2001: 207). The different types of dao are classified according to their individual characteristics, and each has its own name. These weapons are never considered to be swords in Chinese, which is why they are called "knives" regardless of their length. Each type of dao has its strengths and weaknesses (Tom & Rodell, 2005: 76).

The dao, a prominent symbol of military prowess, has been deeply ingrained in China's history, tracing its roots back to several centuries prior to the country's

unification in 221 BCE under the reign of the first Qin emperor. Initially crafted from bronze, the evolution of the dao saw a shift towards the use of iron and steel by the third century BCE, reflecting the advancements in metallurgy of the time. In the early stages, the dao was primarily issued to the rank and file soldiers. However, the officers and the nobility seemed to favor the double-edged jian, a weapon that has been associated with the aristocracy since the feudal era. The jian was considered a symbol of a gentleman throughout the imperial period, reflecting the social stratification of the time. The dao used during this period was predominantly straight, with only a few exceptions. This blade configuration is referred to as zhibeidao in Chinese, which translates to 'straight-backed knife'. The zhibeidao, despite its humble beginnings, gained popularity among officers and aristocrats over time, and its use persisted throughout the successive dynasties. By the time of the Sui dynasty (581-618 CE), the production of the dao had reached new heights of sophistication. Fine steel blades adorned with lavish fittings were crafted, reflecting the prosperity and technological advancements of the era. The Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) marked a significant milestone in the history of the dao. During this period, the style of the dao and the metallurgical techniques used to create them were introduced to Japan. This introduction, either directly from China or via Korea, had a profound influence on the development of Japanese weaponry, marking the beginning of a new era in the history of warfare (Tom, 2001: 207).





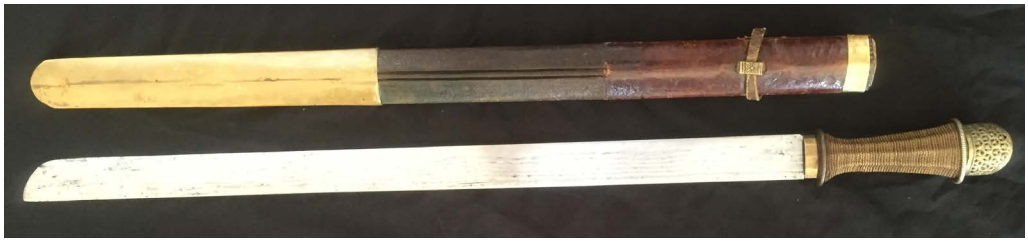
Figs. 1 and 2: A Chinese jian

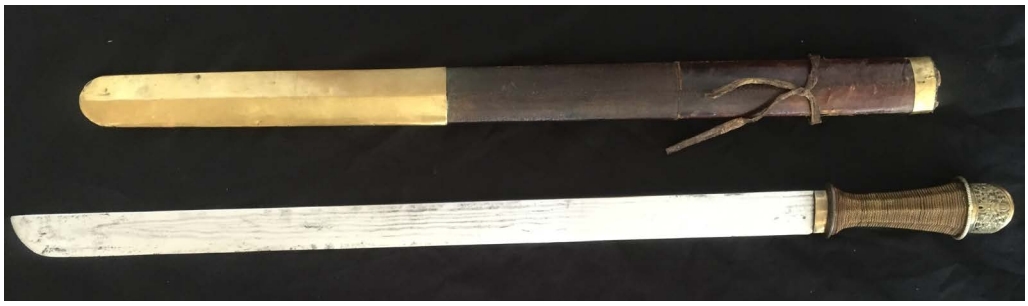
The main question is when the single-edged straight dao started to gain curvature. To begin with the use of various types of dao as military weapons dates back several centuries before the unification of China by the first Qin emperor in 221 BC. The first model was called zhibeidao (straight back knife) and featured a long blade without any curvature. Early examples were made of bronze, but from the 3rd century BCE onwards, weapons used in combat were almost all made of iron or steel. Used for centuries by the military, this weapon only lost its popularity after the end of the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty in 1368 CE. Handle and scabbard styles changed over time, but the

blade retained its straight configuration. The first swords carried and made in Japan and Korea were zhibeidao. This blade shape remained in use in Tibet and Bhutan until the 20th century (Tom & Rodell, 2005: 76-77). Later, this type of single-edged sword led to the peidao (belt knife). The peidao sword is perhaps the most important member of the dao family. It completely replaced the double-edged jian in the army during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE) in the military circles. On the other hand, the jian continued to be used in martial arts circles and by the nobility (see Tom, 2001: 209).

Zhibeidao (直背刀) or "straight back knife"

As mentioned before, the zhibeidao, also known as the "straight back knife" or "straight back saber", is a distinctive weapon characterized by its straight back and parallel edge. Unlike its curved counterparts, the edge of the zhibeidao only curves upwards to meet the spine at the very tip, creating a unique silhouette that sets it apart from other sabers. The zhibeidao served as the standard sidearm for soldiers until the Mongol invasion. The Mongols, armed with their curved sabers, swept across the land, replacing the native styles in all but the most remote corners of the empire. Despite this widespread replacement, the zhibeidao managed to survive, primarily among ethnic minorities such as the Tibetans, Bhutanese and Yi, who resided in the western and southwestern regions of the country. These communities, isolated from the main thrust of the Mongol invasion, managed to preserve the use and manufacture of the zhibeidao, ensuring its continued existence (Dekker, 2024).





Figs. 3 and 4: A Bhutanese sword with a single-edged straight blade

Peidao (佩刀) or "belt knife"

The peidao (佩刀) literally translated as "belt knife", but commonly translated as "saber" or "waist-worn saber" comprises a large and varied group of weapons. It is generally over sixty centimeters long, and has a handle designed primarily for one-handed use. It is also fitted with a scabbard so that it can be worn on a belt hence the name "waist-worn

