

## [The Collecting Of Ancient Swords](#) by [John Piscopo](#)

I collect American and European swords and bayonets from WWI back. I've been collecting since 1992. In 1995 I visited a gun show and found a dealer who had two ancient Iranian swords on his table for \$900. each. I bought them on sight and was hooked.

Since my purchase, my collection has expanded and I now collect ancient swords and other weapons from Europe, the Middle East, China and SE Asia. I have found items readily available for purchase if you know where to look and if you let dealers in antiquities, especially dealers in ancient coins, know your interests.

Should you desire to expand your collection to include swords from the ancient world, there are a few tips I would like to give you to help you get started in the right direction. It will save you time and money in the long run if you can associate your-self with established collectors who can give you guidance and direction.

I have a small network of collectors who share my interests in swords and other weapons as well as odd artifacts from antiquity. We share information on the identification, authentication and valuation of items offered on eBay. Sometimes we are chastised with letters of reprimand from eBay because we occasionally warn an unsuspecting Buyer that he is bidding a premium price on a reproduction. If you would like to join such a network and share your expertise, please email me at [JPisc98357@aol.com](mailto:JPisc98357@aol.com) and I can give you more details.

You can also visit my website: <http://www.johnpiscopo.com>

**Pricing:** Virtually all ancient swords you will encounter on eBay and other auctions will be priced under \$2,000. The higher the prices, the better condition you can expect.

**Availability:** Iranian and Chinese swords are the most available and with the most reasonable prices, commonly available between \$500. and \$1,000. European swords will be harder to find and more expensive. Greek and Roman swords are impossible, I have one Roman sword, the only one I have seen.

**Places to shop:** eBay is a good market but I also follow auctions at Christie's in London, Herman Historica in Munich, Czerny International in Italy and dealers in New Zealand, Hong Kong, Berlin and Copenhagen. See links on my website.

**Research:** Identification is very important in collecting ancient weapons. Similar styles are dictated by utility. The hilts and pommels are the key clues. I would recommend the assembly of a library of books in the field you wish to collect. You can collect a wide geographic range or one specific one, like

Bronze Age Europe, or Han Dynasty China. Anyone interested in titles can email me. Books are available on Amazon.com or BN.com, Chinese books can be gotten from Paragon. Links to book search sites are available.

**Maintenance:** When you collect ancient weapons you become a temporary title holder in a chain of custody. It is your responsibility of doing no damage to the items in your collection and perform restoration with care when necessary. Take care to provide for the eventual disposal of your collection so that your executor knows your wishes after death. Your heirs will have no clue as to your collection's value or how to dispose of it at the most favorable prices.

**Labeling:** Take care to tag every item you purchase with the acquisition information and pricing. This is important if you eventually sell the piece and owe taxes on the sale but also to give your family an indication of values. On the other side of the tag, identify the piece: Ancient Iran/Marlik/C. 1000 B.C.200/Moorey #59. Roger Moorey wrote a very fine book: Catalogue of the Ancient Persian Bronzes in the Ashmolean Museum, a literature citation helps to properly identify your piece.

**Historical research:** Read the books in your library. Know the methods that the ancient bronze and iron smiths used to manufacture swords and other weapons. Know the history of the people whose swords you are collecting, their geography and wars are important in understanding the history of your weapon.

**Authentication:** Know and trust the person or company you purchase from. Ancient swords have been reproduced in quantity and as a result special care must be taken to assure that your collection is not salted with fakes. An appraiser or dealer brought in to value your collection for disposal will give a huge valuation discount if he sees many obvious fakes. Learn how to distinguish the differences between the fake and genuine items. When in doubt, have the sword professionally examined. I use a valuation level of \$800. (Not a purchase price) as a threshold in deciding which items to have examined. It is very important to have Chinese antiquities examined because of the huge number of fakes in the market, eBay has many being offered to unsuspecting collectors.

**Library:** Try to purchase some books before you start collecting. Plan on spending as much on books as you do on swords for at least your first year. Remember that the sure identification of a fake that you might have purchased can save you the price of most of the books the very first time. Identification of an unknown sword on eBay that enables you to purchase a \$1,500. sword for \$600. can also pay for your library quickly.

**Donation:** Be aware that if you donate your completed collection after your death to a museum or university so that they will put it on display for research and as historical artifacts for students to study that it is unlikely your wishes will last longer than the next auction sale. They do not want your artifacts, they want money. The collection will be quickly broken up and dispersed.

**Display:** I mount my swords and other weapons to pegboards on my walls using steel hooks. I keep likes together, Iranian on one board, European on another and Chinese on a third. Dong Son, Vietnamese, weapons have a third board.

**Affiliated weapons:** As you collect swords you will also find daggers, knives, spearheads and butts, javelin and arrow points, axes, maces halberds and other unusual weapons used within the cultures you have interest in. You can collect these easily, mostly under \$300.! Keep a magnet on hand to tell the difference between iron and bronze items.

**Tools:** You should have a 20X magnification glass, a 10X jeweler's loupe, an assortment of fiber and wire brushes, a dental pick, magnet and various cleaners. It would be great to have a tool bench to use for cleaning and restoration. Epoxies can be used to repair broken items.

**Cleaning:** Beware of antiquities that have large accretions of rock hard sand that has not been removed prior to your purchase. This may indicate that the item is a product of the modern sand casting process rather than the ancient bi-valve or lost wax casting process. Plain dirt should be removable by soap and water and a fiber brush and light scrubbing.

**Testing:** Patina is an important asset for any ancient artifact. A little acetone on a cotton ball will tell you if it has been painted on. Remember that weapons were made for warriors to use in battle, their lives depending on the quality of their weapons. You have their weapons because they valued them highly enough to take them to the grave with them. Any craftsman with a poor casting would simply put the metal back into the pot and recast a new sword. A modern craftsman would not care about minor imperfections, he would trust in your ignorance to pass off a piece of shoddy workmanship. Look closely at every item you purchase for signs of file marks, asymmetrical lines, wavy lines that should be straight, beads of metal, sprue stubs and nonconformities.

**Shipping:** Wrapping with care will ensure safe delivery of items you have to ship. Keeping the item rigid is most important. I recommend keeping the use of tape to a very minimum. Remember that unless the artifacts are very corroded, they are not inherently fragile and you are not required to think of them as fine porcelains. I use USPS Priority Mail with minimum insurance. Use insurance so they are forced to keep a record of where the article is, not because you intend on placing a claim, unless of course you are shipping a very fragile item. Please use rubber bands and not tape to secure your item. A roll of tape will not make it safer but will require that a knife or razor be used to unwrap, creating a danger to the artifact.

**Friends:** Remember there is a community of collectors out here who can help you and answer your questions and help you in the acquisition process, you just have to look for us. If you see an eBay auction that has an item you want but can't afford, email the bidders and introduce yourself! No need to be alone simply because your next door neighbor has no love for ancient Iranian swords!