A Celebration in Honor of Dick Davis

The Layered Heart

Essays on Persian Poetry

Edited by

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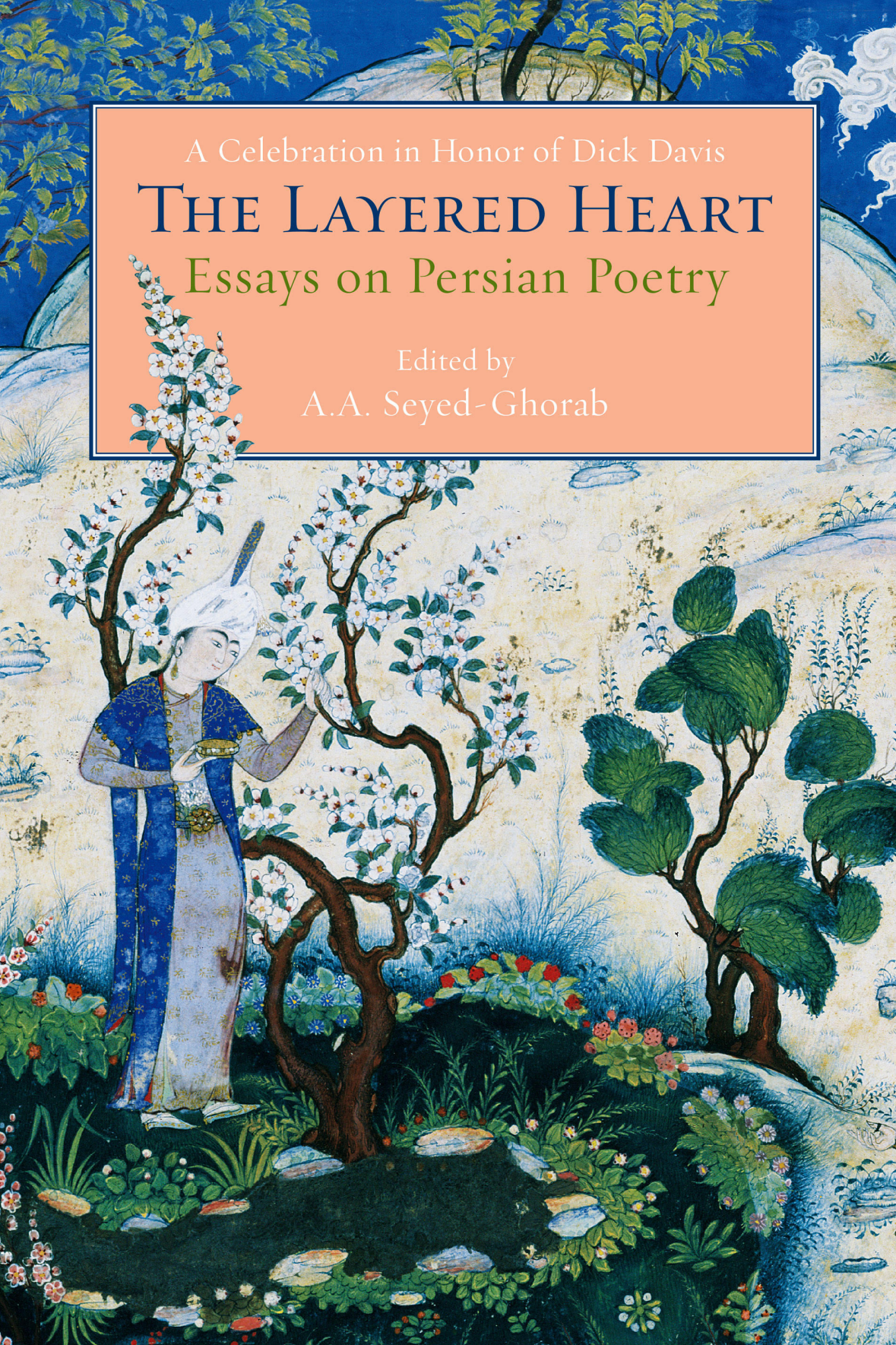

Wrestling in the *Shahnameh* and Later Persian Epics[1]

H.E. Chehabi

In a recent essay, Gabrielle van den Berg writes: "the most famous episode in the *Shahnameh* is no doubt that of Rostam and Sohrab: and more specifically, the culmination of this story, in which Sohrab is killed by his father Rostam."[2] This filicide concludes a single combat referred to in the book as *koshti*, a word that means "wrestling" in New Persian. The association of wrestling, arguably Iran's national (but not most popular) sport, with Ferdowsi's Book of Kings is therefore an ancient and enduring one. In fact, the earliest written occurrence of the word *koshti* may very well be in the *Shahnameh*.

In this essay I shall begin by discussing the pre-Islamic context of the practice of wrestling, as well as the etymology of the word *koshti*. I shall demonstrate that iconographic, literary, and philological evidence all point to a Parthian origin for Iran's wrestling heritage. I will then discuss the six *Shahnameh* episodes that involve wrestling, and go on to examine references to wrestling in some of the other works that constitute Iran's epic tradition. I end with a discussion of the interplay between poetry and practice.

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2. G.R. van den Berg, "The Ring as a Token in the *Barzū-nāma*: On the Importance of Lineage and Origin," in *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, ed. Ali Asghar Seyed-Ghorab (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 215.

The Pre-Islamic Context

The *Shahnameh* is a compendium of legends and stories from pre-Islamic Iran, and yet wrestling does not seem to have been prized much by the ancient Persians.[3] Pre-Islamic representations of wrestling scenes can be found on two silver bowls from northeastern Iran dating from the seventh century. The subject of the first of these, known as the "Sackler Bowl" due to its location at the Sackler Museum in Washington, DC, is a feast, thought to be either a wedding banquet[4] or a Nowruz celebration at court.[5] The bowl depicts various activities at a feast: drinking, music, backgammon, and wrestling.

Figure 1: The Sackler Bowl

3. There is no mention of it in the otherwise exhaustive study of Wolfgang Knauth, "Die sportlichen Qualifikationen der altiranischen Fürsten," *Stadion*, 2 (1976), pp. 1–89. In Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, for instance, wrestling is mentioned only as an exercise practiced in Greece.
4. Prudence Oliver Harper, *The Royal Hunter: Art of the Sasanian Empire* (New York: Asia Society, 1978), pp. 74–6; and Ann C. Gunter and Paul Jett, *Ancient Iranian Metalwork in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the Freer Gallery of Art* (Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery; Freer Gallery of Art; Mainz: distributed by Philipp von Zabern, 1992), pp. 161–3. I thank Touraj Daryaee for bringing the latter book to my attention.
5. A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, "The Iranian Wine Horn from Pre-Islamic Pre-Achaemenid Antiquity to the Safavid Age," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, 10 (1996), pp. 120–21.

The second bowl, at the Cleveland Museum of Art and also dated to late Sasanian times, depicts hunters, musicians, and, like the first bowl, a pair of wrestlers.[6]

Figure 2: Silver Bowl at the Cleveland Museum of Art

The northeast of Iran was influenced by Parthian culture which, as Parvaneh Pourshariati has conclusively shown, endured during the centuries of Sasanian rule, and even survived the fall of the Sasanian empire.[7] Therefore, while the two silver bowls are chronologically "Sasanian," it is not farfetched to suggest that the images they contain

6. Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, pp. 53–4.

7. Parvaneh Pourshariati, "The Parthians and the Production of the Canonical Shāhnāmas: Of Pahlavī, Pahlavānī and the Pahlav," in *Commutatio et Contentio: Studies in the Late Roman, Sasanian, and Early Islamic Near East in Memory of Ze'ev Rubin*, ed. Henning Börm and Josef Wiesehöfer (Düsseldorf: Wellem Verlag, 2010), pp. 347–92.

reflect Parthian cultural traditions. Both bowls depict scenes from a feast, and Parthians were famous for their feasting, a predilection carried on by the Sasanians. That these feasts, *bazm*, involved music and drinking is well known,[8] but the iconographic evidence from the two silver objects would suggest that trials of strength and dexterity were part of them as well – one might even speculate that it was this friendly wrestling that thematically connected *bazm* to *razm*, serious fighting.[9] The presence of wrestling at *bazm*s is corroborated by a passage in Gorgani's romance *Vis and Ramin*,[10] where a lovelorn Ramin laments that in the absence of his beloved Vis nothing gives him pleasure anymore:[11]

نه با کشتی گیران زور آزمایم نه با میخوارگان رامش سرایم

Or, in Dick Davis's translation:

I never try my strength with wrestlers or
Drink with my friends till I can drink no more[12]

The etymology of the word *koshti* confirms the Parthian hypothesis. It is well known that the *Shahnameh* contains loanwords from Parthian

8. See, for instance, Mary Boyce, "The Parthian 'Gōsān' and Iranian Minstrel Tradition," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1:2 (April 1957), pp. 10–45.

9. On *bazm o razm*, see Olga M. Davidson, "Feasting and Fighting: Ultimate Occasions for Hero and Poet," in *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 156–67.

10. For the Parthian origin of this story, see V. Minorsky, "Vīs u Rāmīn, a Parthian Romance," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 11 (1947), pp. 741–64; 12 (1947), pp. 20–25; and 16 (1954), pp. 91–2.