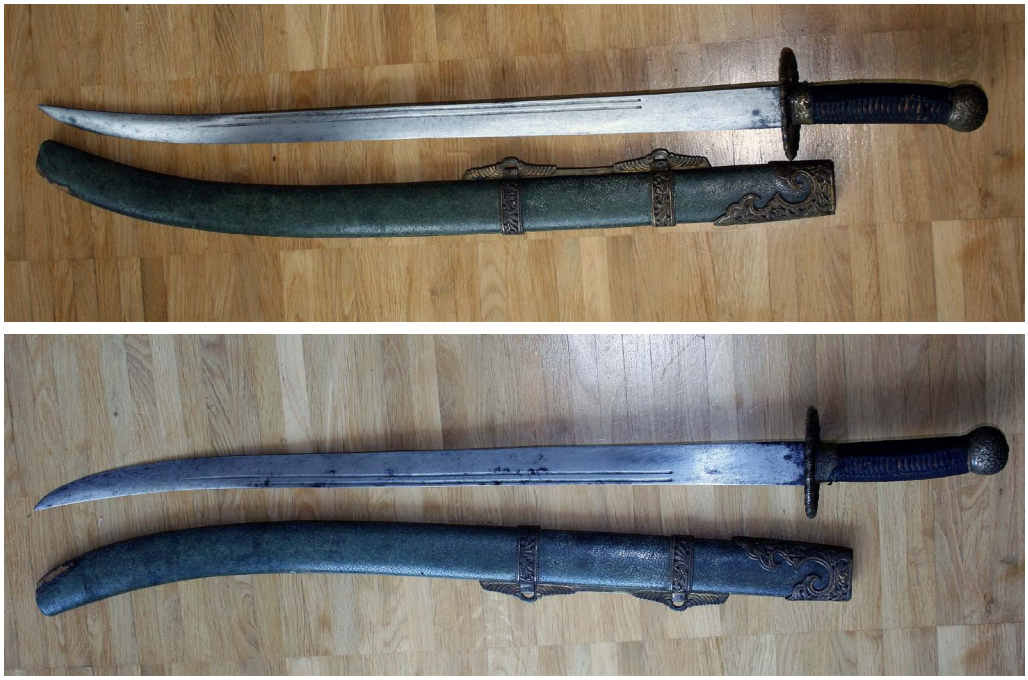
saber" (Tom & Rodell, 2005: 76). The peidao is not necessarily defined by a curved blade. In fact, some of these swords feature a straight edge. The defining characteristic of a peidao is its single-edged blade, which extends for the majority of its length. This weapon is designed to be worn on the hip, further distinguishing it as a peidao. Given the vast array of variations within this category, it becomes essential to delve deeper into the classification, identifying and categorizing the numerous sub-types of peidao (Tom & Rodell, 2005: 77; Tom & Rodell, 2005: 77; Tom, 2020). The origins of this long-bladed weapon can be traced back to the warrior horsemen who lived on the steppes of the Eurasian frontier during the Middle Ages. Its curved blade was better suited to slicing, as its arc matched the circular movement of a horseman's arm. Descendants of these warriors served in the ranks of the Mongol hordes. The advantage of a curved blade was evident on battlefields from Poland to Korea. Their blades were the origin of the various types of Chinese peidao subsequently developed over the following centuries. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were marked by the sweeping conquests of the Mongol hordes. The descendants of Eurasian tribes, in significant numbers, served in the ranks of these formidable forces. Their influence extended across vast territories, from the heartlands of Eastern Europe and the Middle East to the entirety of China. Among the Western observers of this epoch, a certain Carpini (1996: 72) made a noteworthy observation. He recorded that by the thirteenth century, the Mongol aristocracy had widely adopted the use of sabers. This was a significant departure from the traditional weaponry of the time, which predominantly featured straight-bladed swords. The Mongol invaders, however, did not merely bring the saber to China. Their conquests also introduced this curved blade to other cultures that had, until then, relied almost exclusively on straight-bladed swords.

The transition to the saber was not immediate but rather a gradual process. It began in the aftermath of the Mongol conquests and continued well into the fifteenth century (Tom, 2001: 207-209). The first type, based on Central Asian prototypes introduced during the Yuan dynasty, had a cruciform guard. This type of guard later became widespread in the Middle East. During the 15th and 16th centuries, thousands of two-handed Japanese katanas were imported to China. The Chinese enthusiastically copied these disk-shaped guards (tsuba). By the middle of the Ming dynasty, cruciform guards went out of fashion. The peidao is classified according to the shape of its blade, which is between 66 and 76 centimeters long. There are four types of peidao (Tom, 2001: 207-209; Tom & Rodell, 2005: 77; Tom, 2020; for daos shown in Chinese paintings, see: Butz 2003).

- Yanmaodao 雁毛刀 or yanlingdao (雁翎刀) (goose-quill saber)

The yanmaodao 雁毛刀 or "goose-quill knife" or "goose-quill saber" appears to be the next step up from the zhibeidao (直背刀) or "straight-back knife" used by China's military from the Warring States period (1046 – 256 BCE) until well into the Song

Dynasty (960 to 1279 CE), and even by the Mongols on occasion (Tom, 2020). The term yanmaodao is used by collectors and connoisseurs. On the other hand, the term yanlingdao has its origins in the annals of classic literature (Dekker, 2024). The blade of a yanmaodao is essentially straight until the last 17.8 to 22.9 centimeters before the tip. From there, the blade takes on a gentle curve, it means that the tip of the sword is very slightly curved. There is usually a back-edge opposite the curved part of the blade's cutting edge. This is the oldest form of peidao. Its shape is indeed strongly influenced by the ancient zhibeidao with its straight blade (Tom & Rodell, 2005: 77). It means that the zhibeidao was completely straight and sharpened on one side only. So, it was single-edged. The yanmaodao shows a slight curve therefore, it is the beginning of the actual curve in the blade. The earliest surviving specimens date from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE), and it remained in fairly wide use until the end of the 18th century. Later examples are rare. The technique of this sword utilizes the strong points of both jian (劍) and dao (刀). It means that the yanmaodao was designed to combine the best features of the saber and the sword (Tom, 2020; Tom & Rodell, 2005: 77; for a yanmaodao, see: Hagen, 1896, plate XI; 7; for more examples, see: Huangfu, 2007). A yanmaodao has certain characteristics. As mentioned before, the blade profile is straight for most of its length and the curve starts at the cutting edge along the last ¼ towards the tip of the blade. The back of the blade sweeps up slightly to shape the point. Most yanmaodao blades have a backedge or a beveled area that serves as another edge on the blade spine. Some of them are quite sharp and some are blunt, but they are not as sharp as the true edge of the blade (Tom, 2020). As far as surface features of the blade are concerned, some yanmaodao blades have no fullers and the others have fullers to lighten the blade. Most yanomadao hilts were straight (Tom, 2020).



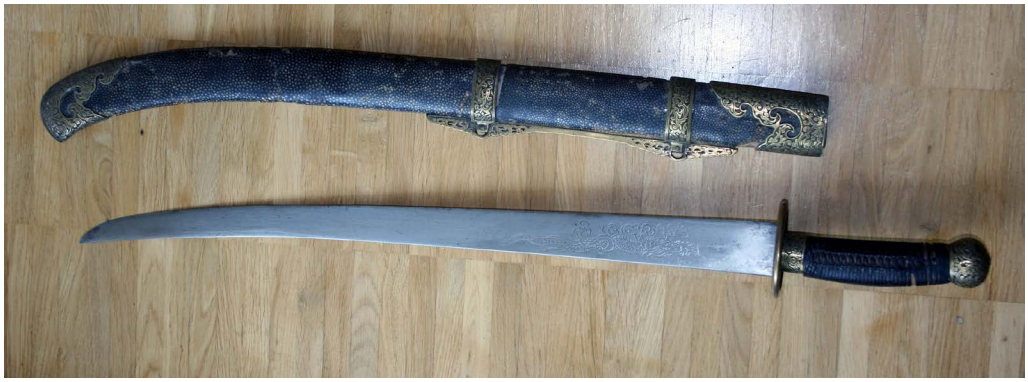
Figs. 5 and 6: A Chinese yanomadao

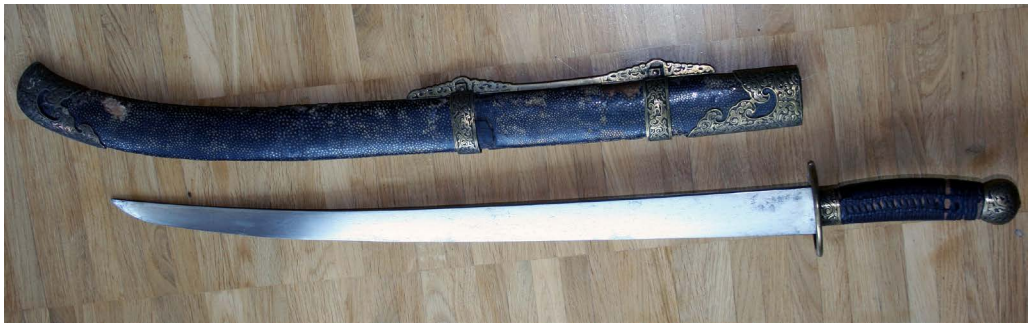
- Liuyedao 柳葉刀 (willow leaf saber)

