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***The Revival of Nowruz and Mehregan Celebrations in the  
Abbasi Court (132-220 AH)***

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**Abstract**

Nowruz and Mehregan were among the celebrations of ancient Iran that were held in the court in the first Abbasid era. Giving gifts by Iranians on Nowruz and Mehregan was one of the main reasons for holding these celebrations in the Abbasid court. The population context of Baghdad, which was predominantly Iranians, had an impact on the celebration of Nowruz and Mehregan. The Abbasids held Nowruz ceremonies to the satisfaction of the Khorasanians and the Iranian ministers, including the Barmaki and Sahl dynasties. The Abbasid caliphs, like the Sassanids, made public ceremonies at the court and allowed the people to hold various ceremonies. In this article, the description, manner and reasons for the survival of Nowruz and Mehregan in the Abbasid court of the first era are discussed.

**Keywords:** Nowruz Celebration, Mehregan, Gift, Khorasanians, Iranian Ministers.

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## **Introduction**

The ancient Iranians had several festivals.<sup>1</sup> Some of these celebrations, such as Nowruz and Mehregan, had an ancient history and were rooted in myth. They had a national aspect and were held by the inhabitants of Iran in all historical periods, including the Islamic period. The Abbasids, who owed their government to the Iranians, including the Khorasanians, used the ideas of Iranshahri and the experience of the Iranians from the very beginning of the caliphate to govern their government, and set the Iranian customs as their model. They were wearing luxurious Iranian clothes, holding Nowruz celebrations, Mehregan and performing special ceremonies like that of Iranians. The construction of the city of Baghdad and its proximity to Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sassanids, and the population structure of this city, which was mostly inhabited by Iranians, were a sign of the dominance of Iranian culture over the Arabs, and Iranian celebrations were held in this city.

Regarding the celebration of Nowruz and Mehregan in the Abbasi court, the question of this research is: What is the reason for holding Nowruz and Mehregan in the Abbasi court in the first era? In this article, an attempt has been made to explain this issue and answer the above question by using the historical method and relying on the main sources. It seems that the prosperity of Iranian celebrations in the Abbasid court was influenced by the economic function of Nowruz and Mehregan, the tradition of giving gifts, which was a tradition of Nowruz and Mehregan.

## **Giving Gifts, a Factor in the Survival of Nowruz and Mehregan**

Giving gifts to the rulers was one of the ancient and enduring traditions of Iranians in Nowruz and Mehregan celebrations and Iranians followed this tradition in the Islamic period. For the first time in the Islamic government, the custom of accepting gifts became popular by the agents of the Caliph Uthman in Iraq, Walid ibn Aqaba and Sa'id ibn al-'As (Malayeri, 1991). During the caliphate of Ali (AS), a group of

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1. Some of these celebrations had a religious aspect and were specific to the religion of Zoroaster, such as the monthly celebrations that were celebrated if the day was named after the moon, such as the thirteenth day of each month, which was called Tir Rooz. Or the celebration of Behizak the Great, which due to the leap year, the year was counted thirteen months every 120 years (See Ashrafi, 2013)

Iranian peasants presented the cups of Simin Khabis (dates mixed with oil) as gifts. Ali (AS) asked what it was. They said: This is the gift for the day of Nowruz. Imam (AS) said, every day is our Nowruz and he ate the Khabis and gave it to those present. He distributed the cups among the Muslims and considered them as the peasants' tributes (Jahez, 1996, p. 319). Some believe that this gift was made by Hormozan, the governor of Khuzestan (Baghdadi, n. d, v. 13, p.326). The same story has also been narrated about Mehregān in which it is stated that offerings were made to Imam Ali (AS) by bu No'man Ibn Marzban and Imam said, "we are in seek of kindness everyday" (Sha'abani, 2000, p.155).

