

NOWRUZ iii. In the Iranian Calendar

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The day Hormoz (the first day of any Persian month) of the month of Farvardin is the New Year day in the Persian calendar; at present it coincides with the day of the vernal equinox (the day on which the Sun enters the first degree of Aries). This entry does not deal either with the position Nowruz occupied in other calendars (for instance, in the Ottoman fiscal calendar, or in the Noşayri calendar), or with the names of the New Year days in other calendars, which derive from the Persian *nowruz*, like Nayriz in Egypt or Nayruz in Andalusia (a bibliographical survey on the matter is given in Cristoforetti, 2003), since they are often different from their Persian originals and parallels.

In the Iranian world, too, there were other days called Nowruz. They did not coincide even theoretically with the day when the Sun entered the first degree of Aries. The Nowruz-e mo‘taẓedi was introduced for fiscal purposes in 282/895 by the Abbasid caliph al-Mo‘taẓed (r. 892-902, hence the name). It existed for about a century and was fixed on 11 Hazirān in the Syrian calendar (11 June in the Julian calendar), which corresponded to 1 Ǧordād in Persian calendar during 892-895 CE (see Taqizāda, p. 157).

In astrological context, the expression Nowruz-e ǧvārazmšāhi indicates the day when the Sun enters the 19th degree of Aries, which is the Sun’s exaltation (Taqizāda, p. 140). Originally, this expression indicated the reformed Nowruz introduced in 958-9 CE in Ǧvārazm (see [CHORASMIA](#)) and fixed on 2 or 3 Nīsān (2 or 3 April in the Julian calendar; see Biruni, *Ātār*, text, p. 241, tr., p. 229). In Biruni’s *Al-Ātār al-bāqīya ‘an al-qorun al-ǧāliya* (text, p. 230, tr., p. 217), one finds a “Naurōz of the rivers and of all running waters” on 19 Esfandārmoḍ (the corresponding day in the Julian calendar changed in time, because the Persian calendar was a solar vague calendar).

In modern popular context, there exist a Nowruz-e ṭabari in Māzandarān on the 2nd day of Mordād of the solar Hejri calendar (24 or 25 July; see Humand, p. 107) and, at a short distance from it, a Nowruz-e deylami in Gilān on 15 Mordād (6 or 7 August; see ‘Arši, 2000, p. 24). Humand (pp. 107-19) provides yet another date of this New Year day for the years 1996 (1375 ;Š.) and 1997 (1376 ;Š.), namely 17 Mordād which corresponds to 8 or 9 August. Along the Persian Gulf coast, there is a Nowruz-e ‘arab (Arab New Year), or Nowruz-e daryā‘i (Sea New Year) on 9 Mordād of the solar Hejri calendar (31 July or 1 August; ‘Arši, 1997, p. 18; but see Sadid-al-Saltana Bandar-‘Abbāsi, pp. 35-36, where the given date is the beginning of Leo, that is, 1 Mordād which is 23 or 24 July). Besides, in Kermān province (Lālazār), there is a Nowruz-e čupāni (Herdsman’s New Year) on 27 Esfand (17 or 18 March; Šan‘ati, p. 693). Undoubtedly, there are other cases as well, which have not yet been investigated.

Abu Reyhān Biruni (see *Ātār*, text, pp. 32-33, tr., pp. 36-38) speaks of a Nowruz of the ancient—that is, Sasanian—kings on the day of the summer solstice. However, the Persian tradition refers to the coincidence between the Nowruz and the first degree of Aries (see Biruni, *Ātār*, text, p. 45, tr. p. 55). Yet, such a fixed coincidence has no historical evidence, because in Sasanian times the Persian calendar was based on a vague solar year of 365 days, and the above-mentioned coincidence would only take place during four consecutive years once in 1,461 years. According to an out-of-date theory—particularly based on Arabic and Persian records in astronomical works—there were two Nowruzes during the Sasanian period: a “civil” Nowruz which moved back throughout the seasons, and a “religious” Nowruz, approximately fixed within the year by means of monthly intercalations carried out in every 116 or 120 years (see [CALENDARS](#)). However, “it has been fairly widely accepted ... that there is no documentary evidence for intercalations and that it is indeed unlikely that they ever actually played a role in practical time-keeping” (de Blois, p. 40).

The Nowruz on (vague solar) 1 Farvardin is the only historically testified Nowruz, and it represented the New Year’s day par excellence. This Nowruz moved one day backward throughout the solar seasons in every four years, and the above-mentioned passages by Biruni could be very well explained as traces of replacing the Nowruz from a position close to the

