



CONGRATULATIONS

CONGRATULATIONS (Pers. *šād-bāš*, Ar.-Pers. *tabrīk*), the custom of conveying congratulations on such happy occasions as the birth of a child, a birthday anniversary, a marriage, a coronation, or a national or religious festival. During the Sasanian period the term *āfrīn* was probably used to express congratulations (e.g., *āfrīn* of *mobedān mobed* in the *Nowrūz-nāma*, p. 18, and recitation of (*āfrīn* in the *Šāh-nāma*; Moscow, I, p. 135 v. 703). The terms *do'ā* and *tahnīa* in later sources seem to be translations of *āfrīn*.

Birth and birthdays. The oldest document referring to birthday celebration in Persia is a note by Herodotus (1.133), according to which Persians celebrated their birthdays with splendid festivals, animal sacrifices, and the serving of food. The most magnificent banquet given at the royal palace was on the occasion of the Achaemenid king's birthday, which was the only day of the year when the king would soap his head and distribute gifts (9.110). The Sasanians must also have celebrated birthdays, though no direct evidence has survived. In the *Šāh-nāma* there is a description of extensive festivities on the occasion of Rostam's birth, as well as to the letter that Sam sent to Rostam's father, Zāl, "congratulating" him, probably reflecting actual Sasanian practice (*Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, I, pp. 108 v. 485, 240 vv. 1526-40). In the early Islamic period the birthday of the Buyid 'Aẓod-al-Dawla (338-72/949-83) was celebrated according to the Persian solar [calendar](#). After his entry for a magnificent court banquet the court astrologer kissed the ground and congratulated him, followed by the statesmen, high-ranking civil servants, and other leading citizens. Poets also recited verses that they had composed for the occasion



(Yāqūt, *Odabā'* VI, p. 258; Faqīhī, 1347 Š./1968, pp. 84ff.; idem, 1357 Š./1978, p. 347). 'Azod-al-Dawla, who was interested in the rejuvenation of Persian culture, must have taken the Sasanians as his models. There is little concrete evidence of birthday congratulations during the succeeding periods until the latter half of the 19th century.

In recent times, under Western influence, birthday parties and cards have become common, though mainly for people under twenty years of age. The birthdays of the Pahlavi king, queen, and crown prince were celebrated officially.

Zoroastrians traditionally celebrate Zarathustra's birthday on 6 Farvardīn (Kordād-rūz, which, according to the traditional Zoroastrian calendar, now falls in summer; Karaka, p. 146; Boyce, *Stronghold*, p. 230) and congratulate one another on the event.

Marriage. There are few historical documents on congratulations at the time of marriage. In the *Šāh-nāma* it is reported that people congratulated Rostam and Tahmīna at the time of their marriage (Moscow, II, p. 176 vv. 94ff.; cf. Gorgānī, p. 243, on the marriage of Rāmīn and Gol).

The marriage between Moḥammad-Rezā Shah Pahlavī and the Egyptian princess Fawzīya in 1318 Š./1939 was celebrated lavishly; arches of triumph were constructed, and there were illuminations (*čērāgānī*) and fireworks in the cities. His subsequent marriages to Ṭorayyā Esfandīārī (1329 Š./1950) and Faraḥ Dībā (1338 Š./1960) were celebrated with equally elaborate festivities (*Gāh-nāma* I, pp. 170, 631, II, p. 1287; *Ketāb-e Pahlavī*, sub 1318 Š., 1329 Š., 1338 Š.). Celebration of wedding anniversaries and receiving congratulations on such occasions are Western customs, imitated only among well-to-do Persian families.

Coronation. Coronation ceremonies are mentioned in the *Šāh-nāma* (e.g., Moscow, I, pp. 81, 136) and in early Islamic sources (e.g., Ṭabarī, I, pp. 834-35, 846, 871, 896; Ta'ālebī, *Gorar*, pp. 480-81, 498-99, 507-09, 532-33, 536); the information in those sources was drawn chiefly from the Pahlavi *Xwadāy-nāmag* and thus probably reflects Sasanian court practice. In response to the expression of congratulation by the grandees of the realm, the king delivered a throne address elaborating on statecraft, the dispensing of justice, the necessity for obedience to the king, and similar themes. No reference can be found to the coronation of kings in Persia before the late 17th century. From



that period European travelers have left detailed descriptions of the coronation of the Safavid shah Solaymān (1077-1105/1667-94). He received congratulations from his courtiers in ceremonial audience (Kaempfer, pp. 35-37; Chardin, IX, pp. 490ff.). There are also descriptions of Qajar and Pahlavi coronation ceremonies (e.g., of Moḥammad-ʿAlī Shah Qājār; see Aubin, pp. 131ff.; *Ketāb-e Pahlavī*, pp. 153-55).

