



## MIR-E NOWRUZI

---

**MIR-E NOWRUZI** (lit. “The prince of the New Year festivities”) or *Padešāh-e nowruz* (lit. “The king of the New Year festivities”), the carnivalesque ritual of electing a commoner to rule for a period of one to five days over the country; it belongs to the traditional Nowruz festival (cf. Dehḵodā, “Mir-e nowruzi” s.v. *Nowruzi*). The custom of the “false emir” or “Nowruz ruler” leading a procession through the city has been traced back to pre-Islamic Nowruz traditions (Gaffari, 1984, p. 363). In western Iran and Kurdistan, as well as in some other regions, which at some stage have come under the influence of Persian culture, the custom survived until the 20th century ([Figure 1](#)).

Several Muslim authors mention Nowruz celebrations (see [NOWRUZ ii. In the Islamic Period](#)). In classical Arabic literature, the Coptic Feast of al-Nayruz, which commemorates its martyrs and marks the beginning of the Coptic New Year at the end of Summer, has been mistaken for Nowruz for phonetic reasons: Nowruz vs. Nayruz (for a selection of short Arabic treatises on Nayruz, see Hārun, II, pt. V, pp. 3-48; cf. [NOWRUZ iii. in the Iranian Calendar](#)). Moreover, the Egyptian Nayruz celebrations include a festival similar to the Mir-e nowruzi (Maqrizi, II, pp. 30, 289-91; cf. Qazvini, 1945; for reports about the festival by foreigners, see Lane, 1860, pp. 490-99; Klunzinger, pp. 184-185; Murray, pp. 79-81; Tritton, p. 335).

Moḥammad Qazvini (1944; 1945, p. 57) noted three occurrences of the custom in classical Persian literature: a *ghazal* by Hafez (ed. Ḳānlari, no. 445), an episode in the *Tāriḵ-e jahāngošā* by ‘Alā’-al-Din Jovayni (I, p. 98; tr. I, p. 124), and another in the *Tadkerat al-šo‘arā’* by Dawlatšāh Samarqandi (pp. 213-14).



There are reports about the festival from the 19th century onwards (Wilson, pp. 144, 236-36, 243-52; Massé, I, pp. 165-66; Bois, p. 477; Eiiubi and Smirnova, pp. 212-22; Keyvān, pp. 641-47; Mostawfi, I, pp. 35-53).

The festival (Qazvini, 1944, p. 14-15; Bāyazidi, 1990, pp. 239-49; Ayyubiān) begins on the sixth day of Nowruz with the election of the *mir-e nowruzi* by the people. After his enthronement he organizes an army and forms a government. The Mir-e nowruzi enjoys considerable authority, including the prerogative to punish his subjects (Morgan, II, pp. 39-40), as well as offering wild promises of wealth and fortune. After his few days of reign, the Mir-e nowruzi is dethroned and has to disappear. The entire carnivalesque ritual is conducted in a spirit of gaiety and lightheartedness.

The procession of the Mir-e nowruzi is occasionally confused with the cavalcade of the *Kusa*, as they were both popular festivals. The clownish figure of *Ḥāji Firuz*, another character of the Nowruz festival, has also been associated with the Mir-e nowruzi ritual (Rāzi, pp. 240-42, 375-82). This confusion can be clarified by placing it within the context of the Nowruz celebrations, which comprise three parts: (1) the cavalcade of the *Kusa* on the eve of Nowruz; (2) the *Ḳojasta* greetings to the king (see below) on the morning of Nowruz; and (3) the short reign of the Mir-e nowruzi. The Zoroastrian background of the Mir-e nowruzi is *Rapiθwin*, the Spirit of noon, which retreats during the winter and returns with the coming of spring (see [NOWRUZ i. in the Pre-Islamic Period](#); [ZOROASTRIANISM i. Historical Review](#)). *Kusa* and *Ḳojasta* are personified divinities of the vegetation: The old and ugly *Kusa* on an old horse or a mule with a crow on one hand represents winter (Hyde, pp. 248-51; cf. Epinette, 1993, 1995), while the young and handsome *Ḳojasta* on a beautiful horse with a falcon perched on one hand represents spring (cf. [Inostranzev](#), p. 94; *Thousand and One Nights*, “The Story of the Magic Horse,” esp. p. 491, n. 20). These pre-Islamic motifs of the warring seasons have left their imprint on early classical Persian literature, as implicitly exemplified in the panegyric poetry of the Ghaznavid poets [Farroki](#), [Manuĉehri](#), and [‘Onṣori](#) which contain several descriptions of the battle between the seasons, with both the retreating winter and the victorious spring personified.

