

## HISTORY

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# Modesty, Virtue, and Power in *Pahlavani* Martial Arts and the *Zurkhanehs* of the Qajar Era (with Emphasis on the Structure, Arrangement and Decorations of Tehran *Zurkhanehs*)

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### Abstract

Background. *Pahlavani* and *Zurkhaneh* rituals have existed in Iran since the Parthian Empire. This martial art continued in the Islamic period and flourished due to cultural and social settings. A study on the evolution of this art specifies its prospering during the Qajar period as the *Zurkhaneh* became a common site in the urban context. *Pahlavani* martial arts play a significant role in depicting heroic behaviors and valiant tutoring and highlight unique architectural features and place emphasis on various cultural venues embedded within signs and symbols.

Problem and Aim. The aim of this study is to portray what moral and cultural principles are applied to the structure and arrangement of the *Zurkhanehs* of the Qajar period. It also attempts to study the cultural and moral position of the *Zurkhaneh* within Iranian society. Recognition of the symbols and signs of this *Pahlavani* martial art can therefore acquaint us with the evolutionary process of the foundation of such institutions, and their cultural role, by analyzing concepts such as modesty, virtue and *Futuwwa* in the structure of the *Zurkhanehs* of Iran during the Qajar era. Methods. The present study investigates the issue under study via a descriptive-analytic methodology based on library resources and field observations.

Conclusion. The findings of the research show that concepts of modesty, virtue, and *Futuwwa* are perceived in the Qajar *Zurkhanehs* of Tehran specifically in the way of entering and in the positioning of the *Morshed* and heroes.

### Introduction

In diverse societies, cultural establishments and symbols have roots in distant pasts that have gradually developed into a symbolic tradition or culture. A number of such associations have been related to marital arts and entertainment. Likewise, studies in Iranian society denote the existence of rituals, traditions, and foundations that have sustained to the present day. *Pahlavani* martial arts or *Zurkhanehs* in Iran are establishments that at first impression display a martial art and in a

more evaluated outlook present a cultural and educational manifestation.

It appears that this martial art, formed around a specific place, beholds a unique ceremony existing in Iran from the Parthian Empire [Bahar 1995]. The presence of similarities in the structure and arrangement of *Zurkhanehs* has led scholars to consider this martial art to be originated from ancient religions, despite the fact it thrived during the Islamic period. This evolutionary art necessitates constant scrutinizing of its structures and arrangements and continuously requires further

research. During the Qajar period, similar to its preceding epochs, *Zurkhanehs* were established in Tehran and are active to the present day as they have gone international and function within their own athletic structure and the framework of the national federation. To achieve this research aim, this study seeks to answer the following research question: RQ1: what is the relationship between the structure and architecture of the *Zurkhanehs* of the Qajar period with the moral concepts in *Pahlavani* martial arts including modesty, virtue, and *Futuwwa*?

The hypothesis put forward in this study is that *Pahlavani* martial arts root in ancient religious cultures of Iran, and over time, this culture has manifested in the form of *Zurkhaneh* architecture. In the Qajar era, in accordance with the religious atmosphere, the foundation of *Zurkhanehs* increased and established itself as a martial art within an educational and cultural foundation. The current study presents the background of *Zurkhaneh* and *Pahlavani* martial arts in Iran and the Qajar era to examine the relationship between the architecture of *Zurkhanehs* and virtue ethics.

Regarding the research background, among the available sources related to the subject of this paper that is *Zurkhaneh* and *Pahlavani* martial arts; a book entitled: "Arms and Armor from Iran. The Bronze Age of the End of the Qajar Period" [Moshtagh Khorasani 2006] emphasizes the concept of chivalry; known as *Javānmardi* or *Futuwwa*, and *Pahlevani* martial arts. Also, another book by this author entitled: "Persian Archery and Swordsmanship: Historical Martial Arts of Iran [Moshtagh Khorasani 2013]; this monumental volume constitutes the most significant recent contribution, written in English, to the study of the theory and practice of classical Persian chivalry. Compared to his previous compendia, especially *Arms and Armor from Iran: The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period*, this volume shifts attention from the material evidence of Persian arms and armour to their combative usage, thus, the focus is no longer on the physical characteristics of weaponry but on the ways in which they are brought into action, in addition to fighting methods without accoutrements, such as wrestling. In addition, an article which is entitled "Didactic Architecture and Music in *Zurkhaneh*" [Afsarian 2016] states that *Zurkhaneh* as not a relatively new phenomenon of Iranian and Islamic culture and he believes that the components of music and architecture in *Zurkhaneh* are selected in a way that is permeable, simple and popular. Another article entitled "Perspectives on *Zurkhaneh*, Reasons for its Creation and Functions" [Basouli 2020] recognizes how *Zurkhaneh* culture originated and developed as a center for martial arts beholding social, educational, religious and cultural functions; moreover, in this article, the author considers *Zurkhaneh* as a cultural indicator rather than a historical place. Another article entitled "The Evolution of *Varzesh-e-Bastani* and *Zurkhaneh* in Iran" [Goodarzi 2004] analyzes the evolution of *Zur-*

*khaneh* as a social and political institution; Goodarzi believes that the *Zurkhaneh*, as a popular institution, with a political origin and a national and religious approach, prospered after the Mongol invasion. Correspondingly, a research paper entitled "Explaining the Relationship between the Symbols and Signs of *Zurkhaneh* Architecture with Heroic Manners and Behaviors" [Masoudi, et al. 2017] states that a number of the heroic features of the *Zurkhaneh* including the *Sardam* (the place where *Morshed* sits) displays qualities such as respect for the elderly, simplicity, attention to the lower-income class, and virtue-seeking; likewise, the pit (*Gowd*) (the place where heroes stand) reflects features such as modesty, piety, religiosity, simplicity, and unity. In the mentioned research studies, the condition of *Zurkhanehs* in the Qajar period, their structure and arrangement have not been considered. Therefore, in the present paper, the authors intend to investigate the nature of this institution in the Qajar period by selecting Qajar *Zurkhanehs* in Tehran as the community under study and by following a descriptive and analytical methodology and relying on library resources and field observations; they attempt to investigate the symbols of modesty, virtue and *Futuwwa* in Qajar *Zurkhanehs* of Tehran.