The liuyedao, "willow leaf knife", has a gentle curve that starts near the handle and then the curve is distributed along the blade length. A deeper curve of the blade means that it could be used to deliver deeper cuts, but the traditional thrust with the saber is still effective, although not in the same way as a thrust with a yanmaodao. The general assumption is that the liuyedao is not native to China and was introduced by the Mongols into China during their conquests. Additionally, the Mongol sabers should have been influenced by Central Asian prototypes (Tom, 2020). The liuyedao remained the most popular saber type in China as it substituted the jian and zhibeidao in the military by the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE), and reduced the popularity of the yanmaodao by mid-Qing period (1644 –1912 CE). Many blades of liuyedao have fullers and a back-edge. It was a widely used sword in China in all divisions of the Chinese army and it is shown in many artworks from the Ming and Qing dynasties. The liuyedao could be used effectively to deliver strong cuts on foot or horseback (Tom, 2020; Tom & Rodell, 2005: 77-78; for an example of liuye dao, see: Hagen, 1896, plate X ; 2; for other examples of liuye dao, see: Huangfu, 2007, and Richardson, 1994: 183). As far as the blade characteristics of liuyedao are concerned, the blade has a curve extending for most of its length. There are also different curves on the blade of liuyedao. Some blades have a slight curve and then the curve increases towards the tip of the blade. Other types of liuyedao have a pronounced curve near the hilt, and then the curve decreases towards the blade's tip. There are also blade types with a symmetrical circular curve. Most blades have a backedge. The hilts of liuyedao sabers can be straight or curved (Tom, 2020).

There is also a variety of liuyedao that has prominent ridges 起 qi on both sides of the blade. This is a feature that is similar to the shinogizukuri cross-section which is typical of Japanese katana. However, this is an old Chinese influence as this is in fact a survival of the typical cross-section of most zhibeidao from the Zhou (1046 BC until 256 BC) through Tang Dynasties (618-907 CE) which have this typical cross-section. The narrow blades, often referred to as miaodao or "sprout saber", are named for their resemblance to a sprout in Jin Yiming's "Single Defense Saber" (1935). Today, the term miaodao is commonly used to refer to the large two-handed version of the liuyedāo. This can cause confusion, as the term was originally used to refer to the narrow, curved blade shape of the liuyedao. However, the two-handed miaodao is a distinct weapon in its own right, with a longer blade and a different fighting style compared to the single-handed liuyedao. The liuyedao also displays a large variety in blade design. Some blades have fullers, which are grooves that run along the length of the blade. These fullers reduce the weight of the blade without compromising its strength, making the weapon easier to wield. Other blades have bevels, which are angled surfaces on the edge of the blade. These bevels can increase the cutting power of the blade, making it more effective in combat. The blade profiles, or the cross-sectional shape of the blade, can also vary.

Despite the variety in design, all liuyedao share a common characteristic: they are all single-edged (Dekker, 2024).





Figs. 7 and 8: A Chinese liuyedao

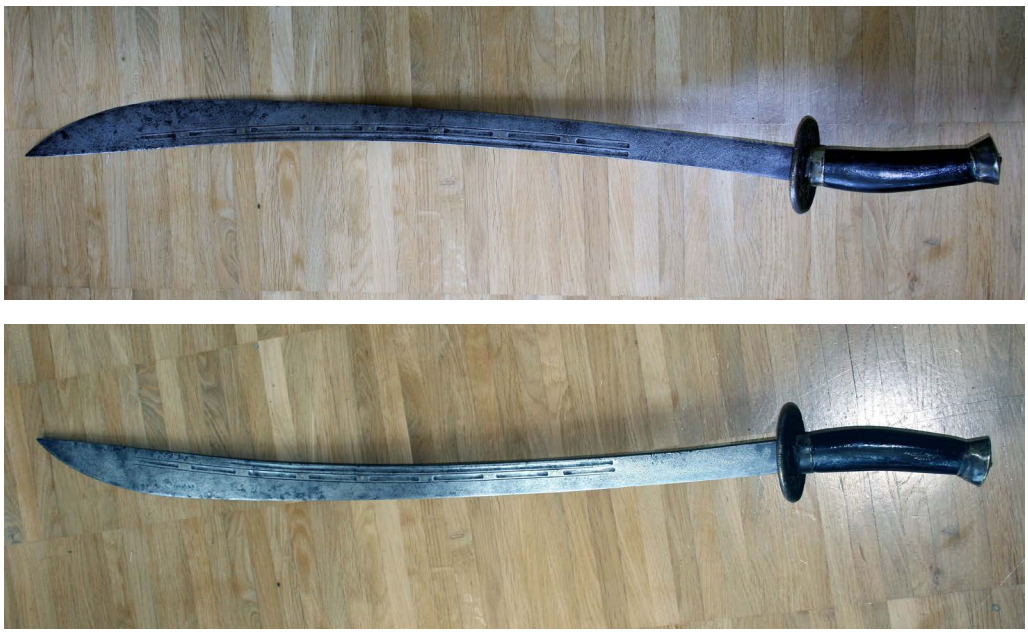
- Piandao (刷刀) or "slicing knife"

Piandao means "slicing knife". Its blade is much more curved than that of the liuyedao. The piandao is a rare type of Chinese sabers. Its deep curve, a distinctive feature that sets it apart from other sabers, makes it particularly suited for close range cutting. This weapon was primarily used by specialized shield bearing units of the Ming and Qing dynasties (Dekker, 2024). Its name and the shape of its blade indicate that the piandao was designed for close slicing. There is an obvious parallel between this sword and the Persian shamshir. It is likely that the Chinese adopted this blade shape after contact with Middle Eastern and South Asian peoples on the Silk Road and maritime trade routes. However, the piandao was not particularly popular in China and apart from during the Qing dynasty and in combination with the tengpai (rattan shield) (Tom & Rodell, 2005: 78), it was not often used (for examples of piandao, see: Huangfu, 2007; for an example of another piandao, see: Hagen, 1896: 1, plate X).

- Niuweidao (牛尾刀) or "oxtail knife"

Niuweidao means "oxtail knife". Its blade is much wider and its width increases from the strong end, then narrows to the tip. The niuweidao, a traditional Chinese saber, exhibits a unique curvature that transitions from a fairly straight base to a moderate curve, culminating in a pronounced curve near the wider tip section. The tip shows an upward sweeping structure. The cutting edge of the niuweidao has a variable curvature.

Its hilt is slightly curved, unlike other peidao which can have either straight or curved hilts. This design is meticulously optimized for cutting softer, unprotected targets, a feature that elucidates its widespread popularity among rebels and civilians during a period when firearms rendered armor obsolete. The earliest examples of the niuweidao do not date from before the first decades of the 19th century. Unlike the other three swords discussed above, the niuweidao does not appear in Ming or Qing portraits, military manuals, or battle scenes (Dekker, 2024; Tom & Rodell, 2005: 80-81; for more examples of niuweidao, see: Huangfu, 2007). The niuweidao stands out as the sole non-military saber. Its origins can be traced back to the 19th century, a time when it was extensively utilized by rebels and martial artists. Following the fall of the Qing dynasty, the Chinese military underwent a significant transformation, transitioning entirely to European style military sabers. Despite this shift, the niuweidao remained steadfast, retaining its relevance and use by martial artists (Dekker, 2024).



