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Reflection of Martial Arts in the Iranian Performing Arts

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the influence of martial arts on performing arts in Iran. The impact of various performing arts and martial arts on each other has been the subject of study by several researchers. Despite Iran being an ancient and vast country with a variety of cultures, religions, and ethnicities, there has yet to be any research into the influence of martial arts on performing arts in Iran. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the performing aspects of martial arts, which can be considered a performing art, before analyzing the effects of martial arts on the performing arts of Iran. These elements are pattern practice [kata], acrobatics, and other spectacular performing elements that are remarkable in martial arts combat and training. Additionally, we analyzed the history of those Iranian performing arts that were evidently influenced by martial arts, such as martial dances, Iranian traditional wrestling, and other ancient Iranian performances, such as Magophonia and Zurkhaneh. The study was conducted using library and internet sources and a descriptive-analytical approach.

Keywords: Performing Arts; Martial Arts; Wrestling; Martial Dance; Ritual.

Introduction

In the Western context, Iranian art is predominantly recognized through forms such as Ta'ziyeh and traditional Iranian theatrical traditions like shadow performances. Substantiating this assertion is evident in recent publications from reputable peer-reviewed journals. For instance, Milad Azarm's article, "Shadow Performance in Iran," delves into the examination of this dramatic form in Iran, providing insights into the factors contributing to its decline following the establishment of the Safavid Shiite government in the 16th century.¹ Another noteworthy publication is found in the prestigious TDR journal, featuring an article titled "Investigating Early Dramaturgy and Theatre Directing in the Shabih'khani of the Qajar Era." In this article, the authors draw upon recently unearthed manuscripts from the Qajar era (1789 to 1925) that feature annotations and stage directions. Through these valuable resources, the authors undertake an interpretation of the directorial and dramaturgical aspects of Ta'ziyeh.² The significance of this research is underscored by an interview with the authors conducted by the Cambridge University Press YouTube channel. However, it is noteworthy that the majority of these scholarly endeavors concentrate on well-established Iranian arts, with limited research available in the domain of martial arts in Iran. The existing academic focus has been primarily on theatrical and traditional forms, leaving a gap in the exploration and understanding of martial arts within the Iranian cultural landscape.

Iran is recognized worldwide for its ancient civilization. Arabs invaded Iran in the seventh century, and according to historical records, "the Mongol invasion of Iran [...] occurred in the thirteenth century".³ Undeniably, the invasions of Alexander, the Mongols, and the Arabs destroyed many historical writings by Iranians. Therefore, we inevitably obtain most of our information about the history of Iran by studying the remaining visual works and some writings of non-Iranians, such as the Greeks, who were once enemies of the Persians. Although some attribute this to the lack of ancient Iranian historians or the lack of written culture among Iranians, Herodotus, known as "the Father of History," mentioned the existence of Persian historians who lived before him.⁴

Martial arts and performing arts occasionally blend together to create unified artistic works. A prime example of this is the Indonesian martial art form known as Pencak Silat, which

¹ Azarm, "Shadow Performance in Iran," 793–809.

² Kouchek-zadeh and Azarm, "Investigating Early Dramaturgy and Theatre Directing in the Shabih'khani of the Qajar Era," 7–36.

³ Azarm, "Shadow Performance in Iran," 5.

⁴ Herodotus, *Ancient History of Herodotus*, 32.

showcases spectacular forms and techniques that are also featured in the Randai Ritual.⁵ Increasingly, researchers of performing arts and martial arts in the modern world have focused their attention on issues like this. Most of these researchers hope to find common ground and a deeper understanding of martial arts and performing arts by analyzing the origins and studying the indigenous rituals of each region, which may be appropriate for actors, performers, and martial artists. The modern perspectives on martial arts that limit them to unarmed fighting techniques for self defense, abstracted motions for self-cultivation, or the use of antiquated weaponry for aesthetics or health are at odds with most prior practices. In fact, the performance of martial arts has its origins in ritual and entertainment.⁶ Studying martial arts and performing arts raises questions about their connection from the past to the present and the differences between them. Obviously, a deep comprehension of the history of martial and performing arts is imperative for finding a suitable answer to these questions. Therefore, initially, we need to examine the origins of martial arts and performing arts.

The Origin of Martial Arts

Despite numerous artistic pieces depicting fighting left behind by various ancient civilizations, the precise origin of martial arts remains vague. The earliest evidence of combat is in drawings of Egyptian pyramids, which date back to 3400 BC. Among the ruins of Mesopotamia or Babylon, archaeologists discovered reliefs depicting battles originating about 3000 BC, and drawings and sketches found in Vietnam from the year 2879 BC depict specific forms of conflict involving the wielding of a bow, spears, swords, and sticks.⁷ Remarkably, cave paintings in Spain from 6,000 to 10,000 years ago provide evidence of organized humans engaging in combat with bows and arrows. Additionally, burial sites from the Epipaleolithic or early Neolithic period contained skeletons displaying damage from weapons in both Germany and Jebel Sahaba in northern Sudan.⁸ It is important to consider that the production of weapons in Iran also has a long history, with the first weapon uncovered in Iran dating back to the Paleolithic era.⁹

⁵ Abdul Latiff, "Revisiting Pencak Silat: The Malay Martial Arts in Theatre Practice and Actor Training," 379.

⁶ Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century*, 3.

⁷ Piechocki and Zukow, *Humanities Dimension of Physiotherapy, Rehabilitation, Nursing and Public Health*, 21.

⁸ Hamblin, *Warfare in the Ancient Near East to 1600 BC: Holly Warriors at the Dawn of History*, *Nursing and Public Health*, 15.

⁹ Shateri, Ahmadi, and Ghasemi, "The Manifestation of Religious Beliefs on the Religious Inscriptions of Safavid and Qajar Swords," 97.

