

**IRS** Following tradition



*Saber made by Emin Mammadov*



CONTINUING THE TRADITION  
OF DECORATIVE FINISHING OF  
AZERBAIJANI ARMOR



*Emin Mammadov*

**F**ew historical icons can match the evocative power of medieval Caucasian armor. For generations, iron, copper, steel carapaces surviving the ravages of time have enchanted soldiers, collectors, students and the general public. Forged largely from sheets of iron, beaten with hammer and stake into elaborate sculptures of defense, the warrior's armor served him in several important ways.

First, it provided a mobile harness that evolved to meet new weapons and tactics throughout the late middle ages and to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The warrior's harness served as life insurance in another sense as well, since the awesome expense for a complete head to foot armor testified to his ability to pay a ransom if captured rather than face the death often dealt to the less fortunate. Looking into an empty harness on display at a museum of Azerbaijan, it does not take much imagination to find oneself transported back in time to the past. Then, as now, the warrior's armor symbolized his prowess, his social station, his potential nobility of purpose.

This connection between our modern sensibilities and the long passed romance of the past has been

founded on a powerful artisan workshop by Emin Nadir oglu Mammadov. For Emin, the armor provides a tangible connection to ideals that might otherwise exist as mere words, grounding these ideals to a reality we can grasp by virtue of the armorer's skill. Through his art, he has succeeded in communicating across the ages, mooring the chivalric ideals of Caucasus to the iron and silver sheet that is his medium, and though that sheet, to us. It is in the practice of his craft, through the use of hammer, forge and stake, that Emin can do more than merely mold steel to his will. If an artist armorer is skilled enough, he can forge something of the ideal, something of his patron's essence and sculpt the armor into a work of art. If he succeeds in capturing this elusive "spark", combining the armorer's function with the essence of character that transmits a message through the ages, then he creates art, much as a fine painting or sculpture preserves the soul of the subject.

The fame of oriental Damascus steel has endured for almost two millennia. Its aesthetic features and functional superiority over other metals used in the manufacture of edged weapons and tools were its hallmarks.

