



FĀḲTA

FĀḲTA, an obsolete Persian name (older **fāḳtak/g*; cf. the pl. *fāḳtagān*; arabicized as *fāḳeta*, pl. *fawāḳet*; see also Schapka, no. 577, p. 180) for a columbine bird, most probably the so-called “collared turtle dove,” *Streptopelia decaocto* Frivaldszky (order Columbiformes), mentioned in classical Persian poetry mainly as a spring songbird.

Manūčehrī Dāmḡānī (q.v.; d. ca. 432/1041?), “the [Persian] bard of nature,” with which the poet had an “empathic” familiarity (Zarrīnkūb, pp. 349, 352-53), gives the most reliable (albeit insufficient) poetic description of the *fāḳta*. The *fāḳta*’s unmistakable morphological feature is a crescent-like band of black feathers on its *gardan* (neck; but also, probably by synecdoche, *galū* or *ḥalq*, “throat”), referred to as *ḥalqa-ye moškīn rasan* (a loop of musk-colored cord; Manūčehrī, p. 1); *māh-e seh šaba . . . az ḡālīa* (a third-night [crescent] moon of *ḡālīa* [a black perfume of ambergris and musk]; p. 175), *māh-e now-e monḳasef* (the new moon eclipsed; p. 180), etc. Otherwise, the *fāḳta*, with its melodious, plaintive call, is variously compared by Manūčehrī to a *nāyzan* (flute player; p. 1), a *ḳonyāgar* (minstrel, songster; p. 30), a *nawḥagar* (mourner; p. 127), a muezzin (p. 129), etc., cooing in trees along with the *qomrī* (turtle dove?; pp. 1, 59, 132), *varašān* (wood pigeon?; pp. 127, 183, 187), *šoḷsol* (see below; pp. 60, 132, 183), etc. For other references to the *fāḳta* by Manūčehrī and by his contemporary Farroḳī Sīstānī (q.v.), see de Fouchécour, pp. 142-43.

Some other poets, apparently less familiar with birds, have attributed three additional characteristics to the *fāḳta*: (1) Its call is a two-note *kūkū*: cf. ‘Omar



Ḳayyām’s “. . . *fākta-ī* . . . *hamī-goft ke kūkū, kūkū*” (“. . . a *fākta* . . . saying, *kūkū, kūkū*”; in a quatrain also cited by Daštī, p. 278) and Sanā’ī Ġaznavī’s “*ṭawq dar gardaño kūkūgūy*” (having a collar about the neck . . . and calling *kūkū*; quoted by Dehḳodā, s.v. “*fākta*”). (2) It has a grey or dark plumage: cf. the adj. *fākta-gūn* (*fākta*-colored) used for clouds by Sūzanī Samarqandī and the sky by Neẓāmī Ganjavī (both quoted by Dehḳodā, s.v. “*fākta*”). (3) The (female?) *fākta* is *bīmehr* (unkind, aloof [from one’s wooer]) and *bīwafā’* (faithless): cf., e.g., Lāme’ī Gorgānī (p. 151), “*Fākta-mehr-ī, nabāyad dar to del bastan, ke to / har zamān joft-e degar jū’i o yār-e now gerī*” (Thou art fickle as a *fākta*; one must not attach one’s heart to thee, because every now and then thou seeketh another mate and taketh a new lover); Sa’dī Šīrāzī (p. 271), “*...bī-mehrtar az fākta-ī*” (. . . thou art more unfriendly than a *fākta*); and ‘Aṭṭār Nīšābūrī (p. 37) addressing the *fākta*, “*Čūn bovad ṭawq-e wafā’ dar gardanat/ zešt bāšad bīwafā’ kardanat*” (Because there is a collar of fidelity about thy neck, it is unbecoming for thee to be unfaithful.).

If the *fākta*’s “faithlessness” can be interpreted as an allusion to the polyandry of the female *fākta*, modern ornithological studies about Persia and Afghanistan (the most accurate and comprehensive of which is Hüe and Étchécopar), do not seem to indicate any single columbine species combining these four features. The semi-circular black marking is found only on the nape of the collared turtle dove and of the red turtle dove, *Streptopelia tranquebarica* Hermann. The latter, however, is out of the question here because of its very limited geographical distribution in the Iranian area (i.e., part of eastern Afghanistan; see Hüe and Étchécopar, p. 390; omitted by Scott et al.). The stock dove (*Columba oenas* L.) and the eastern stock dove (*C. eversmanni* Bonap.), which Scott et al. have arbitrarily called *fākta* and *fākta-ye kāvarī* respectively, are two species of wild pigeons that do *not* have any black “collar” about their necks (pp. 188, 190, 191, and 193; cf. Hüe and Étchécopar, pp. 378-81, and pl. XI). As for the *fākta*’s call, that of our only black-collared columbine species, i.e., *S. decaocto*, is a “trissyllabic song [sounding like] *kūk-rūk-kū*, with a falling tone on the last note—a well-known call, because this species is often kept in captivity” (Hüe and Étchécopar, p. 388). Allowing for varying acoustic perceptions, Ḳayyām’s “*kū-kū-kū-kū*” (probably distorted by his intended pun on the interrogative adverb *kū?* “where is it?,” reflecting on bygone worldly splendor) may well be equated with the ornithologists’ recording. However, the similarity of the *fākta*’s call to the cuckoo’s well-known *kūkū* has misled some contemporary Persian philologists (e. g., Mokrī, pp. 116-17, 146, and Mo’in, s.v. *fākta*) to mistake the *fākta* for the