Drawing on James George Frazer’s description of human scapegoats in rituals from Classical Antiquity (chapter 58), *Kusa* appears as the human scapegoat of the Iranian Spring celebrations, and the ephemeral rule of the Mir-e nowruzi would provide the power vacuum necessary for his expulsion. This



interpretation is strengthened by Frazer's observation that the spring rituals of Greece and Rome relied on characters that are not divinities, but mere incarnations of the divinities. That Kusa is a human scapegoat marks an important difference between the Iranian Nowruz and the Babylonian spring festival, to which Nowruz is often compared, since the Babylonian ritual produces divinities. But the idea of a human scapegoat strengthens the argument that the short reign of the Mir-e nowruzi stands in the ancient Near Eastern tradition of substitute king rituals (e.g., [Athenaeus](#), *Deipnosophistae* 14.44). The vernal equinox creates a power vacuum, into which a temporary king steps (Frazer, chapter 25), since the king, fearing that a wrong decision would bring misfortune upon the coming year, cannot exercise his royal power until the priests endowed with divination signal the "all clear" (e.g., [Biruni](#), pp. 210-12; [Demašqi](#), pp. 278-79, tr. pp. 404-5; [Qazvini](#), 1848, pp. 80-81, 1868, pp. 165-66; cf. [Inostranzev](#), p. 94; [Epinette](#), 1993, pp 78-79). [Bess Donaldson](#) (p. 123) mentions the folk belief of not sleeping at home during the night preceding Nowruz because it was deemed as potentially perilous.

An incident during the reign of Shah 'Abbās I shows that the substitute king ritual was still known in Safavid Iran. [Eskandar Beg Monši](#) mentions in the *Tāriḳ-e 'Ālamārā-ye 'abbāsi* (I, pp. 474-75; tr., II, pp. 648-49), that in 1002/1593-94, when the court astrologers feared for the shah's life because of an inauspicious conjunction of Mars and Saturn, [Yusofi Tarkaš-duz](#), already condemned to death for heresy, sat for three days on the Safavid throne before he was executed (cf. [Monajjem Yazdi](#), p. 122). At the end of the 18th century, this event from the reign of Shah 'Abbās had entered the lore of storytellers and preachers. The British diplomat [John Malcolm](#) (1799-1833) included in his travelogue a description of how the Dervish [Seffer](#) publicly performed the tales of [Abdalla of Khorasan](#) ([Malcolm](#), pp. 111-24). The story cycle culminates with [Abdalla](#) accepting the "mock honor" of sitting on the throne of Shah 'Abbās in order to protect the shah from danger. The shah is so moved by [Abdalla's](#) humanity and wisdom that having discarded the advice of his astrologers to execute him, he instead appoints [Abdalla](#) as governor of Khorasan ([Malcolm](#), pp. 122-24).



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

For a general bibliography on Nowruz, see Nāder Karimiān-Sardašti and ‘Ali Reżā ‘Askari-Čāvardi, *Ketābšenāsi-e Nowruz*, Tehran, 2000.

Sources.

Esmā‘il b.‘Ali Abu‘l-Fedā’, *Historia anteislamica*, tr. and ed. by Heinrich Fleischer, 2 vols., Leipzig, 1831; Arabic text of *Moktaṣer fi aḳbār al-bašar* with Latin tr.

Mollā Maḥmud Bāyazidi, *Nravy i obychai Kurdov*, ed. Margarita B. Rudenko, Moscow, 1963; Kurdish text with Russian introduction.

Idem, *Ādāb va rosum-e Kordān*, introduced by ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Šarafkandi and tr. and ed. by ‘Abd-al-‘Aziz Moḥammadpur Dāšbandi, Tehran, 1990; enlarged Persian version of the “Textes kourdes,” published by Alexandre Jaba as part of the *Recueil de notices et récits kourdes*, St. Petersburg, 1860; for Mir-e nowruzi, see pp. 239-49.

Abu Rayḥān Biruni, *Ketāb al-āṭār al-bāqia ‘an al-qorun al-ḳālia*, tr. as *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, by Edward Sachau, London, 1879.

Dawlatšāh Samarqandī, *Taḍkerat al-šo‘arā’*, ed. by E. G. Browne, London, 1901, esp. pp. 213-14.

Šams-al-Din Mohammad b. Abi Ṭāleb al-Demašqi, *Cosmographie*, edition of *Noḳbat al-dahr fi ‘ajā‘eb al-barr wa‘l-baḥr*, ed. August Ferdinand Mehren, St. Petersburg, 1866; tr. as *Manuel de la cosmographie du moyen âge*, by A. F. Mehren, Copenhagen, 1874.