11. Fakhr al-Din Gorgāni, *Vis va Rāmin*, ed. Mohammad Ja'far Mahjub (Tehran: Bongāh-e Nashr-e Andisheh, 1959), p. 301.

12. Fakhraddin Gorgani, *Vis and Ramin*, trans. Dick Davis (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2008), p. 384.

and other Northwest Iranian languages or dialects,[13] and *koshti* is one of them.[14] The word is related to Middle Persian *kust*, meaning "side" or "area," a cognate of the French word *côte*, which means both "coast" and "rib" (hence Côte d'Azur and *côte de porc*). The addition of the relational suffix *-ig* to *kust* yielded *kustig* in Middle Persian, which is thus an object that pertains to a person's sides in the sense that it is bound around them – a metonymy based on contiguity. In Middle Persian the word denoted the sacred girdle that observant Zoroastrians tie around their waists, now commonly called *kusti*.[15] Parthian *sht* corresponds to Middle Persian *st*, and when the word was absorbed into Persian and its final *g* was dropped, it came to be pronounced *kushti*, later New Persian *koshti*, a word that came to mean both the sacred waist-thread and wrestling. While New Persian adopted the Parthian form, the form *kosti* coexisted with it for a while,[16] but then lost out to *koshti*. That these two seemingly different things have a common etymon becomes clear in light of the wrestling scenes on

13. Ludwig Paul, "The Language of the Šāhnāme in historical and dialectal perspective," in *Languages of Iran: Past and Present: Iranian Studies in Memoriam David Neil MacKenzie*, ed. Dieter Weber (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), pp. 141–52. For the benefit of non-linguists, it should be pointed out that, although a language originating in northeastern Iran, Parthian was in linguistic terms a Northwest Iranian language.

14. Wolfgang Lentz, "Die nordiranischen Elemente in der neupersischen Literatursprache bei Firdosi," *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Iranistik*, 4 (1926), pp. 251–316 (295).

15. For a Middle Persian text on the sacred girdle, see Heinrich F. J. Junker (ed. and trans.), *Der wissbegierige Sohn: Ein mittelpersischer Text über das Kustīk* (Leipzig: VEB Otto Harrassowitz, 1959). For modern studies of the kusti, see Michael Stausberg, "The Significance of the Kusti: A History of its Zoroastrian Interpretations," *East and West*, 54:1–4 (2004), pp. 9–29; and Patricia L. Baker, "Clothed in the Faith: The Zoroastrian *Sudrah* and *Kustī*," *Studia Iranica*, 27 (1998), pp. 259–75.

16. A tenth-century medical text discusses *kosti* as an exercise. See Abubakr Rabi' ibn Ahmad al-Akhavayni al-Bokhāri, *Hedāyat al-Mote'allemin fi l-tebb*, ed. Jalāl Matini (1344/1965, Mashhad: Enteshārāt-e Dāneshgāh-e Ferdowsi, 1371/1992), pp. 60, 173, 434, and 779. I thank Seyyed Hoseyn Razavi Borqe'i for bringing this book to my attention and presenting me with a copy of it.

the two above-mentioned silver bowls, in which the contestants have seized each other's belts. In fact, the Persian verb for "to wrestle" is *koshti gereftan*,[17] "*koshti*-seizing," no doubt an echo of a more generic sense of the word *koshti*: indeed, according to the seventeenth-century dictionary *Borhān-e Qāte'*, one of the meanings of *kosti* is "a rope that the wrestlers of Khorasan tie around their waists."[18] This indicates that the original style of wrestling practiced in Iran, at least in northeastern Iran, was a type of belt wrestling,[19] as seen in a medieval miniature from the Diez Album in Berlin (see fig. 3).

This is one of the most common types of unarmed combat, and can be found in Iceland (Glíma), Switzerland (Schwingen), and all over Asia,[20] particularly in West Asia.[21] Contrasting Greek athletes'

17. *Gereftan* is a cognate of "to grab." See "*grabH," in Johnny Cheung, *Etymological Dictionary of the Iranian Verb* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 119–20.

18. Mohammad Hoseyn b. Khalaf Tabrizi "Borhān," *Borhān-e Qāte'*, vol. 3 (Tehran: Ebn-e Sinā, 1342/1963), p. 1062. The same dictionary avers that the word *koshti* derives from the verb *kuftan*, which would seem to indicate that there was no awareness of the common etymon.

19. The etymological connection between belts and wrestling in the word *koshti* was already pointed out by Paul Horn in his *Grundriss der neupersischen Etymologie* (Strasbourg: Trübner, 1893), p. 191. Others who have noted it are Ebrāhim Purdāvud, *Khordeh Avestā: bakhshi az ketāb-e Avestā* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Asātir, 1380/2001), p. 62; Geo Widengren, *Der Faudalismus im alten Iran* (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1969), p. 155; Bahman Bustān, "Negareshi kutāh beh 'koshti' va barrasi-ye vāzheh-ye ān," in *Iranistische Mitteilungen*, 29:4, ed. Dr Helmhart Kanus-Credé (Allendorf an der Eder: Antigone-Verlag, 1999), pp. 26–9; and Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani, "La lucha: una parte integral de las artes de combate en Irán," *Revista de Artes Marciales Asiáticas*, 5:2 (2010), pp. 65–6. Still, every now and then a connection is made with *koshtan*, "to kill," on the grounds that in the *Shahnameh* one of the adversaries is usually killed at the conclusion of a bout. See Abu al-Qasem Rāyegān Tafreshi, *Ganjineh-ye fonun-e koshti-ye āzād va farangi* (Tehran: Safir Ardahāl, 1391/2012), p. 27.

20. See H. E. Chehabi, "Recovering Asia's Lost West: Iran's Asian Connections in the Realm of Sport," *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies*, 31:2 (2015), pp. 306–11.

21. See, for instance, Cyrus H. Gordon, "Belt-Wrestling in the Bible World," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 23 (1950), pp. 131–7.

Figure 3: Grabbing the Girdle

practice of competing in the nude with non-Greeks' preference for covering themselves, the ancient Greek historian Thucydides writes: "formerly, even in the Olympic contests, the athletes who contended wore belts across their middles; and it is but a few years since that the practice ceased. To this day among some of the barbarians, especially in Asia, when prizes for boxing and wrestling are offered, belts are worn by the combatants."[22]

In the *Shahnameh* the sacred belt or girdle *koshti* is mentioned twice, both times when Goshtāsb girdles his son Esfandyār before he sets out to spread the new Zoroastrian faith throughout Iran. But to tell the story of Goshtāsb's propagation of Zoroastrianism, Ferdowsi used the verse of the *Goshtāsbnāmeh* of Daqiqi Tusi, a poet whose association with Zoroastrianism was closer than Ferdowsi's and who uses the word *koshti* exclusively in the sense of a sacred belt.[23] In the *Shahnameh*, the belt used in wrestling is called *dovāl* or *kamar*, as

22. Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, I.6.4–6.

23. Abu Mansur Mohammad b. Ahmad Daqiqi Tusi, "Goshtāsbnāmeh," in Mohammad Javād Shari'at (ed.), *Divān-e Daqiqi Tusi* (Tehran: Asātir, 1368/1989), pp. 49–92, ll. 60, 83, 112, 838, and 987.

we shall see in the next section. The heroes who duel and wrestle are termed *pahlavān*, a word whose original meaning is "Parthian." In the course of time, the word has also acquired the meaning of "wrestler," especially outside Iran; in Afghan Persian usage, *pahlavāni* and *koshti* are actually used interchangeably.

WRESTLING EPISODES IN THE *SHAHNAMEH*

I cannot claim to have read the entire *Shahnameh* to locate every single instance of unarmed single combat; to find these I have relied on the references found under the lemma *Kuštī* in Fritz Wolff's glossary.[24] Here, six episodes are referenced, the four first of which belong to the Sistan Cycle, which tells the story of the hereditary rulers of Sistan who are allied to the Iranians and act as their "chief martial" heroes, as Dick Davis puts it,[25] when the kings of Iran wage battle. Most of these battles are fought against the Turanians, the Iranian inhabitants of the steppes to the north and west of the Iranian plateau. Although the stories of the Sistan Cycle are ultimately of Saka (Scythian) origin, they are the product of a Parthian cultural milieu,[26] which further corroborates my contention regarding the Parthian origins of Iranian wrestling culture.

ROSTAM AND SOHRĀB

This story is well known: Rostam has a one-night stand with the daughter of the king of Samangān and sires a boy, Sohrāb, who is brought up by his mother Tahmineh. When he grows up, Sohrāb sets out with an army to conquer Iran in the hope of putting his father on

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24. Fritz Wolff, *Glossar zu Firdosis Schahname* (Berlin: Gedruckt in der Reichsdruckerei, 1935), p. 656.

25. Dick Davis, "Introduction," Abolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, trans. Dick Davis (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), pp. xiii–xiv.

26. A.Sh. Shahbazi, "The Parthian Origins of the House of Rustam," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, New Series 7 (1993), pp. 155–63; and Marjolijn van Zutphen, *Farāmarz the Sistāni Hero: Texts and Traditions of the Farāmarznāme and the Persian Epic Cycle* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 31–46.

the throne. But father and son do not recognize each other in time and end up fighting on the battlefield. Sohrāb is mortally wounded by Rostam and dies in his father's arms.[27]

The sequence of their modes of combat sets the pattern for many other single combats in the *Shahnameh* and elsewhere.

Their first encounter is on horseback. They use javelins, swords, and maces, but their armor protects them. Disappointed by the inconclusiveness of their first encounter, they lunge for each other's belts:[28]

غمی‌شددلی هر دو از یکدگر گرفتند هر دو دوال کمر

To Rostam's surprise, Sohrāb does not budge:[29]

میان جوان را نبد آگهی بماند از هنر دست رستم تهی

And the two decide to meet again the next day. When they do, Sohrāb suggests they make peace, but Rostam refuses the offer and tells Sohrāb that they had decided to wrestle and that he had girded his loins (*kamar basteh*) for combat:[30]

زکشتی گرفتن سخن بود دوش نگیرم فریب تو زین در بگوش
نه من کودکم گر تو هستی جوان بکشتی کمر بسته دارم میان

27. For a mostly prose translation of this episode, see Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*, trans. Davis, pp. 187–214. For an English translation in free verse, see *The Tragedy of Sohráb and Rostám*, trans. Jerome W. Clinton (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996).

28. *Shāhnāmeh-ye Ferdowsi*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Sherkat-e Sahāmi-ye Ketābhā-ye Jibi, 1363/1984), p. 76, l. 935.