The celebration of Mehregan and Nowruz became official during the time of Mu'awiyah. He entrusted the Iraq tribute, which was under the supervision of Mughirah ibn al-Harb, to Abd al-Rahman's brother, Obaidullah ibn Daraj. They were his two slaves. Obaidullah asked the Savad people to give him gifts during the Nowruz and Mehregan celebrations, and they did so. The gifts amounted to ten million dirhams a year (Jahshiyary, 1969, p.52). Qalqshandi believes that the first person to introduce Mehregan in Islam was Hajjaj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi (Qalqshandi,1985, p.447), and Umar ibn Abd al-'Aziz did not accept the gift of Mehregan (Ya'aqubi, 1992, p.270). Yazid ibn Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan wrote a letter to Umar ibn Habira asking him to accept the gifts of Nowruz and Mehregan (Ibid, p.280). In the Umayyads era, when the black shadow of prejudice spread over the Islamic world, the Iranians were forced to pay some money to the Umayyads to receive permissions for their celebrations, including Mehregan.

In the Abbasid era, Iranian celebrations became very important. The Abbasids, who owed their government to the Iranians, issued a permit to hold Iranian celebrations and sat on the throne and gave public gifts and received gifts from people on Nowruz or Mehregan. Ibn Shahr Ashoub narrates a narration in *Manaqib* about the Nowruz ceremony in the court of Mansour, the Abbasid Khalif, in which Mansur asked Imam Musa Kazem to answer the visitors on his behalf on Nowruz and to receive gifts. Khalifa considers the reason for holding Nowruz and accepting the gifts of the people to keep the Iranians satisfied. Imam Musa Kazem (AS) sat down and the kings, rulers and armies came to him and congratulated him and brought gifts for him, and Khadem Mansour was

standing beside the Imam and he was watching and counting what they were bringing.(Ibn Shahr Ashoub, n. d, pp.318-319).

There is also a narration in the Muqatil al-Talebeen and Ayoun Akhbar al-Reza that Abd... Ibn Aftas, who was arrested by Harun, was handed over to Ja'far ibn Yahya Barmaki to be imprisoned, and Ja'far killed 'Abda... Ibn Aftas during the Nowruz. He sent his head to Harun in a wrapped cloth as a gift along with other gifts. Harun accepted his gifts (Esfahani, n. d, p.494; Ibn Babawayh, 1994, pp.569-570).

Soli quotes Yazid Ibn Mahlabi that Abu-Dúlaf al-Qàssim ibn Issa Ejli presented Ma'amun a hundred female donkeys loaded with saffron in silk bags (Khaledi'een, 1956, p.109). Jahez narrates that on the day of Nowruz, gifts were brought to Ma'mun. He liked them. This gift was a table made of dates. It was of great length and width given to Abi Salma. Ma'mun was surprised and asked Abi Salma if she had received this gift from him. She answered," Yes". The caliph said, Is this gift in my house? Or is my house in it? She said I had put the gift in the napkin. So Ma'mun asked for the gift. They brought him the gift, which was a tablecloth made of palm leaf with gold bars of about one hundred Mesghals in it. Ma'mun accepted and enjoyed the gift (Jahez, 1996, p. 322).

It is also narrated that "... Ahmad Ibn Yusuf sent a gift worth one million dirhams to Ma'mun on one of the Nowruz festives and wrote these poems and attached them to it.

على العبد حق فهم لا بد فاعله      و ان عظم الموالى و جلت فواضله  
الم ترنا نهدي الى الله ماله      و ان كان عنه زاغنى فهو قابله<sup>1</sup>

Ma'mun read the poem and said he is a wise man who has provided us a good gift ...”(Ibid, 313; Nakhjavani,1934, p. 171). Another gift that was given by the elders and commanders to the caliphs was comprised of the beautiful bondswomen (Badi'e, 1977, p.22). one of the greatest gifts

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1. Although my lord is great and needless in every respect, but he has a right over me that I have to fulfill  
Don't you see that we are returning the God's properties to him, and he, while being needless, accepts it

given by the elders and rulers to the caliphs was beautiful maids.