‘Ezz-al-Din b. al-Aṭīr, *al-Kāmel fi‘l-ta‘riḳ*, ed. C. J. Tornberg, 12 vols., Leiden, 1851-76.

Eskandar Beg Torkamān Monši, *Tāriḳ-e ‘ālamārā-ye ‘abbāsi*, ed. Iraj Afšār, 2 vols., Tehran, 1955-56; tr. as *History of Shah ‘Abbas the Great*, by R. M. Savory, 3 vols., Boulder, Colo., 1979-86.



Abu'l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Moḥammad al-Farḡāni, *Elementa Astronomica*, ed. and tr. by Jacob Golius, Amsterdam, 1669; Arabic text of *Jawāme' 'ilm al-nojum wa-oṣul al-ḥarakāt al-samāwiya* with Latin tr.

Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī Farroḡi Sistāni, *Divān*, ed. Moḥammad Dabir-Siāqi, Tehran, 1957.

Abu Sa'id 'Abd-al-Ḥayy Gardizi, *Zayn al-aḡbār*, ed. 'Abd-al-Ḥayy Ḥabibi, Tehran, 1968.

Ḥāfez, *Divān*, ed. Parviz Nātel Ḳānlari, Tehran, 1980, esp. ghazal no. 445.

'Abd-al-Salām Hārun, ed., *Nawāder al-maḡtuṭāt*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., Cairo, 1973-75, esp. II, pt. V, pp. 3-48 for a miscellany of Arabic treatises on Nayruz.

'Alā'-al-Din 'Aṭā'-Malek Jovayni, *Tāriḡ-e jahāngošā*, ed. Moḥammad Qazvini, 3 vols., Leiden, 1912-37, esp. I, p. 98.

Idem, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, tr. J. A. Boyle, 2 vols., Manchester, 1958, esp. I, p. 124.

Manučehri Damḡāni, *Divān*, ed. Moḥammad Dabir-Siāqi, Tehran, 1947.

Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrizi, *Ketāb al-ḡeṭaṭ al-maqriziya al-mosammāh be'l-Mawā'eḡ wa'l-e'tebār be-dekr al-ḡeṭaṭ wa'l-āṭār yaḡtaṣṣo dhāleka be-aḡbār eqlim Meṣr wa'l-Nil wa-dekr al-Qāhera wa-mā yata'allaḡo be-hā wa-b'eqlimehā*, 4 vols., Cairo, 1324-26/1906-8, esp. II, pp. 389-91, cf. p. 30.

'Abd-Allāh Mostawfi, *Šarḡ-e zendagāni-e man yā Tāriḡ-e ejtemā'i va edāri-e dawra-ye qājāriya*, 2nd ed., 3 vols., Tehran, 1964, esp. I, pp. 35-53.

Abu Bakr Ja'far Naršaḡi, *Tāriḡ-e Boḡārā*, ed. Modarres Raḡavi, Tehran, 1973; tr. as *The History of Bukhara*, by R. N. Frye, Cambridge, Mass., 1954.

Abu'l-Qāsem Ḥasan b. Aḥmad 'Onṣori, *Divān*, ed. Moḥammad Dabir-Siāqi, Tehran, 1963.

Pseudo-Jāḡeḡ, *al-Maḡāsen wa'l-aḡdād*, ed. Gerlof van Vloten, Leiden, 1898.

Pseudo-Ḳayyām, *Nowruz-nāma*, ed. M. Minovi, Tehran, 1933.

Jalāl-al-Din Monajjem Yazdi, *Tāriḡ-e 'abbāsi yā ruz-nāma-ye Mollā Jalil*, ed.



Sayf-Allāh Vaḥid-niyā, Tehran, 1987, esp. p. 122.

Zakariyā' b. Moḥammad Qazvini, '*Ajā'eb al-maḳluqāt*, Arabic version of the first part, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld as *Kosmographie: I*, Göttingen, 1848; German tr. as *Kazwīnis Kosmographie: Die Wunder der Schöpfung*, by Hermann Ethé, Leipzig, 1868.

Idem, '*Ajā'eb al-maḳluqāt*, ed. Naṣr-Allāh Sabuḥi, Tehran, 1340 Š./1961; Persian version.

Abu Maṣṣūr 'Abd-al-Malek Ṭa'ālebi, *Yatimat al-dahr fī maḥāsen ahl al-'aṣr*, Damascus, 1886-87.

*The Thousand and One Nights Commonly Called, in England, the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, tr. and annotated by Edward William Lane, new edition prepared by Edward Stanley Poole, illustrated, 3 vols., London, 1883, esp. II, chapter 17 "The Story of the Magic Horse," p. 491, n. 20.

