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BAST

BAST (sanctuary, asylum), the designation of certain sanctuaries in Iran that are considered inviolable and were often used by people seeking refuge (*bast nešastan*, *bast-nešīnī*)from prosecution (even common criminals), called *bastī*s.The word is probably derived from OIr. (OPers., Av.) *upastā*-"help, assistance," cf. Mid. Pers. *apastām* "reliance," Arm. lw. *apastan* "refuge, shelter" (see *AirWb*., col. 396; Nyberg, *Manual* II,p. 24; Hübschmann, *Armenische Grammatik*, p.104). Arabic *taḥaṣṣon*,asylum in a fortified place, is sometimes used in Iran.

Concepts of asylum and sanctuary are linked with widely spread beliefs and customs. Religious asylum was practiced by Jews, Greeks, and Romans. The Roman Catholic church made it a universal institution. In Islam, the customary right of asylum derives from the notions of "safeguard" or "protection" (see "ʿAhd," "Amān," "Dhimma," "Ḥimāya," in *EI*^{2} and "ʿĀr," ibid., suppl.; see also L. Gardet, *La cité musulmane*,Paris, 1961, pp. 75ff.). From "honoring the guest" (*ekrām al-żayf*)derived the Bedouin concept of the right of asylum (*eqrāʾ*; ibid., pp. 78, 280; see also "Dakhīl" and "Djiwār," in *EI*^{2}),which usually prevailed over "the duty of just war" (L. Massignon, *Opera minora*,Beirut, 1969, III, pp. 539ff.). Religious asylum is provided in a holy precinct (*ḥaram*), the prototype of which is the Kaʿba, where human beings as well as animals and plants find sanctuary (see "Kaʿba," in *EI*^{2}, with reference to Jewish precedents; cf. Qurʾān 3:96). The notion of *ḥaram* space was extended to holy places such as the "shrines" of the imams (see "ʿAtabāt," in *EI*^{2}, suppl., and EIr.; Pers. *āstān/āstāna* is used in Iran) and the tombs (*mazārāt*)of holy persons such as *emām-*

zādas,Sufi saints, or learned men (*ḵānaqāh*, *takīa*, *rebāṭ*, *zāwīa*)visited by pilgrims.

Although this custom is of great antiquity, its beginnings in Iran remain unclear. The existence in Sasanian times of an official “protector of the poor” (*drigōšān yātagōv*)does not imply a right of asylum or an institution (see J. de Menasce, “Le protecteur des pauvres dans l’Iran sassanide,” in *Mélanges Massé*,Tehran, 1963, pp. 1-6). Territorial asylum (which appeared with the creation of modern states in sixteenth-century Europe) seems to have been used early in Islamic Iran, along with religious asylum, whereas extraterritorial asylum appeared gradually with the development of diplomatic missions.

The vizier Šams-al-Dīn Moḥammad Ṣāḥeb-e Dīvān’s retreat for a few days into the sanctuary of Fāṭema Maʿṣūma at Qom (Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāmeʿ al-tawārīḵ*,Baku, III, p. 200) must be interpreted as taking *bast*.Claimants to the throne, tribal chiefs, generals, and nobles who had fallen out with their overlords often found political-territorial asylum under a rival king or ruler (e.g., Safavid princes seeking refuge under the Ottomans).