## 1. *Zurkhaneh* and *Pahlavani* Martial Arts in Iran

As mentioned earlier, *Zurkhaneh* is one of the Iranian cultural-martial arts institutions whose history dates back to ancient times [Bahar 1981]. *Zurkhaneh* is considered a martial art since it contains many political, ideological and moral elements [Goodarzi 2004]. An etymological study of the word "*Zurkhaneh*" indicates that the name is derived from a place of force challenging where men played martial arts mostly built in the back alleys of the city [Siddiq Imani, Kia 1964]. To be more precise, the word "*Zurkhaneh*" consists of two parts *Zur* meaning "strength" and *Khaneh* meaning "house". The word "*Zur*" indicates strength, power or the holy water of "*Zoo*" drank in the monasteries [Nikobakht 2001]. The study of the history of *Zurkhaneh* validates that in the past, this place was so-called as "*Langargah*"; additionally, in the sixth and seventh centuries AH, *Zurkhanehs* were established in the midst of the cities and became places for gathering heroes and chivalrous men [Insafpour 2007]. What can be deduced from the mentioned theories is that the *Zurkhaneh* was a common place in the urban structure of Iran during the Islamic period and the emergence of this phenomenon became a conduit for establishing and preserving social and cultural features.

As mentioned, the *Zurkhaneh* existed as a place for performing martial arts and was recognized as one of the foremost edifices of the city regularly located close to the main bazaar. [Roshar 2004] believes that the *Zurkhaneh*

along with the mosque, public bathroom, coffeehouse and printery formed the traditional social and communication centers of Iran. "Martial artists in the *Zurkhaneh*, in addition to strengthening their bodies, reinforce their faith; hence, practice trust, forgiveness, chivalry, and morality" [Montazer al-Qaim, Haghi 2018: 72].

Initially, "the existence of 'Ayyârân', that is, the early adherents of *Futuwwa*, rooted in *Sassanid* society is documented using *Pahlavi* and *Arabic* sources; then, the interaction of this empire with the Muslim conquerors is traced until the foundation of the *Abbasid* dynasty" [Zakeri 1995: 9]. In the Islamic period, during the emergence of Sufism, *Zurkhaneh* martial arts developed. In the eighth century AH. *Pahlavan Mahmoud*, known as "Pouria Vali" from *Kharazm*, became the frontrunner of all *Pahlavans* (heroes); however, Hinnells [1973] considers that the *Zurkhaneh*, as it appears today in terms of structure, emerged from the *Safavid* era; despite the fact that its originality can be traced back to the *Sassanid* era. In the *Safavid* era, similar to previous epochs, heroism bestowed great value and the position of heroism was one of the prominent positions of the court [Aghili 2002]. Hereafter, in this period, in accordance with the religious and Shiite atmosphere of the society, although evident from the *Sassanid* period, the *Zurkhanehs* and heroic professions received distinct consideration.

Various views regarding the functionality of *Zurkhanehs* exist as it is assumed they behold a multi-functional purpose. *Zurkhaneh* is a cultural, architectural and musical manifestation that includes valuable didactic and moral virtues. *Zurkhaneh* architecture is moral since it beholds a humble and common form and sits among the urban elements of the streets and bazaars of everyday life; additionally, according to [Ghalejughhi, Ghaffarizadeh 2020], it consumes moralistic values, including ethical characteristics such as form (shortness of the entrance door) etiquette (not sitting on the edge of the platform) and symbolic concepts (respect for elders) as all three features pursue an educational purpose. It is alleged that this edifying feature includes religious teaching, moral and customary training [Doostkhah 1992]. The music of the *Zurkhanehs* also roots in educational purposes since it is accompanied by simple forms, motifs and melodies that display the rich concepts of Iranian music. "*Zurkhaneh* is a place for training athletes and in this regard, architecture and music are tools to aid the athlete in achieving this goal" [Afsarian 2016: 88]. One of the inseparable components of *Zurkhaneh* martial art is the element of music, which has played a pivotal role in its performance and formation since the beginning of this martial art. "This music or tune is an instructive and praiseworthy speech that is accompanied by literary, mystical and epic quotations" [Tolouian 2010: 125-126].

In regard to the apparel of the athletes, a piece of clothing known as the "*Long*" is worn by the athletes.

The *Long* comprised of an ordinary form given to them by the instruction of the *Morshed* or veterans. After putting on the *Long*, the veterans fasten another *Long* in the form of a triangle on the first layer and this reflected the certified uniform of this martial art [Aghili 2002]. *Zurkhaneh* outfits, excluding wrestling, initially consisted of the *Long* fastened to the trousers. "Heroes and veterans were the only athletes allowed to release the *Long*'s end" [Parto Beyzai Kashani 2003: 54]. The alike outfit of all athletes was in fact an attempt to create order and discipline in the *Zurkhaneh* space.

