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Mind, Body, and the Cosmos: Chess and Backgammon in Ancient Persia*

آسمان تخته وانجم بودش مهره نرد
کعبتینش مه و خورشید و فلک استاد است
با چنین تخته و این مهره و این کهنه حریف
فکر بردن بودت ، عقل تو بي بنياد است
شرط در آمد کار است نه دانستن کار
طاس گر نیک نشنید همه کس نراداست

BOARD GAMES WERE PLAYED IN MANY PARTS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD AND SO IT is very difficult to attribute the origin of any board game to a particular region or culture. Board games have been found in ancient Mesopotamia, the oldest from the city of Ur, but one must also mention the game of *Senet* in ancient Egypt.[1] Often board games were placed in the tombs of the pharaohs and sometimes the dead are shown playing with the gods, for example one scene shows Rameses III (c. 1270 B.C.) playing with Isis to gain access to the nether world. The importance of this image lies in the depiction of the cosmological and religious significance that ancient peoples attributed to board games—they were not just games played for pleasure. Reference to board games in Persia can be found as early as the Achaemenid period, where, according to Plutarch, Artaxerxes

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1. For the Egyptian game of Senet see E. B. Pusch, *Das Senet-Brettspiel im alten Ägypten*, Münchener ägyptologische Studien 38 (München, 1979); W. Decker, *Sports and Games of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1992). I would like to thank A. Loprieno for this information.

played a board game with dice.[2] There is also a reference to the Parthian king Demetrius playing a board game, albeit in a later source, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

The earliest historical reference to the game of chess occurs in India, where it existed as early as the time of the great Indian grammarian Pāṇini around five hundred B.C.E. The game is also mentioned in the great Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata*, in which the great sage, Vyāsa, explains the rules of the game (Sanskrit: *caturanga*; Middle Persian: *čatrang*; Persian and Arabic: *shatranj*; *chatrang*) to the great Pāṇḍava prince Yudhiṣṭhira. Vyāsa explains that the board game has four groups: *hasty-aśva-nauka-padāta* (elephant, horse, ship, foot soldiers.) Thus the meaning of the name of the game, *caturanga* (Sanskrit) lies not in its four branches, but rather in an "army consisting of four divisions," a reference to the division of the Indian army, where according to the *Amarakośa*, by the sixth century C.E. *nauka* was replaced by *ratha*, thus: *hasty-aśva ratha-padāta* (elephant, horse, chariot, foot soldiers), accompanying the king and the counselor.[3] Patañjali (second century B.C.E.) also makes reference to the game, as does Bāṇā and Daṇḍin (seventh century C.E.) and Ratnākara (ninth century C.E.)[4]

One has also to look to India for the origin of backgammon. The earliest mention of it occurs in Bhartṛhari's *Vairāgyaśtaka* (39), composed around the late sixth or early seventh century C.E.[7] Thus, we have a general stream of Indian knowledge, including that of board games, passing into Persia in late antiquity during the Sasanian period. The use of dice for both games is another indication

2. Plutarch, *Lives*, trans J. Dryden (New York, 1864), xvii.

3. B. Gheiby, *Guzarish i Shatranj* (Bielefeld, n.d.), 12; G. Chaucer, "The Pardoners Tale," *The Canterbury Tales* (Hertfordshire, 1995), 281:

Loke eek that, to the kyng Demetrius	Look at King Demetrius
The king of Parthes, as the book seith us,	the King of Parthia, as the book tells us,
Sente hym a paire of dees of gold in scorn	He sent a pair of golden dies in scorn
For he hadde used at hasard ther-biforn	For he had dice-played beforehand
For which he held his glorie or his renoun	For which he held his glory and renown
At no value or reputacioun.	Without value or reputation."

4. P. Thieme, "Chess and Backgammon (Tric-Trac) in Sanskrit Literature," *Indological Studies in Honor of W. Norman Brown*, ed. E. Bender (New Haven, 1962), 215, reprinted in P. Thieme, *Kleine Schriften*, Part 2 (Wiesbaden, 1971), 424.

5. L. Falkner, *Games Ancient and Oriental and How to Play Them Being the Games of the Ancient Egyptians, the Hiera Gramme of the Greeks, the Ludus Latrunculorum of the Romans and the Oriental Games of Chess, Draughts, Backgammon and Magic Squares* (New York, 1892), 125; Bo Utas, "Chess: I. The History of Chess in Persia," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (forthcoming) *EIr*) 5: 395.

6. It appears that playing chess without dice is a later development; A. van der Linde, "Geschichte und Literatur des Schachspiels I," (1874), 78ff apud Thieme, 424.

7. Thieme, "Chess and Backgammon," 423–24.

of their common Indic origin, since dice and gambling were a favorite pastime in India.

This essay attempts to review the history of the games of chess and backgammon in Persia and to demonstrate their significance in Persian society. The earliest text on the games of chess and backgammon found in Persia, is known as *Wizārišn ī Čatrang ud Nihišn ī Nēw-Ardaxšīr*[8] (Middle Persian: "The explanation of chess and the invention of backgammon"), for which, although its date of composition is unclear, analysis based on the text points to the sixth century C.E. during the reign of *Xusro* I (530–71 C.E.), known as *anōšag-ruwān* (immortal soul). The authenticity of the narrative has been questioned and scholars have pointed out that due to its literary nature we cannot establish its historicity, but it is significant that both the Indic and Middle Persian sources indicate personages mentioned in the sixth century C.E.

Before looking at the text we should discuss the function of chess and backgammon as they appear in other Middle Persian sources for ancient Persian social context. Three other Middle Persian texts mention the game of chess and backgammon in a context that makes clear its role in princely or courtly education. In acquiring *frahang* (Middle Persian; Persian: *farhang*), which is equivalent to Greek *paideia* and best can be translated as "culture," it appears that those of nobility were required to learn several arts, including board games. These sciences were acquired in *frahangestān* (schools for cultural education) for the nobility, similar to the *hērbedestān* and *mowestān*, the "priestly schools," established to train clergy.[9]

The first Middle Persian text is named *Xusro ud Rēdag*, "Xusro and the page," which, according to the narrative, takes place at the court of King Xusro I.[10] The page, who is from a noble line and whose parents have passed away, asks the king to look after him. Among his virtues, the text mentions his exceptional diligence in acquiring *frahang* while attending the *frahangestān*, in memorizing the sacred utterances, in scribeship, calligraphy, horsemanship, jousting, polo, playing musical instruments, singing, poetry, dancing, astrology, and finally, in mastering the following board games (Pahlavi Texts, ed. Jamasp-Asana 29.10–11):

8. C. J. Brunner, "The Middle Persian Explanation of Chess and Invention of Backgammon," *The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 10 (1978): 43–51; A. Panaino, *La Novella degli Sacchi e della tavola reale, testo pahlavi, traduzione e commento al Wizārišn ī Čatrang ud nēw-Ardaxšīr*, (Milan, 1999); J. Curtis and I. Finkel, "Game Boards and Other Incised Graffiti at Persepolis," *Iran* 37 (1999): 45–48.

9. For a study of the requirements for king and princes in ancient Persia see W. Knauth, *Das altiranische Fürstenideal von Xenophon bis Ferdousi, nach den antiken und einheimischen Quellen dargestellt* (Wiesbaden, 1975).

10. D. Monchi-Zadeh, "Xusrov ī Kavātān ut Rētak, Pahlavi Text, Transcription and Translation," *Monumentum Georg Morgenstierne*, vol. 2, *Acta Iranica* 22, (Leiden, 1982): 47–91.

ud čatrang ud nēw-ardaxšīr ud haštpāy[11]
kardan az hamahlān frāztar hēm

"And in playing chess and backgammon
and *haštpāy*, I am ahead of (my) peers."

Thus, based on this text we can gain an insight into the conceptual view of acquiring culture in Persia in late antiquity. Further, attendence at the *frahangestān* demanded that a well-rounded person had to show prowess both in physical and mental training. This idea is also echoed in Greek civilization, which may have influenced the Persian world at large. Nonetheless, certain elements were native to Persia, as is evident if one gives credence to Herodotus, and for more detail, Strabo's account of the Achaemenid Persians. While Herodotus (1.136) states that Persian youth were required "to ride a horse, use the bow, and speak the truth," Strabo (15.3.18) states that the youth were not only trained in the use of bow and javelin, and riding, but were also given training by wise men in the mythic elements of education, rehearsing songs about the deeds of gods (religion) and the noblest men (history). They also learned to plant trees and gather roots, which gave them a wider knowledge of the physical world. Thus, this ancient Persian tradition of intellectual as well as physical training is attested to prior to the conquest of Alexander.

The second Middle Persian text that mentions these games is the *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān* (The book of the deeds of Ardaxšīr, son of Pāpag.) The text is about Ardaxšīr I's rise to power (224–240 C.E.), and his founding of the Sasanian dynasty and unification of Persia. The text, however, appears to be a late compilation and its last redaction probably took place in the seventh century C.E. during the reign of Xusro II (590–628).[12] The games of chess and backgammon are mentioned as part of acquiring *frahang* in the same part of the text which discusses the virtues of Ardaxšīr, along with other sports, (II.12):

pad yazdān ayyārīh pad čōbēgān ud aswārīh ud
čatrang ud nēw-Dabšīr ud abārīg frahang az
awēšān hamōyēn čēr ud nibardag būd

"With the aid of the gods he (Ardaxšīr) was (more)
victorious and experienced than all of them in polo
and horsemanship and chess and backgammon and
other *frahangs*."

11. Sanskrit aṣṭāpada (Persian: *haštpāy*) is similar to the chessboard and has sixty-four squares, eight rows of eight squares, H. J. R. Murry, *A History of Board-Games other than Chess* (Oxford, 1952), 33.

12. O. M. Chukanova, *Kniga deianii Ardashira syna Papaka*, (Moscow, 1987), 162; the method used by Chukanova for dating the last redaction of the text has been criticized by A. Panaino, "The Two Astrological Reports of the Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān (III, 4-7; IV,6-7)," *Die Sprache, Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* 36 (1994): 181–98.