Figs. 9 and 10: A Chinese niuweidao

The evolution of shape of swords in Iran

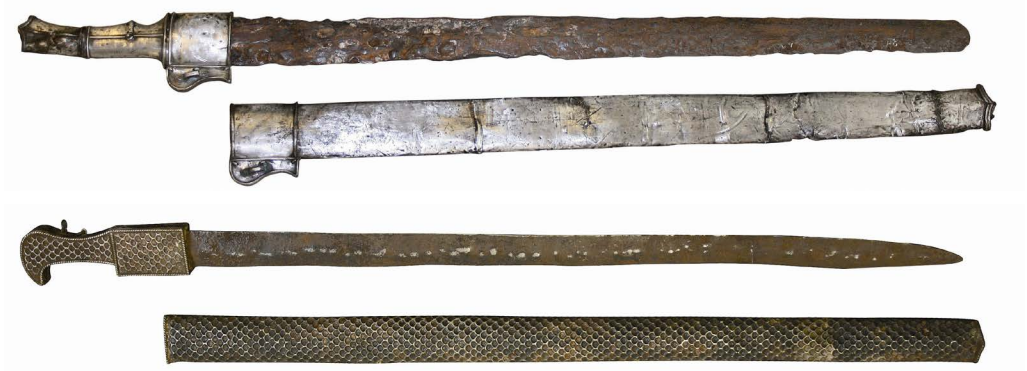
The Persian shamshir شمشیر, a sword of legendary renown, has captivated the imaginations of individuals across the Middle East and Europe for centuries. Its allure lies not only in the intricate artistic patterns of the crucible steel but also in the distinctive curvature of its blade in later examples. However, before the Arab conquest of Iran and the advent of Islam in 631 CE, the swords wielded in Iran were uniformly straight. This implies that the preceding Persian dynasties, namely the Achaemenids (559-330 BCE), the Parthians (250 BCE- 228 CE), and the Sasanians (241-651 CE), all favored straight, double-edged swords. The term 'shamshir' has been adopted by various European languages to denote the quintessential Persian shamshir, characterized by its markedly curved blade. However, the term shamshir in its original context refers to all kinds of

swords, encompassing both curved and straight-bladed varieties. The term shamshir traces its origins back to the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) period, during which swords were referred to as 'shamsher', 'shafsher', and 'shufsher' (Farahvashi, 2002b: 336). According to MacKenzie (1971), the etymological roots of the word shamshir can be traced back to the dawn of New Persian, prior to the introduction of the Arabic alphabet. In early New Persian the sword was denoted by the words 'sneh' (snyh), or 'shamsher' [shamsher] in Middle Persian (Pahlavi). This stands in stark contrast to the Chinese language, where jian was used to refer to double-edged straight swords and dao was used to denote one-edged straight or curved swords. In Persian, however, shamshir was used as a blanket term to refer to any type of sword, irrespective of its shape.

The intriguing question that has piqued the curiosity of numerous scholars revolves around the emergence of the single-edged curved sword, particularly in the Middle Eastern region and more specifically in Iran. The exact historical juncture at which the curved sword supplanted the double-edged straight sword remains shrouded in mystery. Similar to the development of the curved peidao in China, the emergence of curved swords in the Middle East and West Asia can be attributed to troops from Central Asia who influenced the introduction of curved swords in these regions. Thus, curved swords were not native to the Middle East. Lebedynsky (1992: 58) rightfully challenges the conventional association of the curved sword with the Middle East. He contends that the birthplace of this weapon is not this region. Kobylinski (2000: 59), for instance, asserts that the curved swords made their debut in the 7th century. North (1994: 138), however, offers a contrasting viewpoint, suggesting that the single-edged curved sword did not emerge until the 8th or 9th century. This divergence in scholarly opinion underscores the need for further research to unravel the intricate history of the curved sword.

Nicolle (1998: 17) highlights the ambiguity surrounding the exact timeline of the appearance of curved swords in the Middle East. Despite this uncertainty, he suggests that these weapons may have been in use in eastern Iran as early as the late 9th century. Al-Sarrâff (2002: 167-168) introduces the terms al-khisrawani and al-sughdi as classified by Ibn Hizam Akhi, a servant of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-861 CE). These terms refer to single-edged swords that were probably slightly curved. This assertion is consistent with Nicolle's (1998: 17) belief regarding the existence of these weapons toward the end of the 9th century CE. While Ibn Akhi Hizan's classification does not provide a detailed description of the shape of the swords, al-Sarrâff concludes that the al-khisrawani and al-sughdi swords were probably slightly curved. The al-khisrawani swords were made in Fars, a province in southern Iran, which lends credence to the theory that slightly curved swords first appeared in Iran in the 9th century. Al-Sarrâff (2002: 171) further suggests that the earliest reference to curved swords can be traced back to Abbasid scriptures, specifically to al-Jâhiz's letter, Manâqib al-Turk, written in the 9th century. In this text, Khorasanian troops take pride in their "crooked" scabbards, which, according to al-Sarrâff, implies their use of curved swords. This historical evidence,

while not definitive, provides a compelling argument for the early use of curved swords in the Middle East, particularly in Iran. In his study, Zakey (1965: 290-291) elucidates that post the Islamic conquest of Iran, the Iranians persisted in their use of the Sasanian straight swords, a testament to their enduring cultural heritage. Similarly, the Arabs maintained their reliance on the ancient straight swords, a weapon of choice that had served them well in the pre-Islamic era.



Figs. 11 and 12: Sasanian swords

Delving deeper into the evolution of weaponry, Zakey (1965: 290-291) reveals that from the 7th to the 13th centuries, the predominant sword design featured straight, wide, double-edged blades with fullers. The guards of these swords were either cruciform or curved, reflecting the diversity in design and craftsmanship of the time. Interestingly, Zakey underscores the absence of any reference to curved swords in the treatises penned by renowned scholars such as al-Kindi, Biruni, and al-Tarsusi. This omission suggests that the curved sword may not have been as prevalent or as significant during this period. However, a contrasting perspective is offered by al-Sarrâff (2002: 167-168), who proposes that the sword types referred to as al-khisrawani and al-sughdi, as classified by ibn Akhi Hizam in the 9th century, were likely single-edged and curved.

Jacob (1985: 155) aligns his perspective with that of Zakey, asserting that the swords utilized during the early Muslim era in Iran bore no significant differences from those wielded by the Sasanians. He further elaborates that the introduction of the curved sword in Iran did not occur until the advent of Saljuks. The curvature of these swords became more pronounced following the arrival of the Mongols and Timurids. Further, Jacob posits that the curved sword's origins can be traced back to Central Asia, where it was a weapon of choice among nomadic tribes. It is important to note that the initial versions of these swords exhibited only a slight curve. Rossabi (2002: 13) provides an intriguing illustration of early Iranian swords. Although the hilt is absent, the short cross guard remains intact. The blade's curvature commences at the forte, subtly extending towards the tip. This sword, with its slight curve and a raised counter-edge known as a yelman, is a testament to the evolution of weaponry. It is noteworthy that straight swords continued to be prevalent until the 14th and 15th centuries (Zakey, 1965: 290-291). It

was only after this period that curved swords began to emerge in significant quantities. This perspective is corroborated by Kobylinski (2000: 59), who posits that straight swords were the weapon of choice in what is now Iran during the 8th century. The Sasanian Empire (241-651 CE) provides further evidence of this trend. As previously noted, all Sasanian swords were straight. This is a significant detail, as it underscores the continuity of weapon design during this period. Equally significant is the fact that the first Islamic Arab swords, wielded by the Arab conquerors of Iran, were also straight. This is evidenced by archaeological discoveries of early Islamic Arab swords, which are currently preserved in the Sarayi Topkapi Museum in Istanbul (Yücel, 2001).