The Origin of Spectacle and Performing Arts

What is the origin of the performing arts? Who was the first to perform in the presence of another person? Various researchers have provided varying answers to these questions based on the available evidence. The latest evidence suggests that the oldest known musical instruments are flutes and pipes made from bird bone and mammoth ivory. These instruments date back to approximately 40,000 years ago and were discovered in the Swabian Jura region situated in the south-west of Germany, specifically in the Hohle Fels, Vogelherd, and Geißenklosterle caves.¹⁰ It should be noted that scholars have provided diverse opinions on the origins of theater and the dramatic arts, which can be helpful alongside the intricate debate on the background of the performing arts. The best-known theory of theater claims that theater originated from myths and rituals and that ancient societies tried to affect the powers that influenced their lives by performing these rituals. Therefore, they formalized specific actions as rituals or ceremonies whenever they discovered a clear connection between specific activities and the results they wanted.¹¹ However, there are other theories in addition to the theory of ritual origin. Storytelling is another theory that believes narrating and hearing narratives are primal human pleasures. These theorists posit that, occasionally throughout history, storytellers have recited tales or represented events by assuming different roles and enacting pantomime. Also, some theories suggest that theater may have originated from animal imitation or as a form of narrative dance. Aristotle held the opinion that humans are inherently inclined to mimicry, finding enjoyment in mimicking people, objects, and actions as well as observing such imitations. Fantasy, or fiction and drama, allows people to internalize their fears, come to terms with them, and experience their desires in fiction and fantasy rather than reality.¹²

Theatrical Aspects of Martial Arts (Kata-Based Instruction)

Before we deal with the history of martial arts and performing arts in Iran, it must first be clear to us what elements of martial arts we can consider in the performing arts. We must first answer the question: since when in the history of martial arts has a martial artist performed in front of an audience or several audiences? In other words,

¹⁰ Killin, "The origins of music: Evidence, theory, and prospects," 5.

¹¹ Brockett and Hildy, *History of the Theatre*, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4-5.

when did the reflection of martial arts in the performing arts of the world begin? We can answer this question based on the available evidence as follows: since the existence of a martial art, because without teaching martial arts techniques to another, a martial art will not exist, and without two elements called a master and a trainee, martial arts will not make sense. Martial arts need a master who practically teaches the principles and correct manner of training, fighting, and confronting the opponent and supervises the training and struggles of their students. Obviously, this process, in addition to being educational, is also theatrical, because teaching martial arts requires the master to perform the correct movements to teach their students, as well as a performance that includes what the students have learned from their master. In fact, this is the reason that every martial art has a codified set of educational and theatrical movements based on the principles of that martial art called form. This instructional instrument, well-known as "Kata" in Japanese, "Xing" in Mandarin, and "Hyung" in Korean, is employed as the principal instructional approach for transmitting and acquiring martial arts knowledge. It is a crucial element of traditional martial arts systems in many Eastern Asian countries. While the English translation for the word "kata" is "form" or "forms," this lacks informative value and may lead to misinterpretation. The concept of kata training is more accurately represented by the term "pattern practice."¹³

There are other definitions of kata that facilitate a better understanding of why kata, or "pattern practice," is a performing art and to which category of performing arts it belongs. Kata is "a set combination of positions and movements [as in karate] performed as an exercise."¹⁴ An exercise consisting of several of the specific movements of a martial art, especially a pattern prescribed for defending oneself against several attackers, is used in Judo and Karate training."¹⁵ Considering these definitions, a question arises: can we view "pattern practice" or martial arts as a form of choreographed performance and dance? It is quite clear when considering the forms of Wushu, Aikido, Capoeira, Kung Fu, Tai Chi, and other martial arts that the forms are more similar to dance than form. We get closer to the answer to this question by looking at the definitions of choreography. "Choreography is the art of

¹³ Green, *Martial Arts of the World: A-Q*, 135.

¹⁴ "Kata Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster."

¹⁵ "Dictionary.Com | Meanings & Definitions of Kata."

making dances, the gathering and organization of movement into order and pattern."¹⁶ Choreography is "the skill of combining movements into dances to be performed."¹⁷ Other definitions also suggest that choreography is an art that creates a pattern for a performing dance by combining and arranging movements. If we want to analyze this issue with more scrutiny, we must keep in mind that:

Dance design encompasses the elements of space, time, and energy [effort] as a basis; specific design elements include: the types of movements or steps, the number of people, relationships or formations, dance structure and type, dance accompaniment, costumes and other accouterments, and the performing space [which may include the time of day, if important].¹⁸

In addition to the required space for performing the form, the timing of the motions, the energy consumed, and the force applied during performance are all factors that are taken into consideration while performing each "pattern practice." Similarly, the types of movements and steps, the number of people present in the performance, the structure and composition of the form and its type, the companions [fighters] who are added to the performance during the performing [in real form or in the performer's imagination], the clothes, and also other accessories for performing [such as cold weapons such as Nunchaku and a sword] are all pre-determined and organized before the performing. A clear sample of such forms, in which all these elements are well visible, are the Tai Chi and Wushu forms. Therefore, based on the definitions and study of the elements of choreography and rehearsal pattern, we conclude that if "pattern practice" is a kind of dance, then the creation of a "pattern practice" also is a kind of choreography [dance design], and the creators of these forms could be one of the oldest choreographers in history. Common definitions of dance describe it as the movement of the body rhythmically, "usually to music and within a given space, for the purpose of expressing an idea or emotion, releasing energy, or simply taking delight in the movement itself."¹⁹

..[Isadora Duncan and] such eminent theorists as Merle Armitage and Rudolf von Laban, and scholars like Curt Sachs, in addition to countless dancers judging introspectively, accept the naturalistic doctrine that dance is a free discharge either of surplus energy or of emotional excitement.²⁰

¹⁶ "Dance - Choreography, Movement, Expression | Britannica."

¹⁷ "Choreography | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary."

¹⁸ Kassing, *History of Dance*, 19.

¹⁹ Mackrell, "Dance | Definition, Characteristics, Types, History, People, & Facts | Britannica."

²⁰ Copeland and Cohen, *What is Dance?*, 30.

But we must not forget that "dance is human movement created and expressed for an aesthetic purpose."²¹ Therefore, any "pattern practice" that also has an aesthetic aspect can be considered a dance.

The majority of martial art forms possess an aesthetic quality, and in most cases, these forms have a historical background in public shows and court performances. Even today, we see martial arts forms in modern martial dances, martial arts films, and some traditional performances, such as the Randai ritual in Indonesia. Furthermore, martial arts forms that encompass all the elements mentioned can be seen in Wushu, Capoeira, and other martial arts, which fit the definitions mentioned as well. Therefore, the pattern practices that can be performed and have theatrical facets can be considered a kind of choreographed martial dance.

