



## FĪRŪZ

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**FĪRŪZ (PĒRŌZ)**, Sasanian king (r. 459-84), son of Yazdegerd II (r. 439-57). After Yazdegerd's death his other son, Hormozd, hitherto viceroy of Sīstān, was crowned as Hormozd III (q.v.). The relevant sources are not clear as to which of the two sons was the elder. Armenian sources refer to Hormozd as the elder (Patkanian, p. 169), whereas Persian sources have it the other way around (Rawlinson, p. 311). Fīrūz was forced to flee, probably to the Hephtalites (q.v.) who occupied Khorasan at this time. Fīrūz returned after nearly two years, backed by Hephtalite troops as well as Persians under the command of Rahām, of the Mehrān family of nobles (Ensslin, col. 887; Bivar, p. 67; Frye in *Camb. Hist. Iran III*, p. 147), and defeated Hormozd at Ray. Arthur Christensen (*Iran Sass.*, p. 289, n. 5) rejects the assumption of Hephtalite assistance; he speaks of troops "assembled in the eastern regions," because, in his opinion, at the time of Yazdegerd's death the Hephtalites had not yet reached the borders of Persia.

During this civil war the ruler of Albania (q.v.) had declared himself independent; thus Fīrūz's first campaign was directed against this renegade vassal. Fīrūz succeeded in re-establishing peace. In contrast to his father Yazdegerd II, who had sought to convert the Albanians and Armenians to Zoroastrianism, Fīrūz left them in peace (Frye, 1967, p. 321). Ṭabarī (Nöldeke, p. 118) reports, among other things, about Fīrūz, that he showed himself to be just and acted properly and religiously. This probably means that he was quite agreeable to the Zoroastrian priesthood (Christensen, p. 290). Thus we are not surprised to learn that there were persecutions of Christians and Jews within



the Sasanian empire (Nöldeke, p. 118, n. 4; Labourt, pp. 129-30). On the other hand, Fīrūz favored the rise of Nestorianism as the official form of the Christian church in Persia. In 484, at the end of Fīrūz's reign, a council was held in Gondēšāpūr (q.v.) during which Nestorianism was declared to be the doctrine of the Persian Christian church (Labourt, p. 135 ff.; Christensen, p. 291 ff.). A few years into the reign of Fīrūz a seven-year drought occurred, causing a large-scale famine (Rawlinson, p. 313 ff.; Nöldeke, p. 118). Fīrūz endeavored to avert the worst by distributing foodstuffs among the poor, abolishing taxes, and assisting the needy with funds from the treasury. Reports on the extent of the catastrophe may be somewhat exaggerated, given the fact that during this seven-year crisis, some time after 464, Fīrūz prepared a military campaign, probably against the Hunnish tribe of the Kidarites under King Kunkhas (*Kούγκας*; Priscus in Müller, *Fragmenta* IV, 33.4, 106; Blockley, II, p. 348 ff.; Moravcsik, II, p. 165; Frye, p. 348). At any rate, in 464 Fīrūz sought the support of the Byzantine emperor Leo I (Priscus in Müller, *Fragmenta* IV, 31.4, 105; Blockley, p. 344 ff.), but the emperor refused his request. Later, while in Gorgān, Fīrūz received an embassy from the Byzantines, but in the end no agreement was reached (Ensslin, col. 888).

Christensen (p. 293) as well as Richard Frye (1967, p. 348)—the latter relying on Priscus—assume that the Sasanians won the war. But the report of Priscus (Blockley, II, pp. 348 ff.) does not convey such a meaning; he indicates instead that the Persians were weary of war and concluded peace with Kunkhas. Moreover, Blockley (p. 396, n. 163), on the basis of his own textual interpretation, which is contrary to that of Müller (*Fragmenta*) and Gordon (p. 10), is of the view that it was not the Kidarites who had agreed to pay tribute to the Persians, but the other way around. The Persians had then refused to pay, and thus the war had broken out. There are, however, no sources that mention the payment of such tribute to the Kidarites, nor that such tribute had been paid before.

In any case, peace was not to last very long. The Saragur tribe, living in the vicinity of the Caucasus (Moravcsik, p. 267), moved in the direction of the Caspian Gate around 466/467, and Fīrūz's request for help from Byzantium was once again in vain (Priscus in Müller, *Fragmenta* IV, 37.4, 107; Blockley, II, p. 353 ff.). All the same, the Sasanians managed to ward off the danger. Fīrūz now turned against the Hephtalites (Procopius, *de bello Persico*, 1.3, 8 ff.). In the course of this campaign, however, in a battle near Gorgān, he and his son Kavād were taken captive (in 469 according to Rawlinson, p. 318, n. 2; Frye in



*Camb. Hist. Iran* III, p. 147; in 465 according to Göbl, II, p. 148). In a treaty with the Hephtalite ruler, Fīrūz was obliged to commit himself to maintain permanent peace and to pay a cash ransom. Joshua the Stylite (section 10) speaks of the ransom comprising twenty mule loads. Only then could Fīrūz and his army depart. His son Kavād, however, was kept hostage for two years by the Hephtalites.

In Ṭabarī (I, p. 874; Nöldeke, p. 123), this king of the Hayāṭela (Hephtalites) is called Aḵšonvār (q.v.); Ḳošnavāz in Ferdowsī (Wolff, *Glossar*, p. 324). According to Nöldeke (p. 123, n. 4), however, there can be no doubt that the name Kunkhas in Priscus is a distortion of Aḵšonvār/Ḳošnavāz. If Nöldeke is correct, the king of the Kidarites was none other than the king of the Hephtalites.

After the return of Fīrūz from this lost war, disturbances broke out in Armenia and Iberia. The battles dragged on for several years with varying success for Fīrūz. Although in the end he was able to suppress the revolts in Iberia, the Armenians took advantage of the fact that Fīrūz was planning a new campaign against the Hephtalites. He had never fully recovered from the disgraceful defeat of the first campaign and therefore gathered all his troops together. Although many of his closest advisers and confidants advised him against this undertaking, he began the war ca. 481 (Rawlinson, p. 323, n. 5). The campaign would end with a terrible defeat and the death of Fīrūz and some of his sons (Procopius, *de bello Persico*, 1.4, 1 ff.) At the end of 483 (Rawlinson, p. 326, n. 2) or more probably 484 (Göbl, II, p. 90; Frye in *Camb. Hist. Iran* III, p. 148), the decisive battle took place in what is now Afghanistan (near Balk?). Subsequently, the Hephtalites pressed into eastern Persia and forced the Persians to pay them an annual tribute. The powerful Sasanian noble families used the death of Fīrūz to set on the throne a king of their choice, namely, Balaš, Fīrūz's brother, who ruled from 484 to 488.

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