With the establishment of a strong central government under the Safavids and the concomitant rise in religious fervor, the practice of taking asylum in religious or royal holy places became common. Under *bast* protection, *bastī*sfound temporary accommodation and subsistence and could negotiate the terms of immunity with their prosecutors. The concept of the inviolability of a sacred space used for *bast* is often symbolized by a chain stretched across the gate or threshold of the precincts. Immunity is guaranteed by touching the chain and getting into the first courtyard (Massé, pp. 404ff.; Curzon, I, p. 347). The first Safavid shrine to be recognized as *bast* was the tomb of Shaikh Ṣafī-al-Dīn at Ardabīl. This was granted as a boon to Solṭān ʿAlī by Tīmūr in 806/1404 (W. Hinz, *Irans Aufstieg zum Nationalstaat im fünfzehnten Jahrhundert*,Berlin and Leipzig, 1936, p. 15; *Taḏkerat al-molūk*, pp. 189f.). Some places, such as the Ardabīl mosque and the mausoleum of Fāṭema Maʿṣūma at Qom, seem to have been special refuges for debtors (Massé, pp. 406f., quoting Tavernier; Gemelli Carreri, *Giro del mondo*,Naples, 1699-1700, II, pp. 75f.). The royal palace of ʿAlī Qāpū at Isfahan, whose threshold was particularly sacred, provided *bast* to those who took refuge in its cells (Massé, pp. 405f. quoting Tavernier, Della Valle, Bedik, Thévenot, Chardin, Oléarius, etc.). The Čehel Sotūn palace was also a *bast* (Massé, p. 406, quoting Struys). Other places, objects, and animals associated with royalty provided *bast.* Among them we

find the royal kitchens, stables, and horses (the *bastī* had to stand near the horse's head or tail; Malcolm, II, p. 559 n.; see also Curzon, I, p. 155 n.; *bast* was later extended to horses in diplomatic missions, when the *bastī*swould take refuge under the horse, Massé, p. 406), the Pearl Cannon (Tūp-e Morvārīd) in Tehran, and thence the royal artillery (Massé, p. 405; Browne, tr., *Tarikh-i jadid*,p. 152).

Residences of renowned *mojtahed*swere also considered *bast*,even after their owners' deaths (Malcolm, II, pp. 443f.). The whole quarter of Bīdābād in Isfahan was a *bast* because a leading *mojtahed* lived there (Massé, p. 405, quoting De Bode). Mosques of *emāmzāda*sand other saints were also used as refuges (e.g., Šāh Čerāḡ in Shiraz, Sayyed Ḥamza in Tabrīz, Ḥājī Mīr Yaʿqūb in Ḵoy; see Massé, p. 407).

Extraterritorial rights granted to Russia and Britain by the Treaty of Torkamāṇčāy (1828) and an additional firman in 1840 enabled British diplomats to extend their protection to an increasing number of Persians or other subjects, which eventually led to the use of the legations, consulates, and embassy residences, and even the Indo-European Telegraph Department's stations as *bast*s(Wright, pp. 41ff.). Resort to telegraph stations was encouraged by the popular belief that the telegraph wires ended at the foot of the throne in Tehran (Curzon, I, p. 175).

Bast as a form of political protest was used early by social groups. In the reign of Shah ʿAbbās II, in 1066/1657, members of the guilds and craftsmen took *bast* inside the *dawlat-ḵāna* at Isfahan. Through the mediation of a *mojtahed*,they obtained the dismissal of an oppressive watchman (*dārūḡa*)from the Shah and, later, of the *dīvān-begī* (M. Keyvani, *Artisans and Guild Life in the Later Safavid Period*,Berlin, 1982, p. 157, quoting *ʿAbbās-nāma* and *Ḵold-e barīn*).Although political *bast* was extended considerably in the 13th/19th century with the development of diplomatic missions and telegraph stations (see Lambton, pp. 136, 141f.), the biggest *bast*stook place during the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11). In April, 1905, Tehran retailers, bankers, and merchants took refuge at Shah ʿAbd-al-ʿAẓīm in Ray (see Gilbar, p. 296). In December, 1905, the clergy (*ʿolamāʾ*),theology students (*ṭollāb*), and *bāzārī*salso took *bast* at Shah ʿAbd-al-ʿAẓīm, after being expelled from the Masjed-e Šāh in Tehran (Malekzāda, II, pp. 47ff.; Algar, pp. 246f.). The most celebrated *bast* took place in the British Legation at Tehran. During three weeks (19 July-10 August 1906), between 12,000 and 16,000 Tehrani demonstrators camped in the gardens while about one thousand *ʿolamāʾ* migrated to Qom. This led to the granting of a