Theatrical Aspects of Martial Arts (Kata as a Ritual)

Given that certain pattern practices have been longstanding rituals in certain ancient countries, such as China, it is imperative that we examine the relationship between pattern practice and ritual. To determine this relationship, we must first examine the background of ritual and theories about its formation before turning to existing definitions. The question is, can we consider pattern practice a kind of ritual? According to Will Durant, the earliest dances were inspired by the movements of both humans and animals, as well as the imitation of events and actions that eventually led to opera and theater. Durant cites examples of tribal groups in Australia that performed dances and plays with symbolic meanings. For instance, some tribes performed an erotic dance next to a pit decorated with shrubs to symbolize the vulva and threw their spears into the pit at the end of the dance. Other tribes performed a play about death and resurrection in which the dancers pretended to be dead and concealed their heads behind branches, then rose up with a fervent, victorious chant in response to their leader's command, symbolizing rebirth. The removal of rhythm from these performances caused the dance to transition into the theater.²² From this point of view, Durant's theory is similar to Aristotle's theory. Aristotle believed that epic poetry, comedy, tragedy, dithyrambic poetry, and

²¹ Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body*, 49.

²² Durant, *Our Oriental Heritage: the Story of Civilization*, 88–89.

instrumental and lyrical music are all imitations, and we can differentiate them by their objects, modes, and media of imitation.²³ By adopting Durant and Aristotle's theories as criteria and recognizing the art of imitation as a source of both rituals and the performing arts, it becomes more apparent that martial arts share a common history with the performing arts. This is because ancient martial arts styles, such as some Kung Fu styles, clearly imitate the movements and fighting techniques of animals such as tigers, monkeys, eagles, and other animals that require separate analysis and examination. These styles were created for combat and were also performed for display purposes throughout history, and some of them are still performed today. In other words, the pattern practices of these styles are part of the martial arts that are derived from the art of imitation, and by performing choreographed movements, they are usually performed in the form of martial dance. Additionally, it can be helpful to take a closer look at the existing definitions of ritual. Ritual is defined as "the performance of ceremonial acts prescribed by tradition or by sacerdotal decree,"²⁴ or "a set of fixed actions and sometimes words performed regularly, especially as part of a ceremony."²⁵

In addition to these definitions, we can also use the functions of rituals to identify and distinguish them. Oscar Brockett divides rituals into five categories based on their nature. First, ritual is a kind of perception that tries to describe the human condition and how it interacts with the outside world. Second, since early people had no written language, ritual was used as a medium for passing down knowledge and tradition. As a result, we can think of it as having a didactic nature. Third, since ancient times, people have performed rituals to affect the forces that can influence their lives. Fourth, ritual is frequently employed to honor various things, such as the gods, a totem, history, or a victory. Fifth, rituals may be used for recreation and entertainment. Brockett believes that the spectacle, formal patterns, and skill of the performers give pleasure to even the most serious ceremony.²⁶ Finally, based on the definitions of ritual and "pattern practice", we can say that "pattern practices" or martial arts forms are a kind of ritual. Because they are a set of fixed and conventional actions that are often performed in a ceremony. The fact that "pattern

²³ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 3.

²⁴ Penner, "Ritual | Religious, Cultural & Social Practices | Britannica."

²⁵ "Ritual | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary."

²⁶ Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, 4–5.

practice" is a ritual becomes clearer to us when we compare their functions with the functions of the rituals. First, just as rituals show a certain philosophy and worldview of a society, "pattern practices" are also formed from principles derived from a particular philosophy, like the "pattern practices" of Tai Chi, which are derived from Taoism. Second, similar to rituals, "pattern practices" serve a didactic purpose and function as a medium for passing down the fundamental principles and knowledge of each martial art to succeeding generations based on the specific philosophy inherent to that martial art. Third and fourth, it is interesting that many of the pattern practices and martial dances [especially in East Asia] were also often done in veneration of deceased rulers and other dignitaries and to connect with supernatural forces, such as the spirits of the past. Professor Dr. Lorge, the Professor of Asian Studies at Vanderbilt University, believes that Chinese dances that were staged in veneration of the prior rulers in the court may have had a religious or spiritual component. His view is that categorizing these dances as "religious" or "spiritual" depends on how you define them, but they evidently engaged our emotions more than just our mind. According to Lorge, if we define "spiritual" as linking to certain emotional human requirements that are not intellectual or as linking to the spirits of the nobles of the Zhou and Shang dynasties, then we should acknowledge these dances as spiritual, and considering that they were performed for the spirits' benefit, they can also be considered "religious." He remarks that Chinese martial arts have been taught for much more than just combat since their origin, even before the emergence of the various schools of thought from the Warring States period and even prior to the advent of Buddhism in China and its emergence in India.²⁷ The fifth function, which is another commonality between ritual and pattern practice, is their ability to provide entertainment and spectacle, as discussed earlier. Therefore, it can be concluded that most pattern practices with an ancient background share many of the same functions as rituals. As a result, "pattern practice" can be defined as a type of ritual that involves choreographed movements and martial dances, often derived from the art of imitation. Based on these definitions, pattern practices that historically incorporated a theatrical aspect can be considered a part of the reflection of martial arts in the history of performing arts.

²⁷ Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century*, 28.

Theatrical Aspects of Martial Arts (The Theatrical Nature of Fighting and Acrobatics in Martial Arts)

Martial arts involve combat between practitioners who creatively use their learned weapons and techniques. This form of performance has been popular for a long time and continues to attract large audiences globally, including through professional wrestling, martial arts films, and other shows. Similar to the spectators of ancient Greece and Rome who watched boxing and gladiatorial contests, modern audiences are drawn to martial arts competitions, professional wrestling events, martial arts films, and other shows that showcase the art of combat. Though the nature and audience of these shows may differ across countries, specific research projects must be undertaken to fully understand the history of martial arts in that region.

While acrobatics alone cannot be regarded as martial arts, they are integral to some forms, such as Wushu, Muay Boran, and Capoeira, and enhance the theatrical quality of the performance. Therefore, any martial art that includes acrobatics or other theatrical elements can be considered a type of performing art. Additionally, martial arts cannot exist without both the component of combat and the component of pattern practice. Pattern practice is an essential aspect of teaching martial arts to others, while the theatrical nature of combat and acrobatics adds an entertaining element to the performance. As a result, all martial arts can be considered a type of performing art.

Iranian Martial Arts and Performing Arts in the Median and Achaemenid Eras

Prior to delving into the historical evidence, it is better to consider martial arts training in ancient Iran to discover whether martial arts training was widely practiced in that era. And did the use of martial training to acquire martial skills in ancient Iran influence the martial performances or martial scenes of that period?

