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A Note on the Term Xūd-Šikan

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Abstract: *This article concentrates on the term xūd-šikan. Xūd-šikan is a term in military history in Persian. It means helmet-breaker or piercer. Xūd-šikan (خودشکن) is formed by combining the Persian words “xūd” (خود) and “šikan” (شکن), which is the present tense root of the verb “šikastan” (شکستن). It appears in two sources, *Ādāb al-Harb wa al-Šajā’a*, written by Faxr al-Dīn Mubārak Šāh, and *Hedāyat al-Ramī*, written by Sayyid Mīr-‘Alawī. According to what we understand from the sources, this term refers to weapons used against helmets and armour made of iron.*

Keywords: Xūd-Šikan, Persian Sources, Military History, Arms and Armour, Helmet-breaker, Mace, Arrowhead

Introduction

Persian is one of the most important languages in the world. It is the mother tongue of the Iranian geography. Throughout history, it also had the opportunity to spread to the Caucasus, Central Asia, India, and Anatolia. To date, numerous scientific studies have been conducted on Persian sources, words, and terms. However, many resources, words, and terms remain to be discovered and explained. One of these terms is xūd-šikan (خودشکن). This article focuses on the term xūd-šikan.

Origin of the Term Xūd-Šikan

Xūd-šikan (خودشکن) is formed by combining the Persian words “xūd” (خود) and “šikan” (شکن), which is the present tense root of the verb “šikastan” (شکستن). The word xūd has many meanings in Persian. In this research, the meaning of the word xūd as “the helmet” will be at the forefront.¹ Xūd is a word frequently used in Persian sources.² It is a general term referring to a helmet in the field of military history.

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¹ Dehxodā, 1336/1957: VI, 8828.

² Ferdowsī, 2015: I, 19, 48, 107, 142, 172, 215 et al; Faxr-e Mudabbīr, 1346/1967: 257, 266, 267, 425; Zahīr al-Dīn Fāryābī, 1381/2002: 80, 164; Azraqī-ye Harawī, 1336/1957: 91; Qatrān-e Tabrīzī, 1362/1983:

This word is used to refer to helmets made of iron, steel, and other metals, as well as leather.³ The word šikan is the present tense root of the Persian verb šikastan, meaning to break. It is also a noun derived from the verb šikastan, meaning breaker or crusher.⁴

Xūd-šikan in Persian dictionaries usually means “someone who hurts herself or himself.”⁵ Nevertheless, the issue we will focus on in this article is the military meaning of the term xūd-šikan. The military meaning of this term in Persian sources means “helmet-breaker.”

Sources including the Term Xūd-Šikan

The military meaning of the term xūd-šikan is helmet-breaker. For this reason, it is more likely to appear in treatises written on military subjects. In our studies so far, we have only been able to find this term in two sources. The first source is *Ādāb al-Harb wa al-Šajā‘a*, written by Faxr al-Dīn Mubārak Šāh (d. first quarter of the 13th century) (pen name Faxr-e Mudabbīr), who lived during the Delhi Turkish Sultanate (1206-1526). In his work, Faxr-e Mudabbīr records the term xūd-šikan as a weapon. He mentions this term alongside weapons that can be struck and states that the xūd-šikan weapon is used by people who rely on their biceps.⁶

The second source is *Hedāyat al-Ramī*. This source was written by Sayyid Mīr-‘Alawī. It is thought to have been written in the Indian subcontinent between the 16th and 18th centuries. In this source, the term xūd-šikan is mentioned between arrowheads. Sayyid Mīr-‘Alawī touches on that its shape resembles a flower bud and pierces war equipment made of iron, such as iron helmets (xūd-e āhanīn) and armour (jawšan).⁷

The terms xūd-e āhanīn (خود آهنین) and jawšan (جوشن) referred to in the treatise are also important. As mentioned above, xūd refers to helmet equipment in general in Persian. In the text, xūd-e āhanīn touches on iron helmets. Jawšan was a human armor used in the medieval Islamic world. According to Ayyubid historian ‘Alī Mardī al-Tarsūsī (d. 1193), jawšan armor was produced by joining small plates made of iron. Sometimes it was produced from a paste made from leather and horn shavings. This armor was usually produced in Iran (‘Ajam).⁸ In the 12th century, when Tarsusi lived, there were the Saljuqs (1038-1157), a Turkish state, in Iran. It is possible to claim that jawšan armor was a type of armor used and produced by the Turks. Research has

174; Muxtārī-ye Ghaznawī, 1336/1957: 248; Abū al-Faraj Rūnī, 1304/1925: 98; Sūzanī-ye Samarqandī, 1338/1959: 128; Mu‘izzī, 1389/2010: 78, 135.

³ Dehxodā, 1336/1957: VI, 8828; Khorasani, 2010: 456.

⁴ Burhān, 1342/1963: III, 1281; Hasan Anwarī, 1381/2002: V, 4548.

⁵ Dehxodā, 1336/1957: VI, 8833; Steingass, 1963: 482.

⁶ Faxr-e Mudabbīr, 1346/1967: 263.

⁷ Sayyid Mīr-‘Alawī, 1398/2019: 179-180.

⁸ ‘Alī Mardī al-Tarsūsī, 1998: 155.

revealed that this armor originated in Central Asia and was brought to the Near East by the Turks.⁹

Studies including the Term Xūd-Šikan

The military meaning of the term xūd-šikan has so far attracted the attention of very few researchers. Even most Persian lexicographers have overlooked the military meaning of the term. As far as we could determine, among Persian lexicographers, only Hasan Anwarī mentions the military meaning of the term, citing the record of Faxr-e Mudabbīr.¹⁰ As for researchers, those who study weapons and war history come to the forefront. David Nicolle, R. F. W. Elgood, Umut Kansoy, İbrahim Duman, and Manīja ‘Abd al-Hayy mention the military meaning of the term in their works.¹¹ These researchers refer to the term xūd-šikan based on the record of Faxr-e Mudabbīr. They state that the term xūd-šikan means a weapon that can be struck and that its literal meaning is helmet-breaker.