A scrutiny of the history of the establishment of the *Zurkhaneh* and prevailing theories designates the antiquity of this place. Among them, existing philosophies trace the origin of *Zurkhaneh* to the Mithraism religion<sup>1</sup> as it is assumed that the identity of heroism and chivalry existing among Iranians in the past should be pursued in the belief of Mithraism [Aminizadeh, Bastani 2014]. The building of the *Zurkhaneh* and its customs are comparable to Mithraism rituals denoting the etiquette of this belief perceived by *Zurkhaneh* athletes [Elahi 1994]. Another characteristic of the resemblance between *Zurkhaneh* architecture and Mithraism temples is the fact that they are comparable in terms of construction, particularly, the structure of the entrance way. Mithrasim rituals were often performed in caves; however, due to the lack of caves; temples were built underground, in other words, temples were located within a pit with little light; correspondingly, this is also seen in the main structure of the *Zurkhaneh* as it too has a lower area (*Gowd*); furthermore, only those who had reached the age of puberty had the right to go inside [Sirofi 2009].

The passage of time and the intellectual and religious developments of the people; has transferred the *Zurkhaneh* into a social place of brave athletes, seekers of truth and defenders of the territory and nation [Moghtadari, Nouri 1976]. *Zurkhanehs* were considered sacred since they are erected close to other blessed assemblies and this can be embedded in the teachings of ancient Iran; additionally, during the Islamic period, the joining between *Zurkhaneh* and religious centers became further deceptive [Masoudi *et al.* 2016]. With these interpretations, it can be said that *Zurkhaneh*, as a place for cultural-religious gatherings, has arisen from the historical roots of the ancient period. During the Islamic period, specifically from the *Safavid* period onwards, while bearing in mind the prominence of the Shiite religion, *Zurkhanehs* were ornamented with Shi'ah artistic features. In the following periods, such religious symbols

<sup>1</sup> Mithraism, also known as the Mithraic, the understanding of Romans of Mithraic mysteries, was an Iranian religion of worshipping the Izad Sun, Peyman and Mehr and dates back thousand of years before Christ with its height of its global expansion in the second and third centuries; this belief had followers from India to England and Spain [Tabari 2016: 231].

and signs beholding Shi'ah concepts were sustained; additionally, in the religious community of Iran, one of the relentless purposes of this establishment was the practice of moral and religious Shi'ah ethics intertwined with elements of the Shahnameh and ancient Iranian beliefs.

The sanctity of the *Zurkhaneh* prevailed over time and has added to its content capacities in terms of customs and rituals. Consequently, this place has played an effective role in society and communal movements [Basouli 2020]. Unquestionably, it should not be overlooked that this martial art was initially designed for the ruling class for prolonged ages and the middle-class gradually entered based on their free time, social needs, and cultural requirements.

## 2. Virtue Ethics of Traditional Martial Artists and Chivalrous Men

*Pahlavani* and *Zurkhaneh* rituals provide the opportunity to realise a range of technical, physical, and moral excellences. "Ethics is concerned with the study of morality" [Sprigge 2020: 15]; also, virtue ethics mainly deals with the honesty and morality of a person and "a virtue is a morally good disposition to think, feel, and act well in the domain of life" [Hursthouse 2018: 36]. In the broad sense of the term, virtue (Latin *virtus*) denotes any specific excellence or perfection. More narrowly, a virtue is any good or admirable character trait and thus is essentially a moral quality; moreover, its conceptual opposite is vice (Latin *vitium*), which denotes a bad or immoral character trait [Spiegel 2012: 25]. Morality is concerned with the norms, values and beliefs embedded in social processes which define right and wrong for an individual or a community and ethics is concerned with the study of morality and the application of reason to elucidate specific rules and principles that determine right and wrong for any given situation [Visser *et al.* 2010].

Studies on the history of ancient martial arts in Iran and the category of morality indicate that the two features of virtue ethics in traditional martial artists and chivalrous men are *Azādegi* and chivalry which have always been in close contact with each other. As we mentioned earlier, some researches "suggest that the militia known as *Ayyārān* in early Moslem society were descendants of the *Sasanid* elite troops, the *Asbārān*. According to this proposal a division of land-holding soldiers, who owned service to the king in return for the land they received from the central treasury, existed under the *Sasanids*. These were *Azādan*. As a consequence of the extensive reforms inaugurated by *Anūshīrvān*, the social standard of the *Azādan* converged into a set of ethical and moral axioms known as *Azādagi* or *Javānmardi*, adherence to which was expected from the *Asbārān*. Under the early Muslims, *Azādagi* formed the kernel of the virtues and

special practices subsumed under the name *Futuwwa* or chivalry" [Zakeri 1995].

Nonetheless, human behavior is the implementation of the same spirits within a dissimilar time and place [Motahari 2007]. Persian tuition on heroic ethics states: "the principle of chivalry includes three features: first, do what you say; second, keep the truth in words and deeds; and third, be patient and persistent" [Qaboos Ibn Vashmgir 1956: 222]. Thus, every attribute that belongs to chivalry comprises the three mentioned characteristics. In the etiquette of the heroes of the *Zurkhaneh*, it is stated that "heroes should be chivalrous, righteous, early risers and pure-minded athletes and in performing their duties and traditions, they should be vigilant at night and consume good ethics ..." [Bahar 1981: 158].