The last Middle Persian text mentions the game of backgammon in a negative sense. In the *Andarz ī Ōšnar ī Dānāg* (The councils of the wise Ōšnar), the path of moderation, (Middle Persian: *paymān*) is emphasized, and four things done in excess lead to harm for man (33):

pad ēn 4 čiš rāy mard ziyānkārtar bawēd was
xwardan ī may ud waranīg pad zanān ud was
kardan ī nēw-Ardaxšīr (ud) naxčīr nē pad paymānagīh

"With these four things man becomes more destructive:
Drinking too much wine, lusting after women,
playing too much backgammon, and hunting without moderation."[13]

Because of the late date of all the Middle Persian texts it is possible to say that by the time of Xusro I these games were introduced to Persia from India along with a variety of works transmitted in the sixth century C.E. These include such texts as the *Pañcatantra*, which, according to tradition, was translated into Middle Persian by a physician named Burzoe but unfortunately lost. However, a Syriac translation of it was made in 570 C.E. under the name of *Kalīlag wa Damnag*, this being the name of the two main players, or "jackals," in the Sanskrit text, *Karataka u Damanaka*. This story was also translated from Middle Persian into Arabic by ᶜAbdullah ibn al-Muqaffaᶜ in the eighth century C.E., and is known in Persian as the *Dāstānhāy-i Bīdpāy* (The Fables of Pilpay). The Persian version of the *Dāstānhāy-i Bīdpāy* which we have today is the version first translated from Sanskrit into Middle Persian and then into Arabic and then back into Persian.[14] It was through a similar transmission of Sanskrit literature that the Buddhist *Jātaka* stories came to Persia, later being translated into Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, which contributed to the production of Aesop's fables in Byzantium, the *Sandbād-nāmeh*, and the *Arabian Nights*.[15]

These stories were taken from another Indian text called the *Hitopadeśa* (Book of good counsel). This book was part of the Indian genre known as *nītiśāstra* (Mirror for Princes), which in Middle Persian was known as *ēwēnnāmag* "Book of Manners," (Persian: *āyīn-nāmeh*), and was prevalent in Persia. The above mentioned Middle Persian text on chess and backgammon is also considered to be part of this genre.[16] These books of manners, or "mirrors for princes" were common in Arabic and Persian as well, being known as *Siyar al-*

13. For the text and the latest translation see, I.M. Nazeri, *Andarz ī Ōšnar ī Dānā* (Tehran, 1373/1994), 22–23.

14. *Dāstānhāy-e Bīdpāy*, translated by Muḥammad b. Abdallāh al-Bukhārī, ed. P. N. Khanlari and M. Roshan (Tehran, 1369/1990).

15. A. Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism* (New York, 1994), 200.

16. A. Tafazzolī, "Āyīn-nāme," *Encyclopaedia of Iran and Islam*, ed. E. Yarshater, (Tehran, 1978), 266.

mulūk or *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*. A passage in *Dēnkard* VI best explains reasons for which this body of texts were known as mirrors (Middle Persian: *ēwēnag*):

awēšān ēniz ōwōn dāšt ku pad āmōzišn ī ōy ī did ān[17]
čišē ēn weh ka xēm ī xwēš be wirāyēd ud xwēštan
ēwēnag be kunēd ud pēš ī ōy ī did dārēd ud ōy ī
did andar nigerēd ud wēnēd ud az-iš abar hammōzēd.

"They held this too: In teaching one's fellow this one
thing is best: That a man discipline his character, make
a mirror of himself, and hold it in front of his fellows.
The other man looks at it, sees it, and learns from it."

In the *Wizārišn ī Čatrang ud Nihišn ī Nēw-Ardaxšīr*, there are four major figures represented: the Indian king, Dēwišarm/Sačidarm; his minister, Taxritos; and, on the Persian side, Xusro I and his minister, Wuzurgmihr. Although one of the more significant figures mentioned in the Middle Persian texts on chess and backgammon, scholars have called into question the historicity of the Indian king. Not only in this text on chess, however,but also in the *Stories of Bēdpāy* we come across this name for an Indian king (in the *Bēdpāy*, his name is written as *Dabšalīm*). Herzfeld believed that the story of the invention of chess was transferred from Ardaxšir I's time to that of Xusro I,[18] but it appears that indeed not only the Ardaxšīr romance (*The Deeds of Ardaxšīr, son of Pābag*), but also the game was brought to Persia during the reign of Xusro I. The form of the Indian king's name as Dēwišarm, (Persian and Arabic Dabšalīm), thus may be from Sanskrit *Devaśarman*, "God's joy," which appears in the *Hitopadeśa* (Book of Good Counsel).[19] Another possible suggestion that affirms the historicity of the king and places him in the sixth century C.E. is Markwart's hypothesis connecting Dabšalim to the Indian king Yaśōdharman who was the contemporary of Xusro I.[20]

The name of the Indian messenger has also been connected with other famous figures who may have been the product of popular imagination. Herzfeld conjectured that the name *t'tlytus* (Taxritos) is the corrupt form of the name Aristotle,[21] which is unlikely. According to the Middle Persian text, Dēwišarm sent Taxritos to Persia bearing thirty-two chess pieces made of emerald and red ruby to test the intelligence of the Persians, and a letter to Xusro I asking if he

17. Shaked omits the "ān", *Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages, Dēnkard VI* (Boulder, 1979), 86–87 (passage 223).

18. E. Herzfeld, *Zoroaster and His World* (New York, 1974), 2: 628.

19. T. Nöldeke, "Persische Studien," *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*, Phil.-hist. Klasse, Kl. 126, Abh. 12 (1892), 21–23.

20. J. Markwart and J. J. M de Groot, "Das Reich Zābul und der Gott Zūn," *Eduard Sachau-Festschrift* (1915), 257.

21. E. Herzfeld, *Zoroaster*, 628.

could solve the riddle or rationale of this game, reasoning that if Xusro I was a greater king than himself, the sages of his realm would be wiser as well. This of course is nothing more than Sasanian propaganda, exalting the Sasanian court and the king among the empires of late antiquity. Xusro I asks for three days to explain the rationale and rules behind the game of chess, but initially, no one in the court is able to solve the riddle of the game. It is only on the third day that one of the sages by the name of Wuzurgmihr rises and attempts to explain how the game must be played. In an episode reminiscent of one in the *Mahābhārata*, he explains the rules of the game using an analogy of battle between two armies.[22] Wuzurgmihr, in deciphering the logic of the game, makes the following comparison (WČ.10):

u-š homōnāg 2 sar-xwadāy kard šāh *[mādayārān ō raxwī*][23]
hōyag ud dašnag homānāg frazēn ō artēštārān-sālār
homānāg pīl ō puštībānān-sālār homānāg
ud asb ō aswārān-sālār homānāg payādag ō ān
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"He made the king like the two overlords, the rook (on) the left
and right flank, the minister like the commander of the warriors, the elephant like the commander of the bodyguards, and the horse
like the commander of the cavalry, the foot-soldier like the same
pawn that is at the front of the battle[field]."

Taxritos is astonished when he hears the explanation, because it is exactly the rule that the Indian sages had devised with much toil, and now Wuzurgmihr had solved the riddle rather easily. The story attempts to drive home several points to the audience. Not only is the King of Kings of Persia greater than others, but also *Ērān* (the Sasanian Persian Empire) is the greatest empire. Secondly, Wuzurgmihr is not only the greatest of the Persian sages, but of all the sages in the world. He is also able to defeat the Indian sage three times at chess, their own game. The message of the story is simple: Persia is the greatest empire of late antiquity, its king is the greatest king, and its minister or sage is the wisest in the *oikumene*.

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nardašīr, especially in Arabic texts, and also found in the Babylonian Talmud as *nrdašyr*) has enjoyed several popular etymologies among Arab lexicographers. The most common one is that *nardšīr* (Arabic) was composed of *nard* and *šīr*, a *Volksetymologie* accepted by some scholars.[24]

The invention of backgammon gives Wuzurgmihr even more prestige and fame in the realm, and enables him to extract more tribute. This feat and others have made Wuzurgmihr famous in Persian literature, where he has become a semi-legendary and semi-historical person, known as Buzurj(g)mihr.[25]

The Cosmological Significance of Backgammon

The story of Wuzurgmihr's invention of the game of backgammon is most probably fictitious and the game is more likely to have come from India as part of the great age of scientific and artistic transmission of knowledge to Persia during late antiquity.[26] The literary works which came from India were on such subjects as logic (Middle Persia: *tark*; Sanskrit: *tarka*) and rhetoric (*kōšak*; Sanskrit: *kośa;* Middle Persian: *āwyākrn*; Sanskrit: *vyākaraṇa*).[27] From the Greek world, works on geometry (Middle Persian: *zamīg-paymānīh*) and Ptolemaios' μεγιστη' (Middle Persian: *mgstyg*) are well known.[28] The transmission of scientific knowledge from India and Byzantium was also current in the Sasanian period, especially works on astronomy and astrology to which the game of backgammon is related. The importance the Sasanians assigned to these sciences is evident from the names of the practitioners. The astrologer (Middle Persian: *axtarmār*; *starōšmār*), soothsayer (Middle Persian: *murw-nīš*; *kēd*; *kundāg*), zodiac-teller (Middle Persian: *star-gōwišn*), star-reckoner (Middle Persian: *stārhangār*), and time-knower (Middle Persian: *hangām-šnās*) were valued and active in this period which welcomed and utilized new Greek, Indian, and

24. F. Rosenthal, "Nard," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* New Edition 7: 963; Murry also accepted the false etymology of *shīr* for "lion," *A History of Board-Games*, 114.

25. In regard to his fictional nature and lack of historicity see T. Nöldeke, "Burzōes Einleitung zum Buche Kalila we Dimna," *Schriften der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft in Strassburg* 12 (1912): 104ff; for proponents of his historicity and his identification with Burzōe see, A. Christensen, "La légende du sage Buzurjmihr," *Acta Orientalia* 8 (1929): 81-127. For the influence of Xusro I and Wuzurgmihr in the post-Sasanian period see R. D. Marcotte, "Anīshīrvān and Buzurgmihr—the Just Ruler and the Wise Counselor: Two figures of Persian Traditional Moral Literature," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, 51: 2 (1998): 69–90.

26. A. Panaino has suggested that the game was in fact originally a game which existed in the West known as ludus duodecim scriptorum, alea tabula, *La Novella*, 197.

27. H. W. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books* (Oxford, 1943); P. de Menasce, "Notes Iraniennes," *Journal Asiatique* (1949): 1–2; M. Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature," *Handbuch der Orientalistik: Iranistik, Literatur* 1: 36–37.

28. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems*, 86; Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature," 36–37. For a review of all the material in Persian see H. Reza'i Baghbidi, "Vāzhe Guzīnī dar ʿaṣr-i Sāsānī va taʾṯīr ān dar Fārsī-yi Darī," *Nāmeh-i Farhangistān* 5 1998[2000]: 144–58.

Babylonian astronomy, and it appears that the Sasanians indeed effected a unique mixture of Greek, Indian, and Babylonian astrological material.[29]

According to the *Fihrist* of Ibn Nadim, the inventor of backgammon, Wuzurgmihr, also wrote a commentary on the now-lost astronomical work, *Anthologiae* of Vettius Valens, although fragments of the Arabic translation of the Middle Persian version are extant.[30] Wuzurgmihr's preoccupation with astronomy and astrology is significant in light of the cosmological explanation of the game of backgammon according to the Middle Persian text. According to the *Fihrist*, when the Indian king sent the game of chess to the Sasanian court challenging it to figure out the logic of the game, Wuzurgmihr, designed and sent the backgammon board and its pieces to India to challenge the Indians in turn. The Indian sages could not decipher the logic of the game and as a result Wuzurgmihr brought more glory to the court in Iran as well as much booty and honor. Since the Indians could not discern the game's logic, the King of Kings, Xusro I, asked the sage to explain the game. Wuzurgmihr's answer, which clearly demonstrates the cosmological significance of the game, is central to Zoroastrian beliefs. He said the game is analogous to the processes of the cosmos and human life.[31] Fate is the primary actor in the lives of men, and the roll of the dice in the game performs the function of fate.[32] The pieces represent humans, and their function in the universe is governed by the seven planets and the twelve zodiac signs. If we agree that Wuzurgmihr suggests "fate" (Middle Persian: *baxt*) is the principal determinant of one's life and actions and likewise accept Eznik of Kolb's statement that in the Sasanian period, the God Zurvan was equivalent to *baxt*, then we should consider Wuzurgmihr a follower of the Zurvanite doctrine. The difference between the game of chess and backgammon, however, is significant. While the game of chess is a game likened to battle, backgammon is based on the throw of the dice, thus is completely subject to fate.