In the Abbasid period, as in the Sassanid period, many poets wrote poems at the court during Nowruz or Mehregan and received some gifts. Among these poets was Buhturi who even has a poem about Nowruz. (Buhturi, n. d, pp.2090-2092). The works of Writers, who wrote letters to the caliph or courtiers during Nowruz, have more literary value (Ibn Abdrabbeh, 1987, pp.311-312). Gifts in Nowruz and Mehregan, in addition to income for the caliphs, could also be a ground for friendship and intimacy. This tradition was accepted as a good deed before Islam and after Islam.

### **The Social Context of Baghdad and the Presence of Iranians and Khorasanians in this City**

According to Yar Shater (2002, p. 17), "... The change of the Islamic capital from Damascus to Baghdad, which took place immediately after the fall of the Umayyads, indicated a change in the weight of the Islamic caliphate and its desire for the eastern lands of Islam, where the majority of the population was Iranian. " The Abbasids, who had taken their power from the Iranians, especially the Khorasanians, tried from the beginning to settle somewhere near Iran or in Iran. Safah, the first Abbasid caliph, established his rule in Hashemieh near Anbar, and Mansour moved it to a village near Ctesiphon, which had an Iranian name, Baghdad. This caused the influence of Iranians in Islamic culture in various ways (Bayani, 1998, p.15).

When Baghdad was founded, the migration of Iranians to this city began very quickly from the same period of Mansour - the second Abbasid caliph. This invasion was either for the sake of gaining a place or a position, or for acquiring wealth through business and using the political and financial center of a great empire, or for using medical and astronomical information and other scientific, technical and artistic skills in the wealthy apparatus of the caliphs, rijals, and the like, and it was at this time that Baghdad soon became a semi-Iranian, semi-Arab city, replacing a powerful city that had been adjacent to it for more than a century and a half. That is, Baghdad succeeded Ctesiphon (Medain), which was the center of Iranian power and civilization (Safa, 1971, pp.76-77).

Abolfaraj Esfahani displays a picture of the Khorasan rulers who came and went like a population of ants to the court of Caliph Mansour. He narrates that Abu Nakhileh stood at the door of Abu Ja'far [Mansour] and asked to be allowed to enter, but he wasn't allowed, while the Khorasanians came in and out and looked at him mockingly (Esfahani, n.d, p.138 citing Al-'Akoub, 1995, p.12). This anecdote shows the superiority and abundance of Iranians, including Khorasanians, in the Abbasid court.

Tabari also narrates that Fadl ibn Yahya ibn Khalid Barmaki, when became the governor of Khorasan, formed an army of five hundred thousand people, known as the Abbasids, and about twenty thousand of them were sent to Baghdad, which became known as the Karnabiyan (Tabari,2002, p. 1715). This narration also proves the influence of Iranians in Baghdad. Therefore, one of the reasons for the influence, dissemination and development of Iranian culture in the Abbasid court and in the city of Baghdad is the superiority or dominance of the Iranian population in Iraq and Baghdad. This led to the spread of Iranian culture as the dominant culture both among the caliphs and among the Arabs living in Baghdad.

Another social factor that caused the spread of Iranian customs in Baghdad, including Iranian celebrations, was the continuation and superiority of Iranian traditions in comparison with the existing traditions in the Arab realm of the Abbasid Caliphate. These Iranian traditions, which were the result of a thousand years of Iranian experience in civilization, were certainly superior to other Arab traditions, which were the result of tribal life, and the Abbasid caliphs were forced to follow this tradition in order to continue their political life. The Arabs acted and even many Arabs adhered to these traditions and "... the city of Baghdad became a city that was unparalleled in the world at that time. The palaces of the caliphs and the elders of the city, with the shrines and the nobles and maids who were in them gave this imaginary city of a thousand and one nights a special splendor. Caliph's palaces, decorated with carpets, colors and soft curtains, reminded the visitors of the majestic Kasra colonnade ornamented with Baharestan carpet and golden protruding Afshar contours and braids all of which were destroyed and plundered with the defeat of Mada'in; also, the

rituals and ceremonies of the caliphate court in presence of Iranian ministers in golden hats and garments and wearing Iranian-specific jewelries once again refreshed the dead memories of the grandeur and stateliness of Ctesiphon in Bagdad ...”(Zarrinkoub, 1976, p.191).