Regarding the status of martial arts in ancient Iran and the continuity of martial arts and ethics, it should be mentioned that Iranian culture has long considered the well-being of the soul to be dependent on the strength of the body. Zoroastrian Iranians believed that spiritual happiness is conceivable merely by having a healthy and strong body [Doustkhah 1992]. Studies of virtue ethics principles among traditional wrestlers and athletes express that in the first centuries of Islam, anti-demonic traits emerged among ancient Iranians in a ritual named *Futuwwa*; virtuous practices that were prominent in the behavior of *Ayyārāns* in early Muslim society. The use of the term *Futuwwa* with social and organizational implications arose outside the Arabian peninsula, in Iraq and Persia, and it may therefore owe its origin to institutions already existing there in pre-Islamic times [Baldick 1990]. It has recently been proposed by some researchers such as [Zakeri 1995], that the earliest attestation of the term *Futuwwa* with the connotations attached regarding Islamic culture is to be found in the poetry of Baššār B. Bord (783 AH.), an Arabic poet of Persian descent. The followers of Shi'ah Islam, accompanied by *Javānmardi*, acknowledged the legitimacy of the first Imam of the Shiites, Imam Ali (PBUH). Thus, "the beliefs of the Alawites and the rites of the Holy Imams became a fundamental formation for the religion of *Futuwwa* or chivalry, whose followers truthful followers of Imam Ali (PBUH) who, as mentioned previously, were known as *Ayyārān* or the Chivalrous Men" [Yasini 2015: 136].

A review of virtue ethics in ancient literary works of Iran expresses that heroes bestow various traits such as thinking, simplicity and rationalism. For instance, "the heroes of Shahnameh were bestowed qualities such as overcoming feelings and emotions, wisdom and prudence, determination, speed of action, consultation with elders, lack of anger and harshness, conviction, spirituality, high self-confidence and learning from past mistakes" [Hisaei, Irvani 2011: 132]. There is a significant relationship between exercise and virtue ethics; therefore, there is a positive relationship between extraversion, commitment, adaptation and conscientiousness with *Pahlavani*

martial arts among martial artists [Jafari, Homayounfar 2019]. Consequently, it should be alleged that in Iranian society, the principle of heroism is intertwined with virtues set within an ethical framework; moreover, with the prevalence of *Pahlavani* martial arts during the Islamic centuries, the *Pahlavans* became the first martial artists. In effect, *Zurkhanehs* became a place for the community of heroes, as they gradually developed to be ethical role models for society.

### 3. Qajar *Zurkhanehs* in Tehran

As mentioned earlier, *Zurkhanehs* received special attention in the Islamic period, particularly during the Safavid epoch. In the subsequent era, the number of *Zurkhanehs* remaining from the Qajar period is very limited and most have been reconstructed. During the reign of Fathali Shah, the martial art of the *Zurkhanehs* flourished. Correspondingly in this period, with the arrival of photography in Iran, images of *Pahlavani* martial arts and *Zurkhanehs* have been chronicled despite their poor quality; nevertheless, it was during this period that many *Pahlavans* emerged and this national-religious martial art thrived. Attention towards this martial art progressed to the point that government agents each built their own private *Zurkhanehs* and had their own heroes and thus became very popular [Aghili 2002].

It was during the final years of the Qajar reign in the year 1921 that a number of *Zurkhanehs* were built in Tehran. The oldest *Zurkhanehs* include: *Shahidoost*, *Pulad*, *Gordan* and *Pouria*, *Shirafkan* and *Pahlavanpour*. The *Zurkhaneh* of *Pouria* was established in 1921 by Javad Shah Mohammadi; likewise, the *Zurkhaneh* of *Shahidoost* was also established in 1921 by Reza and Ali Ketabi; in addition, the *Zurkhaneh* of *Pulad* was built by Hossein Rezizadeh and *Gordan* was structured by Ahmad Marvi and finally, the *Zurkhaneh* of *Shirafkan* was established in 1923 by Khosrow Masoumi [Moghtadari, Nouri 1976]. All the mentioned *Zurkhanehs* have been reconstructed in the following periods yet their general structure has been preserved.

The infrastructure area of all Tehran *Zurkhanehs* is between 200 and 399 square meters. The area of the hall in special *Zurkhanehs* is typically between 100 and 400 square meters, while in public *Zurkhanehs*, measurements start from 70 square meters and reach up to 500 square meters. The hall of most *Zurkhanehs* is equal to the ground level and only a few have an area below or above ground and the Sardam area is between 2 to 4 meters [Moghtadari, Nouri 1976]. The materials applied in construction were often traditional and local resources. Simple materials such as bricks, clay, and mud have been used and the exterior of the walls are lined with brickwork.

## 4. Modesty, Virtue and Power in Qajar *Zurkhanehs* in Tehran

### 4.1. Structure and Layout

The structure of the *Zurkhaneh* commences with its entrances. An examination of the architecture of the structure indicates that the building had two entrances. One went out into the alley and the other after passing through a short corridor entered the *Zurkhaneh*. The first door was tall whilst the second door was shorter for means that athletes bow their heads in front of the *Zurkhaneh* area before entering [Insafapour 2007]. “The entrance doors of Tehran *Zurkhanehs* are generally made of wood, glass, iron or stone with a height that is approximately more than two meters or less” [Moghtadari, Nouri 1976: 50-49]. An examination on the psychological origins of the *Zurkhaneh* specifies that didactic purposes are implied in its structure.



**Figure 1.** The main entranceway to the *Shirafkan Zurkhaneh*, 1923; Qajar era, Tehran.

[Source: authors]

Humbleness is one of the first categories in the structural study of Qajar *Zurkhanehs* in Tehran and has existed in past *Zurkhanehs*. This symbol started from the entrance way of *Zurkhanehs* and continued inside and existed in the performing ceremonies. “Modesty is one of the moral virtues that originates from the divine and deific nature of human beings; furthermore, since it has a great impact on the development of human personality, it is accentuated in religious teachings” [Kashefi, 2020: 11]. The importance of this merit has led to its consideration in many aspects of individual and social life including the architecture of Islamic societies. Henceforth, by considering the mentioned interpretations, modesty is manifested in the *Zurkhaneh* from the first step commencing from the entrance way as it clarifies the attitude of humility and modesty (Figure 1).