29. Ibid., l. 938.

30. Ibid., p. 82, ll. 1079–80.

Figure 4: Rostam kills Sohrāb

They dismount, tether their horses, and start to wrestle. They fight from dawn to dusk amidst much sweat and blood, until Sohrāb seizes Rostam's belt, lifts him up, throws him down, and sits on his chest:[31]

چو شیران بکشتی بر آویختند ز تنها خوی و خون همی ریختند
ز شبگیر تا سایه گسترد هور همی این بر آن آن بر این کرد زور
...
کمربند رستم گرفت و کشید ز بس زور گفتی تنش بر درید
...
گرفتش ز جای آن تن پیل مست بر آوردش از جای و بنهاد پست
نشست از بر سینهٔ پیل تن پر از خاک چنگال و روی و دهن

Before Sohrāb can cut Rostam's head off with his dagger, Rostam saves himself by telling Sohrāb that it is customary to spare one's opponent's life after the first fall and allow him a second round. The young and naïve Sohrāb believes this lie and lets go of Rostam. Rostam prays for his strength to increase, after which he faces Sohrāb again. This time it is Rostam who fells Sohrāb and pins him to the ground. Knowing that Sohrāb would not stay down for long, he quickly draws his dagger and plunges it into his son's body:[32]

بکشتی گرفتن نهادند سر گرفتند هر دو دوال کمر
...
خم آورد پشت دلیر جوان زمانه بیامد، نبودش توان
زدش بر زمین به کردار شیر بدانست که آن هم نماند به زیر
سبک تیغ از نیام بر کشید بر شیر بیداردل بردرید

As he is dying, Sohrāb asks his adversary to tell his father, Rostam, of his death, whereupon Rostam realizes what he has done and is appropriately devastated.

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31. Ibid., ll. 1089–90, 1092, and 1094–5.
32. Ibid., p. 84, l. 1147, and p. 85, ll. 1150–52.

ROSTAM AND PULĀDVAND

In the second episode, Rostam battles Pulādvand, an ambiguous figure who is called a *div* (demon) but acts more like a *pahlavān*.[33] The Turanian king Afrāsiyāb has attacked Iran, and Pulādvand has offered his help to him in exchange for half his kingdom. He ends up facing Rostam on the battlefield, and after an inconclusive armed combat, Pulādvand invites Rostam to settle their feud without weapons:[34]

بدو گفت پولاد جنگی نبرد　　بکشتی پدید آید از مرد مرد
گرت رای باشد چو شیر ژیان　　ببندیم هر دو به کشتی میان
بکشتی بگردیم یک با دگر　　بگیریم هر دو دوال کمر

Rostam accepts the challenge and[35]

بکشتی گرفتن نهادند روی　　دو گرد سر افراز دو کینه جوی
...
همی دست سودند با یکدگر　　گرفته دو جنگی دوال کمر

In other words, they seize each other by the belt, here called a *dovāl*, and in the end, Rostam lifts Pulādvand up and slams him to the ground:[36]

یکی زور بنمود پولادوند　　بسان چناری ز جا در بکند
به‌گردن‌بر آوردو زدبر زمین　　همی کرد بر کردگار آفرین

33. On this ambiguity, see Rezā Ghafuri and Mehdi Mohammadi, "Shenākht-e hoviyyat-e Pulādvand bar asās-e revāyathā-ye hemāsi," *Motāle'āt-e Dāstāni*, 0:2 (1389/2010), pp. 5–29.

34. *Shāhnāmeh*, vol. 3, p. 128, ll. 1364–6. *Be koshti padid āyad az mard mard* is an often-quoted saying to illustrate the manly qualities fostered by wrestling: wrestling makes a *man* out of a man.

35. Ibid., ll. 1374 and 1378.

36. Ibid., p. 130, ll. 1409–10.

Figure 5: Rostam and Pulādvand

Pulādvand is injured but survives and leaves the scene, whereupon Afrāsiyāb flees.

BIZHAN AND HUMĀN

The romance of Bizhan and Manizheh is universally agreed to be of Parthian origin.[37] Although centered on Bizhan's romantic escapades, it does include the requisite battles and man-to-man combats, including one between Bizhan and the Turanian *pahlavān* Humān.

Bizhan and Humān start by fighting with mace and sword on horseback, but when neither succeeds in subduing the other, they decide to engage in a mounted test of strength: they seize each other's belts and try to lift their opponent out of his saddle:[38]

وزآن پس بر آن بر نهادند کار — که زور آزمایند در کارزار
بدان گونه جستند ننگ و نبرد — که از پشت اسپ اندر آرند مرد
کمربند گیرد کرا زور بیش — رباید ز جای افگند خوار پیش

When neither can dislodge the other from his saddle, they dismount and wrestle:[39]

بدان ماندگی باز بر خاستند — بکشتی گرفتن بیآراستند
...
همی زور کرد این بر آن آن بر این — گه آنرا بسودی گه این را زمین

They strain and try all sorts of holds, but neither prevails. Then the sun sets, and Humān's greater strength is of no use to him.[40]

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37. J. C. Coyajee, "The House of Gotarzes: A Chapter of Parthian History in the Shahnamah," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 28 (1932), pp. 207–24; *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Bīžan" (by Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh); and van Zutphen, *Farāmarz*, pp. 162–5.

38. *Shāhnāmeh*, vol. 3, p. 240, ll. 790–91.

39. Ibid., l. 797, and p. 241, l. 809.

40. In this he resembles Gawain of the Arthurian Legend, whose power waxes and wanes with the sun.

Bizhan seizes Humān's neck with his left hand, his thigh with his right hand, lifts him up, throws him down,[41] and then severs his head with his dagger.[42]

ز هر گونه زور آزمودند و بند — فراز آمد آن رای چرخ بلند
ز بیژن فزون بود هومان به زور — هنر عیب گردد چو برگشت هور
بزد دست بیژن بسان پلنگ — ز سر تا میانش بیازید چنگ
گرفتش به چپ گردن و راست ران — خم آورد پشت هیون گران
بر آوردش از جای و بنهاد پست — سر خنجر آورد چون باد دست
فروبرد سر کردش از تن جدا — فگندش بسان یکی اژدها

41. This is a maneuver known as "body scoop" in American professional wrestling.

42. *Shāhnāmeh*, vol. 3, p. 241, ll. 810–15.

KAY KHOSROW AND SHIDEH

Once again, the scene is a battle between Iranians and Turanians.[43] On the Iranian side, King Kay Khosrow, "the greatest of the Keyanian kings,"[44] faces the armies of his maternal grandfather, King Afrāsiyāb. Afrāsiyāb's young son Shideh, a mighty warrior, challenges the Iranian king to a single combat. Kay Khosrow's councilors advise against accepting his uncle's challenge, but he accepts, arguing that only a man endowed with divine glory (*farr*) can withstand Shideh. Kay Khosrow and Shideh begin their fight on horseback, using lances, maces, arrows, and swords, but neither can vanquish the other. Shideh suggests they dismount and continue on foot, hoping that Kay Khosrow would not accept that because it is beneath his dignity:[45]

چو درماندهشدباخوداندیشهکرد — که گر شاه را گویم اندر نبرد
بیا تا به کشتی پیاده شویم — ز خوی هر دو آهار دیده شویم
پیاده نگردد که عار آیدش — ز شاهی تن خویش خوار آیدش

Kay Khosrow's standard bearer, Rohām, agrees that this would be disgraceful:[46]

بدو گفت رهّام کای تاجور — بدینکار ننگی مگردان گهر

But the Iranian king calls Shideh's bluff. When the Turanian *pahlavān* sees Kay Khosrow's might and strength, he wants to run away, but Kay Khosrow, in a variation on Bizhan's finishing move against Humān, seizes Shideh's neck with his left hand and his back with his right hand, lifts him up, and flings him to the ground so hard

43. For a prose translation of this episode, see Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*, trans. Davis, pp. 381–91.

44. William L. Hanaway, Jr., "The Iranian Epics," in *Heroic Epic and Saga: An Introduction to the World's Great Folk Epics*, ed. Felix Oinas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 83.

45. *Shāhnāmeh*, vol. 4, p. 30, ll. 652–4.

46. Ibid., p. 31, l. 662.

that all his vertebrae are shattered and his leg is broken. He then takes out his dagger, slashes Shideh's armor, and commits avunculucide:[47]

گرفتش بچپ گردن و راست پشت　　بر آورد و زد بر زمینش درشت
همه مهرهٔ پشت او همچونی　　شد از درد ریزان و بگسسته پی
یکی تیغ تیز از میان برکشید　　سراسر بر نامور بر درید
برو کرد جوشن همه چاک چاک　　همی ریخت بر تارک از درد خاک

Dārāb

In the *Shahnameh* Dārāb is the son of Queen Homāy, who is successor to King Bahman, her father and husband. Bahman had inherited the crown from his grandfather King Goshtāsb since his father Esfandyār was killed by Rostam before he could ascend the throne. The reign of Dārāb sits on the cusp between the heroic age of the Sistan Cycle and the historical section of the Book of Kings, because he is presented as the father of Alexander of Macedon. As an infant, Dārāb is evicted by his mother from the palace and brought up by a launderer before he reconciles with his mother and ends up succeeding her. Growing up among commoners, he gets into scrapes with older boys on the streets, but none of them can match his strength in wrestling:[48]

بکشتی شدی با بزرگان بکوی　　کسی را نبودی تن و زور اوی

Clearly, *koshti* here does not connote a martial art but a competitive exercise.[49] The same is true of the *Shahnameh*'s final wrestling episode.

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47. Ibid, p. 32, ll. 694–7.

48. Ibid., vol. 5, p. 14, l. 83.

49. In a later prose epic dedicated to Dārāb, he does not wrestle although he is an accomplished fighter and warrior. See Abu Tāher Mohammad ibn Hasan ibn Ali ibn Musā al-Tarsusi, *Dārābnāmeh-ye Tarsusi*, ed. Zabih Allāh Safā, 2 vols (Tehran: Bongāh-e Tarjomeh va Nashr-e Ketāb, 1344/1965), vol. 1, pp. 16–18, 23–4, 30–35, and 48. I thank Julia Rubanovich for this reference.