The Iranian culture became the dominant culture and the special ceremony of Nowruz and Mehregan were held in this city and the Abbasid caliphs were also attracted to these customs. The Abbasid caliphs used to make public meeting on Nowruz or Mehregan - like the Sassanid kings - and on this day people, elders and courtiers came to see them and brought them gifts or poets wrote poems for the caliphs on this day and Musicians played music on this day. It is narrated, "... On the first day of the year, which was called a special day, the caliph publicly gave gifts and accepted gifts and gave rewards to this and that, and people saw each other giving colorful eggs, sugar cookies and other sweets to each other. They were playing with fireworks and sparkling or fragrant waters were sprinkling on each other. Splashing water sometimes led to desecration and disgrace, and fireworks were also led to accidents..." (Amir Ali, 1987, p.299). Another Nowruz-specific ceremony that became customary in the Abbasid court at the time of Abbasid caliphs was setting fire, pouring water, illumination of the houses and palaces about which it is narrated that "...the ordinary people used pieces of cotton ('Habb Al-Qatan') and clay-made thuribles ('Al-Majamiir Al-Tin') ...”(Tanukhi, 1990, p.173), "The royal palaces were also illuminated by the use of valuable fabrics like 'Zahry'\* soaked in balsam oil (Dohn Al-Belsan) and the other precious and aromatic liquids filled into stone-made thuribles ...”(Ibid).

Jahez also quotes that on Nowruz, magnificent gatherings were held in the court of Harun al-Rasheed, and the houses were decorated with various carpets and golden vessels. Delicious foods with various spices were served. On that day, the maids and women of the harem gathered together and performed special ceremonies and had fun (Jahez, *Ibid*, p.280).

The tradition of lighting the palaces of the Abbasid caliphs during Nowruz and Mehregan shows the dominance of Iranian culture (Ahsan,

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\* The fabric had been very luminous.

*Ibid*, p.349). It is narrated that "... the Dhimmis of Baghdad used to hire a special cook during Nowruz to prepare special food at night so that to be fresh in the morning. They held parties inviting relatives and friends in which melons, plums, peaches and dates were placed on the tables. The women tried to buy perfumes for the day, and used to bring into their homes turtles to repel evil. They were also coloring eggs and painting eggs. Spraying perfume on a man and walking seven steps towards him meant that the evil eye, laziness and fever would go away from him. Tutia or Sadab and Surmeh were used to increase the brightness of the eyes during the next year and it was an auspicious day for taking medicine. At the same time, Muslims participated in this celebration and even drank wine in public, ate lentils like dhimmis, and played with dhimmis by sprinkling water on people. "Respected people used to water each other with musk or sprinkle water around their houses and gardens, and ordinary people used to do this in passages and public streets..." (Sabi, *Ibid*, p.350). Also, according to the tradition that has been practiced since ancient times, in Baghdad, people used to gather in the crossings for six days during Nowruz and light fires, and the efforts of the caliphs to prevent this ceremony did not work. Finally, they had to let the people to do this ceremony freely (*Ibid*, p.349).

Lighting and lighting houses and palaces or Dar al-Khalifa on Nowruz night has its roots in pre-Islamic Iranian religious culture. The ancient Iranians believed that "... on Nowruz night, the Forouhars and the spirits of the dead return to their homes. "They clean the carpets and spread the carpets and make food and think that the spirits of the dead benefit from their smell as well as their light..." (Moqaddasi, 2002, p.574).