summer solstice in late Sasanian times (620-23 CE; during the 7th century, the summer solstice occurred on 19 June of the Julian calendar, and 1 Farvardin coincided with 19 June only during these four years) to a position which coincided with the first degree of Aries during the years 1004-7 CE ; (during the 11th century, the vernal equinox occurred on 15 March of the Julian calendar, and 1 Farvardin coincided with 15 March only during these four years). Such a dramatic event has been implicitly recorded in the monumental inscription of [Gonbad-e Qābus](#) (see Cristoforetti, 2004, pp. 10-14). Then the Nowruz moved back again, and according to the *Nowruz-nāma* (p. 12)—which is a New-Persian treatise attributed to ‘Omar Kayyām(i) and probably composed during the 11th-12th centuries—the Saffarid ruler Kālaf b. Aḥmad (r. 963-1001/2; d. 1008-9) reformed the calendar in order to fix the Nowruz, but the text is not clear (for a discussion see Cristoforetti, 2006a, pp. 33-39). The *Nowruz-nāma* (p. 10) mentions a *Farvardin-e k̄viš* (its [that is, of the vernal equinoctial Sun] own Farvardin) in order to indicate the moment of the “correct” occurrence of the Nowruz, in spite of the different seasonal positions it occupied at various times.

In 471/1079, Saljuq ruler Jalāl-al-Dowla Malekšāh (r. 1073-92) introduced a calendar reform which fixed the New Year day, called Nowruz-e jalāli after a part of his name, at the first degree of Aries. Even afterwards, however, the vague solar calendar survived among some Zoroastrian circles which, until now, consider the Nowruz days to be linked to different forms of Persian vague solar calendar (Boyce, 2005, p. 22), and there are traces of a popular Nowruz which moved to the 1st day of other Persian months in non-Zoroastrian context, too (Cristoforetti, 2007, pp. 45-54; Karamšāhyef, pp. 687-88; Vakilian, p. 202).

Besides, in most sections in Arabic and Persian astronomical works, which describe various calendars, one comes across a Nowruz-e kabir or Nowruz-e bozorg (Great Nowruz) on 6 Farvardin, but the surviving sources on the importance of the sixth day of the first Persian month are all from the Islamic period. The “Great Nowruz” was also called Nowruz-e kordādi (Nowruz of day of Kordād; Dhabhar, p. 339; Kordād is the name which was given to the sixth day of every Persian month) or Nowruz-e k̄ssa (Nowruz of the elite; see [Borhān-e qāte’](#), s.v.), and it followed the Nowruz-e saḡir (Small Nowruz) or Nowruz-e ‘amma (Nowruz of the common people) on 1 Farvardin.

The earliest source (mid-9th century) for the occurrence of the Nowruz on 6 Farvardin is the account by Kasravī recorded in the *Ketāb al-mahāsen wa al-a’yād* (p. 363; for the identification of the author see Inostrantsev, pp. 85-87). A similar, but not identical, account is to be found in Biruni (*Ātār*, text, pp. 217-19, tr., pp. 201-4). In addition, a relevant source about the Nowruz on 6 Farvardin is the Middle-Persian text entitled *Māh ī Frawardīn Rōz ī Hordād* (see J. M. JamaspAsana, pp. 102-8 for the text; and K. J. JamaspAsana, pp. 122-29 for the translation) from the Codex MK, which was once part of the personal library of the editor of the text, J. M. JamaspAsana. The importance of 6 Farvardin is confirmed in the 52nd chapter of the New-Persian work *Šad dar naṭr*, probably composed during the 7th century CE (West, pp. xxxvii, 314-15) and in the New-Persian narration (*rewāyat*) by Dastur Darab Hormazyar (Molé, pp. 99-100). According to Kušyār b. Labbān Jili (d. ca. 1030 CE; *apud* Taqizāda, p. 191), “the sixth day of the Nowruz” (that is, 6 Farvardin) was called *šabb al-mā’* (water-pouring [day]), and it was revered as the Great Nowruz and ; “the Day of Hope,” because it commemorated the completion of the act of creation.

Biruni mentions that “the man who connected the two Naurōz with each other is said to have been Hormuz b. Šāp̄r the Hero [Hormozd ;I, r. 272-273 CE], for he raised to festivals all days between the two Naurōz” (Biruni, *Ātār*, text, p. 218, tr., p. 203; cf. Idem, *Ātār*, text, p. 224, tr., p. 209 for an identical notice about the Mehragān). Yet, “this measure can reasonably be attributed in fact to his [Hormozd ;I’s] high priest, the mighty prelate Kerdir” (Boyce, 2003, p. 59). However, this implies the existence of an old rivalry between the two Nowruzes —a fact that is made implausible by the disagreement of some scholars (cf. de Blois, p. 48) on the matter of the supposed intercalations prior to late Sasanian era, which caused the doubling of the Nowruz. The idea of the absolute importance of 6 Farvardin, because it is the day of fulfillment of creation (Belardi, pp. 72-75), is of general value in a phenomenological perspective and can enlighten the importance given to 6 Farvardin independently from calendrical problems. In this regard, consideration must be given to Biruni’s hypothesis about 6 Farvardin celebrated as “the moment when Jam returned successful” (Biruni, *Ātār*, text, p. 233, tr. p. 220). According to Christensen, “the sixth day of the spring festival was in origin the day of the spring equinox, the right Nowrōz; then, when Persians adopted Islam ... , the Mazdaian festival Hamaspāθmaēdaja disappeared, and the spring festival began at spring equinox, but the idea of the solemnity of the sixth festive day has been conserved” (tr. of Christensen, p. 144).