BAHRĀM GUR

In the *Shahnameh*'s last wrestling episode, the only one in the historical part of the epic, none other than the ruler of Iran himself, Bahrām Gur, proves his luctational prowess. The figure of Bahrām Gur is based on the historical Bahrām V (r. 420–38 CE), although his fanciful adventures are of course the stuff of legend.[50] In one celebrated episode, he visits the court of the Indian king Shangol disguised as an Iranian ambassador charged with reminding him of his duties as tributary to the Iranian monarch. At a banquet offered by the Indian king, Bahram drinks rather too much and challenges one of the wrestlers who have entertained the audience:[51]

بیاراست بزمی بفرمان شاه در ایوان پرستندهٔ نیکخواه

...

چو نان خورده شد مجلس آراستند نوازنده رود و می خواستند

...

بزرگان چو از باده خرّم شدند زتیمار نابوده بی غم شدند
دو تن را بفرمود زور آزمای بکشتی که دارند با دیو پای
برفتند شایسته مردان کار ببستندشان بر میانها ازار
همی‌زور کرد آن بر این این بر آن گرازان و پیچان دو مرد جوان
چو بهرام برداشت جام بلور بمغزش نبید اندر افگند شور
بشنگل چنین گفت کای شهریار بفرمای تا من ببندم ازار
چو با زورمندی بکشتی شوم نه اندر خرابی و مستی شوم
بخندید شنگل بدو گفت خیز چو زیر آوری خون ایشان بریز
چو بشنید بهرام بر پای خاست بمردی خم آورد بالای راست
کسی را که بگرفت ازیشان میان چو شیری که یازد به گور ژیان
همی‌برزمین‌زدچنان‌کاستخوانش بکفت و بپالود رنگ رخانش

50. See also Sunil Sharma's contribution to this volume.

51. *Shāhnāmeh*, vol. 6, pp. 16–17, ll. 305, 310, and 312–22. For a prose translation of this episode, see Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*, trans. Davis, pp. 468–9.

Here we have all the ingredients of the sort of feast Gorgani's gallant Ramin might have attended, with music, wine, and wrestling. In fact, Ferdowsi's verse could be a commentary on the scenes depicted on the two silver bowls discussed earlier.

What is new about this last wrestling scene of the *Shahnameh* is that the athletes wear a special garment, *ezār*, which denotes a cloth tied around the waist to cover the pudenda.[52] Since the episode is set in India, one is reminded of the *langot* worn to this day by traditional Indian *pahalvan*s. Moreover, the extreme violence of Bahram's bout, in which he breaks his opponent's bones, is consonant with the *mallayuddha* style of wrestling combat, as depicted in ancient Indian epics. It is unlikely that Ferdowsi had first-hand knowledge of Indian medieval wrestling culture,[53] and so the congruence of his tale with what we know of India's agonistic traditions more likely bespeaks practices that were common to Iranians and Indians.

A comparison of Ferdowsi's six wrestling episodes yields three insights. First, in the first four episodes that occur in the heroic section, the fighters constantly seize each other's belts, grab their opponent's neck with their left hand and his legs or back with their right hand, and slam him to the ground with considerable violence. This is an example of what Dick Davis has described as the use of "formulaic phrases to describe the physical aspect of warriors," as a result of which "situations also recur."[54] By contrast, the last episode, Bahrām Gur's fight in India, is narrated with considerable detail specific to the situation. Davis's suggestion that oral traditions (which are indicated

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52. It was also worn by sailors. See *Dehkhodā*, s.v. "ezār."

53. On which see N.P. Joshi, "Wrestling Tournaments in Ancient India," *The Poona Orientalist*, 21:1–4 (1956), pp. 50–56; R.N. Mehta, "A Note on the Movement of Wrestlers in India and Ceylon in the Medieval Period," in *Professor Suryya Kumar Bhuyan Commemoration Volume*, ed. Maheswar Neog and H.K. Barpujari (Gauhati: Local Committee, XXII Session, All India Oriental Conference, 1966), pp. 292–4; and Arion Roşu, "Les *Marman* et les arts martiaux indiens," *Journal Asiatique*, 279:3–4 (1981), pp. 417–51.

54. Dick Davis, "The Problem of Ferdowsi's Sources," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 116:1 (1996), pp. 53–4.

by formulaic and repetitive language) were relevant to the heroic section of the *Shahnameh* while written sources were the basis of the historic section is thereby confirmed.

Second, wrestling has different functions. In a recent study of wrestling in ancient Icelandic tradition and literature, the author identifies four types: the hero against a non-human opponent, gladiatorial contests, wrestling as part of a military struggle, and wrestling as a game.[55] In the *Shahnameh* we find all four types: single combats against *div*s (which have been left out of the present study); gladiatorial contest (Bahrām Gur); military combat (the first four battlefield episodes); and wrestling as a game (Dārāb's juvenile roughhousing). Analogs could be found in the Indian tradition as well, from young Krishna's tussles with his friends and the exertions of the *mallayuddha* athletes to the epic combats between heroes (such as the one between Bhima and Jarasandha), or between heroes and non-humans in the *Mahabharata*.[56] Whether these parallels are coincidental or reflect a common Indo-European cultural heritage is a question on which I am not qualified to speculate.

Finally, in the *Shahnameh*'s first three wrestling scenes the protagonist is a *pahlavān*, but in the next three it is the king himself. However, Kay Khosrow defied convention to meet Shideh in single combat, Dārāb wrestled *in tempore non suspecto*, and Bahrām Gur wrestled *incognito*: it seems that wrestling was not quite the right exercise for kings – unlike, say, that other Parthian ludic invention,

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55. Sixt Wetzler, "'Var talað mart um glímur' – Ringkampf im alten Island," in *Sport und Spiel bei den Germanen: Nordeuropa von der römischen Kaiserzeit bis zum Mittelalter*, ed. Matthias Teichert (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 377–99. See also F.J.J. Peters, "The Wrestling in *Grettis Saga*," *Papers on Language and Literature*, 25:3 (1989), pp. 235–41.

56. Rudraneil Sengupta, *Enter the Dangal: Travels through India's Wrestling Landscape* (Noida, UP: Harper Sport, 2016). For more examples from around the world, see Ana Penjak and Hrvoje Karnincic, "Sport and Literature: An Overview of the Wrestling Combats in the Early Literary Texts," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3:5 (March 2013), pp. 49–55.

Figure 6: Bahrām Gur in India

polo.[57] This would explain why there is no mention of wrestling in the *Qābusnāmeh*, for instance, a book whose noble author, a member of the Ziyarid dynasty of northeast Iranian rulers, claimed descent from the historical Kavādh (Qobād) I (r. 488–96 and 498–531 CE), a great-grandson of Bahrām V.[58] *Koshti* was obviously for *pahlavān*s, not for their employers.[59] This is confirmed in the epics that followed Ferdowsi's masterpiece.

LATER EPICS

Most of the later epics derive their material from the Sistan Cycle and narrate the adventures of Rostam's ancestors and descendants.[60] Some of the stories expatiate on those found in the *Shahnameh*, others introduce personages not mentioned in the Book of Kings. With time, Islamic elements enter the plots. While none of these epics come even close to the *Shahnameh* in literary value, they were well known by Persian-speakers and thus tell us something about folk culture. In the following I review some of these later works, my choice being guided solely by availability.

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57. For instances of rulers playing polo, see H.E. Chehabi and Allen Guttmann, "From Iran to All of Asia: The Origin and Diffusion of Polo," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 19:2–3 (June–September 2002), pp. 384–400.

58. Kai Kā'ūs ibn Iskandar, Prince of Gurgān, *A Mirror for Princes: The Qābūs Nāma*, trans. Reuben Levy (London: Cresset Press, 1951), pp. 2–3. (Chapter 19 of the book, incidentally, is on polo.) Pourshariati argues, basing herself on al-Biruni, that the Ziyarids were connected to the Sasanians through one of the Parthian houses of northeastern Iran. See "The Parthians and the Production of the Canonical Shāhnāmas," pp. 351–3.

59. In this Iran differed from medieval Europe; one thinks of the wrestling match between King Henry VIII of England and King Francis I of France at the Camp du Drap d'Or in 1520.

60. For a learned discussion of the continuities and discontinuities between these books and the *Shahnameh*, see van Zutphen, *Farāmarz*, pp. 62–144.

Garshāsbnāmeh

Among the other epics of the Sistan Cycle, the *Garshāsbnāmeh*, written by Asadi Tusi only a few decades after the *Shahnameh*, stands out as being closest to Ferdowsi's masterpiece in terms of literary value.[61] It recounts the exploits of Garshāsb, the great-great-grandfather of Rostam and founder of the dynasty that ruled Sistan. While none of Garshāsb's numerous fights ends in a wrestling bout, he is favorably compared to Rostam in that he was never defeated in wrestling:[62]

زبون کردش اسپندیار دلیر　　به کشتیش آورد سهراب زیر
سپهدار گرشاسب تا زنده بود　　نه‌کردش‌زبون‌کس،نه‌افکنده‌بود

Kok Kuhzādnāmeh

In the Iranian epic tradition, Kok Kuhzād is a bandit chief who, from his mountain fortress (hence his name) near Zābol, makes life difficult for the people of Sistan, to the point where the ruler of that land, Zāl (Rostam's father), has to pay tribute to him. This sad state of affairs is kept from the child Rostam, who learns about it by accident and immediately sets out in the company of Rohām to remedy the situation.[63] There are a number of versions of young Rostam's campaign against Kok Kuhzād; the one used here is a short epic dating from the late eleventh century whose author is unknown.[64]

In the climactic scene, Rostam faces Kok in single combat. Kok offers Rostam to fight with or without weapons, to which Rostam replies that he is ready for both. Kok compares his own powerful build with

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61. Zabih Allāh Safā, *Hamāsehsarā'i dar Irān* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1352/1973), pp. 283–9; and for a summary, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Garšāsp-Nāma" (by François de Blois).