According to the Zoroastrianism of the Sasanian period, fate dominated and controlled human life. The Middle Persian version of *Wīdēwdād* (Anti-Demonic Law) states (Wd 5.9):

gētīg pad baxt, mēnōg pad kunišn ast kē ēdōn gōwēd:

29. D. Pingree, "Astronomy and Astrology in India and Iran," *Isis, An International Review Devoted to the History of Science and its Cultural Influences*, 54, (1963): 241.

30. British Museum MS Add. 23,400. Pingree, "Astronomy and Astrology," 241–42; Brunner, "The Middle Persian Explanation of Chess," 1978, 46; Ibn Khaldūn gives similar information on Wuzurgmihr's preoccupation with astronomy and astrology, Pingree, "Astronomy and Astrology," 245. That the Iranians were interested in astronomy already in the fifth century, before the influence of Indian material, is indicated by E. S. Kennedy and B. L. van der Waerden, "The World-Year of the Persians," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83 (1963): 323; Panaino believes that Wuzurgmihr is not the astrologer who translated the *Anthologiae*, see *La Novella*, 123.

31. C. J. Brunner, "The Middle Persian Explanation of Chess," 46–47.

32. C. J. Brunner, "Astrology and Astronomy II. Astronomy and Astrology in the Sasanian Period," *EIr*, 2: 864.

an ud frazand ud xwāstag ud xwadāyīh ud zīndagīh
pad baxt, abārīg pad kunišn

"The material world is (governed) through fate, the spiritual world is (governed) through action. There is someone who says: wife and children and wealth and sovereignty and life is (governed) through fate, the rest is (governed) through action."

Shaul Shaked, however, has warned us that we should not think of the idea of fate governing human life as solely Zurvanite, since "orthodox" Zoroastrianism also accepted this idea.[33] The shape of the game board is likened to *spandarmad zamīg* (Avestan), *Spəṇtā Ārmaiti*, the goddess of the earth. This is a regular feature of Zoroastrian angelology, where the earth is thought to be part of a cosmological structure which is not only an idea, but also represented as an image.[34] Thus humans are functioning, or living, upon a cosmological being that is alive. The pieces represent the thirty nights and days. The dice represent the *axtarān* and *spihr* (constellations and firmament) whose turns and positions decide one's movements and predict human life. According to the text, the 'one' on the dice represents Ohrmazd's omnipotence and his oneness. The 'two' on the dice represents *mēnōg* and *gētīg*, the spiritual and the material world. The 'three' represents the three stages of heaven in Zoroastrianism, *humat*, *hūxt*, and *huwaršt*, preceding paradise. The 'four' represents another cosmological expression, *čahār sōg ī gētīg*, "the four corners of the world," an important concept in Mesopotamian royal ideology. This phrase is equivalent to Akkadian *kibrāt arbᵓi*, the four corners, i.e., the entire world.[35] The 'five' represents the five

33. Sh. Shaked, "Bakt II. The Concept," *EIr* 3: 538; also regarding the influence of Neoplatonic sources on this passage of the Wīdēwdād, see J. Duchesne-Guillemin in *Hommages à Georges Dumézil, Collection Latomus* 45 (1960): 102–103.

34. Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth, From Mazdean Iran to Shīᶜite Iran*, (Princeton, 1977), 4–5.

35. *šar kibrātim arbaᵓim* "king of the four corners of the world" adopted by Cyrus in the sixth century B.C., *The Assyrian Dictionary*, eds. M. Civil, I. J. Gelb, A. L. Oppenheim, E. Reiner (Chicago, 1971), 8: 331. In Cyrus' cylinder (CyC 1-2):

[mKu-ra-áš šàr kiš-šat šarru rabū šarru dannu
šàr Bābili (DIN.TIR)ki àr kuršume-ri u Akkadī ....]
-ni-šu [.... .... šàr ki-i]b-ra-a-tim ir-bi-it-tim

"Cyrus, King of the world, great king, legitimate king,
king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad,
king of the four quarters of the earth. . ."

See W. Eilers, "Le texte cunéiforme du cylindre de Cyrus," *Commémoration Cyrus, Hommage Universel II, Acta Iranica* (1974) 3: 29-32. *Please note that the fonts used for the transcription are not standard. From literary sources, one can point to the Šāhnāme of

luminaries, according to the text, which are the divisions of the heavens, although here there are some deviations from the norm. According to the *Avesta*, the heavens had four stations which were the stars, the moon, the sun and the eternal light. In this text we have, in a disorderly fashion, the divisions of the heavens into the following stations: the sun, the moon, the stars, fire, and finally the heavenly brightness.[36] Lastly, the six represents the *šaš gāhānbār*, or the six seasonal feasts according to the Zoroastrian religion.

Hitting a piece is likened to killing and when the pieces come back to the game it signifies the act of resurrection which, according to Zoroastrian cosmology, occurs in the twelfth millennium. Astrological signs are also very important for the end of the millennium and the beginning of the apocalyptic age, which ushers the twelfth millennium and the arrival of *Sōšāns*, at which point people are resurrected, and the luminaries return to their original position at the highest point. The seven planets and twelve zodiacal signs are the most important actors in human destiny, an idea which, according to Zaehner, was part of the Zurvanite heresy—astrological fatalism. Thus the seven planets were evil and the twelve zodiac signs were on the side of Ohrmazd, and decided the fate of man in the universe, which is why the *Mēnōg ī Xrad* (278.21–22) stated that all the welfare and adversity that comes to man does so through the seven planets and the twelve zodiac signs, something that the "orthodoxy" and Zoroaster himself had refuted.[37]

Some scholars have claimed that the cosmological nature of the game of chess and backgammon was connected with and corresponded to a mandala, a representation of the cosmic cycle in the Indic world. In this cycle, an initial

Abū Mansūrī, of which only the preface has survived. In explaining the division of the world the author states:

آرامگاه مردمان بوذ به چهار سوی جهان
از کران تا کران این زمین را ببخشیدند و به هفت
بهر کردند و هر بهری کشور خواندند

"Everywhere where there was the resting place of the people,
in the four corners of the world, from end to end, this earth
they divided, and made it into seven portions."

M. Qazwīnī, "Muqaddima-yi qadīm-i *Shāhnāmeh*," *Bīst Maqāla*, (Tehran, 1332/1953), 2: 43.

36. On the question of the influence of Mesopotamian and Greek ideas on the number of heavens, see A. Panaino, "Uranographia Iranica I: The Three Heavens in the Zoroastrian Tradition and the Mesopotamian Background," *Au carrefour des religions: mélanges offerts à Philippe Gignoux*, ed. R. Gyselen, (Bures-sur-Yvette, 1995), 205–26.

37. R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (London, 1961), 238.

cosmological battle took place between the devas and the asuras, that also played a similar part in the corporeal world, where fate and struggle controlled human destiny.

Artistic Representation

The earliest surviving chess pieces are from Persia. These include an elephant (fig. 1) carved from black stone (2 7/8 inches). The piece is from the late sixth or seventh century, which corresponds to the time when the Middle Persian text was composed.[38]

Fig. 1

More importantly there is a silver-gilded hemispherical bowl housed at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, which depicts several important scenes from the Sasanian period (fig 2): a marriage scene, a wrestling scene, and several others, including a scene of two people playing backgammon. Representationally, one can conclude that this bowl depicts the activities that mattered in courtly life,[39] and, based on the text of *Xusrō ud Rēdag*, one may suggest that the bowl represents the activities in which a noble should engage or at least have a basic knowledge of. These include wrestling, being informed about religious precepts and ritual, marrying and having offspring, playing instruments, and also, being able to play board games, i.e., backgammon. Harper has assigned the date of the bowl to the seventh century based on a number of characteristics: the clothing of some of the figures, which is similar to clothing depicted on the reliefs at Tāq-i

38. E. Herzfeld, "Ein Sasanidischer Elefant," *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* (1931) 3: 27; F. Sarre, "Sasanian Stone Sculpture," *Survey of Persian Art* (Oxford, 1939), 1: 593–600; Jessie McNab Dennis and Charles K. Wilkinson, Introduction by Charles K. Wilkinson, *Chess: East and West, Past and Present, A Selection from the Gustavus A. Pfeiffer Collection* (New York, 1968) (cat. no. 1).

39. Prudence Oliver Harper, *The Royal Hunter, Art of the Sasanian Empire* (New York, 1978), 75.

Bustān, the shape of some of the vessels, and the attachment of the short sword in one of the scenes.[40]

The backgammon scene shows that the person on the left has won the game by the fact that his left hand is raised in a sign of victory. The person on the right has his left hand on his knee and it appears that one of his fingers on his left hand is bent. The bent forefinger gesture has had a long history in the ancient Near East, going back to the second millennium B.C.E. and was a gesture of reverence, but in the Sasanian period, it also came to signify submission.[41] Thus in our scene, the loser may be giving a sign of submission or defeat, while his head droops slightly, and the winner has his hand raised, signifying victory.

Fig. 2

The other pictorial evidence for the game of backgammon comes from Central Asia, from the city of Panjikent (Sogdian: *pncyknδ*). In 1946, Russian archaeologists discovered this site which is situated in present-day Tajikistan. The paintings depict religious as well heroic and epic scenes (fig 3), such as that of Rustam's battles, the lamentation for Siyāwaxš (Persian: *sōg ī siyāwaš*), and other imagery which is quite pertinent to the ancient Iranian world.[42]

40. Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, 75–76; A. C. Gunter and P. Jett, *Ancient Iranian Metalwork in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the Freer Gallery of Art* (Washington, DC, 1992), 163.

41. Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Gesture in Ancient Iran and Central Asia II: Proskynesis and the Bent Forefinger," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 4 (1990[1992]): 205.

42. For a discussion of these matters see Guity Azarpay, *Sogdian Painting, The Pictoral Epic in Oriental Art* (Berkeley and London, 1981).

Among the wall paintings from Panjikent, which are now housed in the Hermitage museum at St. Petersburg, there is a scene of what may be described as court activity. The painting shows two people playing a board

Fig. 3

game, which in all probability is a backgammon game, along with several other figures beside them. The exact context of the story is not clear, but it has been suggested that the scene either represents a Buddhist Jataka story or a Turco-Iranian narrative theme.[43] A nimbus appears to encircle the head of one of the players who has his right hand raised as a gesture of victory. The man seated on the left again has his left hand raised showing the bent forefinger. A figure behind the victorious person also appears to be pointing to the loser with the bent forefinger. The bent forefinger here again demonstrates one's submission or defeat at the game and another person uses the same gesture as witness to his defeat.