Historical manuscripts such as Khayyâm Neyshâburi's Nowruzâmeh (Book of Nowruz) (Khayyâm Neyshâburi, 2003: 55) and Mobârakshâh Fakhr Modabar's Adab al-Harb va al-Shoja-e (Customs of War and Bravery) (Mobârakshâh Fakhr Modabar, 1967: 258) provide compelling evidence that the qarâchuri, a type of curved sword wielded by Turkish warriors, had been integrated into Iranian warfare long before the Mongol invasion. This assertion is further corroborated by al-Sarrâff (2002: 171), who alludes to the presence of curved swords among the Khorasan troops during the Abbasid era in the 9th century. In their analysis of Iranian weaponry, Allan and Gilmour (2000: 195) propose that the Mongols and Turkic peoples of the steppe may have introduced the slightly curved sword to Iran. This style of sword remained prevalent in Ilkhanid Iran until the early Safavid period. Kobylinski (2000: 60) concurs with this perspective, suggesting that the design of the shamshir blade was influenced by Mongolian swords from the 14th and 15th centuries. However, Kobylinski's use of the term "Mongol" lacks precision. It is important to note that the Ilkhanids governed Iran from 1256 to 1394 CE, followed by the Timurids from 1387 to 1596 CE. As previously established, certain variations of the curved sword had already been incorporated into Iranian warfare well before these periods. This historical context underscores the complexity and diversity of influences that shaped the evolution of Iranian weaponry.

In the northeastern region of Iran, in the ancient city of Neyshâbur, a remarkable artifact was discovered - a sword dating back to the 9th century CE. This sword, one of the few remaining intact examples of its kind, possesses a nearly straight blade, its curvature so subtle it is barely noticeable. The sword is further characterized by a crossguard and a scabbard suspension system, features that add to its historical significance. The evolution of the Persian sword has been a topic of great interest among researchers. Many propose that the curved sword did not appear suddenly, but rather developed gradually over time. This theory suggests that the curvature of Persian swords became more pronounced as centuries passed. Allan and Gilmour (2000: 198) have noted this continuum in the development of Persian swords. They distinguish between the saber, which has a slight curve, and the shamshir, which boasts a more pronounced curve. According to their research, as well as the findings of other scholars, the highly curved Iranian saber should have emerged during the reign of Shâh Abbâs (1587-1629 CE)

and they use the term shamshir to refer to this type of highly-curved sword. Kobylinski (2000: 60) concurs with this view, asserting that the classic Iranian shamshir came into existence in the early 17th century. This perspective is also supported by Zakey (1965: 291), who posits that the degree of curvature was initially slight at the dawn of the 15th century. However, over time, the curvature appears to have increased, first with the establishment of the Safavid dynasty in Iran, and then more significantly during the reign of Shâh Abbâs the Great (1587-1629 CE).

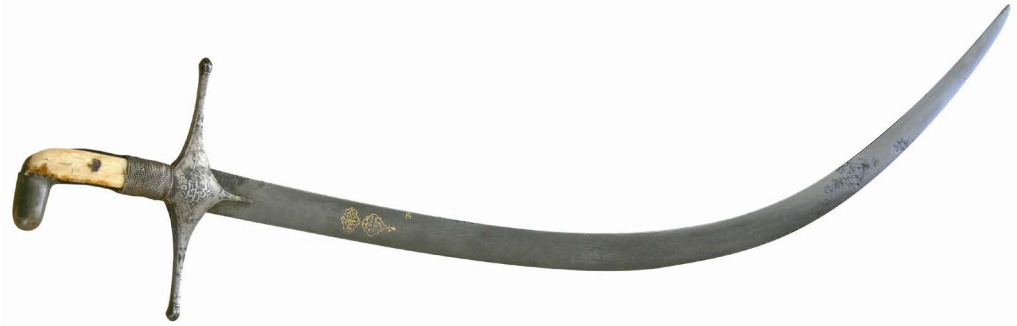


Fig. 13: A highly curved Safavid shamshir

Lebednyky (1992: 69-70) provides an insightful analysis of a renowned Iranian sword, attributed to Shâh Tahmâsp (1524-1576 CE), which is currently housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum. This particular weapon serves as a tangible testament to the evolution of Iranian swordsmanship, marking a clear transition from the ancient Iranian swords to the classical Iranian shamshir. The blade of this sword is characterized by a moderate curvature and a back-edge, also known as a yelman. This design is not only aesthetically pleasing but also functional, enhancing the sword's cutting power. The blade's curvature is not overly pronounced, suggesting a balance between the need for slashing power and the desire for precision in thrusting attacks. What sets this sword apart, however, is the intricate genealogy of Shâh Tahmâsp, which is inlaid in gold on the blade. This detail not only adds to the sword's aesthetic appeal but also provides a historical context, linking the weapon to a specific period and ruler in Iranian history. Despite the unique features of this sword, it is important to note that there is compelling evidence suggesting the existence of swords with a more pronounced curvature long before the reign of Shâh Abbâs. This indicates that the evolution of Iranian swords was not a linear process but rather a complex interplay of various influences and technological advancements over time.

In the halls of the Tehran Military Museum, two magnificent shamshirs stand out, their elegant curvature a testament to classic Iranian craftsmanship. Another such masterpiece can be found in the National Museum of Tehran, each attributed to the Timur period, 771 to 807 AH, or 1370 to 1404 CE. These shamshirs, with their distinctive curvature, offer fascinating insights into the evolution of sword making. Their design suggests that swords of this period were indeed heavily curved, a feature that predates the Safavid era. However, this assumption depends on the accuracy of the attribution

of these shamshirs to the Timurid period. Each of these three swords is decorated with a gold-inlaid cartouche, proudly bearing the name of Timur. One of these sabers was mentioned in the historical manuscript "Irân dar zamân-e Shâh Sâfi va Shâh Abbâs Dovvom". This manuscript, written by the renowned Mirzâ Mohammad Yussof Qazvini Isfahâni in 1078 AH (1667 CE), provides a rich description of the era, which further enhances the historical significance of these swords (see Moshtagh Khorasani, 2006: 424-427, cat 68- 69; Moshtagh Khorasani, 2010).