Aḥmad b. Abi Ya'qub Ya'qubi, *Ta'riḳ*, 2 vols., Beirut, 1960.

Studies.

'Obayd-Allāh Ayyubiān, "Mir-e Nowruzi: Yeki az marāsem-e kohan-e Nowruz dar Kordestān," *Majalla-ye dāneškada-ye adabiyāt-e dānešgāh-e Tabriz* 14, 1962, pp. 99-112.

Moḥammad-Taḳī Bahār, "Tanhā aṭari az Irān-e qadīm yā ruz-e Nowruz," in idem, *Bahār va adab-e fārsi*, ed. Moḥammad Golban, 2 vols., Tehran, 1972, II, pp. 337-40.

Thomas Bois, *Connaissance des Kurdes*, Beirut, 1965, esp. p. 477.

Mary Boyce, "Rapithwin, No Ruz, and the Feast of Sade," in *Pratidānam: Indian, Iranian, and Indo-European Studies Presented to Franciscus Bernardus Jacobus Kuiper on his Sixtieth Birthday*, eds. J. C. Heesterman et al., The Hague, 1968, pp. 201-15.

Idem, "On the Calendar of Zoroastrian Feasts," *BSOAS* 3/3, 1970, pp. 513-39.

Idem, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*, Oxford, 1977.

Idem, "Iranian Festivals," *Cambridge History of Iran* III/2, 1983, pp. 792-815.

Idem, "Nowruz i. In the Pre-Islamic Period," *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online*, November 2009; available at: <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nowruz-i>.

Arthur Christensen, *Les types du premier homme et du premier roi dans l'histoire légendaire des Iraniens*, Stockholm, 2 vols., 1917-34.

Bess Allen Donaldson, *The Wild Rue: A Study of Muhammadan Magic and Folklore in Iran*, London, 1938, repr., London, 1973, esp. pp. 120-23.

Georges Dumézil, "Les fleurs Harout-Marout et les anges Haurwatat-Amērētāt," *Revue des études arméniennes* 6/2, 1926, pp. 43-69

Idem, *Le problème des centaures: Etude de mythologie comparée indo-européenne*, Paris, 1929.

Idem, *Mythe et épopée: L'idéologie des trois fonctions dans les épopées des peuples indo-européens*, 3 vols., Paris, 1968-73.

R. Ehrlich, "The Celebrations and Gifts of the Persian New Year (Now Ruz) according to the Arabic Sources," in *Dr. Modi Memorial Volume: Papers on Indo-Iranian and Other Subjects Written by Several Scholars in Honour of Shams-ul-Ulama Dr. Jivanji Jamshedji Modi*, Bombay, 1930, pp. 95-101.

Wilhelm Eilers, "Der alte Name des persischen Neujahrsfestes," in *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz, Geistes- und sozialwissenschaftliche Klasse* 2, Wiesbaden, 1953, pp. 37-86.

Kerim R. Eïiubi and Iraida A. Smirnova, *Kurdskiï dialekt Mukri*, Leningrad, 1968; esp. pp. 212-22.

Abu'l-Qāsem Enjavi-Širazi, *Jašnhā va ādāb va rosum va mo'taqadāt-e zemestān*, 2 vols, Tehran, 1973-75.

Michèle Epinette, "Kōsaj et mîr-e nowrûzi: Note sur une fête populaire iranienne de printemps," *Al-Derāsāt al-Šarqiya/Etudes Orientales* (Paris) 11-12, 1991, pp. 77-89 with 1 pl.

Idem, "Kusa va mir-e nowruzī," (Persian tr. Šāhrām Ġanbari), *Češmandāz* (Paris), no. 16, Spring 1375 Š./1996, pp. 1-12.

Maria Esperonnier, "Al-Nuwayrī: Les fêtes islamiques, persanes et juives," *Arabica* 32/1, 1985, pp. 80-101.



James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, abridged ed., London, 1922, esp. chapters 25 “Temporary Kings” and 58 “Human scapegoats in Classical Antiquity”; the full text is available via Bartleby.com or the Internet Archive at archive.org.

Farrokh Gaffari (Ġaffāri), “Evolution of Rituals and Theatre in Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 17/4, 1984, pp. 361-89.

Idem, “Darāmadi be nemāyeshā-ye irāni,” *Irān-nāma/Iran Nameh* IX/2, 1991, pp. 177-85.

Wilhelm Geiger, “Nowruz,” *Kāva* 1/5-6, 1916, pp. 4-5.

Şādeq Hedāyat, *Neyrangestān*, Tehran, 1933.