Historical sources consider Cyaxares [a king of the Medes] to be the first to establish a regular army for the Medes. Cyaxares led the Medes to their victory over the Assyrian warrior tribes, who were strong in the art of fighting, by training them to fight on foot and on horseback with weapons such as swords, bows, and spears.²⁸ Some historians remarked on another noticeable subject. The accounts of Herodotus tell us that the sons of the Achaemenids were not allowed to be with their father until

²⁸ Sha'bani, *The book of Iran: a selection of the history of Iran*, 8.

they had reached the age of five and were to stay with their mother; but between the ages of five and twenty, their fathers taught them horseback riding, archery, and honesty.²⁹ In addition, Xenophon claims that in the Achaemenid era, the children of Persian nobles had to learn archery and spear-throwing from the ages of sixteen to seventeen.³⁰ Also, Darius the Great, in an inscription found in his tomb in the Naqsh-e Rostam, clearly states that he was highly skilled in hand-to-hand combat and the use of his hands and feet in combat, and he also had special skills in horseback riding, javelin throwing, and archery, both on foot and on horseback.³¹ It is obvious that Darius the Great did not acquire these skills without training. This text offers a narration of Darius the Great's proficiency in head-to-head combat, indicating that he experienced several martial arts exercises and head-to-head combats that led him to comprehend his abilities. In fact, this text proves the existence of martial arts training and head-to-head combat training among the Persians, which at least was significant for training ancient Persian soldiers. Additionally, it is claimed that in ancient Iran, Persian men and especially soldiers participated in various competitions, such as chariot racing, swimming, weightlifting, horse racing, and shooting arrows from horseback at the highest speed their horse could reach.³² Undoubtedly, the most prominent type of combat training among the Persians took place in their army, especially in the Achaemenid Immortal Corps, which comprised ten thousand special soldiers that, whenever one of them died, became ill, or was wounded, another soldier would immediately fill the vacancy. The Immortal Corps tried to always be ready for battle with constant combat training and continuous military training, and some of them were also responsible for protecting the king.³³ It was for this reason that the Immortal Corps ordinarily recruited members of the nobility or high-ranking families.³⁴ Their chief weapon was the bow, and they were also armed with other weapons, such as spears and short swords.³⁵ All this evidence signifies that the engraving of the image of the bow on the Achaemenid coins and the popularity of archery among the ancient Persians were not without reason. Even in the Behistun

²⁹ Herodotus, *Ancient History of Herodotus*, 43.

³⁰ Xenophon, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia or Institution of Cyrus, and the Hellenics*, 6.

³¹ Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, 212.

³² Nardo, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 270.

³³ Gabriel, *The Culture of War: Invention and Early Development*, 72.

³⁴ Waters, *Ancient Persia: A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire, 550–330 BCE*, 110.

³⁵ Batchelor, *The Ancient Greeks for Dummies*, 70.

inscription in Harsin city, in Kermanshah Province, we see Darius the Great holding a bow and placing his foot on the body of Gaumata, and behind him stands another archer and a spear-wielding soldier.³⁶ Remarkably, the Behistun inscription is a valuable source of information for researching an ancient festival that, according to Herodotus, was called Magophonia.³⁷ Some researchers, such as Professor Bahram Bayzai, believe that Magophonia was a play or performance that depicted the story of the successful coup of Darius the Great against Gaumata, which probably later turned into other traditional spectacles such as the Shah-Koshi festival [the celebration of killing the king] or Dey Be-Mehr ritual, the Mocking Crassus Carnival performance in the Parthian era, Kuse Barneshin,³⁸ Mir-e Nowruzi, and Omar-Koshan.³⁹ According to Herodotus, the ancient Iranians had a yearly festival to celebrate Darius's victory over Gaumata, which caused so much fear among the Magi that on that day no Magi would come out of the dwelling for fear of being killed. Similarly, in the Behistun inscription, we observe nothing but a dramatic narrative that confirms most of Herodotus' statements. Ctesias [a Greek historian] also recounted a story similar to Herodotus' accounts of Magophonia.⁴⁰ According to the theory of these researchers, if we consider Magophonia as a play or performance, it can be concluded that it was performed either realistically or non-realistically. In fact, whether the performance of Magophonia was realistic or non-realistic, it definitely had combat scenes. If we accept that Magophonia was performed so realistically that it deterred the Magi from leaving their homes for fear of being slain, then it is not difficult to imagine that, according to the historical sources of the play's plot, this realistic performance must have included representing some of the coup plotters' fight against Gaumata troops. Therefore, Magophonia can be considered a kind of theatrical mock combat in ancient Iran that possibly had many fight scenes. Also, we can assume that this realistic show had actors with adequate acting and combat prowess to enact these fighting scenes. Nevertheless, if there was even no realistic combat in this show, since the story of this show was a coup and an armed confrontation against Gaumata, it certainly had non-realistic fight scenes. The crucial question that is evoked here is:

³⁶ Maspero, *The Passing of the Empires: 850 B.C. to 330 B.C.*, 681.

³⁷ Vaux, *Ancient History from the Monuments: Persia from the Earliest Period to the Arab Conquest*, 37.

³⁸ Bayzai, *A Study on Iranian Theatre*, 25.

³⁹ Rubin, *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre: Volume 5: Asia/Pacific*, 242.

⁴⁰ De Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature*, 377.

What was the level of expertise of the actors of Magophonia in performing the combat scenes of this show? Although there are very few sources available to answer this question, it is unimaginable that in the vast territory of the Achaemenids, performing the scenes of this important show was entrusted to people without sufficient performing and martial skills; otherwise, Herodotus undoubtedly would not have recounted the deep impact of this show on society, especially the Magi of the Achaemenid era. Xenophon has another account of a Persian martial dance, which clearly speaks of the stunning performance and martial skills of the dancer in this spectacle. This narrative is a significant source for achieving a deeper comprehension of the skills of Persian performers, which can be convincing evidence of the unique skills of Persian performers in the Achaemenid era. Xenophon recounts that a soldier of the Achaemenid Empire from Mysia performed a pantomime-like dance of combat with two other imaginary fighters. The Persian warrior would abruptly bend his shields as if he were confronting an opponent, then swiftly rotate and perform a somersault, landing on his feet while still holding the shields. And at the end of the performance, he performed a Persian dance, clanging his shields, lowering himself on one knee, and then rapidly standing up once more, all in synchronization with the sound of a flute.⁴¹

Furthermore, American historian Albert Olmstead narrates about an annual celebration during the Achaemenid era to honor the goddess Mithra, during which the king would become drunk and perform a martial dance that had been passed down from previous Iranian generations.⁴² Although the historical origins of this dance are not precisely identified, this account suggests that it was a significant ritual martial dance transmitted between Iranian monarchs across generations. The traditional martial nature of this dance suggests that the instructors who trained the kings for the Mithra ritual might have employed "pattern practice" as a means of instruction.