*Powder flask made by Emin Mammadov*

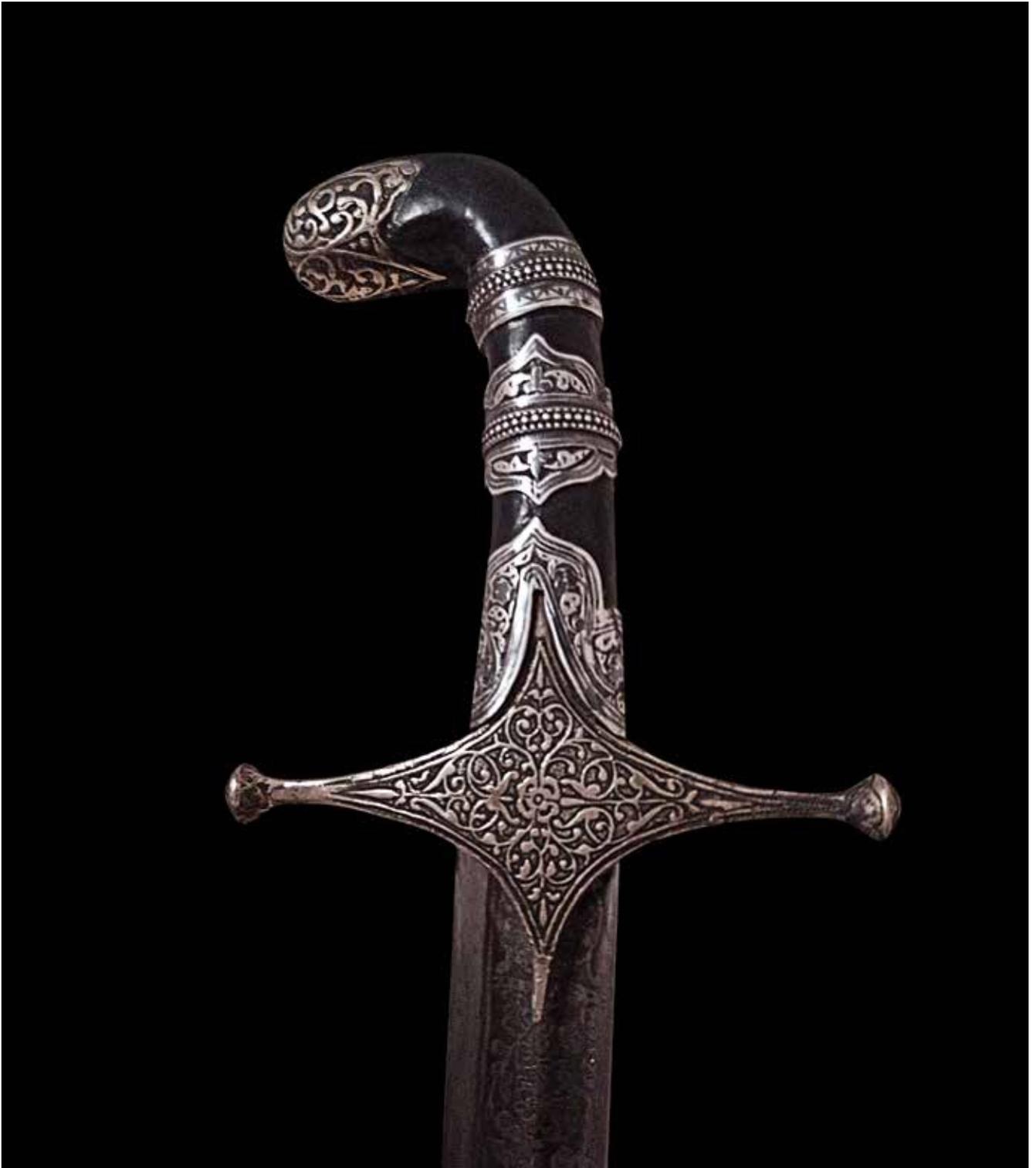
Tales of its capabilities to cut in half a floating silk scarf, or to cleave a steel helmet without turning an edge, have perpetuated its reputation. Efforts to produce similar ultra-high carbon steel persist to the present time. Emin has reviewed and summarized the pertinent literature dealing with the historical, technical and artistic aspects of oriental and mechanical Damascus steel.

In Safavid swords made from Oriental Damascus steel the most famous pattern is commonly referred to as "Qirkh Nardivan", also known as "Prophet Mohammed's ladder". The terminology of "Mohammed's ladder" carries a religious implication. Safavids placed high importance to development of cold weaponry and established lots of artisan centres around their kingdom. Emin comes from a known family in Azerbaijan: his grandfather was a very talented musician tar player, a national artist of Azerbaijan Haji Mammadov, who has been representing republic on a number of international and national concerts and was the first person to play European classical compositions on Azerbaijani national instrument Tar. He was also a head of a hospital N5 in Baku. His other grandfather Mobil, was a pro-

fessor in Ganja Agricultural Academy, a person who was very close to nature and traditions.

Emin faced lots of difficulties to collect initial information, materials about the subject, as majority of artisans who were practicing this ancient magnificent art were either passed away or worked in semi darkness. The only tiny light in the end of that dark tunnel was a legend of Caucasian Arms and Armor in Azerbaijani Historical Museum, Sara Khanum, who was in charge of Armor Fund in the early 1990s. Her experienced eye immediately caught the talent of a young fellow and she kindly agreed to give primary lessons (mostly theory) to Emin. Unfortunately after her sad demise History Museum lost the one and only specialist in that field, with no decent replacement in terms of knowledge and experience. Emin visited many countries and regions, learned various techniques and styles of weaponry making from remaining smiths. He specifically was proud of being a student of A. Volovik and A. Danelia's schools in engraving art. That art comprises of a number of branches: a blacksmith's work, silver work, a bit of wood work and last but not the least, natural talent to paint and to have clear vision.



