



## FARDIN, MOḤAMMAD 'ALI

**FARDIN, Moḥammad-'Ali** (b. Tehran, 6 April 1930; d. Tehran, 7 April 2000), a popular Iranian actor (FIGURE 1). Born and raised in a poor neighborhood in the south of Tehran, Moḥammad-'Ali was the eldest of three children. His father, a carriage builder who later opened his own machinery and equipment shop, was a part-time stage actor appearing occasionally with Taqī Zohuri—an actor who ironically became Fardin's sidekick in several films years later (Bahārlu, 2000, pp. 39-58). After receiving his high school diploma, Fardin joined the Iranian Air Force and pursued a career as a free-style wrestler, which brought him the silver medal in the 1954 World Wrestling Championship in Tokyo (Behmaneš, 2000b, pp. 60-61).

Fardin's 23-year film career blossomed late, after a short stint in the theater, and it suffered an early demise in 1981 when the Islamic Republic of Iran banned him from filmmaking in a wholesale purge of the major entertainers of the pre-revolution era. He was allowed to keep the movie theater he owned and, subsequently, he opened a carpet gallery.

Although widely known as an actor (with about 60 films to his credit), he also directed a dozen films, including his last before the Islamic Revolution—*Bar farāz-e āsmānhā* ('High in the Skies,' 1979), which is an ambitious melodrama. After the revolution, he appeared in only one film, *Barzakihā* ('The Purgatory Dwellers,' 1981). His popularity, however, did not diminish as people continued to watch bootleg videotapes of his films in private (*Māhnāma-ye sinemā'i-e film*, 2000, p. 34).



A prolific movie star, Fardin was largely responsible for attracting people to Iranian movie theaters in the 1960s. In 1964 alone, he appeared in six feature films (Meḥrābi, p. 111). Yet his epochal film, the blockbuster *Ganj-e Qārūn* ('Treasure of Korah' or 'Treasure of Croesus') was screened a year later and broke all the box-office records in Iran. The film, an escapist musical melodrama with a simple-minded narrative of class boundaries, provided a prototype for many pre-revolutionary films, but also made Fardin the prime symbol of the trite commercial films pejoratively known as *Filmfarsi* ('Persian film') in critical circles. His occasional efforts in raising his artistic profile (co-productions in Italy, India, and Lebanon, and appearing in films by better known filmmakers such as 'Ali Kātami, Mas'ud Kimiā'i, and Jalāl Moqaddam) rarely paid off.

In fact, the professional dubbers and vocalists, who spoke and sang for him in his movies, were as essential to the construction of his movie persona as was Fardin's own modest acting abilities. However, his popular appeal came from the type of character he repeatedly played: a blue-collar hero whose physical and moral strength, along with his honesty and altruism, helped audiences of the middle and lower classes to identify with him. Benefiting greatly from Fardin's appealing physique, this archetypal character, in turn, catapulted him to the unprecedented status of a superstar in Iranian cinema. The loud chants of *solṭān-e qalbhā* ('sultan of hearts') heard at his funeral in the spring of 2000 were a reference to the title of one of his blockbuster films and a testament to how interwoven his own character and his screen persona had become in the public's perception. The raucous funeral also served as a protest rally against the restrictive cultural policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran that had banished Fardin from filmmaking for two decades.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Key Films.

*Češma-ye āb-e ḥayāt* ('The Fountain of Life,' 1959).



*Fardā rowšan ast* ('Tomorrow is a Bright Day,' 1960).

*Faryād-e nima-šab* ('Midnight Cry,' 1961).

*Zamin-e talk* ('Bitter Land,' 1962).

*Gorghā-ye gorosna* ('Hungry Wolves,' 1962).

*Sāhel-e entezār* ('Coast of Waiting,' 1963).

*Āqā-ye qarn-e bistom* ('Mr. 20th Century,' 1964).

*Ensānhā* ('Men of Honor,' 1964).

*Gedāyān-e Tehrān* ('Beggars of Tehran,' 1964).

*Jahannam zir-e pāy-e man* ('The Hell is under My Feet,' 1964).

*Masir-e rudkāna* ('The Course of the River,' 1964).

*Ganj-e Qārūn* ('Treasure of Korah' or 'Treasure of Croesus,' 1965).

*Soltān-e qalbhā* ('Sultan of Hearts,' 1968).

*Kuča-mardhā* ('Men of the Street,' 1970).

*Bābā šamāl* ('Baba Shamal,' 1971).

*Jahannam be ezāfa-ye man* ('The Hell and I Together,' 1972).

*Ġazal* ('Gazelle,' 1976).

*Bar farāz-e āsmānhā* ('High in the Skies,' 1979).

*Barzakihā* ('The Purgatory Dwellers,' 1981).

Sources.

A. Bahārlu, *Sinemā-ye Fardin be rewāyat-e Moḥammad-'Ali Fardin*, Tehran, 2000.

A. Behmaneš, "Wa ḥāla ruḥ-at-rā be kodā besepar," *Māhnāma-ye sinemā'i-e film* 251, 2000a, pp. 34-35.



Idem, “Noḳostin owj dar parvāz, sepas parvāz-e bihamrāh,” *Māhnāma-ye sinemā'i-e film* 252, 2000b, pp. 60-61.

M. Meḥrābi, *Tāriḳ-e sinemā-ye Irān, 1279-1357*, Tehran, 1995.

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