cuckoo, heedless of the essential “black *ṭawq* on the neck” of the former, and of the fact that *kūkū* as the name of a bird is unattested in classical Persian and Arabic sources (for an accurate description of the cuckoo [order Cuculiformes], see Hüe and Étchécopar, pp. 394-98; Scott et al., pp. 192, 195-97, perhaps in imitation of the English word or the French *coucou*, have named this bird *kūkū*).

The literary allusions to the dark or grey coloration of the *fākta* do not fit the plumage of *S. decaocto*, which is “beige on the back and pale mauve in front” (Hüe and Étchécopar, p. 388). On the other hand, all wild pigeons (genus *Columba*; see KABŪTAR) have an overall ash-grey or slate-grey plumage (Hüe and Étchécopar, pp. 378-85). As to *bīmehrī* / *bīwafā’ī* (polyandry?), Hüe and Étchécopar mention it for the female cuckoo, which “seems polyandrous, and uninterested in its offspring” (p. 395). The conclusion which seems inevitable as to the identity of the *fākta* is that some Persian poets (as well as others) have confused the traits of at least two birds, i.e., *S. decaocto* and, most probably, *Columba palumbus*, the wood pigeon, a species combining a grey plumage and a melodious call that sounds like / *āmūr . . . pūr tū-žūr* (Fr. *amour. . . pour toujours* “love . . . for ever”; Hüe and Étchécopar, p. 384).

Classical prose *adab* works and pseudo-zoological writings are of little or no avail for identifying the *fākta*. The great philologist Jawharī Fārābī (4th/10th cent.) describes the *fākta* only as one of the *dawāt al-aṭwāq* (possessors of collars; I, p. 259) and considers it identical to the *ṣolṣol* (III, p. 1745). This identification was indiscriminately repeated by some later authors, e.g., Damīrī (d. 808/1405; p. 196); Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfī (fl. 740/1339-40; p. 82), who adds that “the Mongols call it [the *fākta*] *kākū*” (perhaps related to the above *kūkū*); and, more recently, Mo’īn (s.v. “*ṣolṣol*”) and Schapka (s.vv. “*fākta*” and “*ṣolṣol*”). The *ṣolṣol*, whatever its true identity, is not the *fākta*, at least in Persian poetry; for example, Manūčehrī mentions both as two different songbirds several times in the same poems (e.g., pp. 59-60, 132). Zakarīyā’ Qazvīnī (d. 682/1283), mainly interested in the “marvelous” features of creatures, speaks of the *fākta* only as “a well-known bird *yatabarrako behe al-nās* [by which people are blessed, or which people enjoy?], whose call supposedly scares the snakes away, and fumigation with whose blood (mixed with pigeon blood, pitch, and tar) causes sleeplessness to anyone who smells it” (p. 422). Damīrī’s description of the *fākta* is vague and partly incorrect: “It is indigenous to ‘Erāq and not to the Ḥejāz, anthropophile by nature, dwells in houses, and lives a long life . . . The Arabs describe it as a liar.” The rest of



Damīrī's long article (pp. 135-37) concerns mainly the medicinal properties of the fākta and interpretations of its appearance in dreams.

The term *fāketa* seems to be still in use in the modern ornithological terminology of some Arab countries. For instance, the Iraqi author Amīn Ma'lūf says that the *fāketa*, pronounced *foktīa* in Iraq and called *yā-karīm* in Syria, is a species of *ḥamāma moṭawwaqa* (collared pigeon; for the probable nature of the famous *al-ḥamāma al-moṭawwaqa* in the *Kalīla wa Demna* story, see KABŪTAR), *S. decaocto* or *Turtur risorius* [sic.], whereas the *ṣoḷṣol*, called *šefnīn* in Iraq and *qomrī* in Egypt, is the turtle dove, *Streptopelia turtur* (p. 87). According to Steven Goodman et al., *fāketa* in Egypt is synonymous with *ṣalṣala*, the pink-head dove, *Streptopelia roseogrisea* (p. 311); *ṣoḷṣol* is equivalent to *qomrī*, *S. turtur* (p. 313); while *S. decaocto* is called *yamām moṭawwaq* (lit., collared wild pigeon), *fāketa*, *qomrīy*, or *yā-karīm* (p. 312).

Incidentally, the onomatopoeic name *yā-karīm*, which otherwise means “O Generous One!” (an invocation to Allāh) in Arabic, has been given by Scott et al. to *S. decaocto* in Persia (pp. 191, 193), whereas they have called the turtledove (*S. turtur* L.) *qomrī-e ma'mūlī* (lit., the common or ordinary turtledove; pp. 191, 194).

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