



FALĀKAN

FALĀKAN (a sling), a term probably derived from the Avestan *fradaxšanā-* (Darmesteter, II, p. 215, n. 38; *AirWb.*, col. 981). Asadī Ṭūsī (*Loġat-e fors*, ed. Mojtabā'ī and Ašraf, pp. 197-98), quoting a verse by Rūdakī, defined *falākan* as *kalāsang*. *Kalāsang/qalmāsang* is described as a device “woven from wool or silk with which shepherds and footmen (*šāṭerān*) throw stones” (*Borhān-e qāṭe'*, ed. Mo'īn, III, pp. 1486-87, 1539; cf. Garūsīn, p. 84). In central Persia today, *ke/kolāsang* and *kalāsonga* are used for sling (Sotūda, p. 308), while in eastern Persia the variant *palakmān/palakmo(n)* (Šālčī, p. 76; Režā'ī, p. 120) are employed.

The slingstone is called *zarštva-* and *asan-* in the Avesta (*Yt.* 10.39; *Vd.* 17.9). In Persian dictionaries, the slingstone is usually called *moštāsang* (*Borhān-e qāṭe'*, ed. Mo'īn, IV, p. 2011). The stones were kept in a bag (*tūbra*) along with the sling to facilitate their transport (Bal'amī, ed. Rowšan, II, p. 1223; Jūzjānī, ed. Ḥabībī, p. 38).

The legendary king Kayūmart (see GAYŪMART) is said to have used a *falākan* on which God's name was inscribed to fight demons (Bal'amī, ed. Bahār, p. 114). The Achaemenid (553-330 B.C.E.) army included a group of slingers who even used lead bullets (Briant, pp. 1064-65). According to Bal'amī (ed. Rowšan, II, p. 1223), an 'ayyār (q.v.) of Baghdad used a *falākan* to smash the sword of a Khorasani soldier during the siege of the city by the forces of al-Ma'mūn under Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn. Slings were also used by the defenders of forts when they were besieged. Faqr-e Modabber mentioned both sling and slingstone (*sang-e falākan*) among the necessities for defending a fortress. He distinguished these



stones from other ones intended to be launched by catapults or thrown by hand (Faḵr-e Modabber, p. 424). The sling was still employed in wars of the 10th/16th century. For example, when Herat was attacked by Uzbeks in 957/1550, one of their chiefs, Šāh Moḥammad Solṭān, was hit by a slingstone that threw him off his horse (Eskandar Beg, p. 93). This, however, was a rare case of the utilization of the sling in a war of that period. In general, muskets and cannons had already begun to replace slings and catapults. Subsequently, the sling was only used by shepherds and footmen, as indicated in the dictionary definitions.

Jovaynī (ed. Qazvīnī, III, p. 131) referred to the *falākan-e majānīq* (catapults) used by the defenders of the fortress Alamūt (q.v.) when it was besieged by the Mongols in 654/1256. Similarly, *Borhān-e qāṭeʿ* (ed. Moʿīn, IV, p. 2038) describes *manjanīq/k* as resembling a large *falākan*, although the two had totally different mechanisms.

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