



BAKT I. THE TERM

i. The Term

BAKT (Middle and New Persian) “fate, lot,” often with the positive sense of “good luck” (*kʰošbak̄tī*), though the related NPers. verb *bāk̄tan* means “to lose” (as opposed to *bordan* “to win”) in a game or gamble. The Avestan passive past participle *baxta*, from Aryan *bhag-* “to allot” (Old Indian *bhajati* “divides,” *bhakta* “apportioned”) appears as a neuter noun meaning “allotted destiny” or “fate’s decree” (*Vd.* 5.8, 21.1), mainly with the negative sense of “misfortune, doom, perdition” (*Yt.* 8.23; *AirWb.*, col. 923). The Iranian word accordingly fits the concept of fate as the pre-allotted share, held by all nations and expressed in words such as Greek *hē aīsa* and *ho oītos* “destiny” corresponding to the Avestan masculine noun *aēta* “part” (Indo-Germanic *ai-to-*; see Pokorny, p. 10, and Güntert, *Kalypso*, p. 248²) as well as *hē moīra* “goddess of fate” and *tō méros* “part” (IE. *smer-*); Hittite *henkan* “fate, plague, death,” properly “apportionment” (*henk* “to apportion”); Russian *dólya* and *dólyushka* “share, lot, destiny,” nouns related to the verb *delitʹ* “to divide.” From the Muslim Arabs has come the universally known “kismet” (Arabic *qesma* “fate” and *qesm* “part;” see Eilers, “Schöpfergott,” in *Ex Orbe Religionum, Studia Geo Widengren Oblata*, Leiden, 1972, II, p. 400). Syriac likewise has *ḥelqā* “fate” from *ḥalaq* “to divide, to allot” (whence the Pahlavi ideogram *HLKWN-* for the semantically identical Mid Pers. *baxtan/baxš*).

Typical Persian idioms are *bakt-e bīdār* “wide-awake luck,” *bakt-e javān* or *now* “young” or “new luck,” *bakt-e sabz* “green luck,” all meaning good fortune in contrast to *bakt-e kofta* “sleeping luck,” *bakt-e bargāšta* “reversed” or



“dwindling luck,” i.e., ill-fortune.

A compound which deserves note is Mid. Pers. *baḡ(ō)baxt* “God-given destiny” from Avestan *bayōbaḡta* “decided by God” (Y. 8.35; see *AirWb.*, col. 922); it appears in the *Bundahišn* as an epithet of the Alborz range. In the modern language there are compounds meaning “fortunate” such as *baḡtāvar* and *baḡtūr* (from *baxt-āβar*), *Baḡtīār* (from *baxta-dāra-*), a man’s name, whence *Baḡtīārī*, the name of the tribe in western Iran, as well as *kʷošbaḡt*, *javānbaḡt*, *nowbaḡt*; likewise *baḡt-āzmāī* (lit., “testing one’s luck”) “lottery.” There are also personal names such as *Āzādbaḡt*, *Nēkbaḡt*, *Šādbaḡt* (Justi, *Namenbuch*, pp. 487f.). The name of the Baḡtagān salt lake west of Neyrīz is probably a patronymic derived from a shortened form of such a man’s name.

More doubtful is the relationship of *baḡt* “fate” to *baḡtak* “nightmare” (Eilers, *Die Al, ein persisches Kindbettgespenst*, Munich, 1979, pp. 44.16, 45.18, 48.5) and to *baḡtū* “thunder” (fate’s utterance of threats?). *Baḡtū* is also a name of mountains (A. Gabriel, *Durch Persiens Wüsten*, Stuttgart, 1935, p. 203), but probably then refers to water partings; cf. *Kūh-e Baḡt-āb* (S. Hedin, *Eine Routenaufnahme durch Ostpersien I*, Stockholm, 1918, p. 57).

Formed from *bhag-* with a suffixed *š* is the Mid. Pers. and NPers. *bakš* “part.” The derived verb *baḡšīdan* “to divide” or “give” ought to be distinguished from the homophonous *baḡšīdan* “to forgive” (Man. Mid. Pers. *aβa-xšāy-*, Parth. *aβa-xšāh-*). Another form *bāš* is probably the source of the NPers. stem *pāš* (East Persian *fāš* from *βāš*) found in *pāšīdan* “to scatter, sprinkle,” *ābpāš* “watering can,” and the place names *Ābpāšān* and *Bāšgāh* given to water-distribution points (Eilers, *Geographische Namengebung*, Munich, 1982, p. 40).

Also related to *bhag-* “to divide, allot” are the Avestan neuter noun *baxəδra* “part,” Mid. Pers. and NPers. *bahr* “share,” and with metathesis NPers. *bark* “part” (*AirWb.*, col. 923; Nyberg, *Manual II*, p. 43a).

Further derivatives of the same fruitful root are Mid. Pers. *baḡ* and NPers. *foḡ* (East Iranian, with labial vowel), from Old Persian *baḡa* “God” (as distributor, cf. Arabic *al-Qāsem*), or, in poetry, “idol,” Mid. Pers. and NPers. *bāḡ* “garden,” properly “piece of land,” NPers. *bāj* or *bāž* “tribute, toll,” from the Old Persian masculine noun *bāji*; and finally the place name *Balk*, derived through a form *Bahl/Baxl* from Old Persian *Baxtriš*, the name of the province, which must have been connected with water distribution (cf. *bāš/pāš* above; Eilers, *Geographische Namengebung*, pp. 23f., 40). For the Bactrian camel (the two-



humped draft animal), the term is *boktī* with labial vowel.

Still to be mentioned are NPers. *bāzi* “game” and the numerous compounds of *bāz* such as *asbbāz* “jockey,” *gūybāz* “polo player,” *‘ešqbāz* “philanderer,” *kabūtarbāz* “pigeon fancier,” *lajjbāz* “nagger,” *šamšīrbāz* “fencer,” *tanābbāz* “tightrope walker,” *waraqbāz* “card player,” *zanbāz* “seducer,” etc.; also *sarbāz* “soldier,” literally one who gambles with his head, and *jānbāz* “life-risker,” e.g. dare-devil acrobat.

The question whether the Arabs borrowed their word *waqt* “time” from *bakt* or an East Iranian form thereof remains uncertain. *Waqt* (pronounced *vakt*, *voket*, or the like) is not of Semitic origin, and the concepts of time and fate are not far apart (cf. Arabic *dahr* which means both).