62. Ali b. Ahmad Asadi, *Garshāsbnāmeh*, ed. Parviz Yaghmā'i (Tehran: Donyā-ye Ketāb, 1386/2007), p. 44, ll. 10–11.

63. Safā, *Hamāsehsarā'i*, pp. 318–22.

64. "Kok Kuhzādnāmeh," in *Haft manzumeh-ye hemāsi*, ed. Rezā Ghafuri (Tehran: Markaz-e Pazhuheshi-ye Mirās-e Maktub, 1394/2015), pp. 193–204.

Rostam's and notices that while Rostam is taller, he, Kok, is wider. So he gives himself a better chance if they wrestle, for he can seize the younger man's waist and slam him to the ground like a wild lion:[65]

ز بالای خود دید بالاش بیش ولیکن فزون دید پهنای خویش

...

به دل گفت کشتی به آید مرا به کشتی گرایید باید مرا
که شاید نیابم به کشتی ستم تن خویش بر روی او افگنم
بود کش به کشتی بگیرم میان زنم بر زمینش چو شیر ژیان

Untypically for Iranian epics, they begin by pummeling each other with their fists, since Rostam is also a good pugilist:[66]

تهمتن به مشت اندرآمد نخست که در مشت هم بود چالاک و چست

After exchanging plenty of blows, they finally get down to wrestling. They go at each other like two elephants with iron courage that interlace their trunks:[67]

چو پیلان جنگی بر آشوفتند بسی مشت بریک دگر کوفتند

...

تو گفتی دو پیلند آهن جگر بپیچیده خرطوم بر یک دگر

Their bout is inconclusive, and so they walk five parasangs to drink water from a spring and then resume their fighting. What follows is a much more detailed account of the discrete phases of a throw than anything we have seen so far.

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65. Ibid., p. 200, ll. 174 and 176–8.
66. Ibid., p. 201, l. 183.
67. Ibid., ll. 184 and 186. There is a wrestling hold called *khortum pich*, "trunk twister."

Rostam grips Kok so tightly that everything goes dark for Kok. Four stages of the maneuver are now narrated. First, Rostam lifts Kok up so that the latter's feet are on a level with Rostam's knees. Then he places Kok on top of his own chest. In the third move, he lifts Kok up and puts him on his own shoulders, and in the fourth and final phase he slams him to the ground.[68]

که بر چشم او شد جهان ناپدید — چنان تنگ او را به بر در کشید
رسانید نزدیک زانو به کین — به زور نخستین دو پا از زمین
بر سینهٔ خویش دادش قرار — به زور دوم پر دل نامدار
همی کرد بر دوش او کک خروش — به زور سِیّم بر نهادش به دوش
...
بدان سانش بر کوفت بر خاک بر — به زور چهارم ز بالای سر

Foreshadowing what he will do to his son when he grows up, Rostam now kneels on Kok's chest and kills the chief of the bandits with a dagger Rohām has obligingly handed him:[69]

نشست از بر سینهٔ او دلیر — بدان سان که بر سینهٔ گور شیر
یکی دشنه رهام دادش به دست — سرش را بدان دشنه برّید پست

Subsequently, Rostam goes to Kok's fortress, where he frees a number of beautiful women whom Kok had abducted. Among these women there is also one who has not been touched by her abductor, and it is with her that Rostam returns home to face his parents. When Zāl scolds him for acting brashly, he promises to obey his father's orders thenceforth.

68. Ibid., ll. 204–6, and p. 202, ll. 207–9.
69. Ibid., ll. 212–13.

BORZUNĀMEH

There are in fact two works with this name, both about the adventures of Borzu, son of Sohrāb. The one discussed here is the earlier one of the two, which dates from the eleventh century.[70] When Afrāsiyāb returns from Iran after the war in which Sohrāb was killed, he meets Sohrāb's son Borzu, and encourages him to avenge his father. Borzu is trained by the *pahlavān*s of Turan, and, against the wishes of his mother, sets out for Iran. After a few skirmishes with various Iranian heroes, Borzu finally meets Rostam on the battlefield. Rostam does not know he is fighting his grandson.

They first fight with weapons, but neither achieves victory. Rostam is so impressed by the young man's abilities that he tells him that, although he has lived for over four hundred years, he has never beheld a hero such as Borzu:[71]

مرا سال افزون شد از چارصد که روزی نیامد مرا پیش بَد

...

نه چون تو شنیدم، نه دیدم دگر نه در تخمه ام بست چون تو کمر

After the two part, Rostam looks for ways to avoid another fight. But his stratagem does not work, and they meet again. Their fight goes through the usual stages: first they use weapons on each other, then they grab each other's belts and try to lift each other out of the saddle. They get mixed up, like the trunks of two elephants with iron courage, but to no avail:[72]

گرفته به دو دست بندِ کمر چو شیران آشفته بر یک دگر

...

70. Khvājeh Amid Atā b. Ya'qub, mashhur beh Atā'i Rāzi, *Borzunāmeh*, ed. Seyyed Mohammad Dabirsiyāqi (Tehran: Anjoman-e Āsār va Mafākher-e Farhangi, 1382/2003).

71. Ibid., p. 57, ll. 1366 and 1368.

72. Ibid., p. 71, ll. 1684, 1686 and 1689.

نجنبید بر زین از آن دو یکی نکردند کم کینه را اندکی

...

تو گفتی دو پیلند آهن جگر بپیچیده خرطوم در یک دگر

Rostam tells Borzu that he has had enough of fighting, as his arm and his horse are tired, and proposes that they wrestle. They dismount, tie their horses to their belts (as was customary in that age, the author tells us), and start straining against each other:[73]

چو اسپان ببستند اندر کمر گرفتند مر بازوی یک دگر

...

بکردند بر یک دگر بند سخت ز تن هر دو مانندِ برگ درخت

At one point, Rostam's horse Rakhsh attacks Borzu's horse, which runs away. This causes Borzu to slip, enabling Rostam to grab and throw him to the ground. He kneels on his chest and draws his dagger to kill Borzu:[74]

ز نیروی اسپ آن جهان پهلوان به خاک اندر آمد به زانو نوان

...

به سختی که زد بر زمینش ز کین تو گفتی بلرزید رویِ زمین
چو شیری نشست از برِ سینه اش بر آن تا بخواهد ازو کینه اش
بر آورد خنجر به کین از میان خروشید مانند شیرِ ژیان

But before he can commit prolicide, Borzu's mother intervenes, reveals Borzu's identity, and tells Rostam that he should be ashamed of himself for going around killing his son and grandson on the pretext that Iran and Turan are enemies:[75]

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73. Ibid., p. 72, ll. 1720 and 1722.
74. Ibid., ll. 1730 and 1733, and p. 73, ll. 1734–5.
75. Ibid., p. 73, ll. 1744–5.

که گاهی نبیره کشی گاه پور　　بهانه ترا کین ایران و تور
ترا خود به دیده درون شرم نیست　　جهان را به نزدیکت آزرم نیست

Rostam desists and takes Borzu home to Sistan, where his great-grandfather Zāl greets him with a hearty hug, after which they all have a big meal:[76]

به بر در گرفتش ورا زال ِ زر　　نشاندش مر او را اَبر زین ِ زر
...
به خوردن نهادند یک سر سران　　همه نامداران آن کشوران

Afrāsiyāb does not give up yet, but in the end is beaten.

Shahryārnāmeh

In this relatively short early twelfth-century epic we encounter Rostam's great-grandson Shahryār, son of Borzu.[77] Early on in this epic, Shahryār, as leader of an Indian army, faces Rostam's son Farāmarz in man-to-man combat. The two throw away their swords, gird themselves for battle, dismount from their horses, grab each other around the waist, and wrestle like fierce lions:[78]

فکندند شمشیر ها را ز چنگ　　کمرها گرفتند از کینه تنگ
ز پشت ستوران بزیر آمدند　　دو یل هر دو مانند شیر آمدند
بکشتی گرفتن دو شیر ژیان　　گرفتند مر دیگری را میان

76. Ibid., p. 76, ll. 1817 and 1820.

77. See Safā, *Hamāsehsarā'i*, pp. 311–315.

78. Hakim Osmān-e Mokhtāri, "Shahryārnāmeh," in *Divān-e Osmān-e Mokhtāri*, ed. Jalāl al-Din Homā'i (Tehran: Sherkat-e Enteshārāt-e Elmi va Farhangi, 1382/2003), p. 804, ll. 15–17. On p. 805 a miniature from a manuscript is reproduced which clearly shows Farāmarz and Shahryār grasping each other's belts.

They fight till nightfall, but neither one can gain a victory, until Shahryār reaches for his dagger to kill his grand-uncle:[79]

نه این را ظفر شد نه آنرا شکست سپهبد سوی دشنه یازید دست

But just as he is about to kill Farāmarz, an old *pahlavān* intervenes to tell them that they are relatives, averting another family tragedy.

Bahmannāmeh

The early twelfth-century *Bahmannāmeh* narrates the life and times of King Bahman, who, as son of Esfāndyār, is successor to his grandfather King Goshtāsb, his father having been killed by Rostam.[80] The last three of the book's four parts deal with Bahman's efforts to extract vengeance from Rostam's family, rulers of Sistan, for the death of Esfandyār. Bahman wages war against Rostam's daughters Zar Bānu and Bānu Goshasp.[81]

Battles scenes and duels abound in this epic as well. In the penultimate episode of the first part, Bahman wages battle against Lo'lo', the retainer (and secret lover) of his consort, who has betrayed him. Bahman tells Lo'lo''s troops that he wishes them no harm and challenges him to a duel. The two don their armor and proceed to fight on horseback, but neither can best the other with weapons, so they seize each other's belts and exert force: [82]

گرفتند مر یکدگر را کمر همی زور کردند بر یکدگر

79. Ibid., p. 805, l. 6.

80. A shorter version of Bahman's exploits is included in the *Shahnameh*.

81. Irānshāh ibn Abi al-Kheyr, *Bahmannāmeh*, ed. Rahim Afifi (Tehran: Sherkat-e Enteshārāt-e Elmi va Farhangi, 1370/1991). For a discussion see Safā, *Hamāsehsarā'i*, pp. 298–4, and for a summary see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Bahman-Nāma" (by W.L. Hanaway, Jr.).