In the entry of the *Zurkhaneh*, access to the main room was possible only through a slightly sunken door,

forcing everyone to bow in respect while entering. At the center of the room lay the pit (*Gowd*), a hexagonal sunken area about one meter deep in which rituals took place. The style and overall appearance of the doors of Qajar *Zurkhanehs* have roots in the history of ancient Iranian temples, essentially, deliberately or instinctively they convey a kind of moral edification as those who enter must bow their heads and this indicates modesty and humility upon their arrival to the *Zurkhaneh* (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The second entranceway to the *Shirafkan Zurkhaneh*, 1923; Qajar era, Tehran.

[Source: authors]

Another part of the structural elements of *Zurkhaneh* is the roof. The roofs of *Zurkhanehs* were often arched. The *Zurkhaneh's* main room was often sunken slightly below street level to provide constant temperatures and prevent drafts that might harm the perspiring athletes, nonetheless, its roof contained windows for light. The heightened roof bestowed two purposes; first to emphasize the position of the pit (*Gowd*) from the outside and second to increase the height of the pit (*Gowd*) from the inside. High altitude indicates the sanctity of the place and lessens human vanity. Therefore, athletes by standing in the pit (*Gowd*) stood away from arrogance and egotism more than before and acquired the lesson of humility while truly comprehending the sanctity of the environment. [Momeni, Masoudi 2017] believe the sacredness of *Gowd* can be compared to the mihrab of a mosque in terms of holiness and position. Hence, as soon as people enter the *Zurkhaneh*, modesty and meekness are perceived infused by the architecture of the *Zurkhaneh*.

An examination of the architectural structure of *Zurkhanehs* shows that apart from the pit (*Gowd*) as the main principle of the structure, the location the "*Sardam*" is also of significance. The *Sardam* is an elevated and decorated seat which is reserved for the man who accompanies the exercises with rhythmic drumming, bell ringing and the chanting of Persian poetry and religious words; known as the *Morshed*. The *Sardam* appears to

reflect the relics of Sufism and seeks to enhance heroic manifestations of warfare thus swords, shields, armors, helmets, poles, stones, and the dervish belts were often displayed in this area. "The shape and appearance of the *Sardam* varied in the *Zurkhanehs* of Tehran as some were made in the form of semicircles, cones, squares and pyramids, or trapezoids" [Moghtadari, Nouri 1976: 51-50] (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** *Sardam* and the *Morshed* with his famous bell in *Pulad Zurkhaneh* of Tehran, 1921, Qajar era, Tehran.

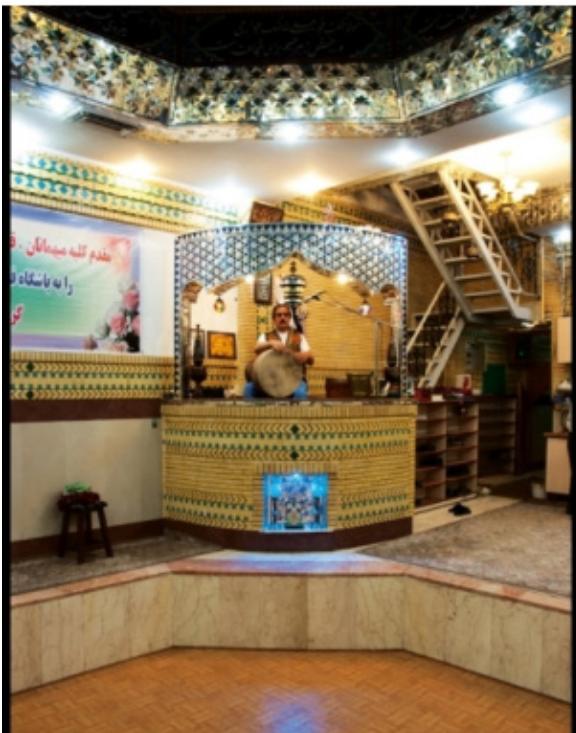
[Source: House of Culture and Art Collection]

To be more accurate, the *Sardam* is a platform about one meter high from the ground and beholds historical heritages associated with Sufism. Sufism is a manifestation of scarcity and is considered holy; correspondingly, it can be described as the interiorization and intensification of Islamic faith and practice since heroes, according to the principle of Sufism and *Pourya Vali*, are well-thought-out to be of the deprived class. In all, the tutor of the *Zurkhaneh* was the *Morshed* and the place where he sat is called the *Sardam*; for this reason, the *Sardam* beholds the message of training chivalrous athletes and advocating fair play [Masoudi *et al.* 2017]. Since courage and clemency have origins in humanity, chivalry, discipline and convey the message of keeping oneself away from lowly words and deprived deeds that are not in the dignity of a believer [Ghalejuqi, Ghafarizadeh 2020].

The *Sardam* of the *Zurkhaneh* is influenced by the mourning of Shiites during Muharram. The presence of a brazier and lamp in front of the entrance door of *Takaya* is also present in *Zurkhanehs* [Parto Beyzai Kashani 2003]. The existence of fire in *Zurkhanehs* has also been affected by the mourning ceremonies of Imam Hussein (PBUH) and the Shiite school [Heidari, Dolatshah 2012]. Accordingly, it can be supposed that the *Sardam*, as one of the main parts in the architecture of *Zurkhaneh*, is a reminder of the deeds of Imam Hussein (PBUH) in the face of evil. In reality, heroism and chivalry were practiced in the *Zurkhanehs* of this period (Figure 4).