Also in Baghdad, various ceremonies were held on Nowruz by various groups in which the courtiers also participated, including the ceremonies held by the people of Samajah. There was a group of people who wore masks on their faces. They played and performed all kinds of funny games and programs during Nowruz. This game was so interesting that Khalifa Abbasi Mutawakel also watched the games and even gave gifts to this group (Al-Shabeshti, *Ibid*, pp.39-40).



## **The Role of Iranian Ministers in Preserving and Perpetuating Iranian Celebrations**

With the Abbasids' coming to power, which was the beginning of the institution of the ministry, which coincides with the heyday of that institution, the Iranian patrons took over the ministry for several generations. They popularized a variety of administrative methods, court ceremonies, costumes and Iranian celebrations in the Abbasid court, and greatly shaped the ministry's duties and functions (Yarshater, *Ibid*, p.102). The transformation of the Abbasid Ministry under the influence of the Sassanid bureaucracy became both a means of popularizing Iranian patterns and a tool to consolidate Iranian influence (*Ibid*, p.103). Eventually, it led to the transfer of Iranian culture, including Iranian celebrations and holidays, to the Abbasid court. Here some of the Iranian ministers who until the end of Mamun's term were in charge of transferring celebrations and festivals will be mentioned:

### **Khalid Barmaki**

Khalid Barmaki did not think of replacing the Abbasids, but because he considered the ancient civilization of Iran better and superior to the civilization of the Bedouin Arabs, he thought of spreading the Persian language, national customs and traditions of Iranians, especially Nowruz and Mehregan among Muslims. He used the best political method in governing (Kanpoury, 1969, pp.248-249). He was a performer of Iranian customs and traditions, including Iranian celebrations. He not only introduced these traditions to those around him who were mostly Iranians and adhered to the ancestral traditions and customs, but also the Arabs and gave them gifts during the Nowruz or Mehregan ceremonies, as mentioned in the historical sources regarding the Nowruz ceremonies (Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā, 1988, p.213; Nakhjavani, 1934, p.102). Khalid's forgiveness and devotion attracted many people, including poets, to sing to him, and in order to enjoy his blessings, they sang poems in praise of him or about Nowruz or other Iranian holidays, which themselves caused the preservation of Nowruz or other celebrations. As it is narrated, Bashar ibn Bard received thousand dirhams for each verse from Khalid Barmaki for his praise of the Abbasid minister and his family (Esfahani, n.d, p.173). Khalid had a cordial relationship with the Abbasid caliphs such as Safah, Mansour, and Mahdi, and they used his experience in

governing and disseminating Iranian customs and consulted with him in all matters. Khalid was very keen on the spread of Iranian culture in the Abbasid court. He can also be considered as one of the main motivators of the Caliph to perform Iranian festivals.

### **Yahya Barmaki and his Children**

Among those who influenced the Iranian culture, including Iranian celebrations and festivals in the Abbasid court, were Yahya and his children. Yahya was Harun's teacher and mentor (Tabari, 2002, p.1669). Harun entrusted him with everything during his caliphate (*Ibid*, p.1705). Yahya also shared the works with his two children, Fazl and Jafar. He was holding public meetings with people until midnight. He established a pension for the city's dignitaries, religious people, and good men. He established schools for orphans and took over all the courts and the ministry, and was the first minister to be named Amir (Jahshīyārī, 1969, pp.228-229). Regarding the role of Yahya and his children in promoting Iranian culture and customs in the Abbasid court and their position and importance, several points can be studied.

1) The influence of Yahya ibn Khalid Barmaki and his sons, Fadl and Ja'far and Muhammad ibn Yahya on the three Abbasid caliphs Harun, Amin, Ma'mun, whose guardianship was entrusted to Yahya, Fadl, Muhammad ibn Yahya and Ja'far, respectively is important. These three caliphs were trained by these great men and they had to learn the temperament and tradition of the Barmaki dynasty. According to the tradition of the caliphs of Bani Abbas, who were inclined to the Sassanid style of governing, one of the duties of the minister was to teach the book of Ardashir Ahd to the caliphs and crown prince (Haqiqat, 1995, p.59). This was a kind of promotion and explanation of Iranian culture in the Abbasid court and paved the ground for the familiarity of the future caliph with Iranian traditions.