82. *Bahmannāmeh*, p. 177, l. 2801.

In the end, the Lo'lo''s horse buckles under, allowing Bahman to lift him up and take him prisoner. In spite of the belt-seizing, the word *koshti* is not used in this episode, nor is it used in other man-to-man combat scenes. In the final episode of the first part, Goshtāsb's vizier tells Bahman that Rostam, whom Esfandyār had appointed Bahman's mentor, has been killed, which allows Bahman to start his campaign against the rulers of Sistan.

The main character in the fourth part is Rostam's grandson Borzin. In one episode, he and his men lose their way and come across a camp of herders whose chief, Burāsb, receives them with utmost hospitality and throws a party (*bazm*) replete with grilled meat, wine, and music for them:[83]

بخوردند و از خوان بپرداختند یکی بزمگاهِ مهی ساختند

...

فلک دود بست از بخارِ کباب ز جرعه زمین مست شد از شراب
زبوی گل و نرگس و یاسمین زمین شد بسانِ بهشت ِ برین
همه ساز آن بارگه سیم ناب همه دل پُر آوازِ چنگ و رباب

A few days later, Burāsb has a big celebration of Nowruz, New Year. On this occasion he promises his beautiful daughter to whomever can best her in a fight on horseback and also defeat his black wrestler. After hosts and guests sit down, an announcer encourages the heroes present to seek fame by becoming the winner:[84]

بدانید کامروز سال ِ نوست گه ِ رامش و جشن کیخسروست
به میدان شوید و بجویید کام بسانِ دلیران بر آرید کام

83. Ibid., p. 512, ll. 8766 and 8768–770.
84. Ibid., p. 515, ll. 8836–7.

When the heroes have assembled on the field, a black man, bare-headed and barefoot, arrives. This is a wrestler with worldwide fame who is smothered in grease from head to foot:[85]

سرِ نامداران در آمد زخواب گرفته به میدان یکایک شتاب
چوشدتودهمیدان‌ازآن‌سروران سیاهی بیامد چو کوه روان
برهنه سر و پای و اندامِ اوی به کُشتی به گیتی شده نامِ اوی
به روغن بمالیده سر تا به پای چو دیوی رمیده ز نامِ خدای

The black wrestler defeats one challenger after the other. In his first bout, he puts his hand between the legs of his opponent, lifts him up, and slams him to the ground with such force that his vertebrae are dislocated:[86]

بغُرید مانندهٔ پیل مست میان دو پایش برون کرد دست
برآوردوزدبرزمینش‌درشت سر مُهرهٔ او برون شد ز پشت

The next one is an Iranian grandee who is killed with a strike to his head:[87]

بیامد یکی نامدار از میان ز تخمِ بزرگانِ ایرانیان
یکی‌مشت‌زدبرسرش‌آن‌سیاه به زخمش چنان نامور شد تباه

After the black wrestler has defeated twenty *pahlavān*s and killed three,[88] one of Borzin's men dares him to confront the star athlete,

85. Ibid., ll. 8838–41.
86. Ibid., p. 516, ll. 8853–4.
87. Ibid., ll. 8856–7.
88. Ibid., p. 518, l. 8884.

reminding him that, since he is of the line of Neyram and a grandson of Rostam, he has wrestling in his nature and lineage:[89]

که تو مایهٔ تخمهٔ نیرمی نبیره جهان پهلوان رستمی
تراهست‌کشتی‌سرشت‌ونژاد کنون داد باید بدین روز داد

Borzin takes off his clothes, and upon seeing his bare body, Burāsb's daughter, who is observing him from behind a curtain, falls in love with him.[90] The Zangi (i.e. Zanzibari) wrestler, however, takes fright – and rightly so, for Borzin smacks him in the face, breaking two of his front teeth, then puts his hand between his opponent's legs, expertly lifts him up, seizes him by the neck, slams him to the ground, and sits on him like a wild lion:[91]

بزد بر دهانش یکی پشتِ دست دو دندان پیشین او را شکست
درون کرد دستش میان دو پای هنر کرد و برکند او را ز جای
به‌گردن بر آورد و زد بر زمین نشست از بَرش همچو شیر عرین

That the poor African wrestler must have been exhausted after twenty-three fights does not seem to diminish Borzin's glory, who then proceeds to defeat Burāsb's daughter in a mounted joust, thereby winning her hand. He later reconciles with Bahman and is named his *jahān pahlavān*.

The language of the wrestling scenes in the *Bahmannāmeh* is worth lingering over. At no point do the contenders seize each other's belts; *koshti* is not associated with *gereftan* and the black wrestler is not called a *koshtigir*. The style of wrestling practiced is no longer belt-wrestling and in fact resembles Greek pankration in that striking is allowed. It also seems to have entertainment value, as it is part of the Nowruz

89. Ibid., p. 517, ll. 8876–7. Neyram, also known as Narimān, is Rostam's great-grandfather, the son of Garshāsb and father of Sām.

90. Ibid., p. 518, ll. 8890–91.

91. Ibid., p. 519, ll. 8898–8900.

festivities. One might speculate that this reflects the cultural milieu of the late eleventh and early twelfth century. The Seljuk rulers, to one of whom the *Bahmannāneh* is dedicated, were fond of wrestling, which was part of their Turkish Central Asian heritage.

Sāmnāmeh

The last of the poems in the Persian Epic Cycle recounts the exploits of Rostam's grandfather Sām and was written in all probability by Khāju of Kerman in the late thirteenth century.[92] Although it is more of a romance in that Sām's amorous adventures in distant lands are the main theme of the book, it contains a number of combat scenes in which Sām inevitably defeats (and often kills) his opponents. In one of his travels, Sām and his two companions encounter a somewhat unkempt and aggressive man hailing from the West called Shāpur. Shāpur defeats Sām's two companions in single combat and ties them together, which irritates Sām and induces him to challenge Shāpur. An armed struggle remains inconclusive, and so Sām proposes that they wrestle to see who is stronger, but without killing each other:[93]

به کشتی بکوشیم با یکدگر ببینیم تا کیست فیروزگر
به نیرو گرت کوفتم بر زمین نبرّم سرت گرچه هستی به کین

Shāpur accepts and girds his loins for battle. They wrestle for many hours, until dawn. Having never faced such a powerful opponent, Sām prays to God for strength. He then grabs Shāpur's waist, passes his hand between Shāpur's legs, lifts him up, slams him to the ground, sits on top of him, and asks him whether he wants to be friend or foe, intimating that if Shāpur chooses the latter branch of the alternative he will be killed:[94]

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92. Safā, *Hamāsehsarā'i*, pp. 335–40.

93. Mahmud b. Ali Khāju-ye Kermāni, *Sāmnāmeh*, ed. Mitrā Mehrābādi (Tehran: Donyā-ye Ketāb, 1386/2007), p. 418.

94. Ibid., p. 419.

پذیرفت شاپور ازو این سخن دلش رای دیگر بیفکند بن
به‌کشتی‌کمر بر میان‌بست‌چست سوی سام پلو در آمد نخست
نهادند سر بر سر یکدگر دو جنگی دو شیر و دو پرخاشگر
...
چنین تا سفیده بر آمد ز کوه زمان و زمین شد ازیشان ستوه
...
بگفت و بنالید بر دادگر ازو خواست نیرو یل نامور
کمرگاه شاپور جنگی گرفت به چنگال گفتی نهنگی گرفت
برون کرد دست از میان دو پا به نیرو درآمد ربودش ز جا
به بالا بر آورد و زد بر زمین نشست از بر سینهٔ او ز کین
...
به من دوست گردی و یا دشمنی بگردی ز کژی و اهریمنی
و گرنه سرت را ببّرم ز تن زخون تنت سازم ایدر کفن

Shāpur elects to stay alive, tells Sām that he is wandering the earth in search of his beloved, and since Sām is doing the same, the two commiserate, become friends, and set off together to look for their respective inamoratas.

Toward the end of the book, Sām battles a *div* who, while human in form, is much bigger. Their armed combat is inconclusive, and the *div* advises Sām to give up the struggle. But Sām tells his opponents that among Iranians it is customary to wrestle when fighting with weapons proves inconclusive:[95]

به پاسخ بدو گفت سام سوار که یک رزم ماندست در کارزار
چنین است آئین ایرانیان که بندد در رزم هر گه میان
به میدان چو ناید سلیحی به بند به تیر و به گرز و به تیغ و کمند
چو این آزمایش‌شود روز جنگ پس آنگه به کشتی بیارند چنگ

95. Ibid., p. 685.

The two wrestle, Sām again prays to God, and manages to throw his opponent.[96] He kneels on his chest and lets him go only to kill him on a later occasion, in the presence of King Manuchehr.

