



FALAKA

FALAKA (also *falak*, *čūb o falak*), one of the most common instruments of corporal punishment in Persia. The victim would be made to lie down on his back, and his feet would be fastened to a pole of about 2-3 m long with a loop in the middle made of leather or rope. The loop was held in place by passing its two ends through two holes made in the pole about 20-25 cm apart, with knots at the end to prevent the cord from slipping through. The feet of the victim were put through the loop and the pole was twisted, tightening the loop around the feet so as to prevent release. Then held up by two people, each of whom was holding one end of the pole, the agent of punishment, would strike the soles of the victim's feet with sticks. Sometimes another person would be standing by to hand the agents fresh sticks in case the one being used broke under the force of the blows (Najmī, p. 387). Although the punishment was usually administered to members of the lower social classes, occasionally well-to-do merchants were also subjected to it (e.g., punishment of a leading merchant of Tehran in 1303/1905; see *Tārīk-e bīdārī*, ed. Sa'īdī Širjānī, I, pp. 321-23). These merchants were typically accused of hoarding or charging high prices for their goods. Another group of people who regularly suffered this treatment were school children. They would be subjected to the treatment by the school's vice-principal (*nāẓem*: lit., regulator, or disciplinarian) for laziness or unruliness, particularly in traditional *maktabs*, the elementary, one classroom schools common in Persia to the end of the Qajar rule (effectively 1921; see EDUCATION iii), but also in modern schools with diminishing usage under Reżā Shah (r. 1304-40 Š./1925-1941). It is now considered a thing of the past (Najmī, p. 389; for a photograph of the administration of this punishment,



see p. 390, and Šahrī, V, p. 402, fig 78).

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