2) The power of Yahya bin Khalid Barmaki was another factor in the development of Iranian culture because he had full authority as a minister in all matters and was responsible for all national and military affairs and his sons served as emirs in various states. Due to his power, politics, tact, grace and generosity to the people, many people, even non-Iranians, were attracted to him, and thus many people became inclined to

Iranian celebrations and culture. For example, we can mention Jibril bin Bakhtishua, who was a Christian. Because he was raised by Barmakians - Yahya bin Khalid and his children - Jahshīyārī, *Ibid*, p.289) he came to Mutawakel on Nowruz and gave the valuable gift given to him by Yahya's wife Dananir to Mutawakel (Tanukhi, 1973, pp.245-249).

3) Yahya ibn Khalid Barmaki and his sons were Iranians, and they had full authority in the ministry. They gathered the Iranians around them and gave them administrative, national, and clerical jobs. Imitating the border guards and cavalrymen of the Sassanid era, they each had a court in which many of the customs of ancient Iran were performed, and the secretary class who were in charge of important national affairs during the Sassanid era came to power again. In Baghdad, the Abbasid caliph followed the same path, and in fact, in the system of Bani Abbas and his rulers, except for the religions of Islam and the Arabic language, everything was Iranian including the customs and ceremonies, military and national organizations and civil affairs (Jahshīyārī, *Ibid*, p.289). The Brahmak family attached importance to celebration, as Mas'udi narrates, "...When Yahya ibn Khalid, Fadl, Ja'far and other Barmakians reached the position of king and ruler and their work was established, they enjoyed constant celebrations..." (Mas'oudi, 1997, p.376). The Barmakians held celebrations such as Nowruz and Mehregan in the court with special splendor, and on this day, like their father, Khalid Barmaki, they had public meetings (Ibn al-Ṭīqṭaqā, *Ibid*, p.213), and on this day, people brought them gifts and poets praised them. Yahya and his sons also presented gifts to the caliph for the preservation and protection of Nowruz and Mehregan, who, in imitation of the Iranians, celebrated Nowruz and Mehregan and had public meetings. As previously mentioned, Jafar Barmaki sent some gifts to the caliph on Nowruz along with Abdullah Ibn Aftas's head who was the enemy of Caliph Harun al-Rasheed (Esfahani, n. d, p.494; Ibn Babawayh, 1994, pp.569-570).

Abolfaraj Isfahani also mentions in his book *Al-Aghani* that Mehregan ceremony was held by Mohammad Ibn Yahya Barmaki. Abolfaraj Isfahani also mentions in his book *Al-Aghani* that Mehregan ceremony was held by Mohammad Ibn Yahya Barmaki. Ibrahim accepted and left the meeting. Mohammad ibn Khalid Barmaki appointed a person to count whatever gifts were brought to him.

Muhammad said to the person who was writing the gifts: Do not inform Ibrahim Mosul about this gift. Ibrahim returned to Mohammad ibn Yahya and told him to bring whatever was given to him. He brought all of them except the statue. Ibrahim said to Muhammad, "These are all gifts." He said yes, except for one gift and that one gift which was a statue, and Ibrahim turned to Muhammad and said, "If these gifts are for me, I will do whatever I want with them." He gave the statue to his maid and distributed the rest of the gifts to the others present until nothing was left. Then, when he wanted to leave the meeting, he picked two apples and said that this was my share, and left. So Muhammad ibn Khalid Barmaki was surprised by the greatness of his character (Esfahani, *Ibid*, p.217). This narration specifies several points: first, the Barmaki dynasty, such as the Sassanid kings and elders, used to have public meetings on Nowruz and Mehregan, and people brought gifts for them. Second, as in the Sassanid era, anyone who brought a gift to the king, one would write his name with the gift he had brought (Jahez, *Ibid*, pp.190-191).