Undoubtedly, studying the available accounts of this skillful martial dance and various martial arts trainings among the ancient Persians can be helpful in achieving a better comprehension of the performing quality of the martial scenes in the Magophonia. However, the question is, what kind of training have the performers of the combat scenes in Magophonia had? In response to this question, although we

⁴¹ Xenophon, *The Works of Xenophon*, 1: 246.

⁴² Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire: Achaemenid Period*, 25.

cannot say precisely what training these proficient performers have had, we can certainly state that martial arts have been a part of their training. In addition, it is obvious that the martial arts training that the Persian children had in the Achaemenid era, such as training in head-to-head fighting, fencing, archery, and other combat training mentioned earlier, and even the exercises of the Persian martial dance that Xenophon narrated, could have been good training for the performers of Magophonia in the Achaemenid era. Therefore, it can be concluded that any fight in these mock combats was performed by skilled performers, and the martial arts of the Achaemenid era had a remarkable influence on the performance quality of the Magophonia martial spectacle.

Iranian Martial Arts and Performing Arts in the Parthian and Sassanid Eras

Even in the aftermath of the Achaemenid era, the bow held its place as a favorite weapon among Iranians. Undoubtedly, no force like the Parthian army was renowned for its proficiency in archery throughout history. They are even known for their famous military tactic, the "Parthian shot," and their irregular style of warfare [guerrilla warfare]. This manner of warfare was such that they pretended to retreat, then turned themselves back [on horseback] and shot at the enemies behind them, which required great skill in horseback riding and archery.⁴³ It is interesting that Iran did not have a standing army since the Parthian period until the era of Khosrow I Sassanid [531–579 A.D].⁴⁴ Initially, they established a heavy infantry and regular cavalry in the manner of the Seleucids, but it was not long before they abandoned this manner and followed their previous method of warfare.

In this method of warfare, infantry was used only for battle in the highlands, and cavalry was the major force of the Parthian army. The Parthian cavalry was divided into lightly armed spearmen and heavy cavalrymen. The lightly armed cavalrymen were the most skilled archers of their era. The heavy cavalrymen had armor that covered them from head to toe, and their horses also had such armor. They were used for breaking up enemy ranks, and lightly armed

⁴³ Overtoom, *Reign of Arrows: The Rise of the Parthian Empire in the Hellenistic Middle East*, 40–41.

⁴⁴ Erdkamp, *A Companion to the Roman Army*, 260.

cavalrymen were used for support and long-range shooting.⁴⁵

The Parthians not only established a formidable army but also devised the Pahlavani wrestling [کشتی پهلوانی-Koshti-e Pahlavāni] and Zurkhaneh [زورخانه], both of which have regular trainings. Among the various exercises of wrestling and Zurkhaneh, the swinging wooden clubs exercise [میل-گرفتن-Mil Gereftan] is particularly remarkable, which is specifically designed to develop body strength in equestrian and boxing. They performed all exercises of Pahlavani wrestling to the rhythmic sound of singing and drumming by a drummer known as the Morshed in the modern Zurkhaneh ritual.⁴⁶ The Pahlavani exercises, which are traditionally practiced in the Zurkhaneh, incorporate specialized sports equipment such as the Mil [میل], which is a stick weighing between two and twenty kilograms, and the Kabbādeh [کباده], a heavy iron bow that typically weighs between twelve and sixteen kilograms. These two pieces of sports equipment are derived from two ancient Iranian weapons, namely the Persian mace [گرز-Gorz] and the bow [کمان-Kamān].⁴⁷ Furthermore, there is another sport tool called Sang [سنگ], derived from ancient war shields, which is composed of two heavy wooden planks with two handles, weighing between thirty-five and forty kilograms. Athletes employ all three tools by lifting and rotating heavy objects as part of their routine to strengthen their muscles in Zurkhaneh. Also, there is another sport tool known as Takhte-Shenā [تخته شنا], which is approximately one meter in length, fashioned from wood, and derived from the shape of a sword. This sport tool was used in ancient Iran for fencing practice. Presently, it is employed for performing push-up exercises [شینو-Shenow] with the aid of two supports beneath it.⁴⁸

One of the notable exercises in this martial art is referred to as spinning [چرخ زدن-Charkh Zadan]. In this exercise, an individual rotates around in a dance-like manner, accompanied by the song Morshed [مرشد] chants.⁴⁹ These choreographed movements⁵⁰ bear the most resemblance in two respects to the martial dance of the Persian soldier narrated by Xenophon: firstly, that dance also involved successive rotations, and secondly, the choreographed movements of this dance were performed in unison with the music. The existence of these two crucial similarities means that even if we were thoroughly aware of this manner of

⁴⁵ Muti', *Encyclopaedia of Iranian History*, 2: 147.

⁴⁶ Burgan, *Empires of Ancient Persia*, 117–119.

⁴⁷ Rochard, "The Identities of the Iranian Zūrkhānah," 317.

⁴⁸ Green and Svinth, *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation*, 74.

⁴⁹ Rochard, "The Identities of the Iranian Zūrkhānah," 317.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 319.

dancing today and attempted to reconstruct it, the spinning exercise of Zurkhaneh would be one of the most effective exercises to prepare the performer for this performance. Because it can enhance a performer's coordination with the music and improve their agility and mastery of rotational movements during the performance.