A fourteenth-century manuscript of the *Šhāhnāmeh* contains two scenes, one at the court of Xusro I, and the second at the court of Dēwišarm. In the scene (figs. 4 & 5) Wuzurgmihr is seated on the floor with three other Persians, all with white turbans. In front of the Persian sage is a board, which, from the context of the story, we know is a backgammon board. The Indian king is seated on his throne, surrounded by the Indian sages who are painted darker and have darker turbans. Wuzurgmihr points with his right hand to the backgammon board which probably means that he is either challenging the Indian sages or explaining the rules of the game after the Indian sages have been confounded. It is particularly interesting to note that one of the two white-bearded Indian sages

43. Mario Bussagli, *Painting of Central Asia* trans. Lothian Small (Geneva, 1963), 46–47.

has his hand by his mouth, symbolizing his amazement or perplexity. We should also note that the design of the board is very similar to that of the backgammon board on the wall paintings at Panjikent.[44]

What can be concluded from these representations and our texts is that board games such as chess and backgammon were not just recreational games, rather they symbolically represented the importance of the cycle of life, wherein the game of chess was likened to battle and the struggle in life, and the game of backgammon represented fate and the cosmic cycle. These board games were sports which simulated the physical challenge of life and combat, as well as the training of the mind in order to be a well-rounded person, namely someone who has acquired *frahang/farhang*.

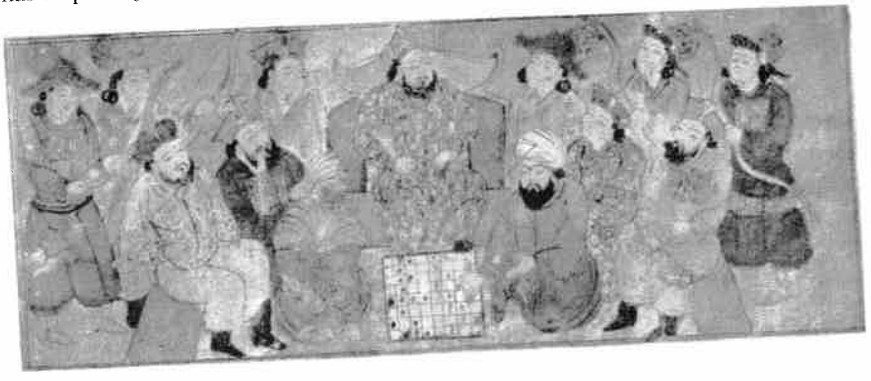

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

The Perso-Islamic World

We know that in the early Islamic period, the Arabs were familiar with back-

44. Dennis and Wilkinson, *Chess East and West*, xii.

gammon. Thaʿalibi relates the story that when the Arab Muslims conquered the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon they found a set of backgammon pieces belonging to Xusro II (590–628 C.E.) which were made of coral and turquoise. There is, in fact, evidence that the game of backgammon was popular in Arabia during the time of the Prophet Muhammad.[45] Yet backgammon was not unequivocally accepted. The companions of the prophet, such as Abu Hurayra (d. 676 C.E.), refused to meet Muslims who had played backgammon. He is also to have said "One who plays *nard* with stakes is like one who eats pork; one who plays without stakes is like one who puts his hand in pig's blood; and one who watches the game is like one who looks at pork meat."[46] By the eighth century C.E., the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence considered the game of backgammon as *ḥarām* (forbidden).[47] We have many textual references, however, to the game being played at the courts of many regions of the Islamic Near East, which means that the game may have been played by the masses as well, and in fact its popularity supports this supposition.

During the early ʿAbbasid period (750–900 C.E.), backgammon was popular at the courts of both Harun al-Rashid and his son, al-Maʾmun. Reportedly, al-Maʾmun liked to play backgammon because if he lost, he could place the blame on the dice,[48] or fate. The same may be said of the game of chess, which was seen as a form of gambling by many Muslims. Medieval authors justified the game by stating that as long as it was played for mental exercise it was beneficial. The *Qābūs-nāmeh* also dedicates a chapter to the games of chess and backgammon. It discusses the proper etiquette of playing as well as when and from whom one should win and when and to whom one should lose. It states strictly that one should not bet on the games; only then does playing the game become a proper activity.[49] During the Seljuk period it is reported that Alp Arslan was also fond of backgammon, although once, according to a Persian text, he became very angry when he threw two ones instead of two sixes.[50] Although the game was decreed to be *ḥarām*, backgammon remains a favorite

45. Franz Rosenthal, *Gambling in Islam* (Leiden, 1975), 88.

46. Al-Bukhari, *al-Adab al-mufrad*, ed. M. F. ʿAbd al-Baki (Cairo, 1375), 326–28; and for other traditions also see Rosenthal, *Gambling*, 91.

47. Murry, *A History of Board-Games*, 114–115.

48. Murry, *A History of Board-Games*, 115.

49. ʿUnsur al-Maʿālī Kay-Kawus b. Iskandar b. Qabus b. Washmgir b. Ziyar, *Qābūs nāmeh*, ed. Q.-H. Yusufī (Tehran, 1375), 77.

50. Ahmad b. ʿUmar b. ʿAlī Nizami Samarqandi, *Chahār maqāla*, ed. M. Qazvini and M. Moʿīi, (Tehran, 1331), 68–69; certain manuscripts mention *sih* "three" instead of *dū* "two" for the number of dice. Qazvini's manuscript has two, but there is also evidence of the game being played with three dice. In *Nafāyis al-funūn fi ʿarāyis al-ʿuyūn* by Muhammad b. Mahmud Amuli, ed. Mirza Ahmad (Tehran, 1309), 2: 220, , three dice are mentioned in backgammon and the game is again likened to the cosmos.

board game in the Near East and parts of the Mediterranean world to the present.[51]

It is the Persian form of the game that spread to the rest of the Near East and Anatolia, as evidenced by the names still used in Turkey and the Arab countries today. Reason for this proposition is that even today when playing the game in Turkey and in the Arab countries, it is called *shash-baysh*, *nard* or *nardi*, or (Arabic) *ṭāw(i)la*. The technical terminology is generally in Persian, such as the terms used for numbers: *yak* (Persian: *yak*); Middle Persian: *ēk*; *du*; Persian: *dū*; Middle Persian: *dū*, *sey*; Persian: *sih*; Middle Persian: *sē*, *jahr*; Persian: *čāhār*; Middle Persian: *čahār*, *benj*; Persian: *panj*; Middle Persian: *panj*; *shesh*; Persian: *shash*; Middle Persian: *šaš*). When calling combinations, the players rarely call in Arabic, rather the Persian form is used, such as *shesh-baish* or *dū-yak*.[52] In Georgia the game is called *nardi*, in Central Asia it is called *narr*; and in the Deccan, *tukhta-i-nard* from Persian *takhtah-i nard*.[53]

Finally in Persian poetry there are many references to the game; Anwari, Asadi, Firdawsi, Khaqani, Manuchihri, Masʿud Saʿd, Mukhtari, Mawlavi, Saʿdi, and Sanaʾi all mention backgammon.[54] Several of the poets place the game in its original cosmological context, staying faithful to Wuzurgmihr's description of the game. Manuchihri gives the following couplet on human fate and the cosmos:

فلک همچو پیروزگون تخته نردی ز مرجانش مهره زلولوش خصلی

"The firmament is like the victorious-looking backgammon (game),
Its pieces from coral, the quality of pearl."

The significance of chess and backgammon and its diffusion into the Islamic world and further into Europe is another matter, with which we are not concerned here. It should be mentioned, however, that different civilizations introduced changes into these games to render them more congruent with their cultural realities and beliefs. To conclude, one point demonstrates this change in the game of chess according to the environment in which it was played. After the Christian Spaniards were able to beat back the Muslims who had brought the game of chess to Andalusia (Spain), they replaced the *wazīr* with the queen, so that the game looked more Spanish than its Near Eastern counterpart.

51. The author lived in Greece for some years and saw the popularity of the game among the Greeks.

52. Robert A. Barakat, *Tāwula: A Study in Arabic Folklore* (Helsinki, 1974), 10–11.

53. Murry, *A History of Board-Games*, 115.

54. See Dihkhuda, *Lughat-nāmeh*, ed. M. Moʿin and Dj. Shahidi, s.v.

Appendix

Transcription, Translation, and Text of the Wizārišn ī Čatrang ud Nihišn ī Nēw-Ardaxšīr

There have been several translations of this text in the nineteenth and the twentieth century, beginning with D. P. B. Sanjana,[55] C. Salemann,[56] J. C. Tarapore,[57] M. Lucidi,[58] A. Pagliaro,[59] C. J. Brunner,[60] and A. Panaino.[61] H. S. Nyberg made important emendations and notes to the original Pahlavi text,[62] and O. Hansen,[63] and A. Cantera[64] have made important comments on the text. There have been three Persian translation of the text as well, those of M. T. Bahār,[65] S. Orian,[66] and the best one that of B. Gheiby.[67] One should also pay attention to the *Shāhnāmeh* of Firdawsi which contains a version of this text with much secondary detail.[68] Tha^{c}alibi has also supplied the Arabic version of the story which is closer to the *Shāhnāmeh* than the Middle Persian version.

The MK codex which contains the *Wizārišn ī ud Nihišn ī Nēw-Ardaxšīr* was edited by K.J. Jamasp-Asana, based on several manuscripts, the TD, MK, and JJ. The codex consisted of 163 folios where the *Wizārišn ī ud Nihišn ī Nēw-Ardaxšīr* was found in fol. 115 - fol. 120. The codex contains a variety of texts, some short and a few longer ones, such as the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān*, and *Xusro ud Rēdag* [sic].

For the transcription, I used MacKenzie's system, and in the translation, the Middle Persian forms of the names with some modifications. The following symbols have been used in the transcriptions: ( ) addition, < > omission. First the transcription, then the English translation, and finally the original text are as follows.

pad nām ī yazdāh

1) ēdōn gōwēnd kū andar xwadāyīh ī husraw anōšag-ruwān az dēwišarm ī wuzurg šahryār ī hindūgān šāh abar uzmūdan ī xrad ud dānagīh ī ērān-šahrīgān ud sūd-īz ī xwēš nigerīdan rāy čatrang ēw juxt 16 tāg az uzumburd ud 16 tāg az yākand ī suxr kard frēstīd.

2) abāg ān čatrang 1000 ud 200 uštar bār zarr ud asēm ud gōhr ud morwārīd ud jāmag ud 90 pīl u-š čiš ī mādagīg kard abāg frēstīd ud tātarītos čiyōn andar hindūgān pad wizēn būd abāg frēstīd.

3) pad frawardag ōwōn nibišt ēstād kū abāyēd čiyōn ašmā nām pad šāhān-šāhīh pad amā hamāg šāhān-sāh hēd abāyēd kū dānāgān (ī) ašmā (-īz) az ān ī amā dānāgtar bawēnd agar čim ī ēn čatrang wizārēd ēnyā sāk (ud) bāj frēstēd.

4) šāhān-šāh 3 rōz zamān xwāst ud ēč kas nē būd az dānāgān ī ērānšahr kē čim ī ān čatrang wizārdan šāyēst.

5) sidīgar rōz wuzurgmihr ī bōxtagān abar ō pāy ēstād.

6) u-š guft kū anōšag bawēd man čim ī ēn čatrang tā im rōz az ān čim rāy be nē wizārd tā ašmā ud harw kē pad ērānšahr hēd be dānēd kū andar ērānšahr mard ī man dānāgtar hom.