### **Sahl Family**

Sahl family were Iranian and their main birthplace Sarakhs, is one of the prestigious cities of Khorasan in eastern Iran. It is mentioned in some narrations that their ancestors were Zoroastrian kings of Iran. Until the caliphate of Harun al-Rasheed, this family adhered to the religion of Zoroaster. In the time of Harun Al-Rasheed, Sahl Ibn Zadan Farrokh, the father of Fadl, converted to Islam through Salam, the slave of Yahya bin Khalid Barmaki and found a place close to Yahya (Jahshiyārī, *Ibid*, p.293). Among his sons, Fadl became the servant of Fadl ibn Yahya and Hassan became the servant of Abbas ibn Fadl ibn Yahya. When Rashid succeeded in acquiring allegiance for Ma'mun in 182 (AH) to become the caliph after Amin, he handed over the government and the provinces of Khorasan and its affiliated states as far as Hamedan to Ma'mun. Ma'mun traveled to eastern Iran, and because his mother was Iranian and had been raised by Iranians such as Jafar Barmaki, he was under the influence of Iranians such as Fazl ibn Sahl and Tahir ibn Hussein ibn Masaab, with the assistance of whom he managed to consolidate his position in eastern Iran. After being unseated by his brother, Amin, the Iranians, who considered his victory as the victory of the Iranians over the Arabs, supported him, and finally Tahir killed Amin by defeating Ali

ibn Isa and capturing Baghdad, and brought his head to Ma'mun as a sign of victory from Baghdad. Ma'mun's caliphate began. Due to the services provided by Fazl Ibn Sahl to him, Ma'mun named him the "Head of Two Positions", i.e. the army and the administrative affairs (Ibn al-Ṭīqtaqā, *Ibid*, p.306).

The choice of Merv as the Dar al-Khalafah (capital) in Khorasan, which was the cradle and main center of Iranian culture and was one of the areas where Iranian traditions were preserved after Islam, restored the glory of Khorasan to it. As a result, the Khorasaniyans were attracted to Ma'mun (Tqosh, 2001, p.120). The caliph and the courtiers were inevitably fascinated by the Iranian traditions, including Iranian celebrations and feasts. Fadl ibn Sahl had a lot of power over the caliph and the caliph had entrusted everything to him and the people called him Al-Wazir Al-Amir because of his power and influence (Ibn al-Ṭīqtaqā, *Ibid*, p.306). From the works that Fazl did in the court, his inclination towards Sassanid customs can be recognized and he can also be considered as one of the people who caused the spread of Iranian culture and customs in the Abbasid court (Jahshīyārī, *Ibid*, p.295).

Fadl ibn Sahl's tendencies towards the Zoroastrian religion and Iranian customs and his domination over Ma'mun caused dissatisfaction among the Abbasids and Arab elders, including Harthama, the Ma'mun's army commander, who entered Khorasan in 201 AH and came to Ma'mun and told him harshly, "You preferred this majus, i.e. Fadl Ibn Sahl, over your friends and helpers..." (Ya'aqubi, *Ibid*, p.467). Fazl, who felt threatened by Harthama, killed him by those around him. The killing of Harthama caused a riot in Baghdad, and even the people openly refused to obey Hassan ibn Sahl and his brother Fadl, calling him majus, the son of majus. They expelled Hassan Ibn Sahl, the governor of Baghdad, from the city. Mansour ibn Mahdi and later Ibrahim ibn Mahdi were appointed as caliphs in Baghdad and the people pledged allegiance to him as the caliph (Mas'oudi, *Ibid*, p.333; Amir Ali, *Ibid*, pp.268-269).