The new year (Nowrūz). Again there is no precise information on the customs and ceremonies connected with Nowrūz before the Sasanian period. It seems that at the Achaemenid court nobles, courtiers, representatives of subject peoples, and the like were received by the king on that day, so that they might present gifts and probably also express their congratulations, for such ceremonies are depicted on the reliefs at Persepolis (Walser, p. 20; Olmstead, p. 275). For the Sasanian period only Persian and Arabic sources are available. According to Bīrūnī (*Āṭār al-bāqīa*, pp. 218-19), celebrations lasted six days, and on each day the representatives of one particular class of people were received in a royal audience; they greeted the king, presented their gifts, and received rewards from him (cf. Qazvīnī, pp. 80-81). The first person to enter the royal presence to give congratulations was a good-looking man, who called himself *kojasta* (auspicious). He was followed by another person, who carried all the gifts for the king. After that the leading officials were received (Demašqī, p. 288; [Pseudo] Jāḥeẓ, pp. 360ff.).

In a text attributed to Ebn Moqaffaʿ (Grignaschi, pp. 103-04, 129) it was reported that on Nowrūz those received in public audience at court arrayed themselves according to rank. The king, wearing his crown, praised God and addressed the people; then the *dabīrbad* (chief secretary), *mobedān mobed* (high priest), ministers, and commander-in-chief of the army delivered congratulatory speeches. Finally, the king gave a concluding speech. An example of the congratulations by the *mobedān mobed* is cited in the *Nowrūz-nāma* (p. 18). Another version of such congratulations is cited in *Bakšī az tafsīr-ī kohan* (pp. 12ff.; cf. Šādeqī, pp. 107ff.).

There is little information on the modes of greeting and congratulation on Nowrūz at the beginning of the Islamic period, but the custom of giving gifts to the caliphs at Nowrūz became common under the Omayyads. The first person in the Islamic period to introduce the custom of exchanging gifts at Nowrūz was Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, the Omayyad governor of Iraq (41-95/661-714; Alūsī, p. 350); it was abolished by ʿOmar b. ʿAbd-al-ʿAzīz (99-101/717-20) but revived under Yazīd b. ʿAbd-al-Malek (101-05/720-23; Yaʿqūbī, *Tarīk* II, pp. 366, 376).



With the increasing prominence of Persians in the 'Abbasid administration Nowrūz and Mehragān (the sixteenth day of Mehr) were customarily celebrated at court (Mas'ūdī, *Morūj* VII, pp. 277-78).

For the Safavid period the descriptions of Nowrūz celebrations, including congratulations, are again to be found in reports by foreign travelers (e.g., Chardin, II, pp. 266ff.). According to these reports, the courtiers, nobles, and ranking officials were received by the king and expressed their congratulations. Similar Nowrūz audiences were customary during the Qajar period (E'temād-al-Salṭana, *Rūznāma-ye kāṭerāt*, pp. 63-64; Brugsch, II, pp. 346ff.; Polak, I, chap. 12). Such ceremonies continued with some modifications throughout the Pahlavi period (*Gāh-nāma*, pp. 108, 270).

Since early times Nowrūz has been the most important festival on which Persians congratulate one another, in ceremonies that take both formal and private forms. During Nowrūz visits people exchange phrases like "Happy New Year" (*Īd-e šomā mobāarak*), "I convey my congratulations" (*Tabrīk 'arzmīkonam*), and "Hundred returns of the day" (*Šad sāl be īn sālhā*).

According to Farīd-al-Molk (p. 40), Mīrzā Malkom Khan (1249-1326/1833-1908), who had served as Persian minister to London, introduced into Persia the custom of sending congratulations cards at Nowrūz. The practice was probably inspired by the practice of exchanging Christmas cards in the West. Congratulations cards are usually decorated with pictures of flowers and plants, miniature paintings, or representations of such Persian landmarks as Persepolis and famous mosques (particularly since the Revolution of 1357 Š./1978). The miniature paintings are usually derived from illustrations of the *Šāh-nāma*, and, because Jamšēd is considered the initiator of Nowrūz, representations of his throne were among the most common designs on congratulations cards during the Pahlavi period. Copies and imitations of works by recent painters can also be found on these cards accompanied by standard phrases like "May your Nowrūz be victorious" (*Nowrūzetān pīrūz bād*) and "For conveyance of congratulations" (*Barā-ye 'arż-e tabrīk*).

Religions festivals. The most important Islamic festivals are 'Īd-e Feṭr and 'Īd-e Qorbān. The anniversary of Moḥammad's call to prophethood (*mab'at*); 'Īd-e Qadīr-e Kōm (when, according to Shi'ite belief, 'Alī was designated as Moḥammad's successor); and the birthday of the twelfth imam are also occasions for public congratulations and special ceremonies.



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