Khāvarānnāmeh

While epics celebrating the feats of pre-Islamic heroes continued to be written after Ferdowsi, there was also some religious opposition to them on the grounds that they distracted from the more legitimate heroes, such as the Prophet's son-in-law Ali b. Abi Tāleb and his uncle Hamza. The result was that pious poets started writing epics about the central figures of Islam, in particular Shiite Islam, in the same meter and style as the *Shahnameh*.[97] The most famous of these is a fifteenth-century work on the battles of Ali in the East (hence the title of the book, *khāvar* meaning "east" in Persian), where he has gone to spread Islam in the company of loyal companions, including the famous Mālek-e Ashtar.[98] While some of the stories related in this work are based on Islamic traditions, others reflect the Persian milieu in which the book was written and are reminiscent of the works we have seen so far. As part of their battles against the infidels of the East, both Mālek-e Ashtar and Ali engage in wrestling bouts. In one of the last episodes of this book, Salsāl, the "fire-worshipping" king of the land of Qām, meets the army of Islam led by Mālek-e Ashtar. Salsāl has ten sons, who bear Persian names from the Sistan Cycle, such as Gudarz, Sām, Giv, etc. Five of these sons are killed in battle, but when Salsāl sends his sixth son to confront the Muslims, they are on the verge of defeat. At this point, Ali suddenly shows up, draws his famous two-pronged sword, and reverses the battle's fortunes. Salsāl becomes curious about Ali and arranges to meet him. When they meet, Ali tries to convert him, but Salsāl refuses, and they decide to fight

96. Ibid., p. 687.

97. On the religious epics, see Safā, *Hamāsehsarā'i*, pp. 377–90.

98. Ebn Husām, *Khāvarānnāmeh: Ebn Husām Khusifi Birjandi: negārehhā va tazhibhā-ye Farhād[,] naqqāsh-e saddeh-ye nohom-e Hejri* (Tehran: Vezārat-e Farhang va Ershād-e Eslāmi, 1381/2002).

it out. First, however, Salsāl enjoys a classic *bazm* feast with music, wine, and grilled meat:[99]

بیا راست مجلس به چنگ و رباب به سر برد شب در شباب و کباب

The next day they meet in battle. In most stereotypical fashion, they first fight on horseback with weapons and clad in armor. When neither can vanquish the other, they praise each other's prowess and attempt to convert each other. When neither wants to convert, Salsāl proposes to Ali that they wrestle. Ali accepts, they grab each other's belts, but being evenly matched, all that their heavy straining achieves is that their belts are torn and their armor is broken. The bout ends inconclusively:[100]

بیا تا زمانی بر این دشت جنگ به کشتی گرفتن بسابیم چنگ

...

دو آشفته بر یکدگر چون پلنگ به کشتی گرفتن گشادند چنگ
گرفتند مر یکدگر را کمر نمودند هر دو ز بازو هنر
به نیروی سر پنجهٔ زورمند فراون گشادند و بستند بند

...

کمرها بدرّید و بگسست پی تن و جوشن و جامه پر خاک و خوی

They disengage, the war continues, and ultimately Ali is victorious and returns to Medina.

Rostamnāmeh

If the Persians are annihilated in the *Khāvarānnāmeh*, other works attempt a synthesis of Persian heritage and Islam by harmonizing

99. Mohammad ibn Hesām al-Din Khowsafi, *Ta'ziyehnāmeh-ye Pārsi: Kholāseh-ye Khāvannāmeh*, ed. Hamid Allāh Morādi (Tehran: Markaz-e Nashr-e dāneshgāhi, 1382/2003), p. 284, l. 4296.

100. Ibid., p. 289, l. 4413, and p. 290, ll. 4416–18 and 4420.

the two world views. In some of these, Rostam meets Ali and is converted to Islam by him, often through the mediation of Solomon (who is considered a prophet in the Islamic tradition).[101] In many of these stories, Rostam is persuaded to accept Islam after he is thrown by Ali in a wrestling bout. In the *Rostamnāmeh*, a recently published short epic written in Safavid times by an anonymous author, Rostam and Ali wrestle on horseback. Rostam seizes Ali's belt, but try as he might, the only result is that he gets a nosebleed:[102]

بیازید چنگ و گرفتش کمر　　چنان قوّتی کرد آن شیر نر
اگر کوه بودی بکندی ز جا　　نجنبید از جای شیر خدا
فروماند بازوی رستم ز کار　　بپیچید بر خود به مانند مار
چه‌فوّاره‌از بینی‌اش‌خون‌روان　　چکان‌گشت‌شدبازوی‌اش‌خون‌روان

Ali only laughs, seizes Rostam's belt, and throws him to the heavens:[103]

بخندید وگفتا که ای زابلی　　ببین قوّت خویش و زور علی
کمرگاه رستم گرفت و ربود　　بینداختش سوی چرخ کبود

After some interesting and eye-opening encounters in heaven, Rostam returns to earth and embraces Islam:[104]

سپهدار ایران‌زنوجان‌گرفت　　ره کفر بگذاشت ایمان گرفت

101. Anonymous, *Rostamnāmeh: Dāstān-e manzum-e mosalmān shodan-e Rostam beh dast-e Ali ('a) beh enzemām-e mo'jezeh-ye mowlā-ye mottaqiyān*, ed. Sajjād Āydenlu (Tehran: Mirās-e maktub, 1387/2008), editor's introduction.

102. Ibid., p. 12, ll. 269–72.

103. Ibid., pp. 12–13, ll. 274–5.

104. Ibid, p. 16, l. 299.

The Muslim Rostam was a perfect metaphor for Safavid Iranian society to reconcile the two dimensions of its identity. There are many more such stories in Iranian folklore, as collected by Anjavi Shirāzi.[105]

Bereshitnāmeh (Āfarineshnāmeh)

Muslim Iranians were not the only ones who cast their religious texts in Persian epic forms. Jews did too, and none more masterfully than the fourteenth-century poet Shāhin of Shirāz.[106] In the last of his four works, the *Bereshitnāmeh* (Book of Genesis), he gives an account of Jacob's famous nocturnal encounter with the angel, where they wrestle until daybreak and Jacob gets hit in the hip (Genesis 32:24–6). Shāhin's version is much embellished, and when the "moon-faced youth," who turns out to be an angel, cannot prevail against Jacob after much struggling, he hits him on the thigh, not on the hip:[107]

پدید آمد برش در شب جوانی هژبری جنگجوئی پهلوانی
ابا یعقوب افتاد او بکُشتی چو شیر شرزه ای بی یار و پُشتی
بهم کشتی گرفتند تا سحرگاه نکردند از کشاکش دست کوتاه
مَلَک بود آن جوان ماه رخسار که با او در کشاکش بود و پیکار
ابا یعقوب پر دل بر نیامد بمردی از وی افزون تر نیامد
بزد سر پنجهٔ محکم برانش که زان آزرده محکم استخوانش
بخورد او درد و با او بود در جنگ نمی کردش رها آسوده از چنگ

The biblical story of Jacob's fight with the angel found its way into mainstream Islam too, for in a sixteenth-century text on wrestling we are told that wrestling was an art that goes back to the Prophet

105. For a discussion see Sorour S. Soroudi, "The Islamization of the Iranian National Hero Rostam as Reflected in Persian Folktales," in *Persian Literature and Judeo-Persian Culture: Collected Writings of Sorour S. Soroudi*, ed. H.E. Chehabi (Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2010), pp. 134–54.

106. Vera B. Moreen, "The 'Iranization' of Biblical Heroes in Judeo-Persian Epics: Shahin's *Ardashīr-nāmah* and *Ezrā-nāmah*," *Iranian Studies*, 29:3–4 (1996), pp. 321–38.

107. [Shāhin Shirāzi], *Shāhin Turāt*, ed. Manuchehr Khubān (Los Angeles: Ketab Corporation, 1999/1378/5759), p. 205.

Jacob, who taught it to his sons, telling them that it would be useful as a defense against their enemies.[108]

Hamāseh-ye Hizom-shekan

Finally, let mention be made of a twentieth-century poetic work that celebrates the life of Abraham Lincoln as the emancipator of slaves. Although the work includes a ten-couplet poem on *pahlavān*s,[109] there is no mention of young Abe Lincoln's famous wrestling match with Jack Armstrong. Should the work ever be republished, perhaps one could interpolate, in time-honored fashion, a few couplets relating to that event. Taking his cue from Bizhan, King Kay Khosrow, and Borzin, Abe seizes Jack's neck with his left hand, his belt with his right hand, and then throws him – as illustrated in a 1949 issue of *Esquire* magazine:

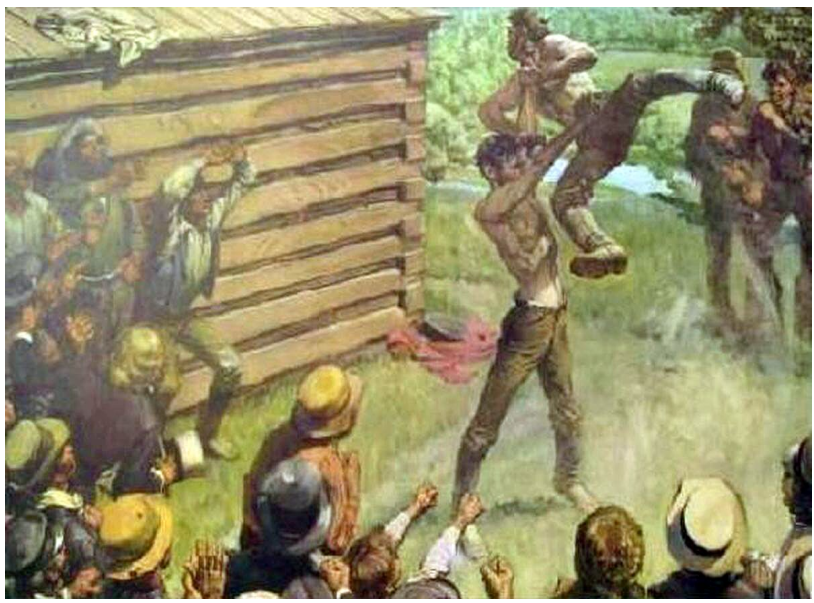

Figure 7: Abraham Lincoln wrestling with Jack Armstrong

108. Mowlānā Hoseyn Vā'ez Kāshefi Sabzevāri, *Fotovvatnāmeh-ye Soltāni*, ed. Ja'far Mahjub (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Bonyād-e Farhang-e Irān, 1350/1971), pp. 306–7.

109. Basij Khalkhāli, *Hamāseh-ye Hizom-shekan* (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye Ettelā'āt, 1344/1965), p. 393.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The stories contained in the *Shahnameh* and the later epics were told and retold by storytellers both in verse and in prose form. They were part of the daily lives of Persian-speaking peoples;[110] most Iranians and quite a few Persian-speakers outside Iran,[111] whether literate or not, were and occasionally still are familiar with them. The fact that a wrestling scene is de rigueur in every epic, whether it belongs to the Sistan Cycle or to the religious imagination, betokens the prominence of wrestling as an agonistic exercise in Iranian society and popular culture.[112] This prominence can be seen in numerous idiomatic sayings that allude to wrestling (analogous to the American "taking it to the mat").[113] Moreover, ideals of Iranian manhood included knowledge of the rudiments of wrestling until the 1950s,[114] to wit the observation of Terence O'Donnell, an American who spent fifteen years in Iran, that

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110. Kumiko Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

111. See, for instance, Jūra Kamol, *The Story of Barzu: As Told by Two Storytellers from Boysun, Uzbekistan*, ed. R. Rahmonī and G.R. van den Berg (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2013).