7) man čim ī ēn čatrang xwārīhā wizārom ud sāk (ud) bāj az dēwišarm stānom ud anē-iz čiš-ē kunom ō dēwišarm frēstom ī-š wizārdan nē tuwān (ud) az-iš 3 bārag sāk man gīrom ud pad ēn abēgumān bawēd kū ašmā pad šāhān-šāhīh arzānīg hēd ud dānāgān ī amā az ān ī dēwišarm

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55. D. P. B. Sanjana, *Ganje shâyagân andarze Atrepât Mârâspandân, Mâdigâne chatrang and Andarze Khusroe Kavâtân. The Original Péhlvi Text, the same Transliterated in Zend Characters and Translated into the Gujrati and English Languages, a Commentary and a Glossary of Selected Words* (Bombay, 1885).

56. *Mittelpersische Studien. Ersets Stük (sic). Mélanges Asiatiques tirés du Bulletin de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St. Pétersbourg* (1887) 9/3: 222–42.

57. J. C. Tarapore, *Vijārishn-i chatrang or the Explanation of Chatrang and other Texts, Transliteration and translation into English and Gujarati. The Original Pahlevi Texts. With an Introduction* (Bombay, 1932).

58. *Il Testo Pahlavico Vičārišņo čatrang ud nihišni nēw-artaxšēr* (Roma, 1935–1936).

59. A. Pagliaro, "Il Testo Pahlavico Sul Giuoco degli Scacchi," in *Miscellanea G. Galbiati, Fontes Ambrosiani* 8 (Milano), 3: 97–110.

60. C. J. Brunner, "The Middle Persian Explanation of Chess," 43–51.

61. A. Panaino, *La Novella*.

62. H. S. Nyberg, *A Manual of Pahlavi* (Wiesbaden, 1964).

63. *Zum mittelpersischen Vičārišn čatrang, Internationaler Orientalistenkongress in Rom* (Glückstadt Holst, 1935), 13–19.

64. A. Cantera, review of A. Panaino's *La Novella degli Scacchi e della Tavola Reale* in *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 95, (2000): 304–311.

65. M. T. Bahar, "Gozāresh-e šatrang va nahādan-e vanirdšēr," *Tarjumeh-ye Helsinki čand matn-e pahlavī* (Tehran, 1347): 10-17.

66. S. Orian, *Mutūn-i pahlavī* (Tehran, 1371/1992), 152–57, 226–342.

67. B. Gheiby, *Guzārish-i Shatranj* (Bielefeld, 2001).

68. *Shāhnāmeh-yi Firdawsī*, Moscow edition, 1970, 8, 206–17, lines 2628–2810; Sh H. Qasemi, "Paydāyish-i Shatranj bih rivāyat-e *Shāhnāmeh*," *Taḥqīqāt Islāmī* 6 (1991–1992): 458–66.

dānāgtar hēnd.

8) šāhān-šāh 3 bār guft kū zīwā
wuzurgmihr tātarītos ī amā u-š 12000 drahm ō
wuzurgmihr framūd dādan.

9) rōz ī dudīgar wuzurgmihr tātarītos ō pēš xwāst
ud guft kū dēwišarm ēn čatrang pad čim (ī) kārezār homānāg
kard.

10) u-š homānāg 2 sar-xwadāy kard šah ō mādayārān raxw
ō hōyag ud dašnag homānāg frazēn ō arēštārān-sālār
homānāg pīl ō puštībānān-sālār homānāg
ud asb ō aswārān-sālār homānāg payādag ō ān
ham-payādag homānāg ī pēš-razm.

11) u-š pas tātarītos
čatrang nihād abāg wuzurgmihr wāzīd ud wuzurgmihr 3
dast az tātarītos burd ud padiš wuzurg rāmišn ō
hamāg kišwar mad.

12) pas tātarītos abar ō pāy ēstād.

13) u-š guft kū anōšag bawēd yazad ēn warz
ud xwarrah ud amāwandīh ud pērōzgarīh ō ašmā dād ērān
ud anērān xwadāy hēd.

14) čand tā dānāgān ī hindūgān
ēn čatrang ēw juxt nihād pad was harg (ud) ranj
ō ēd gyāg āwurd (ud) ēč kas wizārdan nē tuwān būd.

15) wuzurgmihr (ī) ašmā az
āsnxrad ī xwēš ēdōn xwārīhā ud sabukīhā
bē wizārd.

16) u-š ān and xwāstag ō ganj ī šāhān-
-šah wisē kard.

17) šāhān-šāh dudīgar rōz wuzurgmihr ō pēš
xwāst.

18) u-š ō wuzurgmihr guft kū wuzurgmihr ī
amā čē ast ān čiš ī-t guft kū kunom (ud)
ō dēwišarm frēstom?

19) wuzurgmihr guft kū az dahibedān andar ēn hazārag

ardaxšir kardātar ud dānāgtar būd ud nēw-ardaxšīr
ēd juxt pad nām ī ardaxšīr nihom.

20) taxtag ī
nēw-ardaxšīr ō spandarmad zamīg homānāg kunom.

21) ud 30
muhrag ō 30 rōz ud šabān homānāg kunom 15 ī spēd
ō rōz homānāg kunom ud 15 (ī) syā ō
šab homānāg kunom.

22) gardānāg ēd tāg ō wardišn ī axtarān
ud gardišn ī spihr homānāg kunom.

23) ēk abar gardānag-ē
ōwōn homānāg kunom kū ohrmazd ēk ast (ud) har
nēkīh ōy dād.

24) 2 ēdōn homānāg kunom čiyōn
mēnōg ud gētīg.

25) 3 ōwōn homānāg kunom čiyōn humat
ud hūxt ud huwaršt ud menišn ud gōwišn ud kunišn.

26) 4 ōwōn homānāg kunom čiyōn čahār āmēzišn kē mardōm
az-iš az-iš čahār sōg (ī) gētīg xwarāsān ud xwarwarān (ud) nēmrōz
ud abāxtar.

27) 5 ōwōn homānāg kunom čiyōn 5
rōšnīh čiyōn xwaršēd ud māh ud stārag (ud) ātaxš ud warzag (ī) az
asmān āyēd.

28) 6 ōwōn homānāg kunom čiyōn
dādan ī dām pad 6 gāh ī gāhānbār.

29) nihādag ī
nēw-ardaxšīr abar taxtag ēdōn homānāg kunom čiyōn
ohrmazd xwadāy ka-š dām ō gētīg dād.

30) wardišn ud gardišn ī muhrag pad gardānāg-ē ōwōn homānāg čiyōn
mardōmān ī andar gētīg band ō mēnōgān paywast ēstēd
pad 7 ud 12 hamāg wardēnd (ud) wihēzēnd ud ka ast
ēk ō did zanēnd ud abar čīnēnd čiyōn mardōmān andar gētīg ēk
ō did zanēnd.

31) ud ka pad gardānāg-ē ēd gardišn

hamāg abar čīnēnd hangōšīdag ī mardōm kē hamāg az gētīg
widārān bawēnd ud ka did-iz bē nihēnd hangōšīdag ī mardōmān
kē pad ristāxēz hamāg zīndag abāz bawēnd.

32) šāhān-šāh ka-š ān saxwan āšnūd rāmišnīg
būd ud framūd 12000 asb (ī) tāzīg az ham mōy
padisār pad zarr (ud) morwārīd ud 12000 mard (ī) *juwan kē
pad wizīn ī az ēranšahr 12000 zrēh ī haft-*gard
ud 12000 šamšēr (ī) pōlāwadēn ī wirāst hindūg (ud) 12000
kamar ī haft čašmag ud abārīg har čē andar 12000
mard (ud) asp abāyist har čē abrangīgīhā payrāyēnīdan.

33) wuzurgmihr (ī) bōxtagān abar awēšān sālār kard ud rōzgār-ē
wizīdag pad nēk jahišn ud yazdān ayārīh ō hindūgān frēstīd.

34) dēwišarm ī wuzurg šahryār ī hindūgān-šāh ka āwēšan
pad ān ēwēnag dīd az wuzurgmihr ī bōxtagān 40 rōz zamān
xwāst.

35) ēč kas nē būd az dānāgān ī hindūgān kē
čim (ī) ān nēw-ardaxšīr dānist.

36) wuzurgmihr did-iz ham čand
ān sāk ud bāj az dēwišarm stād ud pad nēk jahišn (ud)
wuzurg abrang abāz ō ērānšahr āmad.

37) wizārišn (ud) čim ī čatrang ēn kū č(ērī)h pad nērang az ān
čiyōn dānāgān-iz guft ēstēd kū pērōz kū pad xrad
barēd az ān (ī) a-zēn ardīg mādagwarīh <ī> dānistan.

38) wāzīdan (ī) čatrang ēn kū nigerišn ud tuxšišn <ī>
pad nigāh dāštan ī abzār ī xwad wēš
tuxšišm čiyōn ō burdan šāyistan ī abzār ī ōy
did ud pad ummēd ī abzār ī ōy ī did burdan
šāyistan rāy dast ī wad nē wāzišn ud hamwār
abzār ēk-ē pad kār ud abārīg pad pahrēz dārišn
ud nigerišn bowandag-menišnīhā ud abārīg ōwōn čiyōn andar
ēwēn<ag>-nāmag nibišt ēstēd.

frazaft pad drōd ud šādīh

Translation

In the name of the Gods

1) It is said that during the reign of *Xusro*, of Immortal soul, for the sake of testing the wisdom and knowledge of the Iranians and to see his own benefit, Dēwišarm, great sovereign of the Indians, sent one set of chess, sixteen pieces made from emerald and sixteen pieces made from red ruby.

2) Along with that (game of) chess he sent 1200 camel loads of gold and silver and jewels and pearls and garments and 90 elephants and things specially made for them, which were sent along, and Taxritos who was notable among the Indians was sent along.

3) In a letter he had written thus: Since you are named king of kings, and over us you are king of kings, then your wise men also must be wiser than ours, either you explain the logic of this (game of) chess or send (us) tribute and tax.

4) The king of kings asked for three days, and there was not one among the wise men in *Ērānšahr* who was able to explain the logic of that chess (game).

5) On the third day, Wuzurgmihr, the son of Boxtag stood upon his feet.

6) He said thus: May you be immortal, I did not explain the logic of this game of chess till today for that reason so that you and anyone who is in *Ērānšahr* know that I am the wisest in *Ērānšahr*.

7) I will easily explain the logic of this (game of) chess and will take tribute and tax from Dēwišarm, and I will create and send something to Dēwišarm which he will not be able to explain, (and) for the second time I will again take tribute and therefore it will become certain that you are worthy of the kingship of kings and our wise men are wiser than those of Dēwišarm.

8) The king of kings said three times thus: Bravo Wuzurgmihr, our Taxritos, and he commanded to give Wuzurgmihr 12000 silver coins.

9) On the second day Wuzurgmihr called Taxritos before him and said thus: Dēwišarm has designed this chess (game) like a battle in purpose.

10) He made the king like the two overlords, the rook (on) the left and right flank, the minister like the Commander of the Warriors, the elephant is like the Commander of the Bodyguards, and the horse is like the Commander of the Cavalry, the foot-soldier like the same pawn, that is at front of the battle(field).

11) Then Taxritos set the (game of) chess and played with Wuzurgmihr, and Wuzurgmihr won 3 hands from Taxritos, and because of this, great joy came to the country.

12) Then Taxritos stood upon his feet.

13) He said thus: May you be immortal, God has given you this miraculous power, and glory and strength, and victoriousness. You are the lord of *Ērān* and non-*Ērān*.