Thomas Hyde, *Historia religionis veterum Persarum*, 1st ed., Oxford, 1700, esp. pp. 248-51.

Konstantin A. Inostranzev (Inonstrantsev) *Taḥqiqāti dar bāra-ye Sāsāniān*, tr. Kāzem Kāzemzāda, Tehran, 1973, esp. pp. 89-114. Previously published with the title *Moṭāla’āti dar bāra-ye Sāsāniān*.

Jamshed Cawasji Katrak, “Ancient Iranian Festivals According to Al-Biruni,” in *The Commemoration Volume of Biruni International Congress in Tehran 1973*, Tehran, 1976, pp. 121-51.

Moşafā Keyvān, “Nowruz dar Kordestān,” *Yaġmā* 19/12, no. 224, 1967, pp. 641-47.

Carl Benjamin Klunzinger, “The Nerus Day,” in *Upper Egypt, its People and its Products*, London, 1878, pp. 184-85; German original, *Bilder aus Oberägypten, der Wüste, und dem Rothem Meere*, Stuttgart, 1877.

Alexandre Kohut, “Les fêtes persanes et babyloniennes mentionnées dans les Talmuds de Babylone et de Jerusalem,” *Revue des Etudes Juives*, 24-25, 1892, pp. 256-71.

Anna Krasnowolska, “Some Heroes of Iranian Calendar Mythology,” in *Proceedings of the 2nd European Conference of Iranian Studies*, Rome, 1995, pp. 371-82.

Idem, *Some Key Figures of Iranian Calendar Mythology*, Krakow, 1998.

Idem, "Kusa," *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online*, May 2006, available at: <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kusa>.

Edward William Lane, *An Account on the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, London, 5th ed., edited and enlarged by Edward Stanley Poole, 1860, pp. 490-99, esp. p. 490 for the Coptic Nowruz.

John Malcolm, *Sketches of Persia from the Journals of a Traveller in the East*, Philadelphia, 1828.

Henri Massé, *Croyances et coutumes persanes, suivi de contes et chansons populaires*, 2 vols., Paris, 1938, esp. I, pp. 165-66.

Jacques Jean-Marie de Morgan et al., *Mission scientifique en Perse*, 5 vols. in 7, Paris 1894-1905, esp. vol. II, pp. 39-40 and pl. XI.

M. A. Murray, "Nauruz or the Coptic New Year," *Ancient Egypt*, 1921, part 3, pp. 79-81.

Sa'id Nafisi, "Tāriḳ-e jašn-e Nowruz," *Payām-e Novin* 1/7, March-April 1959, pp. 1-10; 1/8, April-May 1959, pp. 72-84.

Moḥammad Qazvini, "Mir-e nowruzi," *Yādḡār* 1/3, October-November 1944, pp. 13-16.

Idem, "Šāhedi digar barāy-e 'mir-e nowruzi'," *Yādḡār* 1/10, June 1945, pp. 57-66.

Hāšem Rażi, *Gāh-šomāri va jašnā-ye Irān-e bāstān: Hamrāh bā āyinhā va marāsem-e bargozāri va sonnathā va bāvarhā-ye kohan az ruzḡār-e bāstān tā emruz*, Tehran, 1992, esp. pp. 240-42, 375-82.

John Richardson, *A Dictionary: Persian, Arabic and English*, 2 vols., Oxford, 1777-1780.

Homāyun Šan'ati, "Do sanad dar bāra-ye ravāj-e Nowruz dar Mešr-e bāstān," *Āyanda*, 16, nos. 1-4, 1990, pp. 34-39.

S. H. Taqizadeh, "The Iranian Festivals Adopted by the Christians and Condemned by the Jews," *BSOAS* 10/3, 1940, pp. 632-53.

A. S. Tritton, "Folklore in Arabic Literature," *Folklore* 60/3, Sept. 1949, pp.



332-39, esp. p. 335 for Nowruz.

Ervad Manekji Rustomki Unvala, “A Few Parsee Festivals (Jashans) According to an Old Parsee Manuscript,” in *Spiegel Memorial Volume: Papers on Iranian Subjects Written by Various Scholars in Honour of the Late Dr. Frederic Spiegel*, ed. Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, Bombay, 1908, pp. 201-210.

Samuel Graham Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs: With Scenes and Incidents of Residence and Travel in the Land of the Lion and the Sun*, rev. 3rd ed., Chicago, 1895, pp. 144, 236-37, and 243-52.

Ehsan Yarshater, “Now Ruz: The New Year Celebrations in Persia,” *Iran Review* 4, March 1959, pp. 12-15.