



ḤĀJĪ FIRUZ

ḤĀJĪ FIRUZ, the most famous among the traditional folk entertainers, who appears in the Persian streets in the days preceding Nowruz (Figure 1). The Ḥāji Firuz entertains passers-by by singing traditional songs and dancing and playing his tambourine for a few coins. He rarely knocks on a door, but begins his performance as soon as the door is opened.

Ḥāji Firuz blackens his face, wears very colorful clothes, usually—but not always—red, and always a hat that is sometimes long and cone-shaped. His songs, quite traditional in wording and melody, are very short repetitive ditties (Bolukbāši, 1977, pp. 108-9; idem, 2001, p. 38). Typical of these songs is:

*Ḥāji Firuz-e /Sāl-i ye ruz-e sāl-i ye ruz-e.
Hame midunan /Man-am midunam.
Eyd-e nowruz-e /Sāl-i ye ruz-e.*

(It's Ḥāji Firuz/[He's] only one day a year.
Everyone knows /I know as well.
It is Nowruz /It's only one day a year.)

The following song is usually sung with a traditional “funny accent” or a mimicking of a speech impediment:

*Arbāb-e kod-am salāmo 'aleykom,
Arbāb-e kod-am sar-eto bālā kon!
Arbāb-e kod-am be man nigā kon,*



*Arbāb-e kod-am lotf-i be mā kon.
Arbāb-e kod-am boz-boz-e qandī,
Arbāb-e kod-am čerā nemikandi?*

(Greetings my very own lord,
Raise your head my lord!
Look at me, my lord!
Do me a favor, my lord!
My very own lord, the billy goat,
Why don't you smile, my lord?)

Occasionally, the Ḥāji Firuz, whose income depends on his ability and talent to entertain by humor, manages to work other traditional songs into his routine. One of the most popular of these, which is almost impossible to translate, goes as follows:

*Beškan beškan-e, beškan!
Man nemiškanam, beškan!
Injā beškanam yār gel-e dār-e,
Unjā beškanam yār gel-e dār-e,
In siāh-e bičāre čeqad howšele dār-e*

(The word “*beškan*” may be called out as a refrain to the song by the onlookers.)

Classical Arabic and Persian sources that mention many folk entertainers do not refer to Ḥāji Firuz at all, nor is he mentioned in casual reference in poetry or prose of the classical period. There can be little doubt, however, that Ḥāji Firuz has virtually replaced all the other New Year entertainers of the past such as Kusa, Mir-e Nowruzi, Ġul-e biābāni, Ātaš-afruz, etc. (for some of these see Enjavi, II, pp. 112-13, 170-71; Mostowfi, *Šarḥ-e zendagāni* I, pp. 354-55).

In a paper originally published in 1983, Mehrdād Bahār opined that the figure of the Ḥāji Firuz is derived from ceremonies and legends connected to the epic of prince Siāvaš, which are in turn derived from those associated with the Mesopotamian deities of agriculture and flocks, Tammuz (Sumerian: Dumuzi). Following James Frazer, Bahār argued that Tammuz returned from the world of the dead every spring, and his festival, commemorated the yearly death and rebirth of vegetation. In some of these ceremonies during which people sang and danced in the streets, many blackened their faces. From this flimsy



evidence, Bahār deduced that the Iranian Ḥāji Firuz with his blackened face must be a survival of the Mesopotamian rite of darkening one's face while participating in the festival of Tammuz (Bahār, 1995a, p. 226). Ten years later in an interview Bahār stated his original supposition more emphatically, and claimed that “Ḥāji Firuz's blackened face symbolizes his returning from the world of the dead, his red clothing is the sign of Siāvaš's red blood and the coming to life of the sacrificed deity, while his joviality is the jubilation of rebirth, [typical] of those who bring rejuvenation and blessing [along] with themselves” (Bahār, 1995b, p. 231). In a later note written on Chapter 14 of the *Bundahišn*, he speculates that the name Siyāwaxš might mean “black man,” or “dark-faced man;” and suggests that the “black” part of the name may be a reference either to the blackening of the faces of the participants in the aforementioned Mesopotamian ceremonies, or to the black masks that they wore for the festivities. He adds that the Ḥāji Firuz character may be a remnant of these ancient practices (Bahār, 1996, pp. 194-95). He fails, however, to substantiate his views, and they remain a series of speculations based only on analogies with absolutely no evidentiary support. Another scholar finds the Ḥāji Firuz to be a continuation of a New Year's tradition of the Sasanian period, during which black slaves, wearing colorful clothing and a great deal of makeup, would entertain the public with song and dance (Rāzi, p. 44). Ja'far Šahri considers the Ḥāji Firuz a more recent character, and related not to some ancient religious ceremonies but rather to black slaves who formed troupes of entertainers. He suggests that the red color of Ḥāji Firuz's clothes may represent happiness and the name Firuz (lit. ‘victorious’) must have been given to them as a good omen (Šahri, IV pp. 111-14). In a brief anthropological essay on Iranian festivals, two distinct characters, namely *mir-e nowruz* (the Nowruz prince) and Ḥāji Firuz are unjustifiably mixed, with the suggestion that Ḥāji Firuz is a remnant of the older character (Ruḥ-al-Amini, pp. 47-48). The Ḥāji Firuz chant that is given by Maḥmud Ruḥ-al-Amini is slightly different from what most sources provide (p. 48):

Ḥāji Firuz-e,
Eyd-e nowruz-e,
Sāl-i čand ruz-e

(It's Ḥāji Firuz
 It's the Nowruz festival
 It's only a few days a year.)

Be that as it may, the Ḥāji Firuz as a character of traditional Iranian minstrelsy



has fallen on hard times in this age of religious governance, and may not survive the official piety.

For a music sample, see [Hāji Firuzi](#).

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