14) Several of the Indian wise men prepared this set of chess (pieces) with much effort, and toil brought it to this place, (and) no one was able to (give an) explanation.

15) Your Wuzurgmihr due to his innate wisdom rather so easily and simply explained it.

16) He dispatched that much wealth to the treasury of the king of kings.

17) The next day the king of kings called Wuzurgmihr before him.

18) He said to Wuzurgmihr thus: Our Wuzurgmihr, what is that thing which you said to me: I will make and send it to Dēwišarm?

19) Wuzurgmihr said thus: Among the rulers of this millennium Ardaxšīr was more capable and most wise and I will name this (game) backgammon (*Nēw-Ardaxšīr*) in Ardaxšīr 's name.

20) I will make the board of the backgammon like the *Spandarmad* earth.

21) and I will make 30 pieces like the 30 nights and days, I will make 15 white, like the day, and I will make 15 black, like the night.

22) I will make this single die as the turning of the constellations and the revolution of the firmament.

23) I will make the one on the dice like Ohrmzad, who is one and all goodness was created by him.

24) I will make the two like the spiritual and the material world.

25) I will make the three like good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, and thoughts, words, and deeds.

26) I will make the four like the four humors which the people are made of, and (like) the four corners of the world, northeast and southwest, and southeast, and northwest.

27) I will make the five like the five lights, like the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the fire and the heavenly brightness which descends from the sky.

28) I will make the six like the creation of the creatures during the six periods of *Gāhānbārs* (which makes the divisions of the year).

29) I will make the arrangements of the (game of) backgammon on the board like the Lord Ohrmazd, when He created the creatures of the material world.

30) The turning and revolution of the pieces by the die is like people in the material world, their bond connected to the spiritual world, through the 7 and 12 (planets and constellation) they all have their being and move on, and when it is as if they hit one against another and collect, it is like people in the material world, one hits another (person).

31) And when by the turning of this die all are collected, it is in the likeness of the people who all passed out from the material world (died), and when they set them up again, it is in the likeness of the people who during the (time of) resurrection, all will come to life again.

32) When the king of kings heard that speech, he became joyful and commanded 12000 Arabian horses of the same hair (color), bridled with gold and pearls and 12000 young men who are distinguished in *Ērānšahr*, 12000 coat of mail armor and 12000 swords prepared of Indian steel, (and) 12000 seven-studded (jeweled) belts and whatever is needed for 12000 men (and) horses, everything adorned in the most splendid manner.

33) Wuzurgmihr, the son of Boxtag was made commander over them,

and at the chosen date, with good fortune and with the aid of the Gods, sent to the Indians.

34) Dēwišarm the great, the sovereign of the king of the Indians, when he saw them in that manner, he asked Wuzurgmihr, the son of Boxtag for 40 days time.

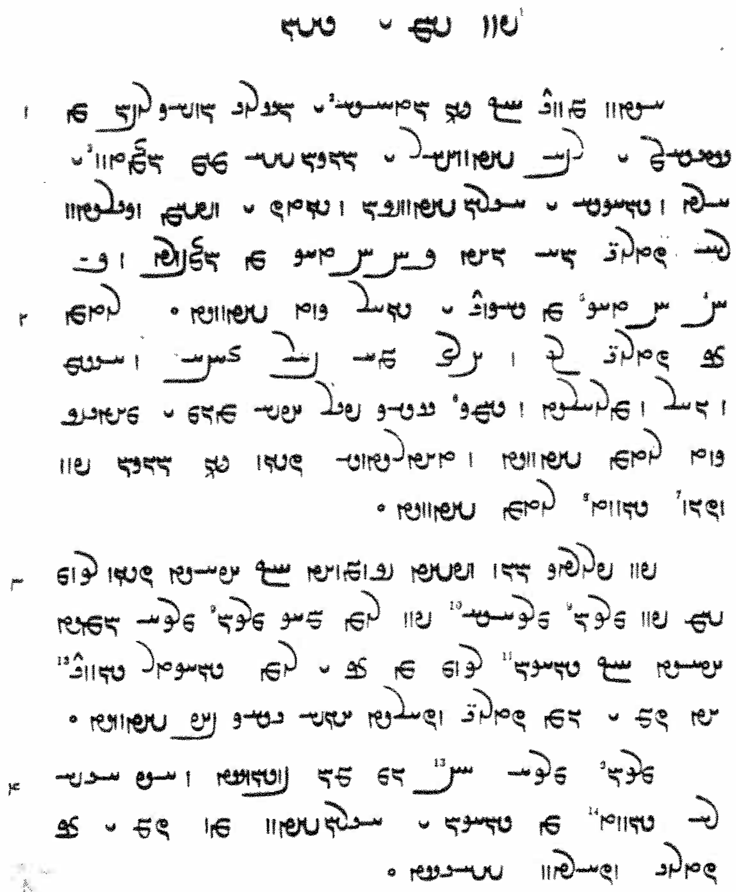
35) There was no one among the wise men of the Indians who knew the logic of that (game of) backgammon.

36) Wuzurgmihr again collected as much tribute and tax from Dēwišarm and through good fortune and great splendor returned to *Ērānšahr*.

37) The explanation (and) the logic of chess is this: Victory through skill, in the manner which the wise have said: The victor who wins through wisdom, from having the essential knowledge of weaponless war.

38) The explanation of chess is this that, observation and striving through protecting one's own piece, greater striving to be able to capture the other person's pieces, not playing a bad hand because of hope of being able to capture the other person's pieces, always keeping one piece on the attack and the others on the defense, observing with complete mindfulness, and other as has been written in the *Book of Manners*.

Completed with salutation and joy.



1 In TD the text 'Darakht-i asūrik' is not copied; the copyist makes a note of the omission stating in Persian. 2 TD, JJ. 3 TD. 4 MK, JJ. 5 MK, JJ om. 6 MK, JJ. 7 MK, JJ. 8 MK, JJ. 9 TD. 10 JJ. 11 TD. 12 JJ. 13 TD. 14 JJ.

١١٦ [illegible]

٥ [illegible]

٦ [illegible]

٧ [illegible]

٨ [illegible]

٩ [illegible]

١٠ [illegible]

15 MK, JJ om. 16 MK, JJ [illegible]. 17 JJ [illegible]. 18 MK, TD [illegible]. 19 MK [illegible]. 20 MK, JJ [illegible]. 21 JJ omits [illegible]. 22 MK, JJ prefix [illegible]. 23 JJ omits. 24 MK, JJ [illegible]. 25 MK [illegible]. 26 JJ omits [illegible]. 27 TD [illegible]. 28 TD [illegible]. 29 TD [illegible]. 30 JJ prefixes [illegible], which is written and struck off in MK. 31 MK [illegible]. 32 TD [illegible]. 33–34 TD omits.

١١٧ [illegible]

[illegible]

١١ [illegible]

١٢ [illegible]

١٣ [illegible]

١٤ [illegible]

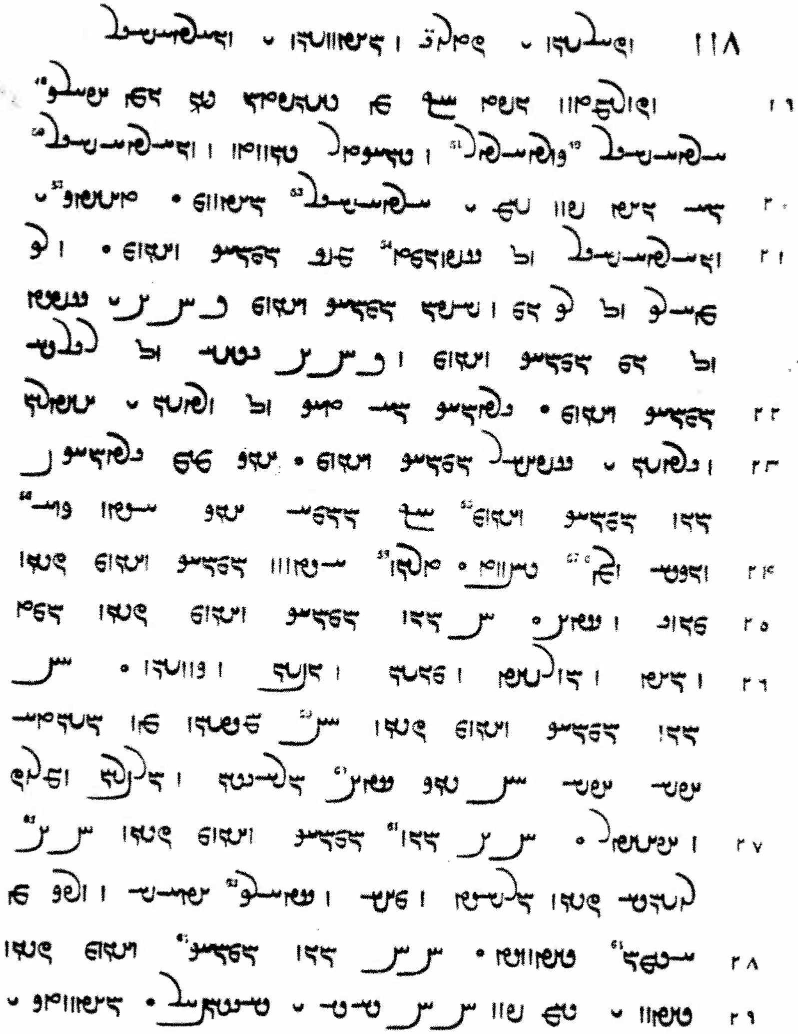
١٥ [illegible]

١٦ [illegible]

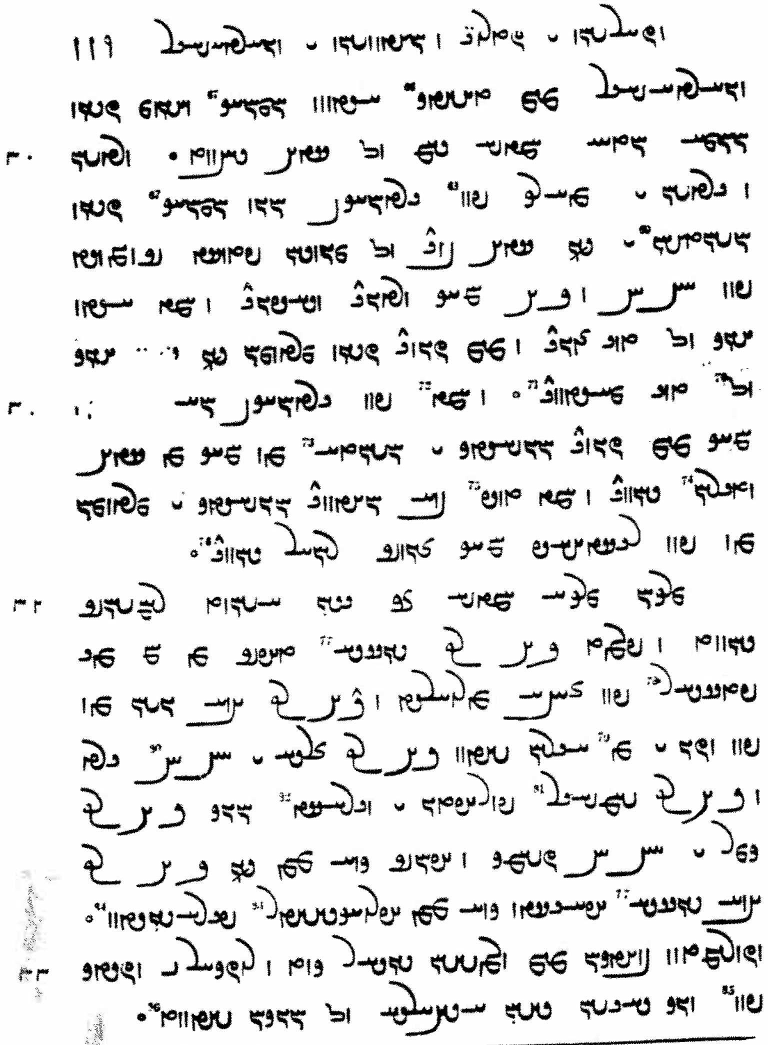
١٧ [illegible]

١٨ [illegible]

35 MK, JJ om. 36 TD [illegible]. 37 TD omits. 38 TD [illegible]. 39 MK [illegible]. 40 MK [illegible]. 41 JJ [illegible]. 42 MK, JJ [illegible]. 43 MK, JJ [illegible]. 44 MK, TD [illegible]; JJ [illegible]. 45 TD [illegible]. 46 JJ [illegible]; TD [illegible]. 47 MK, JJ [illegible].