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For Emin, the traditional Caucasian weaponry, a singular work of art in steel and silver, can be appreciated from a number of viewpoints. Its functionality as a weapon is remarkable, as are the sophisticated metallurgy and scientific thinking utilized by the swordsmith. Beyond the shape of the sword itself, among the most critical aes-

thetic elements are the different crystalline structures and forms in the steel. Artisan believes that there is also an intimate connection between the sword and our history, as its features were shaped in response to historical events. Furthermore, it is fascinating to meet and learn from the modern day craftsmen who still produce these blades.



The weapons he makes are strictly in a line of traditional school of craftsmen of Caucasian Region: they are remarkable both as a weapon and as an object of art. Its design evolved over centuries to cut well and efficiently. The properties that make it so effective as a weapon also lend it to compelling aesthetic qualities. Emin hopes to provide a comprehensive introduction to the traditional sword making in order to help young people who have interest in this sacred art to examine and appreciate these inimitable works of art and continue his passion in future. Visiting lots of antique stores in Baku, Emin came across lots of works of art, but most of them were in pretty poor condition. Owners either were forced to sell silver parts during tough times in Second World War or did not take care of them as did not consider necessary... So, heading in this direction

was not an easy step, as it involved lots of financial expenditures and hardship. Unfortunately government never supported talented smiths that worked in this tiny sacred niche of art...

Over time, Emin Mammadov was selected to be a student in Christian Albrecht University of Kiel in Germany, completed his degree, became a PhD and went to work overseas as it was difficult to get a decent job without connections in Baku. After a while, Emin's works became more known to the public. His swords are in 2 museums in Canada and Israel, some of his shashka swords are in private collections of well-known people like Andrey Yastrzhemskiy (former advisor of a first Russian president) and some other people.

Alexander Volovik, a well-known engraving artist of Azerbaijan kindly guided Emin on a number of ways to



create a firm platform for ornaments and patterns: he took Emin along with other students to the regions, often to the places where not many people ever go. As a result, Alexander established a spiritual link that allows to create masterpieces, provided a talent makes its effort to achieve the aim...

Emin Mammadov lives and works in Calgary, Canada. Apart from his engineering background and profession, he continues his art now trying to connect his roots in arms making to Canadian culture. Artisan smith does not leave any significant arms show without his participation, received high recognition in Canadian Knife Making Guild. Despite being relatively far from his native town, he continues to maintain good contacts with local smiths in Azerbaijan and guides them in a number of ways to ensure development of the craft and its appreciation.

Emin sees lots of future in the exclusive works of Saftar Akhmedov, Elmar Jaffarov, skills of Ruslan Aliyev (scrimshaw artist) and Zaur Aliyev (polishing and sharpening-). Artist believes that there is a strong need for governmental support to develop sword craftsmanship in Azerbaijan, establish grants and competitions for young smiths. On the other hand, present juridical rules "governing" that field are far from being realistic and practical. Although government allowed certain

crafts to resume making in late 80s, some restrictions were put in place that still apply and unfortunately got worse today... There is literally no distinction made between knives used by thugs and metal art of our forefathers.. So, one must go with a sombre mind over that type of legislation in Azerbaijan and appreciate the art of talented smith and artists if our government realizes the importance of development of an old art like that and see it growing in future...

In order to change current devastating situation, Emin calls for the ministry of culture of Azerbaijan to establish clear procedures for artists in metal arts. He also suggests Ministry of Culture to propose a system of licenses for knife and sword craftsmen. This system will ensure simplicity and prosperity of market for talents and will bring art of sword making if not to the same levels of the Safavid period, but to the step which will be close... Besides, these can and should be used as high valued presents for international visits of our governmental officials as well as diplomatic missions overseas...

Emin Mammadov being an optimist in his character, hopes this article will help in certain way to establish a new "bridge" between artists and young talents of our republic and those working overseas and ministry of culture of Azerbaijan. ❀