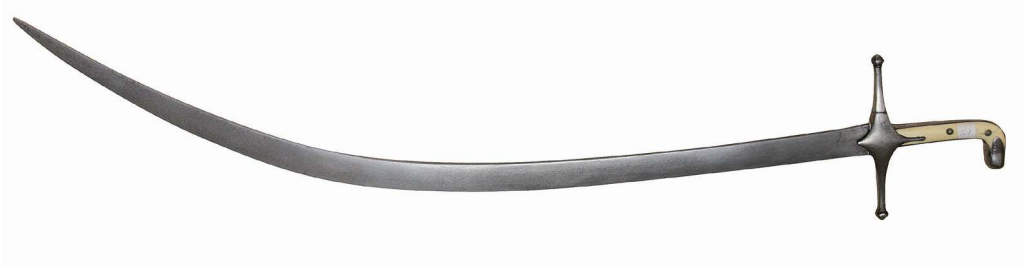


Fig. 14: Another highly curved Safavid shamshir

In the annals of history, Qazvini Isfahani (2003: 159-160) refers to a blade that is attributed to Amir Timur Gurkani. Passing through the hands of kings, it surfaced during the reign of Shah Safi, entrusted to him in the hope that he would emulate Timur's world-conquering exploits. The blade bore the name of Amir Timur Gurkani written on the blade. This was not just a weapon, but a symbol of power and heritage, a tangible link to the past and a beacon for the future. To add to the intrigue, two shamshirs attributed to Timur are decorated with gold inlays and bear inscriptions. The name of Amir Timur Gurkani is engraved in a cartouche alongside that of Shah Safi. The inscription reads "Bandeh-ye Shah Velayat Safi", which translates as "the representative/slave of Shah Velayat [reference to Imam Ali] Safi" (Moshtagh Khorasani, 2006: 424-427, cat 68 - 69). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the use of straight swords such as this one continued into the Qajar period, albeit in limited numbers. This fact underlines the continuing importance and influence of these weapons, not only as tools of war, but also as symbols of power and prestige.

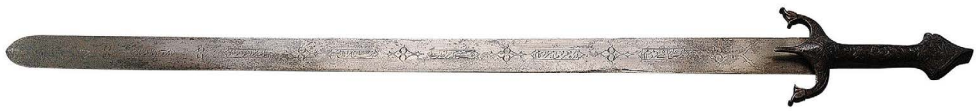


Fig. 15: A straight shamshir from the Qajar period

There are several expressions in Persian period manuals that describe the shape of a shamshir. Here are some of them.

Shamshir-e kaj شمشیر کج (curved sword)

There are also different expressions to describe a very curved sword, such as shamshir-e kaj شمشیر کج (curved sword) (see Romuz-e Hamzeh, 1940: 224; Âsef, 2003: 97);

shamshir-e kham شمشیر خم (curved sword) (Fathali Khân Sabâ, 267); shamshir-e khamideh شمشیر خمیده (curved sword) (Digital Lexicon of Dehkhoda).

Shamshir-e yekrokheh شمشیر خمیده (sword with one edge)

There are several expressions to describe a slightly curved sword, such as: shamshir-e yekrokheh شمشیر یک‌رخه (sword with one edge) (Mirzâ Lotfallâh, 1706-1707, 1696-1697); and shamshir-e yekruy شمشیر یک روی (sword with one edge) (Zafarnâmeh, Nâderi, 1968: 191).

Shamshir-e dodam شمشیر دو دم (straight sword with two edges).

There are several expressions to describe a straight sword in Persian, such as shamshir-e dodam شمشیر دو دم (double-edged sword) (Tartusi, 2001: 71, vol. 4 ; Dâstân-e Hossein Kord-e Shabestari, 2003: 167); shamshir-e doruyeh شمشیر دو رویه (double-edged sword) (Nâderi, 1968: 191); shamshir-e mostâqim شمشیر مستقیم (straight sword) (Digital Lexicon of Dehkhoda), and shamshir-e râst شمشیر راست (straight sword) (Modarresi *et al.,* 1991).

Mirzā Lotfallāh offers the most comprehensive account of swords, their creation, and analysis in his seminal work Ta'id Besarat (Aid to Sight). Written under the pseudonym Nithār and bearing the honorary title of Nosratallāh Xān, Lotfallāh's treatise is a cornerstone in the field of šamširšenāsیشمشیرشناسی (sword analysis) (Moshtagh Khorasani, 2022: 6; Elgood, 2017: 896). In Ta'id Besārat, Lotfallāh introduces a unique classification system for swords based on their length and curvature. He identifies two primary lengths: the sirqad سیرقد (long swords) and the kamqad کم‌قد (short swords). The term 'qad' قد means 'length' or 'height', 'sir' سیر means 'full' or 'long', and 'kam' کم means 'less' or 'short'. Lotfallāh's classification goes beyond length and delves into the curvature of the swords. He establishes a spectrum ranging from straight (rāst راست) swords to highly curved (sirxam سیرخم) swords. Following the straight swords on this scale are the slightly curved swords, called straight-curved (rāstxam راست‌خم). The spectrum progresses to moderately curved swords (širinxam شیرین‌خم), then to well curved swords (xošxam خوش‌خم), culminating in highly curved swords (sirxam سیرخم). In addition, Lotfallāh also identifies a unique category of swords with a forward curve or angle, called pešxam پش‌خم. This comprehensive classification system underlines Lotfallāh's profound understanding of the art of sword making and his contribution to šamširšenāsi.

Conclusion

The entire class of single-edged Chinese blades is called dao (knife), regardless of length, shape or guard configuration. It differs from the family of other double-edged bladed weapons known as jian (sword). The use of various types of dao as military weapons dates back several centuries before the unification of China by the first Qin

emperor in 221 BCE. The first model was called zhibeidao 直背刀 (straight back knife) and featured a long blade without any curvature. This weapon was used in the Chinese army for centuries, losing popularity only after the end of the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty in 1368 CE. The introduction of this curved sword is rooted in the style of swordsmanship of the horsemen who inhabited the vast steppes of the Eurasian frontier at the time. The curvature of the blade was not merely an aesthetic choice, but a strategic design that enhanced its slicing ability. This design was ingeniously crafted to mirror the circular motion of a rider's arm, maximizing the efficiency and lethality of each cut. Later, this type of single-edged sword developed into the curved peidao 佩刀 (belt knife). The different types of dao are classified according to their individual characteristics, and each has its own name, e.g. peidao (belt knife), itself divided between yanmaodao 雁毛刀 (goose-quill knife), liuyedao 柳葉刀 (willow leaf knife), piandao 劐刀 (slicing knife), and niuweidao 牛尾刀 (ox tail knife).

The term 'shamshir' is not merely confined to the description of highly curved swords in Iran. In fact, in the Persian language, it serves as a universal term for all sword types. The etymology of 'shamshir' can be traced back to pre-Islamic Iran, where it was known by various names such as shamsher, shafsher, and shufsher in the Pahlavi language. The swords of pre-Islamic Iran were characterized by their straight, double-edged design. However, the exact timeline of the introduction of curved swords or sabers into Iran remains a subject of debate. The earliest evidence suggests their appearance around the 8th or 9th century. While it is widely accepted that the advent of strongly curved swords in Iran occurred during the reign of Shâh Abbâs (1587-1629), there is compelling evidence to suggest their usage predates this period. In Persian, there are distinct terminologies to describe a straight sword, such as shamshir-e dodam and shamshir-e doruyeh (both meaning double-edged sword), shamshir-e mostâqim and shamshir-e râst (both meaning straight sword). Similarly, the language offers a variety of expressions for a highly curved sword, including shamshir-e kaj, shamshir-e kham, and shamshir-e khamideh (all meaning curved sword), as well as shamshir-e yekrokheh and shamshir-e yekruy (both signifying a single-edged sword).