48 MK, JJ [illegible]. 49-50 TD omits. 51 JJ [illegible]. 52 MK [illegible]. 53 MK, JJ [illegible] with [illegible] written above [illegible]. 54 MK, JJ [illegible]. 55 Written and struck off in TD. 56 JJ omits. 57 MK torn; JJ, TD [illegible]. 58 TD [illegible]. 59 MK, JJ om. 60 TD [illegible]. 61 MK omits. 62 MK, JJ om. [illegible]. 63 MK, JJ [illegible]. 64 MK, JJ [illegible]. 65 JJ [illegible].



66 TD [illegible]. 67 MK [illegible]. 68 TD [illegible]. 69 JJ [illegible]. 70 MK [illegible]. 71 MK [illegible]. 72 JJ omits. 73 JJ [illegible]. 74 TD [illegible]. 75 JJ [illegible]; TD [illegible]. 76 MK [illegible]; TD [illegible]. 77 JJ [illegible]. 78 TD [illegible]. 79 MK, JJ om. 80 TD [illegible]. 81 MK [illegible]. 82 TD [illegible]. 83 MK [illegible]; JJ [illegible]. 84 TD [illegible]. 85 MK, JJ [illegible]. 86 TD [illegible].

87–88 MK, JJ om. 89 JJ adds. 90 JJ adds. 91 TD adds. 92 TD adds. 93 TD adds. 94 MK, JJ om. 95 JJ omits. 96 TD adds. 97 TD omits. 98 TD adds. 99 TD adds. 100 TD adds. 1 TD adds. 2–3 TD adds. 4 JJ adds. 5 TD adds.

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Philippe Rochard

The Identities of the Iranian *Zūrkhānah**

A MAJOR AMBIGUITY ATTACHES TO THE *ZURKHANAH*, THE TRADITIONAL GYMNASIUM of Iran. It is celebrated as an abode of chivalry and traditional values such as generosity, forbearance, and fair play, but it also has a reputation of harboring unruly elements on the margins of legality, men who are willing to rent their strong-arm services to whomever pays most. In this article I propose to explore this ambiguity and trace its roots in the social history of the institution. To do this, I shall first provide a quick update on the state of traditional athletics today, then expound on the paradox, and finally attempt to explicate it by discussing the identities of three social types that frequented the *zūrkhānah*.

A BRIEF UPDATE ON A TRADITION

The Iranian *zūrkhānah*, literally "House of Strength," is the traditional gymnasium in which athletes practice a series of gymnastic and bodybuilding exercises that have been called "ancient sport," *varzish-i bāstānī*, since 1934. Formerly these gymnasia mainly taught the art of Turco-Persian wrestling, but the establishment of the National Iranian Wrestling Federation in 1939 put an end to this practice. Traditional wrestling did not disappear, however, and is now called *pahlavānī* wrestling in memory of the title that used to be bestowed on the champions of this discipline,[1] but its organic link with the *zūrkhānah* has been severed. Contrary to the situation in Turkey, where there exists a corps of professional traditional wrestlers,[2] Iranian wrestlers only practice *pahlavānī* wrestling on the side, when a national competition is in sight; once a tournament is

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1. *Pahlavānī* wrestling differs from the international freestyle variety in that bouts are longer (an echo of the time in which there were no time limits at all) and that wrestlers may grab each other's breeches, which allows for holds using the belt and the hem behind the knee. These breeches are made of reinforced cloth or leather and are called *tunbān*. See Patricia L. Baker, "Wrestling at the Victoria and Albert Museum," *Iran* 35 (1997): 73–80.

2. See Carl Mehmet Hershiser, "Turkish Oiled Wrestling and the Commodification of Traditional Culture," unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1998.

over, they return to their training in freestyle wrestling.[3] For all intents and purposes, therefore, gymnastic and bodybuilding exercises now constitute the *zūrkhānah*'s only activities.

Customarily, athletes execute the exercises in groups of between ten and fifteen in an octagonal pit (*gawd*), to the rhythmic chant of a musician, here termed *murshid*, who sits on a podium (*sardam*), and accompanies himself with a percussion instrument (*żarb*), and a bell, (*zang*). Since 1941, national Iranian radio has broadcast these rhythmic chants every morning, allowing devotees to do these exercises at home. More recently, traditional exercise sessions have begun appearing in non-traditional multi-purpose sports clubs, which reflects a change in the character of the athletes: where the older generation limited itself to ancient sport and wrestling, younger *zūrkhānah* athletes also practice other disciplines such as bodybuilding, weight lifting, martial arts, even soccer. As a direct consequence of this diversification, new gymnastic movements, drawn mainly from East Asian martial arts, have begun appearing in the acrobatic improvisations (*shīrīnkārī*) that are part of a *zūrkhānah* session.[4]

Space and Hierarchy

When they meet in a traditional house of strength, the athletes form a circle inside the exercise pit and face the session's exercise leader, the *miyāndār*, who occupies its center. Their precise place within the circle is determined by a hierarchy: the most senior members, the *pīshkisvat*s, occupy the place of honor closest to the *murshid*, while to their left and right younger members stand in descending order of seniority all the way to the beginners, who stand farthest from the *murshid*'s podium. The traditional classification that organized the younger members into beginners (*nawchah*) and apprentices (*nawkhwāstah*) has been gradually abandoned as modern bureaucratic structures were introduced into the world of Iranian sports. In particular, the establishment of the national wrestling federation in 1939 led to the adoption of international age categories and new collective teaching methods, which rendered the old system of apprenticeship from master to pupil obsolete.[5] As for attire, athletes put on their breeches on special occasions and for competitions, but for their daily exercises they use the *lung*, a red square cloth wrapped around the loins and passed between the legs.

3. This absence of a specialized setting has unfortunately led to a genuine impoverishment of the knowledge of the techniques of traditional wrestling.

4. A similar process of borrowing can also be observed in *pahlavānī* wrestling, where certain new techniques can clearly be traced to judo, which some wrestlers practice on the side.

5. Most recently, this reorganization of teaching has also reached the music masters. Having been initiated into the art of chanting and drumming in collective courses, today's young *murshid*s do not hesitate to claim that they are self-taught, while their elders are proud to trace their teaching lineage back three or four generations.

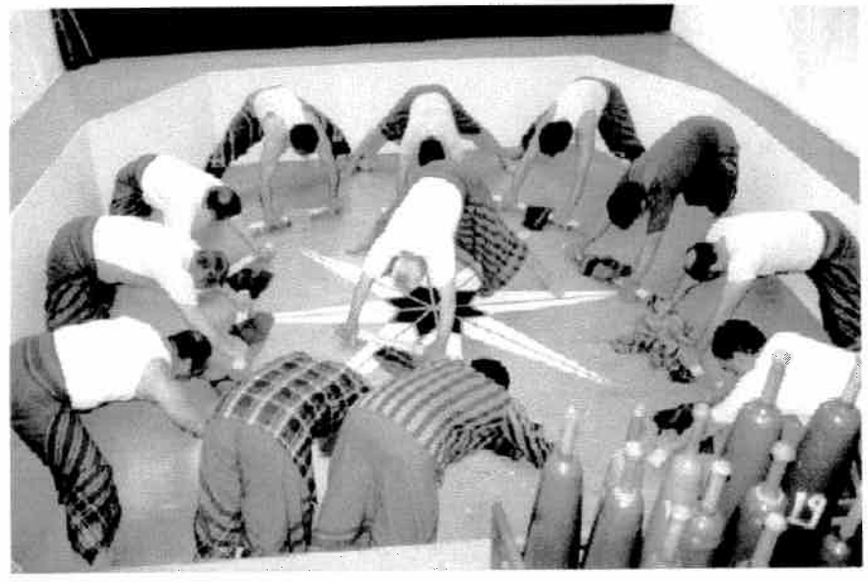

Fig. 1: *Shinā* (lit. "swimming") push-up exercises with *Takht*. Zurkhanah-i Nur, Tehran, 1994. Photographer. Ph. Rochard

Fig. 2: *Charkhīdan* (rotation) exercises, at medium speed. Zurkhanah-i Nur, Tehran. photographer: Ph.Rochard.