Apart from the *Sardam*, as one of the main features of the *Zurkhaneh*, the pit (*Gowd*) is similarly significant. However, in all *Zurkhanehs* of Tehran, the pit (*Gowd*) is

made in a regular octagonal shape, except for the *Shirafkan Zurkhaneh* in which the pit (*Gowd*) is built in a hexagonal shape that is reminiscent of the design of the sun or the hexagonal tomb of Imam Hussein (PBUH); therefore, it can be concluded that similar features such as the shape of the *Gowd* symbolize religious and moral ideas above the physical appearance of the *Zurkhaneh*. "The area of pit (*Gowd*) is approximately 10 to 20 square meters and in the past, the depth of the pit (*Gowd*) was more than one meter" [Moghtadari, Nouri 1976: 55-57]. Heidari & Dolatshah, (2012) assume the pit (*Gowd*) is reminiscent of the Khaksar Dervish tradition and the dramatic event of Karbala. "This arrangement, while displaying the beginning of the struggle, avoids arrogance and strives for justice" [Masoudi *et al.* 2017: 97]. Thus, the *Gowd* of the *Zurkhaneh* is lower in height from the seating of the crowd and this emphasizes the modesty of the athlete (Figure 5).



**Figure 4.** The sitting place of the *Morshed*, *Pahlavanpur Zurkhaneh*, built in 1923, Tehran, Qajar era [Source: authors]



**Figure 5.** The pit (*Gowd*) of *Pahlavanpur Zurkhaneh*, built in 1923, Tehran, Qajar era [Source: authors]

#### 4.2. *Zurkhaneh* Equipment and Decorations

The reflection of epic and didactic poems in *Zurkhaneh*s played a significant role in providing decent and ethical models. Visual education generated a central part in institutionalizing moralistic principles. Figure 6 is a reflection of this principle in the *Pahlavanpour Zurkhaneh* in Tehran.



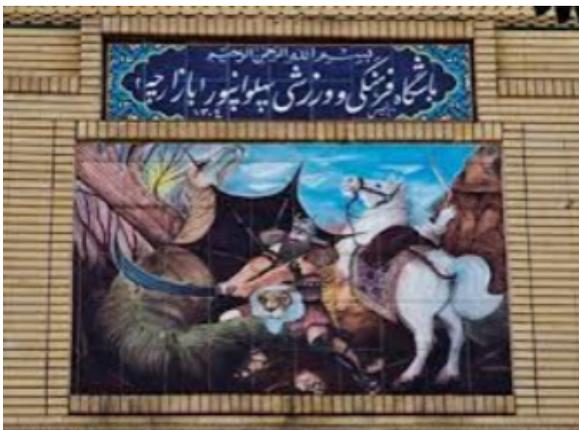
**Figure 6.** A view of the use of epic and instructive poems in *Pahlavanpour Zurkhaneh*, built in 1923, Tehran, Qajar era [Source: authors]

Didactic training is one of the manifestations of individual authority in martial arts. *Zurkhaneh* architecture can also be considered a reflection of self-management of power and control. In *Zurkhaneh* and *Pahlavani* martial arts, one of the prominent categories is the issue of power and its exhibition and regulation. In *Zurkhaneh*, next to the *Morshed*, there is a bell that is played on special occasions, specifically when veterans arrive. The bell is a brass bowl that is hung on a chain above *Morshed's* head and a bullet is embedded in the middle of which *Morshed* sounds when required [Insafpour 2007]. "In ancient societies, the bell was a sign of strength and respect" [Tehranchi 2009: 71]. Power is a concept that has been considered in most natural, theological, philosophical, and human sciences; furthermore, scholars and philosophers have explained the concept of power from various angles, including social class and individual characteristics [Eskandari 2002]. In terms of comparison, an item similar to a bell is also seen in the Zoroastrianism religion in the form of a piece of gold symbolizing fire floating over the burning fire. However, this was later influenced by Shi'ah beliefs to the extent that is named as the Heidari bell (the bell of courage) [Heidari, Dolatshahi 2008]. Chains and bells in the *Futuwwa* culture are a symbol of solidarity and justice and have roots in Sassanid culture [Zakeri 1995]. To satisfy the people and to communicate directly with the oppressed, Anasharvan Sassanid installed a bell on the palace so that the sound of the bell could be heard directly by the king, therefore the bell symbolizes grace, power, ability and justice [Masoudi *et al.* 2017: 96]. Figure 7 shows the position of the *Morshed* and his bells.



**Figure 7.** The place of the *Morshed* and his bells, the *Shirafkan Zurkhaneh*, 1923; Qajar era, Tehran. [Source: authors]

Architecture is a platform for informal learning; Whether in the body of an educational environment or in the context of a cultural and religious setting. The structure and body of the *Zurkhaneh* indirectly grants advice and morals for its users. By applying signs and symbols, the *Zurkhaneh* apprises athletes of high moral concepts including “humility, simplicity, seeking the underprivileged, religiosity, attention to tradition, return to principles, order, justice respect for the elders, defending the oppressed and many other merits” [Masoudi *et al.* 2017: 100]. Furthermore, in a number of the *Zurkhanehs* of Tehran, wall-paintings in the style of coffee houses are apparent [Moghtadari, Nouri 1976]. Applying such paintings that derive from the stories of the *Shahnameh* endorse epic and heroic personalities, in actual fact, it is an attempt to provide appropriate models of power and didactic education for all athletes of the *Zurkhaneh* (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** A view of a wall painting in *Pahlavanpour Zurkhaneh*, built in 1923, Tehran, Qajar era [Source: author]

In the *Zurkhanehs*, the *Morshed* is continually present. The drumming and beat of the *Morshed* stimulates the athletes and spectators and therefore he is known as one of the main pillars of this ancient martial art; to an extent that without his presence, this ritual lacks enthusiasm and passion. From the beginning to the end of the event, the *Morshed* recites epic and lyrical poems

on every occasion to motivate athletes and as a result of much trade, they have become skilled in the art of ancient martial arts. “After the Sufi customs entered the *Zurkhaneh*, the percussionists who were called *Motrebs* were renamed and found the title of *Morshed* meaning guider” [Moghtadari, Nouri 1976: 7]. According to [Miri 1970], in addition to the *Morshed*, another pivotal figure in the *Zurkhaneh* is the veteran of this martial art who leads and trains the athletes and manages the affairs of the *Zurkhaneh* and is selected from the most proficient athletes of this martial art.