The introduction and development of curved swords in different regions reveals a fascinating chronology. In Iran, the advent of these elegantly curved weapons can be traced back to the 8th and 9th centuries CE, a period significantly earlier than their appearance in China. This period, spanning the 8th and 9th centuries CE, witnessed a transformation in warfare tactics and weaponry, with the curved sword playing a pivotal role. Iranian warriors embraced this new weapon, which offered superior maneuverability, especially on horseback. In contrast, the introduction of curved swords in China came much later, during the Yuan Dynasty in 1368 CE. This period, marked by Mongol rule, marked a significant change in Chinese warfare and weaponry. The Mongols and the Central Asian tribes who fought for them were famous for their archery on horseback. They introduced the curved sword to China, revolutionizing Chinese martial arts and

forever changing the landscape of Chinese warfare. The curved sword made its mark in two different historical periods and regions, reflecting the dynamic evolution of warfare and weaponry. The contrast in the timeline of its introduction in Iran and China offers a fascinating glimpse into the different paths of cultural and military evolution of these ancient civilizations.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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تکامل شمشیرهای منحنی: مطالعه سنجشی میان شمشیرهای چینی و ایرانی

منوچهر مشتاق‌خراسانی[I]

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چکیده

این پژوهش به بررسی صنعت تکامل شمشیرها با سنجش در چین و ایران می‌پردازد. این یادداشت با بررسی پیدایش و چگونگی تکامل انواع شمشیر در چین آغاز و بر چگونگی تغییرات آن‌ها به‌عنوان مقدمه تمرکز خواهد کرد؛ از این‌روی به نوع شمشیرهای چینی معروف دولبهٔ «جیان» و انواع مختلف مشهور به «دائو» به‌دلیل طراحی خاص خود می‌پردازد. سپس موضوع بحث به برابر ایرانی آن با اصطلاح شناخته شده‌اش، یعنی «شمشیر» گسترش می‌یابد؛ این ادعا از آن جهت است تا اثبات شود که اصطلاح «شمشیر»، برخلاف تصور غلط رایج بسیاری از پژوهشگران و مجموعه‌داران غربی، تنها در مفهوم گونهٔ «خمیده» (دارای تیغهٔ منحنی) آن نیست. درست در برابر این دیدگاه، شمشیر در زبان فارسی برای اشاره به هر نوع شمشیر صرف‌نظر از شکل آن استفاده می‌شده است. درحقیقت، این پژوهش با تمرکز بر دوره‌های تاریخی به بحث پیدایی شمشیرهای منحنی‌شکل در چین و ایران می‌پردازد.

کلیدواژگان: شمشیر، دائو، جیان، شمشیر، چین، ایران، شمشیر خم‌دار، ساسانیان، سلسله مینگ، آسیای مرکزی، سلسله یوان، پیدائو، ژیِیدائو.

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ناشر: پژوهشگاه میراث‌فرهنگی و گردشگری

مقدمه

این پژوهش به گونهٔ ویژه برروی تغییرات انجام‌شده بر صنعت شمشیر در چین و ایران تمرکز دارد؛ دو تمدنی که به داشتن مهارت‌های رزمی و پیشرفت‌های فلزکاری شهره بودند. در چین باستان، شکل شمشیرهای اولیه، از نوع شمشیرهای تیغه صاف دولبهٔ معروف به «جیان» (Jian) و شمشیرهای تیغهٔ صاف تک‌لبه به‌نام «ژی بیدائو» (Zhibeidao) بودند؛ با این‌حال، گشایش‌های مغولان دگرگونی معناداری در صنعت شمشیرزنی چینی ایجاد کرد. سوارکاران آسیای میانه که در ارتش مغول خدمت می‌کردند بیشتر از شمشیرهای خمیدهٔ تک‌لبه استفاده بهره بردند؛ آن گونه‌ای از شمشیر که خیلی زود از سوی چینی‌ها پذیرفته شد؛ این پذیرش به پیدایی نوعی شمشیر چینی به‌نام «پیدائو» (Peidao) انجامید. هم‌چون چین، در ایران باستان نیز شمشیر تیغه صاف دو لبه رایج بوده است؛ با وجود این، ایرانیان نیز با طرح شمشیرهای خمیده در هنگام نبرد با گروه‌های قومی آسیای میانه آشنا شدند؛ این گونه از راه سربازان کران خراسان، که مجهز بدین شمشیر بودند، به بخش‌های دیگر ایران راه یافت. با گذشت زمان، اندک‌اندک بر خمیدگی تیغهٔ آن افزوده شد و در صنعت ساخت «شمشیر بسیار خمیده» در دورهٔ صفوی به اوج خود رسید.

بحث و تحلیل

استفاده از شمشیرهای تیغه صاف دولبهٔ چینی معروف به «دائو» به سده‌ها به پیش از روزگار دودمان شین (Qin) در ۲۲۱م. برمی‌گردد. نمونه‌های نخستین آن به‌نام «ژی بیدائو» با دسته‌ای صاف، دارای تیغهٔ بلند صافی و بدون خمیدگی بود که بیشتر از مفرغ ساخته می‌شد. این‌گونه شمشیر در دورهٔ «یوآن» (Yuan) یعنی دورهٔ مغولان (۱۳۶۸م.) به افول خود نزدیک شد. پس از این‌گونه، نوعی شمشیر به‌نام «یان مائودائو» (Yanmaodao) در چین به پیدایی آمد که تنها دارای اندک خمیدکی بود. دیگر شمشیر خمیدهٔ تیغهٔ معروف چینی به‌نام «لیو یی دائو» (Liuyedao) شناخته می‌شود؛ باوجود این، این‌گونه شمشیر، بومی چین نیست و توسط مغولان در زمان گشایش‌های خود به چین وارد کردند. افزون‌بر این، نمی‌توان نادیده گرفت که شمشیرهای (خمیده) مغولان نیز برگرفته از نمونه‌های آن در آسیای میانه بوده است. این رزم‌افزار نه تنها به رایج‌ترین نوع شمشیر در چین شهرت یافت که در ارتش دودمان «مینگ» (۱۳۶۸-۱۶۴۴م.) جایگزین «جیان و ژی‌بیدائو» شد؛ هم‌چنین محبوبیت استفاده از شمشیر «یانمائودائو» در میانهٔ پادشاهی دودمان «چینگ» (۱۶۴۴ تا ۱۹۱۲م.) کاهش یافت. این شمشیر، یعنی لیو یی دائو به‌طور گسترده‌ای در چین و درمیان تمام لشکریان استفاده شد؛ بسیاری از آثار هنری از دودمان‌های «مینگ و شینگ» دربردارندهٔ نگاره این نوع شمشیر هستند. با گذشت زمان، خمیدگی این شمشیر بیشتر و بیشتر شد. دیگر شمشیر تیغه خمیدهٔ این دو دوره «پیان دائو» (Piandao) است که یادآور نوع ایرانی خود تصور می‌شود؛ با وجود این، پژوهشگران باور دارند که این نوع شمشیر از خاستگاه خاورمیانه یا جنوب آسیا به چین وارد شده است؛ هم‌چنین، با فروپاشی دودمان شینگ، نوع شمشیر خمیده تیغ معروف به «نیو وی دائو» (Niuweidao) تا به سدهٔ ۱۹م. روایی یافت.

در ایران باستان نیز از هخامنشیان تا به ساسانیان، شمشیر تیغه صاف دو لبه رایج بوده است؛ هرچند کلمهٔ «شمشیر» به اندازهٔ کافی و از دید بار معنایی به هر نوع شمشیر می‌تواند گفته شود، اما این اصطلاح ازسوی پژوهشگران اروپایی در مفهومی دیگر ارزیابی شده است. اروپاییان تصور دارند که واژهٔ شمشیر فارسی تنها بر نوع خمیدهٔ آن مفهوم دارد. به‌کارگیری واژهٔ شمشیر با روایی در زبان پهلوی ساسانی به دورهٔ پیش تازیان برمی‌گردد؛ هر چند نمی‌توان منکر برخی واژگان دیگر در نامیدن این رزم‌افزار در زبان پهلوی شد.