The most spectacular part of the Zurkhaneh comprises stunning acrobatic movements known as "Shirin-kāri" [شیرین کاری]. During this section of the Zurkhaneh ritual, the most talented individuals typically showcase their unique skills. According to historical sources, this traditional performance encompassed the performance of diverse physical movements, including backflips, somersaults, rapid spinning, handstands, and traversing a distance of approximately one kilometer while maintaining balance on their hands.⁵¹ One of the most spectacular parts of "Shirin-kāri" is "Mil-bāzi" [میل بازی], where performers adeptly hurl diminutive sticks into the air in a variety of stunning manners, recapturing them one at a time with adroit skill.⁵²

As previously mentioned, Iranians did not maintain a standing army from the Parthian epoch until the reign of Khosrow I Sassanid, except for the royal guards and foreign troops who were employed for combat.⁵³ Similar to the Achaemenids, the Sassanids formed a large army known as the Jāvitān or Jāvidān Army [سپاه جاویدان-Sepah-e Jāvidān], consisting of tens of thousands of soldiers. The commander of this army held the title of Vartharg Nigān-Khodāi [ورثرگ نیگان خدای].⁵⁴ The Sassanid army, also known as the Arteshtārestān [ارتشتارستان], was categorized into two distinct divisions: the cavalry [أسواران-Aswārān] and the infantry [پایگان-Pāygān]. Additionally, they had a unique manual of warfare, which can be traced back to the Arteshtārestān [ارتشتارستان] section of Denkart's book [دینکرد]. The Sassanid soldiers were equipped with a diverse array of weapons, such as swords, maces, bows, spears, axes, or clubs.⁵⁵ The majority of weapons used by the Sassanids bore resemblance to those employed by the Parthians. The Sassanids subsequently incorporated new weaponry, including double-edged swords, into their arsenal. The Sassanid military was headed by Pāygān-Sālār [پایگان سالار] as the infantry instructor and Sporgān [سپورگان] as the cavalry instructor. Notably, the latter was responsible for directing the military training of the cavalry and was required to be

⁵¹ Ensāfpur, *Tārikh va Farhang-e Zurkhāneh va Goruh-Hāye Ejtemā'ie Zurkhāneh-Row*, 168.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 203.

⁵³ Arnason and Raaflaub, *The Roman Empire in Context Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, 299.

⁵⁴ Farrokh, *Sasanian Elite Cavalry*, 11.

⁵⁵ Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, 45.

selected exclusively from the noble class.⁵⁶ Historians have also noted the existence of a sport similar to medieval knights combats on horseback among the Sassanids, which is known as jousting today. Although hand-to-hand combat has always been popular among Sassanids, they apparently had a law that required them to perform this martial art in an equestrian form with a lance. Interestingly, sometimes, instead of fighting between two armies, two knights from two different armies would fight each other in an agreement. The victory of each of these knights was considered the victory of their army in the war. This fighting method of the jousting martial art is derived from the same spectacular duels that played a determining role in some of the Roman-Persian Wars. These show duels, which were a part of wars in Europe and Asia for centuries, have not lost their popularity throughout history, and even today, jousting is the official sport of the state of Maryland, USA.⁵⁷ It is evident that due to the popularity, importance, and determining role that this martial art performance had among the Sassanids, it required repeated and exhausting exercises to bring the warrior's martial skills to the highest possible level and to have an impressive and acceptable performance against the enemy. A martial art performance that had a determining impact on the fate of the armies and led to either victory or defeat for one of the warring parties. Thus, given the popularity and significant role of this combat performance among the Sassanids, it can be claimed that these spectacular duels were among the most notable martial arts performances of the Sassanid era.

Iranian Martial Arts and Performing Arts among the Iranian Militia Forces

Following the decline of the Sassanids and the emergence of secession movements and opponents of the Arab caliphs, there were instances of martial arts training in Iran's history that were separate from the military forces. Among them, we will analyze three eminent movements: the Zanj Rebellion movement [جنبش زنگیان-Jonbesh-e Zangiān], the Ayyārs movement [جنبش عیاران-Jonbesh-e Ayyārān], and the Hashashins movement [جنبش حشاشین-Jonbesh-e Hashāshin], which have a special place in the history of Iran. In the ninth century [869–883 AD], the Zangi slaves called Qen [قن] chose an Iranian who had been dubbed Sāhib-al-Zanj [صاحب الزنج] to command their revolt against the Abbasid caliph. The Zanj Rebellion occurred approximately one thousand years after the slave uprising headed by Spartacus in

⁵⁶ Farrokh, *Sasanian Elite Cavalry*, 13-15.

⁵⁷ Burgan, *Empires of Ancient Persia*, 66.

Rome, which occurred between 71 and 74 BC and involved the participation of around twelve thousand slaves. It is noteworthy that today the people of the world consider the Spartacus revolt to be the greatest slave uprising, while the Zanj uprising was much larger than the Spartacus revolt, both in terms of the number of people and in terms of the size and duration of the battle. The Zanj rebellion occurred near Basrah, Ahvaz, and Abadan, where one hundred and fifty thousand slaves fought for fifteen years. During that era, they beheaded suspected people and trained others in archery, fencing, riding, and other skills before sending them to Baghdad to be sold.⁵⁸

During the eleventh century AD, a new militia group called the Ayyārān [عیاران] emerged in Kurdistan, Iran. The Ayyārān, also known as Fatiān [فتیان], were a group of dervishes and Sufis who had achieved a high level of organization. The Futtuwat-Nāmeḥ [فتوت نامه] book provides a complete explanation of their beliefs and opinions (Ibid: 573). The Ayyārān were the initial Iranian troops to establish an autonomous Iranian government, known as the Saffarids, after the arrival of Islam in Iran. They had a well-organized military group, where each group of ten soldiers was led by a guardian named Arif [عریف], each of the ten Arifs was led by a Naqīb [نقیب], each of the ten Naqibs was led by a Qāed [قائد], and each of the ten Qāed was led by an Amir [امیر]. The Ayyārān's responsibility was to perform night-walking [شب‌روی-Shabravi], covertly spy on the enemy encampment, infiltrate the prison and unlock the cells, anesthetize and abduct the prisoners and enemy commanders, and undertake other similar tasks. Their training included wrestling, archery, and fencing, and they often carried bows or slings, knives, swords, anesthetics, daggers, and Qamas [قمه-Qammeh].⁵⁹

Another militia group known in the world because of its terrorist activities during the Seljuk, Abbasid, and Crusades eras was the Hashashin, whose first leader was Hasan Sabbāḥ [حسن صباح]. The origins of Hashashin were Iran and Syria (Chaliand & Blin, 2007: 61). Among their most famous victims were Nizām al-Mulk [نظام الملك], Alp Arslān [آلپ ارسلان], king of Seljuk; Conrad, son of Guillaume IV, king of Prussia, who had defeated Salāḥuddin Ayoubi [صلاح الدین ایوبی]; Orkhān [اورخان], ruler of Ganja; and many other prominent figures of their era.⁶⁰ Devising military exercises, the plan of operations, and military training were conducted by Hasan Sabbāḥ himself, and he supervised the training of individuals. Hasan's well-trained teachers prepared the people for the operation with hard and exhausting exercises, including

⁵⁸ Rāvandi, *Social History of Iran*, 3: 557-558.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 576-577.