The exercises took place in a more or less standard order and were led by the most senior member present, the *Miayndar*. After some warming-up calisthenics (*Pazadan*), in the course of which one of the athletes might leave the *Gowd*, lie on his back, and lift heavy wooden boards called *Sang* with each arm, athletes did push-ups (*Shena*) and then swung mils (clubs), both exercises being accompanied by the *Morshed*'s drumming and chanting [Goodarzi 2004]. The “Mil” is a martial art tool made of a cylindrical stick-shaped tubular body that weighs from ten to thirty kilograms. “Its shape resembles mace and has its root in ancient time, since this martial art was one of the *Futuwwa* (fairness) group's asceticism, they would use this equipment to fit their body” [Moghtadari, Nouri, 1976: 75-87] (Figure 9). According to [Parto Beyzai Kashani 2003], Mils are in three types: 1- Entertainment Mil: weighing 2 kg with 65 cm height. 2- Light Mil: weighing 3 kg with 70 cm height. 3- Heavy Mil: weighing 15 kg with 110 cm height. The entertainment club is smaller and shorter than other clubs so that may be used for performance and tossing. This tool is similar to the weapon of a mace that is actually created to fight the Devil and according to the Pahlavi wisdom of Chapter 43, the method of crushing the devil's forces with a Mil is recommended [Insaifpour 2007]. For this reason, it appears that the aspirations of chivalry in *Zurkhaneh* rituals cannot be unrelated to such past rites and divine purposes.

One of the famous movements of the athletes is when they take turns whirling rapidly (*Charkh*) around the *Gowd*, after which one or two athletes would in turn step forward to swing a *Kabbadeh* above their heads, this being a heavy iron or steel bow on the cord of which heavy rings are strung. Those who wish to perform the *Kabbadeh* after whirling, individually or in pairs, ask permission from the senior by saying “*Rokhsat*” and each takes a *Kabbadeh* and performs its ritual. This chain-like tool in this martial art is similar to a bow, and for martial performers, all the tools in the *Zurkhaneh* represent a weapon [Zarrinkoob 1995]. In Persian cultures, The *Kabbadeh* resembles a bow that is used for archery exercises. The *Kabbadeh* is a bow practiced for fighting the rebellious devil [Insaifpour 2007]. According to [Dehkhoda 1998], the *Kabbadeh* is a training bow used to strengthen the shoulders of archers. In terms of structure, they are made

of pure iron or steel with a stable body. Old bows were made of a wooden core strengthened by sinew and horn for it to become strong, and then oiled [Basouli 2020]. *Zurkhanehs* regularly have two types of *Kabbadehs*: one lighter in weight for beginners and the other heavy for experienced athletes. The *Morshed* had a special beat for the *Kabbadeh*; yet only the veterans had an exclusive rhythm when using this tool [Ensafapour 2007]. In addition, the whirling action can be reminiscent of Sufi dance of Sama and can also be a manifestation of Shiite honors [Heidari, Dolatshah, 2012]. [Zarrinkoub 1988] refers to whirling athletes as Dervish whirlers and believes that the whirling and Sama will aid them to fight against their egotism; correspondingly, [Zarrinboub 1988] considers whirling as a reference to the intuition of truth in all directions, jumping a sign of overcoming the enthusiasm of the Alawite world, and kicking a sign of trampling on the soul of Amara. In addition, “whirling in the *Zurkhaneh* is considered a war exercise and the whirling act of heroes was used to repel the enemy” [Heidari, Dolatshah 2012: 69].

Another piece of equipment used is the *Sang*, a large rectangular exercise board used for weight training in the Iranian style. They are used in pairs for strength and agility exercises, mainly while lying on the floor; additionally, it could be said they are precursors of bench-press, and still practiced widely today in Iran [Parto Beyzai Kashani 2003]. They relate back to ancient warrior training for skillful use of shields used to ward off blows during fighting [Nekoogar 1996]. The *Sang*, or wooden shield originates from a large slab of stone used by the ancient Persian warriors to develop incredible strength as well as agility for the battlefield; moreover, the *Sang* comes from the word *sang-e zur* (power stone) and represents the *Separ* (shield) [Abbasi 1984]. One side of the shield is moved near the floor throughout the exercise is curved. There is a hole at the central part of each *Sang* with a bar across that is used as a hand grip around this opening covered by a soft material to protect the hands. The grip is focused on the center of the weight where the slightest movement applies a large amount of torque to the grip of the user. Once both *Sangs* have left the ground, the rules are that they must not touch each other, nor the floor, nor the body of the person wielding them [Nekoogar 1996]. Today, they are made of wooden planks, equipped with handles and similar to older types, the central wooden handles are often covered with felt to protect the hands while training. Each *Sang* can measure up to 110 cm long and 80 cm wide and weigh from 5kg to 40 kg mutant together making 10 to 80kg sets ([Parto Beyzai Kashani 2003: 26]. The wooden planks may vary in thickness between 3 and 6 cm with the density of wood further influencing the finished weight. Traditionally, the athlete will lie on his back on a blanket or carpet on the ground. Then, he takes the handles so that each hand is holding one *sang* before starting on a series of exercises.