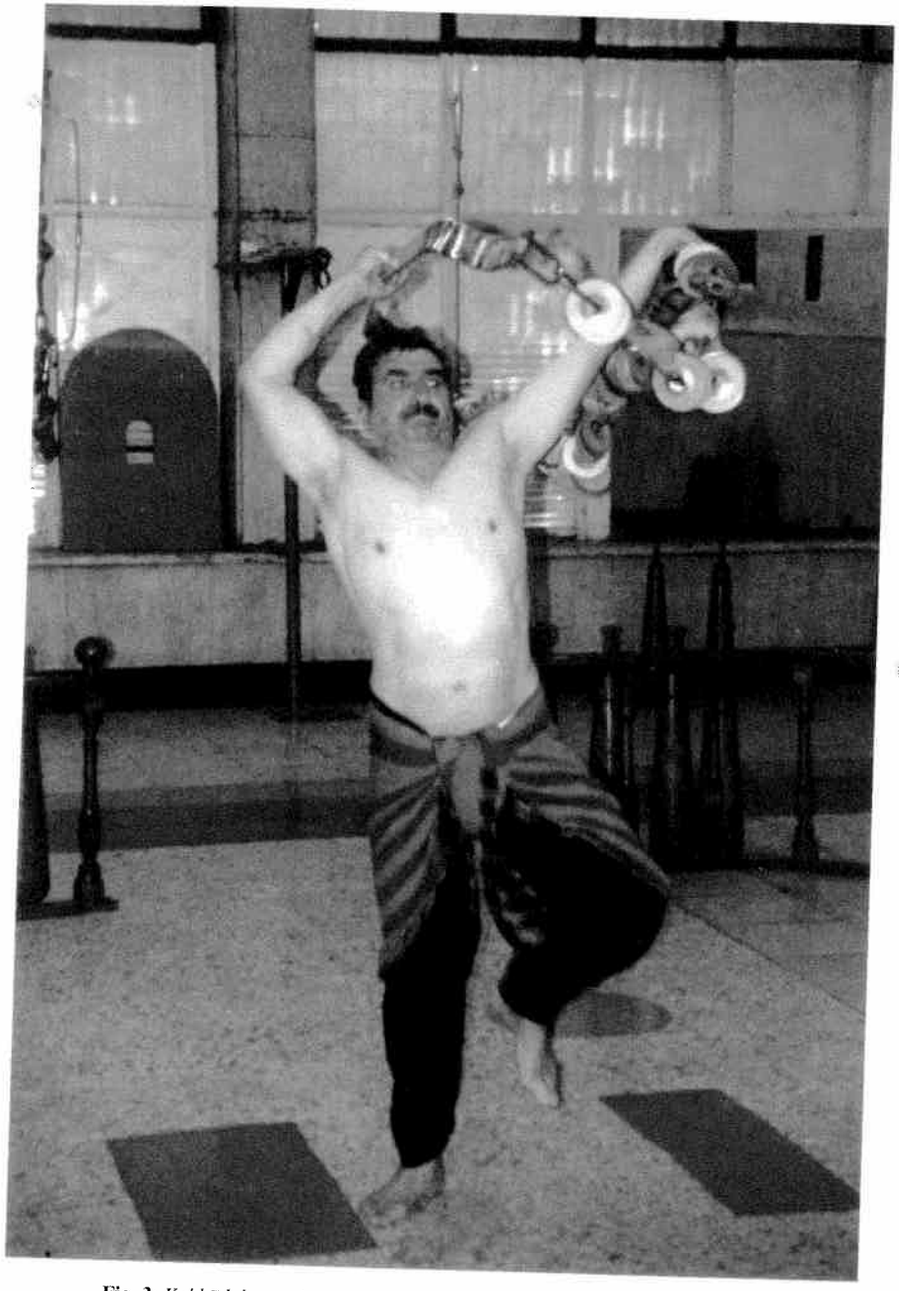

Fig. 3: *Kabbādah* exercise performed in a gymnasium. Note the *sang* in the background. Bashgah-i Sulaymaniya, Tehran, 1996. Photographer: Ph. Rochard.

Instruments and Exercises

Of the various instruments known to have existed, four are currently in use. These are the *mīl* (Indian clubs), always used in pairs and made of wood and weighing between two and twenty kilograms; the *kabbādah*, a heavy iron bow, whose weight has been fixed at between twelve and sixteen kilograms and which athletes swing from one side to the other over their heads; the *sang*, heavy wooden boards of about forty kilograms each that an athlete lifts, one in each hand, as he lies on his back; and the *takht-i shinā*, a small wooden plank used as a base for various types of push-ups. The origin and evolution of these instruments are complex and difficult to trace; the *mīl* and the *kabbādah* probably originate in ancient weaponry.

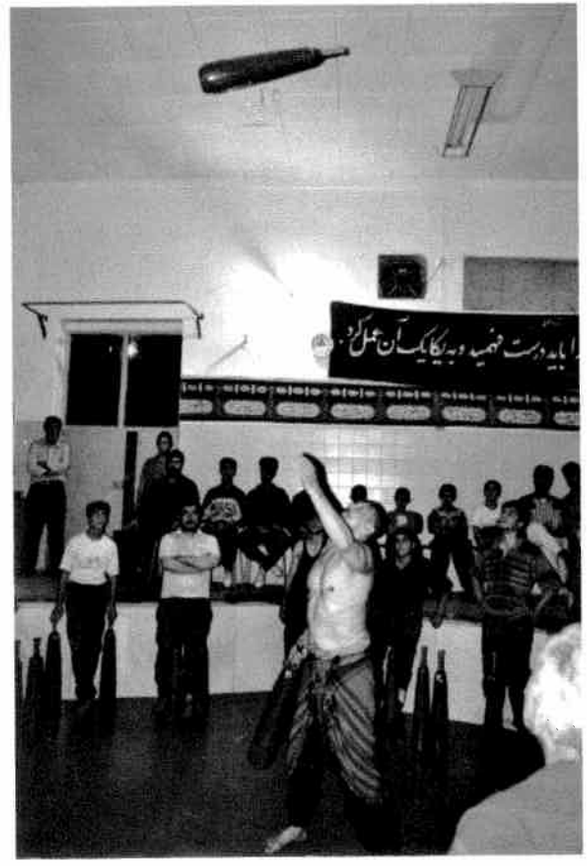

Fig. 4: Juggling with heavy *mīl*. Zurkhanah-i Shirkat-i Naft. Photographer: Ph. Rochard.

No instruments are needed for the remaining warm-up exercises and the exercises that build endurance and flexibility. Most notable among these is the *charkh*, a whirling exercise which the athletes do in ascending order of seniority, from beginners to seniors.

Ethics and Morality

The most ardent defenders of ancient sports declare that the *zūrkhānah*s teach a philosophy of life that originates in the ancient but often reformulated moral and

spiritual tradition of mystical Islamic chivalry, *javānmardī*.[6] Frequented, for obvious reasons of propriety, only by men, the *zūrkhānah* is an institution that exalts the ideals of traditional masculinity (*mardānagī*), which many take to be the same as *javānmardī*, although the former is merely a prerequisite for the latter. Thus, an exercise session provides an opportunity to remind those present, whether athletes or spectators, of their social duties, duties that include generosity, mutual help, courage, loyalty, respect for elders, and keeping one's word. These ritualistic restatements of the community's basic values allow everyone to bask in the comfort of true solidarity, as long as he is worthy of it. The *zūrkhānah* is a place where athletes can achieve social integration while at the same time distinguishing themselves, a place that offers them occasions to activate social connections and a setting in which to exercise the body.

Perpetuation and Renewal

Although for the last eighty years the *zūrkhānah* has been only one among the many places where a man can engage in physical exercise, it is not a forgotten and moribund tradition brought to life by the anthropologist. According to the head of the Iranian Federation of Ancient Sports, a total of between twenty and thirty thousand athletes engage in traditional exercises every day;[7] and Teheran alone has over fifty gymnasia where they are practiced. There is hardly a village in Iran that does not have a house of strength, with the exception of those situated in the littoral regions of the Persian Gulf.

The rules and regulations of the *zūrkhānah* tend to adapt to the new tastes of Iranian society. Since the end of the Iran/Iraq War in 1988, Iran's Federation of Ancient Sport and Pahlavani Wrestling has tried very hard to promote the activi-

6. The literature on *javānmardī* is vast, and has been analyzed in radically different ways by different authors. See Fariba Adelkhah, *Being Modern in Iran*, trans. Jonathan Derrick (London, 1999); Cl. Cahen, and W. L. Hanaway Jr, "ʿAyyār" *Eir* s.v.; Cl. Cahen and Fr. Taeschner, "Futuwwa," *EI*^{2} s.v.; Cl. Cahen, "Aḥdāth," *EI*^{2}; Claude Cahen "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du moyen âge, I" *Arabica* 5 (1958): 225–50 and "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du moyen âge, II," *Arabica* 6 (1959): 25–56; Claude Cahen, "Y a-t-il eu des corporations professionnelles dans le monde musulman classique?" in A. H. Hourani and S. M. Stern, eds., *The Islamic City: A Colloquium* (Oxford and Philadelphia, 1970), 51–63; Henry Corbin *L'homme et son ange-initiation et chevalerie spirituelle* (Paris, 1983); Angelika Hartmann, *an-Nāṣir li-dīn Allāh: (1180-1225): Politik, Religion, Kultur in der späten Abbasidenzeit* (New York and Berlin, 1975); Parviz Natil Khanlari, "Ā'īn-i ʿayyārī," *Sukhan* 18 (1348/1969): 1071–77, 19 (1348/1969): 19–26, 113–22, 263–67, 477–80; Muhammad-Jaʿfar Mahjub, *Ā'īn-i javānmardī yā futuvvat* (New York, 2000); Murtaza Sarraf, ed., *Rasā'il-i javānmardān: Mushtamal bar haft futuvvat-nāmah* (Tehran, 1973, 1991); Franz Taeschner, *Zünfte und Bruderschaften im Islam: Texte zur Geschichte der futuwwa* (Zurich, 1979); Fr. Taeschner, "Akhī," *EI*^{2} s.v.; Jean-Claude Vadet "La *Futuwwa*, morale professionnelle ou morale mystique," *Revue des Études Islamiques*, 46 (1978): 57–90; and Mohsen Zakeri, *Sasanid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society: The Origins of Ayyaran and Futuwwa* (Wiesbaden, 1995).

7. Sayyid ʿAbdullah Sajjadi, personal communication.

ties of which it is in charge. To counteract the young generation's waning interest in the tradition, it organizes national competitions, has a policy of appointing younger cadres, and has modified the gymnastic program to make it more varied and attractive. It even offers real training opportunities for the under sixteen year olds, who were traditionally barred from entering a house of strength. Moreover, it coordinates these policies with the provincial federations that carry them out, which is a break with the centralism of previous years. A variety of private donors (companies, generous individuals, bazaar merchants) and public sponsors (ministry of oil, ministry of culture, municipal governments, the Foundation of the Astan-i Quds in Mashhad, etc.) participate in the financing of these activities and thus encourage them. Since the election of Muhammad Khatami to the Iranian presidency in May 1997, the heads of provincial federations have acquired added importance as they now participate in the election of the head of the national federation.

As a result of these policies, the numbers of young men who participate in ancient sports has noticeably gone up. The active role that some provincial federations (notably those of Kurdistan, Khorasan, and Azerbaijan) have taken, allows one to be confident that this improvement will survive the conflicts that the innovations have generated in Teheran between traditionalists and modernizers.

Pushed by the necessity of appealing to the young, who crave glory and recognition, ancient sport has adapted itself to the tastes of the young athletes who prefer exercises of agility (e.g., whirling and juggling) to those in which strength alone matters (e.g., the iron bow). The reasons for this change in tastes are embedded in the evolution of all the other social and aesthetic standards that Iranian society has undergone since its entry into the industrial age. Movement is now more desirable than static force, and leanness more than the big belly that used to be a sign of wealth and good health. To this, one must now add the dictates of today's audiovisual media, which alone can provide the celebrity that counts in the eyes of the athletes. If one wants to be noticed, one's performance must be "brief and spectacular." Thus for the new team competitions that complement the old competitions in individual disciplines (*kabbādah*, *charkh*, etc.), the *miyāndār*s and their men prepare synchronized exercises that are carefully choreographed and whose technical and artistic merits are duly noted and rewarded by the judges.[8]

The federation is not alone in modernizing and promoting ancient sports; local and individual initiatives are numerous. In Qazvin a local official of the National Physical Education Organization has opened a school for young athletes, in Tabriz the municipality has established *zūrkhānah*s in disused public bathhouses (*hammām*), and the National Iranian Oil Company has organized a demonstration on its premises on the occasion of National Women's Day, to encourage mothers to allow their sons to attend *zūrkhānah*s. Finally, since 1997,

8. See Philippe Rochard, "Le beau geste sportif dans le sport traditionnel iranien (zurkhâne et varzesh-e bâstâni)," *Actes du colloque de la Societas Iranologica Europaea*, volume 3 (Louvain, forthcoming).