Fazl Ibn Sahl, who had been brought up by the Barmakiyans, recommended all his relatives and patrons to Ma'mun after Ma'mun's seizing of the power, due to the influence he had on him. They were granted the tenures of various positions and cities (Buva, 1986, p.143). This shows that Fazl used the Iranians and their experiences in running

the Abbasid government and had great respect for anyone who served Iranian culture (Al-'Akoub, 1995, p.144). Thus, we see that the dominant culture in the Abbasid court during the time of Fazl Ibn Sahl's ministry was Iranian culture, and perhaps according to the narrations, he had Zoroastrian tendencies. Therefore, in his time, Iranian celebrations and festivals had mostly religious origins and it was a must for the followers of that religion to perform them. Fadl Ibn Sahl and his associates paid attention to Iranian celebrations and festivals and celebrated these festivals at the court. "... The double-boss had his schoolings in Iranians' Wisdom School and the proper guardian of the ancestral heritage ..." (*Ibid*, p.256). He can be considered as one of the figures promoting the Iranian culture, rituals and traditions.

### Ahmad ibn Yusuf

Ahmad ibn Yusuf was one of the patrons who reached the ministry of Ma'mun at the suggestion of Hassan ibn Sahl. He was a genius writer and a brilliant poet and had insight into the customs and rituals of the kings and rulers (Ibn al-Ṭīqtaqā, *Ibid*, p.312). He played an important role in reviving Iranian celebrations and feasts, including Nowruz and Mehregan. It is narrated that "... Ahmad Ibn Yusuf sent a gift worth one million dirhams to Ma'mun on one of the Nowruz celebrations and wrote these poems and attached to them..." (*Ibid*, p.313; Nakhjavani, 1934, p.171).

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Other sources also refer to this narration (Al-Qalqashandi, 1985, p.448; Al-Askary, 1930, p.95; Ibn Asaker, 1995, p.116; Khaledi'een, 1956, p.116). It is also narrated about Eid al-Adha that when Ma'mun chose Ahmad ibn Yusuf as the minister, Ahmad gave a gift of one million dirhams to Ma'mun in Mehregan and wrote a poem on that gift (Khaledi'een, 1956, p.41). Considering the above, the importance and

1. Although my lord is great and needless in every respect, but he has a right over me that I have to fulfill  
Don't you see that we are returning the God's properties to him, and he, while being needless, accepts it

role of Ahmad ibn Yusuf in reviving Iranian celebrations and festivals in the Abbasi court was so high that some sources even consider him the first person who introduced the custom of giving gifts to the caliph in the Abbasi court (Al-Qalqashandi, 1985, p.448).

### **Conclusion**

The ancient Iranians had several celebrations, some of which had a national aspect and were celebrated by all the inhabitants of the Iranian plateau throughout the historical period. Nowruz and Mehregan were among the celebrations that were preserved in the Islamic era with the arrival of the Arabs in Iran. These celebrations were even held in the court of the Abbasid caliphs. The Abbasid caliphs, like the Sassanid kings, had public meetings and special ceremonies such as Nowruz and Mehregan were held in the Abbasid court. One of the reasons for the permanence of these celebrations in the Abbasid court was their economic and social functions. The custom of giving gifts was one of the most important factors in the survival of Nowruz and Mehregan celebrations. Receiving gifts by the Abbasid governors, rulers and caliphs would entice them. This factor became the main motivation for holding these celebrations and became one of the sources of income for the Abbasid caliphs. Other factors that perpetuated the Iranian celebrations were the construction of Baghdad and its population and the migration of Iranians, including Khorasanians, which led to the spread of Iranian culture in Baghdad. Also, the Iranian ministers, especially the Barmaki dynasty - Khalid, Yahya, Fazl and Jafar - as well as Fazl ibn Sahl and Ahmad ibn Yusuf were effective in reviving the Iranian festivals and holding these celebrations in the Abbasid court. They, like the Sassanid kings, had public meetings and gave gifts to the caliph. These factors perpetuated Iranian celebrations in the Islamic period and even in the court of the Abbasid caliphs. The courtiers and the Arab people celebrated Nowruz and Mehregan and these celebrations remained as lasting traditions.

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