⁶⁰ Yusofiniā, *History of Tonekābon*, 196-197.

all kinds of dexterous jumps, climbing and descending cliffs and valleys, horseback riding, fencing, dagger throwing, and javelin throwing.⁶¹ The Hashashin's operations were not always covert, and they sometimes planned to perform their operations in public, deliberately killing people to create a profound impact on the people's emotions and their spectators. They aimed to make people understand the great tragedy that would result from enmity with them. For instance, Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzi [فخرالدین رازی] was among those who, after being threatened, refrained from speaking harshly about them.⁶² The Hashashin would occasionally notify their intended targets of their fury by leaving a note accompanied by a dagger. This warning aimed to alert targeted individuals about the impending danger and Hashashin's rage.⁶³ The performance of such a terrifying show by the Hashashin left a great deal of fear in people, which is why they are still considered one of the most perilous forces in history. As evidence of their lasting impact, some Romance language speakers still use the word "Assassin," which is derived from the name Hashashin, to mean "killer" or "terrorist." This word has remained in various languages since the epoch of the Hashashin.⁶⁴

Iranian Martial Dances

Throughout history, Iranian martial dances have played a crucial role in both Iranian martial and performing arts history. These dances were an essential aspect of the physical training of ancient Iranians, and they were performed for cultural and entertainment purposes. As previously mentioned, Albert Olmstead narrated about a prevalent martial dance during the Achaemenid era. This dance was passed down from one generation of kings to another for performance during the celebration of the goddess Mithra.⁶⁵ Also, Xenophon was one of the first historians to mention a martial dance presented by a Persian soldier.⁶⁶ Martial dances were prominent during the Achaemenid and Parthian periods, as documented by other historical sources.⁶⁷ Certain types of these Iranian martial dances remain prevalent and widely performed by Iranians. In Sistan province, there is a sword dance [رقص شمشیر-Raqs-e Shamshir], in which two dancers with their swords and shields show a variety of defensive

⁶¹ Najmi, *The Story of Hassan-e Sabbāh and Alamut Castle*, 60-61.

⁶² Ja'fariyān, *The History of Shi'ism in Iran; from the Beginning to the Rise of the Safavid State*, 642-643.

⁶³ Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, 209.

⁶⁴ Najmi, *The Story of Hassan-e Sabbāh and Alamut Castle*, 69.

⁶⁵ Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire: Achaemenid Period*, 25.

⁶⁶ Xenophon, *The Works of Xenophon*, 1: 246.

⁶⁷ Mirnia, *People's Culture: Iranian Folklore*, 111-112.

and offensive techniques and gradually escalate speed, power, and intensity to their dance.⁶⁸ Also, among the Bakhtiari, Lur, and Qashqai tribes of men residing in the southwest region of Iran, a war dance performance known as the stick game [چوب بازی-Chub-bāzi] is widespread in practice.⁶⁹ In Khorasan province, there is a form of martial stick dance that involves two or four individuals performing in pairs. The dance features paired movements, with each dancer holding a one-meter stick in each hand. They follow the beat of the Dohol [دُهل] instrument and move their legs back and forth, circle in a circle, jump, and spin together. During the most spectacular part of the dance, they clash their two sticks once, then twirl around, face each other, and clash their two sticks again.⁷⁰

Another martial stick dance is common among the people of Aligudarz, called Zazmāru [ززمارو]. It is performed with two sticks that are sixty to eighty centimeters long and two to three centimeters in diameter, one for attack and the other for defense. This dance is also performed in pairs to the sound of the Dohol instrument. It is customary to perform the Zazmaru dance among the Kurdish tribes residing in the northern towns of Khorasan, particularly Quchān, Chenārān, Ardakān, Dargaz, Shirvān, Bojnord, Esfarāyen, Joveyn, Joghātāy, and others, to the music of Sorna [سورنا] and Dohol instruments. It is remarkable that certain forms of martial dancing in Iran serve as a means of commemorating tribal bravery and victories, including the widely practiced Yazleh dance [یزله] by Arab tribes residing in the Khuzestan province. The dance is typically performed in an armed manner and involves synchronized movements to music, emphasizing courage and heroism. Another sample of this type of Iranian martial dance is a religious dance, known among the Turkmen tribes of Iran as "the mention of the dagger" [ذکر خنجر-Zekr-e Khanjar] or the dagger dance [رقص خنجر-Raqṣ-e Khanjar], that is usually performed in a group of more than five dancers. A person becomes the leader of the group and starts with invoke-like chanting, and the dancers dance in pairs and accompany the group leader by making sounds from the bottom of the throat, which is a sign of courage. The group leader regulates the hand and foot movements of the dancers, and the movements gradually become faster until finally the dancers circle the leader in a circle and end the dance by raising a dagger as a sign of victory.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Green and Svinth, *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation*, 71.

⁶⁹ Richter, *Iran: The Culture*, 21.

⁷⁰ Mirnia, *People's Culture: Iranian Folklore*, 115-117.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 133-136.

Iranian Spectacular Wrestling Styles

Iran is known worldwide for its Pahlavani wrestling, a traditional style in which wrestlers fight while wearing knee-length pants. In addition, Iran has many other traditional wrestling styles, such as Bāchukheh wrestling [کشتی باچوخه-Koshti-e Bāchukheh], mainly performed by Kurdish tribes in Khorasan, which is similar to judo. During Bāchukheh wrestling matches, wrestlers wear woolen coats, belts, and trousers up to the knees as they attempt to knock each other to the ground using clothing grabs and various wrestling techniques. The traditional combat style of Bāchukheh wrestling does not allow for ground fighting, and the wrestler who falls first is considered the loser. Alternatively, even punches and kicks are permitted in the ancient Iranian wrestling styles, as in modern Gile-Mardi wrestling [کشتی گیلهمردی-Koshti-e Gile-Mardi]. Gile-Mardi wrestling is widespread in the north of Iran, particularly in Gilan province. Other instances of traditional wrestling styles that are common in Iran encompass Zir-o-Bālā wrestling [کشتی زیر و بالا-Koshti-e Zir-o-Bālā] in Kermanshah province, Lori wrestling [کشتی لری-Koshti-e Lori] and Jang wrestling [کشتی جنگ-Koshti-e Jang] in Lorestan province, Turkmen wrestling [کشتی ترکمنی-Koshti-e Turkamani] in Khorasan province, Lucho wrestling [کشتی لوچو-Koshti-e Lucho] in Mazandaran province, and Sistani wrestling [کشتی سیستانی-Koshti-e Sistani] in Sistan province.⁷² Notably, Iran is home to multiple styles of wrestling, and although they have unique fighting techniques, some of them share the same method as Bāchukheh wrestling, where wrestlers rely on waist scarves or local thongs to bring their opponents down. Additional examples of these styles are Lori wrestling or Sāfoneh wrestling [کشتی سافونه-Koshti-e Sāfoneh] in Lorestan province, Kaj Gardān wrestling [کشتی کجگردان-Koshti-e Kaj Gardān] in Sistan province, and Zorān-Pātoleh wrestling [کشتی زوران-Koshti-e Zorān-Pātoleh] in Kurdistan province, which also use similar fighting techniques. Zorān-Pātoleh wrestling, done on natural grass or soft soil, involves wrestlers wearing traditional clothing.⁷³

