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by

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xxviii, 401

from the rest. The great pride of the Eastern swordsmiths was the quality of their blades. Judging from Indian and Persian paintings, hunters wielded them with great effect, leaning from their saddles to deliver great slashing blows which almost cut an animal in two. The painting of Umed Singh, Raja of Bundi, N. India (1749-c.1773) in the Victoria and Albert Museum (I.S. 554-1952) shows him on horseback slicing the throat of a giant boar with his *talwar*, having unsuccessfully attacked it with bow and arrows. Another Bundi painting of c. 1820 depicts a huntress, a lady of the court, striking down a tiger with a wide-bladed *talwar*.⁹⁹ An English officer in India in 1840 noted:

The Sikhs have a curious way of catching the wild hog, which I never saw practised in any other part of India. They make a kind of snare of strong withys, and setting them in runs of the hogs generally succeed in catching the finest boars, who when once disturbed, rush blindly on, till brought up by these snares, when a man goes up, and generally at a single blow of his sword puts an end to them.¹⁰⁰

European blades were often fitted to Eastern hilts and there was a considerable trade between the Solingen smiths and the African markets.¹⁰¹ The Rev. J. G. Wood had this to say on the sword of the Hamran Arabs:

It is straight, double-edged, and is furnished with a cross-handle, like that of the ancient Crusaders, from whom the fashion seems to have been borrowed. The blades are of European make, and the Arabs are excellent judges of steel, valuing a good blade above everything. They keep both edges literally as sharp as razors, and prove the fact by shaving with them. . . . The length of the blade is three feet, and the handle is about six inches long, so that the weapon is a very weighty one, and a fair blow from its keen edge will cut a man in two. . . . Armed with merely a sword, these mighty hunters attack all kinds of game, and match themselves with equal coolness against the elephant, the rhinoceros, the giraffe, the lion, or the antelope.¹⁰²

The elephant was hunted by two mounted hunters, one acting as a decoy galloping just in front, whilst the other attacked from the rear cutting through the hind feet of the animal leaving it helpless.

During a hunt in Abyssinia with these Arabs, Sir Samuel Baker borrowed a silver-mounted family sword from his head man, Taher Noor, who cautioned him against striking a stone

with it. Suddenly attacked by a young rhinoceros Baker 'delivered a lightning-like downward cut with Taher Noor's favourite sword. The young rhinoceros fell stone-dead, all in a heap. The Arabs ran to the spot. Taher Noor took the sword carefully from my hand, and pointing it at arms length, he looked along the edge; he then wiped the blade upon the body of the rhinoceros, and, to prove the perfection of his weapon, he shaved a few hairs off his naked arm; then exclaimed with a deep sigh of pleasure and astonishment, "*Mashallah*", and returned it to the scabbard.' Baker found that the sword had cut between two of the vertebrae nearly severing the fifteen-inch thick neck, the head being held only by the thick skin of the throat.¹⁰³