While performing the *Sang* ritual, the athlete usually utters words and acclaims, praising God, the holy Prophets and Imams often mixed with irony and metaphor; such as: “Masha’Allah”, “Kheibar Goshā Ali” (PBUH), “Oh, The Hexagon Shrine of Imam Hossien (PBUH)”, “The Eighth Qibla of Imam Reza (PBUH)”, “Oh Allah Almighty” and other praiseworthy words [Kazemini 1964].

Push-up boards or *Shena* are base boards that are shoulder length or slightly longer (about 60 to 70 cm) and wide as the palm of the hand (about 8 cm) with two short pedestals under it. The *Morshed* after chanting introductory songs rings the bell and beats the drum continuously and guides the athletes in performing this act. The *Shena* exercise is not one of the main events of *Zurkhaneh* and they are classified into four basics: chair push-up, opposite limb push-up, double lap push-up and screw push-up [Anwari 2003: 322]. In general, as mentioned, the tools of *Pahlavani* martial arts symbolize a weapon and accentuate Iranian and Shiite culture and traditions including warfare, shooting and swimming.



**Figure 9.** A view of athletes using *Zurkhaneh* equipment in *Pahlavanpour Zurkhaneh*, built in 1923, Tehran, Qajar era [Source: author]

With such interpretations, the *Zurkhanehs* of the Qajar period followed principles such as virtue, humility and the decent use of power in their structure and arrangement [Kashfi 2020]. Hence, it can be stated that *Zurkhaneh* architecture is an introverted and functional architecture; on the other hand, the lesser use of ornaments and the simplicity of the elements play an imperative role in promoting moral principles such as modesty.

As *Zurkhanehs* were notable from other structures by their *Gowd* area; the entrance way and the *Gowd* were connected via a hallway and this style of architecture presented a hierarchy in the moral conduct of athletes. During the Qajar era, the structure of the *Zurkhanehs* remained the same by conserving similar traits. By studying the structure and arrangement of *Zurkhanehs* in the Qajar period, it was found that the *Zurkhaneh* encompassed features such as a lower door for entrance; for heads to be bowed in respect, the *Gowd*, positioned lower than the ground to practice humbleness and modesty and the position of the *Morshed* and his bell to accentuate discipline, heroism, virtue, and power; all being popular characteristics of the *Zurkhaneh*.

## Conclusion

Martial arts have existed in Iran since ancient times. *Pahlavani* martial art flourished during the Islamic period in Iranian society and similarities between this martial art and the structure of *Zurkhaneh* have triggered many specialists to study the antiquity of this martial art. According to obtainable sources, during the Safavid period (1135-907 AH), *Pahlavani* became one of the common enjoyments of the Iranian people as it was greatly influenced by religious and cultural beliefs; in addition, this belief manifested itself in the form of symbols and signs in the structure and arrangement of *Zurkhanehs*. In the next epoch in the history of Iran, the Qajar era, the structure of the *Zurkhanehs* remained the same by conserving similar qualities. Features including a lower entry for the bowing of heads to show respect, the *Gowd* positioned lower than the ground to practice humbleness and the position of the *Morshed* and his bell to accentuate discipline, heroism, virtue, and power; are all prevalent features of the *Zurkhaneh*. The use of *Shahnameh* poetry and its heroic epic poems in the *Zurkhaneh* setting and the reciting of the *Morshed* whilst beating the drum; all indicate the valiant spirit and value. Henceforth, *Zurkhanehs* became a place for the gathering of heroes as they gradually developed to be ethical role models promoting virtue ethics of *Pahlavani* martial arts and gallantry traits. With these interpretations, it can be concluded that the structure of Qajar *Zurkhanehs* in Tehran has been able to accommodate symbols of humility, virtue, and power in a simultaneous manner whilst promoting ethical values in the society.

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## **Skromność, cnota i władza w sztukach walki Pahlavani i miejscu ćwiczeń Zurkhanehs w okresie Qajar (z naciskiem na strukturę, układ i dekoracje teherańskich Zurkhanehs)**

**Słowa kluczowe:** Okres Qajar, Tehran Zurkhaneh, Pahlavani i sztuki walki, skromność, futuwwa

### **Streszczenie**

Tło. Rytuály Pahlavani i Zurkhaneh istniały w Iranie od czasów Imperium Partów. Sztuka walki Pahlavani była kontynuowana w okresie islamskim i rozkwitła ze względu na uwarunkowania kulturowe i społeczne. Badanie ewolucji tej sztuki określa jego prosperowanie w okresie Qajar gdy Zurkhaneh (miejsce ćwiczeń) stał się wspólnym miejscem w kontekście miejskim. Sztuki walki Pahlavani odgrywają znaczącą rolę w przedstawianiu bohaterskich zachowań i nauczania, zachowują unikalne cechy architektoniczne i zachowują różne miejsca kultury osadzone w znakach i symbolach.

Problem i cel. Celem niniejszego badania było przedstawienie, jakie moralne i kulturowe zasady są stosowane w strukturze i układzie Zurkhanehs z okresu Qajar. Próbowano również zbadać kulturową i moralną pozycję Zurkhaneh w społeczeństwie irańskim. Dlatego rozpoznanie symboli i znaków sztuki walki Pahlavani może zapoznać nas z procesem ewolucji powstawania takich instytucji i jej roli kulturowej poprzez analizę pojęć takich jak skromność, cnota i Futuwwa (rodzaj etyki) w strukturze Zurkhanehs Iranu w okresie Qajar. Metody. Niniejsze studium bada zagadnienie poprzez metodologię opisowo-analityczną w oparciu o zasoby biblioteczne i obserwacje terenowe.

Wnioski. Wyniki badań wskazują, że koncepcje skromności, cnoty i Futuwwa są zauważalne w okresie Qajar w Zurkhanehs w Teheranie, szczególnie przy wejściu i pozycjonowaniu religijnych werestów Morshed i postaci bohaterów.