112. For a sympathetic exploration of this linkage (which actually gave me the idea for writing the present article), see Marcello di Cintio, *Poets and Pahlevans: Journey into the Heart of Iran* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2006).

113. Such as "*kenār-e gowd neshesteh migeh lengesh kon*" ("he sits beside the mat and yells: 'pin him'" = he wants others to do the hard work), "*kondasho keshid bālā*," "*Yāruro zarbeh kard*" ("he pinned him" = wiped the floor with him), "*Yā Ali lengesh kon mā ham rush*" ("go and pin him, and then I'll help" = you go and do the dirty work). I thank Najmedin Meshkati for pointing the latter two out to me. In Turkish, too, there are many expressions that allude to wrestling.

114. Mas'ud Noqrehkār's novel *Bachchehhā-ye a'māq* (Saarbrücken: Nawid, 1991) is very instructive in this regard, as it provides many examples. To be taken really seriously in Tehran's red-light district Shahr-e Now, for instance, it helped if a man had cauliflower ears. *Be koshti padid āyad az mard mard* indeed!

"Iranian men tussle with each other to the end of their lives."[115] As the presumed author of the *Sāmnāmeh* put it, *Chonin ast ā'in-e irāniyān*!

One notable aspect of many if not most of the single-combat episodes, both armed and unarmed, narrated in the epics is that they take place between blood relatives whom fate has placed on opposite sides of a conflict. Perhaps the cultural roots and/or consequences of this incessant intra-family feuding bear some further exploration.[116]

The mostly formulaic descriptions of wrestling scenes raise the question as to whether the moves and holds they contain are literary tropes or whether they have a basis in actual practice. If we confine our search to present-day Iran, we will find only little continuity with the fighting arts of the mythical and legendary heroes. However, if we extend our view to Central Asia, or "Greater Khorasan," matters are different. This is not astonishing, since various Turkic and Iranic peoples have rubbed shoulders in Central Asia and Greater Khorasan for centuries, if not millennia.

Let us begin with horseback wrestling, which, as we have seen, often opens two *pahlavān*s' fight in the post-*Shahnameh* works. That the Parthians were exceptional equestrians is well known, but they shared this prowess with neighboring steppe peoples.[117] Today, the Kyrgyz practice belt-wrestling on horseback, a game called *Er enish* (Эр эңиш) in Kyrgyz (see figure 8):

Typically, the *pahlavān*s of the epics then dismount and start belt-wrestling on foot. What is called *pahlavāni* wrestling in Iran today does not begin with the contestants seizing each other's belts, and the only echo of the etymology of the word *koshti* is the *pish-qabz*, a sturdy

115. Terence O'Donnell, *Garden of the Brave in War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 41.

116. This pattern is not unique to Persian literature and mythology, of course. For an exploration of the theme in medieval German literature, see Wolfgang Harms, *Der Kampf mit dem Freund oder Verwandten in der deutschen Literatur bis um 1300* (Munich: Eidos Verlag, 1963).

117. For a classic study, see Carl Diem, *Asiatische Reiterspiele: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte der Völker* (Berlin: Deutscher Archiv-Verlag, 1941).

Figure 8: Kyrgyz horseback belt-wrestling, *Er enish*

waistband at the top of the breeches[118] worn in traditional wrestling that the contestants may seize in order to unbalance their opponent. There are, however, many regional belt-wrestling styles in Central Asia: Turkmen *göreş* (called *koshti torkamani* in Persian), Uzbek *kurash*, and Kyrgyz *alysh* come to mind. Among Persian-speakers, the local style in the city of Herat, one of the centers of historical Khorasan located in today's Afghanistan, resembles the wrestling depicted in the *Shahnameh*.[119]

Finally, there is the bone-breaking throw that so often decides a fight in the epics. It has become an archetypal move not only in literature but also in the visual arts, as we find it on many miniature illustrations of Sa'di's story in the *Golestān* about an old wrestling master who defeats his disrespectful student using the one hold he has not taught him.[120]

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118. On which see Patricia L. Baker, "Wrestling at the Victoria and Albert Museum," *Iran*, 35 (1997), pp. 73–80.

119. The belt is called *kamar-kash* in Herat.

120. See Sa'di, *Golestān*, ed. Gholām-Hoseyn Yusofi (Tehran: Khvārazmi, 1373/1994), p. 79 (Chapter 1, anecdote 27).

Figure 9: The old wrestler and his pupil, from the *Golestān* of Sa'di

The violence attending narrations of this throw must seem incongruous to modern readers familiar with the normative definition of a *pahlavān* as an upright man who values chivalry and fair play. Such incongruence is not unique to Iran. In the land where the very notion of "fair play" was invented, we have Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like it*, where the might of the wrestler Charles is recalled in these words: "The eldest of the three wrestled with Charles, the duke's wrestler; which Charles in a moment threw him and broke three of his ribs, that there is little hope of life in him: so he served the second, and so the third. Yonder they lie; the poor old man, their father, making such pitiful dole over them that all the beholders take his part with weeping." And when Charles is unexpectedly defeated, "he cannot speak" and has to be borne away.[121] Moreover, the injuries in *As You Like It* are mild compared to the death that awaits the losers in Thomas Lodge's *Rosalind or Euphues' Golden Legacy* (1590), the text that was Shakespeare's main source for his play.[122] Admittedly, both the Persian and the English authors probably indulged in a bit of artistic license, *eghrāq-e shā'eräneh*, to enhance the drama of their fight scenes. Still, a closer scrutiny of written sources from Iran reveals that the ideal *pahlavān* of the twentieth century is in many ways an invented tradition, motivated by the need to lend nobility to practices that were threatened by the introduction of more prestigious modern sports. Thus an unpublished physical-education manual written in 1875 lists fifty-one wrestling moves, of which the thirty-fourth, called *dast dar mokhālef*, bears a certain resemblance to the throws narrated in the epics. The author even quotes (or composes) a popular quatrain encapsulating this move, showing that if poets appreciated wrestling, wrestlers also valued poetry:

دشمنانرا همه با خویش موالف دارد　　طرف‌دستی‌است‌که‌در فن‌مخالف‌دارد
کش‌دست‌توی‌و دگر دست‌در مخالفش　　بردار از زمین و بسوی سما ببر

121. *As You Like It: Updated Edition*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 101 and 104.

122. Michael Hattaway, introduction to ibid., pp. 46–7. For more detail, see Cynthia Marshall, "Wrestling as Play and Game in As You Like It," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 33:2 (Spring 1993), pp. 265–87.

And the counter to this move is to slap one's opponent's face with the sole of one's foot.[123] While dangerous and demeaning moves have been eliminated from many combat sports,[124] including traditional Iranian wrestling, mishaps still happen: a few years ago, a competitor was killed after being devastatingly thrown by a much heavier opponent in a *bāchukheh* (the Kurdish wrestling style of northern Khorasan in which athletes wear a short jacket) tournament. (This death led to the introduction of weight classes in the sport.)[125]

The Parthian words *koshti* and *pahlavān* have had a worldwide career; they can be found as loanwords in many languages in a vast area stretching from the Balkans to the islands of Southeast Asia. By the same token, no Persian name has historically been as popular among non-Iranians as Rostam, which can be found, albeit in slightly altered forms, in the same geographic expanse.[126] In South Asia, the name 'Rustam' is the very epitome of physical strength (*pace* Asadi). Until independence in 1947, the wrestling champion of India was called 'Rustam-i Hind,' and since independence Rostam has become one of Bollywood's answers to Italian peplum films, featuring the adventures of mighty heroes in lands near and far. In sum, while Ferdowsi may have thought that he did not have much to say about the Arsacids, Parthian cultural traditions and themes he first codified a thousand years ago live on, both inside and outside Iran.

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123. Ali Akbar b. Mehdi al-Kāshāni, "Ganjineh-ye koshti" (Manuscript R.C. 8781, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris), p. 30. I thank Philippe Rochard for providing me with a copy of this manuscript and for locating this passage for me.

124. The classic example is the derivation of relatively "gentle" judo from the much rougher jujitsu. For a discussion see Benoit Gaudin, "La codification des pratiques martiales: une approche socio-historique," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 179 (2009), pp. 4–31.

125. Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani, "*Bā čuxe* Wrestling: A Traditional Wrestling Art from Iran," *Revista de Artes Marciales Asiáticas*, 9:2 (2014), p. 118.

126. For details see Chehabi, "Recovering Asia's Lost West," pp. 308–10.

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Figure 1: The Sackler Bowl
Freer Gallery of Art and Ar Bodleian, Ouseley 176, fol. 170r thur Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Arthur M. Sackler, S1987.2.31

Figure 2: Silver Bowl in the Cleveland Museum of Art
Bowl, 500-700. Iran, Sasanian, 6th-8th century. Silver; overall: 5 x 13.4 cm (1 15/16 x 5 1/4 in.). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 1966.369

Figure 3: Rostam kills Sohrāb
Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase – Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, S1986.259

Figure 4: Grabbing the Girdle
Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Diez Album

Figure 5: Rostam and Pulādvand
University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ouseley 176, fol. 170r

Figure 6: Bahrām Gur
"Bahram Gur Exhibiting his Prowess in Wrestling at the Court of Shangul, King of India," Folio from the First Small Shahnama (Book of Kings). Metropolitan Museum, Public Domain.

Figure 7: Lincoln
Previously published in *Esquire* magazine, July 1949.

Figure 8: Kyrgyz horseback belt-wrestling

Figure 9: The old wrestler and his pupil, from the *Golestān* of Sa'di
Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: The Art and History Collection, LTS 1995.2.31