The question is complicated by the existence of various other festivals, similarly doubled, as attested in Iranian tradition. In this regard, the coincidence between the 6th day of the Persian calendar and the New Year of the Armenians, Sogdians, and Khwarazmians obviously creates further complications.

In the *Tāriḳ-e Bokārā*, Abu Bakr Moḥammad Naršaḳi speaks of a second local Nowruz that followed the first one by five days, but he does not call it “the Great Nowruz” (Naršaḳi, text, p. 16, tr., p. 18; for a discussion on the topic see Cristoforetti, 2006b, pp. 100-3).

Ebn Ḥawqal (p. 364) reports about seven festive days of Nowruz in Isfahan during the 10th century (see [NOWRUZ, Islamic Period](#)); this is an apparent reference to a week. As a matter of fact, in spite of Biruni’s account on Hormozd ;I, there is no historical evidence of a 6-day festive period of the Nowruz celebration.

Persian astronomer and mathematician Mollā Moẓaffar Gonābādi, who worked at the court of Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 1588-1629) in Isfahan, did not mention the *sizdah-e Nowruz* in the list of Persian festivals, but he recorded both the “great Nowruz” on 6 Farvardin and the Ābānagān on 10 Farvardin (Gonābādi, Chap. 15, pp. 12-16). However, it seems improbable that references to 6 Farvardin as “the great Nowruz” in such a late theoretical work could prove the actual observance of the festival. Christensen (pp. 155-56) considered the festival on the 6th of Farvardin being still alive during the 17th century on the basis of the *Borḥān-e qāte‘* (pp. 287-91); however, the only quoted traveler who wrote on the subject is rather generic: “the feast of Nowruz continues about one week, but the first day ... is by far the most solemn” (Dubeux, pp. 461-62). According to Christensen (p. 158), the six-day festive period has been prolonged during the 19th century. Nowadays, without any attention to 6 Farvardin, the festive period of Nowruz ends on 13 Farvardin with the *sizdah bedar* or *sizdah-e Nowruz*.

There are ancient traces of a twelve-day festival in the *‘Oyun aḳbār al-Reżā* by Ebn Bābawayh Qomi (d. 381/991-2), in the section dedicated to the usages of the people called Aṣḥāb al-Rass (Qomi, Chap. 16, pp. 132-35). According to this text, the Aṣḥāb al-Rass lived in twelve towns, each bearing the name of a Persian month, and their king was called T.rkuz (= N.rkuz < Nokruz). When the time of the festival of the main town arrived, a big party was launched there during “twelve days and twelve nights,” like the number of “their festivals during a year.”

In the middle of the 10th century (958-59), the Sun entered the 19th degree of Aries on 3 Nisān/April. According to Biruni (*Āṭār*, text pp. 241-2, tr. pp. 229-30), the Khwarazmshah Abu Sa‘id Aḥmad (on the uncertain dates of his reign see Fedorov, pp. 73-74) fixed the Nowruz on that day (Nowruz-e ḳvārazmšāhi). In his Persian *Tafhim* (p. 272), Biruni also refers to the 2nd of Nisān as the Nowruz-e ḳvārazmšāhi in 958-59 CE. This incertitude is of some interest, because 2 Nisān was the 13th day after the official date of the vernal equinox for the Christians (21st of Aḍār/March), and the Khwarazmshah’s astronomers took into consideration “the Greek and Syrian”—that is, Christian—calendar in order to fix the local one. A fixed Nowruz could be found in Noṣayri tradition as well: according to the *Majmu‘ al-a‘yād* by Abu Sa‘id Maymun Ṭabarāni (d. 1034-35): “[Nowrūz] always falls on the fourth day of April. It is the first day of the Iranian year, which begins in the month named farwardīn” (*apud* Bar-Asher, p. 218). However, the vague solar Nowruz of the Persian tradition fell on 4 April during 924-927 CE only, and it is the 15th day after the day considered as the vernal equinox day by the Christians (March 21), in spite of the fact that during the 11th century the vernal equinox fell on March 15 of the Julian calendar. It is noteworthy that exactly 13 days run between the two dates proposed for the Christian Nativity since ancient times (December 25 and January 6), in a possible parallel with the two dates of Aiōn celebrations in Alexandria (Pettazzoni, pp. 171-75). Possible analogies with the 12-day period between the vernal equinox and the Western usages performed on the 1st of April were suggested by the Iranian scholar Maḥmud Ruḥ-al-Amīni (see Cristoforetti, 2005 p. 321-22). According to Boyce (2005, p. 30) the reckoning of Sizdah bedar “appears to be taken over from the religious Nō R`z of 6 Fravardīn ... for thirteen days after that was Fravardīn day of Fravardīn month” (that is, 19 Farvardin, which is Nowruz-e ḳvārazmšāhi). At the moment, there is no sufficient evidence that would give a solid explanation for the origin of the 13-day period of the Nowruz celebrations with the *sizdah bedar* at the end of them.

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