Thoughts on the Term Xūd-Šikan

We have come across the term xūd-šikan in two sources. In the first of these sources, *Ādāb al-Harb wa al-Šajā‘a*, xūd-šikan is mentioned among the weapons that can be used to attack and hit the enemy. The author of the treatise, Faxr-e Mudabbīr, states that weapons, including the xūd-šikan, can be used by people who rely on their arm strength. He thus emphasizes the weight of xūd-šikan.¹² Based on this record of Faxr-e Mudabbīr, researchers consider the term xūd-šikan to be a type of mace.¹³ The fact that the literal meaning of the term is helmet-breaker and that Faxr-e Mudabbīr emphasizes the weight of this weapon is effective in reaching this idea. We, too, agree with other researchers and think that the term xūd-šikan in *Ādāb al-Harb wa al-Šajā‘a* is a type of mace. Nevertheless, Faxr-e Mudabbīr may have used the term xūd-šikan to refer to another heavy striking weapon, rather than specifically to a mace.

In the second of these sources, *Hedāyat al-Ramy*, xūd-šikan is referred to among the arrowheads. The author of the treatise, Sayyid Mīr-‘Alawī, remarks that among the arrowheads of the war arrow there are tutārča (تتارچه), bīd-barg (بید برگ), zarah-dūz (زره دوز), xūd-šikan, sa-sū (سه سو), and many more. He continues to give information and indicates that the arrowhead of xūd-šikan resembles a flower bud and

⁹ Gorelik, 1979: 34; Duman, 2020: 142.

¹⁰ Hasan Anwarī, 1381/2002: IV, 2872.

¹¹ Nicolle, 2004: 741; Elgood, 2007: 154; Kansoy, 2018: 1021; Duman, 2020: 122; ‘Abd al-Hayy, 1387/2008: 94.

¹² Faxr-e Mudabbīr, 1346/1967: 263.

¹³ Nicolle, 2004: 741; Elgood, 2007: 154; Kansoy, 2018: 1021; Duman, 2020: 122; ‘Abd al-Hayy, 1387/2008: 94.

that this arrowhead is used to pierce war equipment made of iron.¹⁴ The term *xūd-šikan* in *Hedāyat al-Ramy* appears in front of us in the form of an arrowhead. This arrowhead was certainly used to pierce hard armour and helmets. Therefore, it must have been called the helmet-piercer or breaker.

The term *xūd-šikan* in both *Ādāb al-Harb wa al-Šajā'a* and *Hedāyat al-Ramy* denotes a weapon used against helmets and armours made of iron. This term appears as a mace in one source and as an arrowhead in the other. As far as we understand from two sources, in Persian, the term *xūd-šikan* denotes an offensive weapon used to break and pierce helmets made of iron and steel.

Conclusion

The examination of the term *xūd-šikan* in Persian military literature demonstrates that its semantic value cannot be adequately determined through lexical definition alone. Rather, its meaning becomes intelligible when the term is considered in relation to the technical and functional context in which it occurs. The evidence discussed in this study indicates that *xūd-šikan* should be understood primarily as a functional designation for a weapon intended to penetrate or damage protective equipment, particularly helmets and iron armour.

The two sources examined here reveal an important distinction in the material expression of the term. In *Ādāb al-Harb wa al-Šajā'a*, *xūd-šikan* occurs among hand-held striking weapons and is associated with a weapon whose effective use depended upon considerable physical strength. This context supports its identification as a type of mace or heavy striking weapon. By contrast, *Hedāyat al-Ramy* places *xūd-šikan* within a distinctly different technological category, namely arrowheads. Its description as an arrowhead resembling a flower bud and capable of penetrating iron military equipment indicates that the term could also designate a specialised armour-piercing projectile point.

The apparent discrepancy between these two usages is therefore more significant than a simple question of whether *xūd-šikan* denotes a mace or an arrowhead. The evidence suggests that the term was not necessarily restricted to a particular weapon form; instead, it appears to have conveyed a specific martial function – the capacity to break through, damage, or penetrate a helmet or other form of rigid armour. In this respect, *xūd-šikan* may be regarded as a functional rather than exclusively typological designation within Persian military vocabulary. The semantic relationship between the two attestations is consequently established not by their physical morphology, but by their shared purpose on the battlefield.

¹⁴ Sayyid Mīr-ʿAlawī, 1398/2019: 179-180.

This interpretation also helps explain why the term has remained comparatively obscure in Persian lexicographical and military scholarship. The limited number of identified attestations, together with its occurrence in different technological contexts, may have obscured its specialised military sense. Earlier studies that identify the *xūd-šikan* of *Ādāb al-Harb wa al-Šajā'a* as a mace are consistent with the evidence, but the occurrence of the same designation in *Hedāyat al-Ramy* demonstrates that its semantic range was broader than a single weapon category.

Accordingly, the evidence presently available allows *xūd-šikan* to be defined as a helmet-breaking or armour-piercing weapon designation, rather than as the fixed name of one specific weapon. In one context, this function was embodied by a heavy striking weapon, while in another it was realised through a specialised arrowhead. The term thus provides a small but revealing example of how Persian military terminology could encode the intended effect of a weapon rather than merely its physical form. Further examination of Persian military treatises, archery manuals, lexicographical works, and related technical literature may reveal additional attestations and help determine whether this functional usage extended beyond the two sources considered here.

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