Certain traditional wrestling styles in Iran are traditionally performed during wedding ceremonies in specific regions. Amongst these forms of wrestling, Bāvaj wrestling [کشتی باوج-Koshti-e Bāvaj] is regarded as one of the most spectacular styles. In fact, Bāvaj wrestling is prevalent during the summers in the Talish tribe's region. Even today, it is occasionally performed in its customary manner at their weddings. This wrestling is played in tandem with the Ney [نی], a Persian end-blown flute. Typically, instrumentalists are shepherds, and an

⁷² Green and Svinth, *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation*, 75.

⁷³ Mirnia, *People's Culture: Iranian Folklore*, 163-167.

outdoor arena where Bāvaj wrestling is demonstrated attracts a fervent crowd of locals. In Shahrekord, local weddings also feature a traditional wrestling match called Moqli wrestling [کشتی مقلی-Koshti-e Moqli], which is similar to Bāvaj wrestling. The match is held between a member of the groom's family and a member of the bride's family, and the winner is awarded a sheep. Similarly, Baghal wrestling [کشتی بغل-Koshti-e Baghal] is a traditional wrestling event held at weddings in Qazvin. The wrestlers wear everyday attire and engage in combat while the audience forms a circle around them. The event is overseen by an experienced local referee, and the rhythmic beats of drums and Dohol accompany the wrestling.⁷⁴

In Mazandaran province, in addition to weddings, Lucho wrestling is also held at national and religious festivals at local markets, and the referees of this contest are usually one to three veterans of the competitions. Initially, the drum and Dohol are played, which marks the beginning of the combat. At the beginning of the ceremony, a wrestler challenges any fighter who wants to fight, and the fighting ends with falling one or more points of the opponent's body or clapping, which means surrender. The winner of the contest takes his prize, which is tied to a stick called Lucho, and puts the Lucho stick on his shoulder and takes it home with the villagers. In addition, traditional Goresh wrestling [کشتی گورش-Koshti-e Goresh], which bears resemblance to Lucho wrestling, is a common spectacle at weddings and other ceremonies in the Turkmen areas of Mazandaran province. The victor of this form of wrestling is bestowed with a reward called Bāyrāq [بایراق], which is often a sum of money or a length of cloth. Furthermore, Kamari wrestling [کشتی کمری-Koshti-e Kamari] is also common among Turkish Qizilbash men, and their combats are held at weddings, celebrations, during hobbies, after the harvest of agricultural products, and on winter nights. During Kamari wrestling combats, wrestlers wrap shawls around their waists, and wrestling techniques are allowed on the upper part of the waist. The winner is the one who hits one or both shoulders of the opponent on the ground. The referee of this competition is also a veteran, and the winner receives cash, sheep, or cows from the owners of the festival.⁷⁵

Conclusion

The primary aim of this study is to clarify which elements of martial arts can be categorized as performing arts, beginning with an overview of their origins. Therefore, we examined some

⁷⁴ Ibid., 151-155.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 157-163.

performing elements, such as the instructional element of kata, or "pattern practice", which includes choreographed movements and is considered a type of performing art [martial dance] according to the definitions. In addition, we employed the criteria established by Oscar Brockett as our guideline to distinguish performing aspects of martial arts from non-performing ones, which identify the five distinctive characteristics of rituals. According to Brockett, if an activity possesses one or more of these five characteristics, it can be deemed a ritual. After comparing the unique features of the five principles of the rituals with the characteristics of "pattern practices," or katas, it was concluded that most katas possess at least one or more of these distinctive features, and they can be categorized as a type of performing art. Furthermore, the definitions and assessments used in this study lead to the conclusion that martial arts can be considered a type of performing art due to their performing components, such as the fixed spectacular movements of kata, some acrobatics, and spectacular martial movements.

Martial arts have been a part of Iranian performing arts since ancient times. Although martial arts have had a considerable impact on Iranian performing arts, these influences have varied during different historical periods. The research also focused on the influence of martial arts on Iranian performing arts from the era of the Medes until the present day. Initially, we referred to the assessment of martial arts education during the Achaemenid period, which implies that it had a significant impact on the performance of martial arts scenes in the Magophonia performance, portraying an armed coup. Similarly, there is considerable evidence of the influence of Iranian martial arts on the practices and other performing elements of Zurkhaneh during the Parthian era. During the Sassanid era, the prevalence of medieval jousting duels in Iran is also noteworthy, which were very popular due to their performing aspects and decisive role in the wars of that epoch in Asia and Europe. In the aftermath of the Sassanid Empire's downfall and the arrival of Islam in Iran, numerous Iranian militia groups emerged, each with its own specialized combat training, such as the warriors of the Zanj Rebellion movement, the Ayyaran, and the Hashashins. They employed this combat training in many cases to perform their bloody scenarios and intimidating performances.

Furthermore, the martial dances and traditional wrestling styles of Iran are among the oldest and most fundamental elements of the country's performing arts history. Iranian martial dances are an ancient tradition, some of which date back to the Achaemenid period. Many of the Iranian traditional dances that are still performed today have a long history. Examples include the Sistani sword dance, the Turkmen dagger dance, and other stick dances that are

common in various areas of the country. Undoubtedly, alongside these martial dances, wrestling can also be considered one of the most important Iranian martial and performing arts. In addition to Pahlavani wrestling, which is the oldest known wrestling style in Iran and dates back to the Parthian era, there are many other traditional wrestling styles in Iran that are still popular today and are even performed at some Iranian weddings and ceremonies. Among the most important of these traditional wrestling styles are Moqli wrestling in Shahrekord city, Lucho wrestling in Mazandaran province, and Bāvaj wrestling among Talish tribes in Iran, which are also performed at some traditional weddings.

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