باوجود این، این مفهوم شمشیر در زبان فارسی در سنجش با واژگان جیان و دائو متفاوت ارزیابی می شود؛ جیان در چین به شمشیر تیغه صاف دو لبه گفته می‌شد و رزم‌افزار دائو به شمشیر تیغه صاف یا با اندکی منحنی و تک لبه به‌کار می‌رفت. برخلاف این دو، شمشیر واژه‌ای عام برای هر نوع از این‌دسته از رزم‌افزار بود.

«نیکول» (۱۹۹۸: ۱۷) دربارهٔ ابهام در زمان پیدایی شمشیرهای خمیده تیغه در خاورمیانه بحث کرده است؛ او تصور کرده که این نوع شمشیر به آغاز سدهٔ نهم میلادی در شرق ایران (خراسان) مورداستفاده قرار گرفته‌اند. «الصراف» (۲۰۰۲: ۱۶۷-۸) به تفسیر دو شمشیر معروف به «الخسروانی و السغدی» پرداخته که «ابن‌حسام» (خدمتگزار خلیفهٔ متوکل) گزارش کرده است. این دو اصطلاح در مفهوم شمشیرهای تک لبه (تیغ) خمیده است. این گزارش می‌تواند گواهی‌کنندهٔ دیدگاه نیکول باشد؛ هرچند ابن‌حسام به‌بیان جزئیات دقیق این شمشیرها نپرداخته است، اما الصراف تصور دارد که الخسروانی و سغدی یادآور شمشیرهای تیغه خمیده‌اند.

الصراف تصور دارد که بهره‌گیری از شمشیرهای خمیده به دورهٔ عباسی برمی‌گردد که منابع قابل‌توجهی در دست است؛ او برای این‌کار به نامهٔ «جائز»، «مناقب‌الترک»، نوشته شده به سدهٔ نهم میلادی، اشاره دارد که در آن سواران خراسانی به شمشیرهای «کج (ناصاف)» خود می‌بالند؛ الصراف، این نوع شمشیر را همان شمشیر تیغه خمیده تفسیر کرده است؛ هرچند این شواهد را نمی‌توان قطعی نامید، اما می‌تواند بر موضوع به‌کارگیری شمشیر تیغه خمیده در خاورمیانه و به‌ویژه ایران جنوبی (سرزمین اصلی) گواهی نماید.

با وجود این، «زکی» (۱۹۶۵: ۲۹۰) تصور کرده که ایرانیان به دورهٔ پساساسانی بر استفاده از شمشیرهای تیغه صاف نیاکان ساسانی خود پافشاری داشته‌اند؛ زیرا آن را بخشی از هویت فرهنگی خود می‌دانستند. اعراب نیز تا مدت‌ها برهمین سنت نیاکانی خود بودند. او باور دارد که از سدهٔ ۷ تا ۱۳م. شمشیرهای تیغه صاف دو لبه روایی داشته و تنها نوعی خمیدگی کم در آن‌ها پدیدار شده است. زکی بر عدم هر گونه شواهد در گزارش دانشمندانی چون: «الکندی»، «بیرونی» و «طرسوسی» تأکید کرده است. منابع کهن‌سال چون نوروزنامه منسوب به «خیام» یا کتاب آداب الحرب و الشجاع از «مبارکشاه فخر مدبر» مدارک ارزشمندی از نوعی شمشیر به‌نام «قراچوری» به‌دست می‌دهند؛ هرچند این نوع شمشیر از سوی سپاهیان ترک استفاده می‌شده است، اما مدت‌ها پیش از آمدن مغولان در ایران شناخته شده و رایج بوده است. این گزارش گواهی‌کنندهٔ دیدگاه الصراف است که به استفاده از این نوع شمشیر ازسوی سواران خراسانی به سدهٔ نهم میلادی اشاره دارد.

«آلن» و «گیلمور» (۲۰۰۰: ۱۹۵) پیشنهاد دارند که مغولان و ترک‌ها هر دو در معرفی این نوع شمشیر به ایرانیان نقش داشته‌اند؛ یعنی همان شمشیر تیغه خمیده که از دورهٔ ایلخانی تا به دورهٔ صفوی در ایران رایج بود.

از نمونه‌های منحصربه‌فرد و اندک شمار شمشیر خمیده تیغه می‌توان به نمونهٔ به‌دست‌آمده از نیشابور اشاره کرد که به سدهٔ نهم میلادی تاریخ‌گذاری شده است. خمیدگی زیبای آن بسی قابل‌توجه است؛ هم‌چنین باید به نمونهٔ دیگر از این نوع رزم‌افزار در موزهٔ نظامی و دیگری در موزآ ملی ایران به دورهٔ تیموری اشاره کرد.

باوجود این، موضوع ایجاد خمیدگی در هنر شمشیرسازی ایرانی یکی از بحث‌های مهم درمیان پژوهشگران بوده است؛ برخی باور دارند که این خمیدگی به ناگهانی به پیدایی نیامد و بلکه با گذشت زمان صورت گرفته است؛ هم‌چنین نمی توان نادیده گرفت که شمشیر ایرانی به روزگار «شاه عباس صفوی» (۱۵۸۷-۱۶۲۹م.) به اوج خمیدگی خود رسید؛ از این‌روی، اصطلاح شمشیر به گونهٔ خاص برای این گونهٔ شمشیر بسیار خمیده به‌کار رفت. «کوبیلینیسکی» (۲۰۰۰: ۶۰) موافق این دیدگاه است؛ هم‌چنین، نسخهٔ خطی ایران در زمان شاه صفی و شاه عباس دوم از «میرزا محمد

یوسف قزوینی» داده‌هایی ارزشمند از روزگار صفوی به‌دست داده است. باوجود این، در سالنامه‌های فارسی به نام‌های متفاوت شمشیرها برخورد می‌کنیم که بر پایهٔ شکل و ظاهر آن‌ها نام‌گذاری شده است: شمشیر کج، شمشیر یک‌رخه، دُو دم از شمار همین نام‌گذاری‌ها است.

نتیجه‌گیری

در تاریخ کشور چین با دو نوع شمشیر دائو، یعنی شمشیر تک‌تیغه (یک دَم) و جیان دو دَم روبه‌رو هستیم. دائوها تا به دورهٔ یوآن در چین روایی داشت تا جای خود را به شمشیر خمیده تیغه داد؛ این دوره به دورهٔ مغولان معروف است. شمشیر خمیده تیغهٔ چینی از شمشیر سوارکاران اوراسیایی ملهم بود که بعدها به‌نام پیدائو به‌کار رفت. در ایران نیز شاهد چنین تغییر بار معنایی واژگانی هستیم. هرچند واژهٔ شمشیر در زبان ساسانی به هر نوع شمشیر به‌عنوان معنای عام کاربرد داشت، اما در دوران بعدی شمشیر در مفهوم نوع خمیده تیغهٔ آن اختصاصی به‌کار رفت. برخلاف چین، که برای شمشیر نوع خمیده وام‌دار مغولان است، ایرانیان دست‌کم از سدهٔ هشتم و نهم میلادی با آن آشنا بودند؛ باوجود این، ایرانیان این نوع شمشیر را از مردمان آسیای میانه برگرفتند؛ همان کران جغرافیایی که چینی‌ها مدیون آن بودند. این تفاوت زمانی در آشنایی با این نوع شمشیر از ایران به چین به نوع شرایط اجتماعی و تکامل متفاوت دو کشور در طول تاریخ برمی‌گردد.