Constitution and a National Assembly (Browne, *Revolution*, pp. 118ff.; Malekzāda, II, pp. 161ff.; Algar, pp. 250f.; Wright, p. 47; Gilbar, p. 299). There were also important *bast*sin Tabrīz (British consulate: September, 1906; Turkish consulate: June, 1909; see Browne, *Revolution*,p. 130). The anti-Constitutionalist Shaikh Fażl-Allāh Nūrī took *bast* with some followers in Shah ʿAbd-al-ʿAẓīm for ninety days to express his disapproval of constitutional government (Malekzāda, IV, p. 212; Abdul-Hadi Hairi, *Shiʿism and Constitutionalism in Iran*,Leiden, 1977, p. 192). Like others involved in large-scale political protest, *bastī*senjoyed various forms of support; in addition to British diplomatic protection, Constitutionalists were given financial aid by wealthy Iranian bankers and merchants (Gilbar, p. 299).

There were many attempts to restrict *bast.* In cases of great offense, attempts were made to starve out the *bastī*s(Massé, p. 407, quoting Morier). Violating or breaking of *bast* by force (*Šekastan-e bast*) brought about a malediction or a curse upon trespassers. This was the case of the Afsharid Nāder Mīrzā, who showed disrespect to the shrine of Imam Reżā and to the *ʿolamāʾ* (Algar, pp. 33, 47f.). After he had killed the *mojtahed* Mīrzā Moḥammad Mahdī he was tortured and put to death (Nāʾīnī, *Jāmeʿ-e jaʿfarī*, ed. Ī. Afšār, Tehran, 1343 Š./1964, pp. 111ff.; M.-Ḥ. Qoddūsī, *Nāder-nāma*, Mašhad, 1339 Š./1960, p. 441). He had also killed a *bastī* hidden in his stables (Malcolm, II, p. 59 n.). His mischief was recalled by Ayatollah Ṭabāṭabāʾī at the time of the Constitutional movement, when *bast* was broken by Qajar troops as Mašhad and Shiraz (Algar, p. 249). Troops broke *bast* at Mašhad in 1934 (see R. M. Savory, in G. Lenczowski, ed., *Iran under the Pahlavis*,Stanford, 1978, pp. 97f.). Authoritative reduction of *bast* was undertaken by Amīr(-e) Kabīr, who objected to the use of mosques to shelter armed followers of the *ʿolamāʾ* in Isfahan, Tabrīz, and Tehran. He also tried to suppress extraterritorial *bast* (Algar, pp. 129ff., F. Ādamīyat, *Amīr-e Kabīr o Īrān*,Tehran, 1354 Š./1975, pp. 432ff.). There were renewed attempts to suppress *bast* after Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah's first visit to Europe (Curzon, I, p. 460). One of the most portentous violations of *bast* occurred in January, 1891, when Jamāl-al-Dīn Asadābādī "Afḡānī" was violently expelled from Shah ʿAbd-al-ʿAẓīm (Algar, pp. 199ff.; Pakdaman, pp. 141ff., 321ff., letter to Amīn-al-Żarb). The Majles, which was bombarded by the troops of Moḥammad-ʿAlī Shah (June, 1908), was also considered a *bast*.Moṣaddeq took refuge in it in 1953 (see P. Avery, *Modern Iran*, London, 1965, p. 436).

Although only Muslims benefited, in principle, from *bast*,there were

exceptions for Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians (see, e.g., Curzon, I, p. 155; on *ḏemmī*s' protection, see Lambton, p. 141). *Bast* protection was extended to ritually pure animals (Massé, p. 405; Algar, pp. 134f.; on pilgrim animals, see B. A. Donaldson, *The Wild Rue*,London, 1938, p. 68). Safety was not guaranteed to Babis who had been promised *bast* immunity (Browne, tr., *Tarikh-i jadid*, pp. 152f.). Jules Richard, a Frenchman who promoted photography in Iran, converted to Shiʿism after being involved in a scandal and took *bast* at Shah ʿAbd-al-ʿAẓīm in 1857 (see Ch. Adle, *Studia Iranica* 12, 1983, p. 257).

In Afghanistan, religious *bast* was practiced until the Communist revolution. Places such as the sanctuary of Mazār-e Šarīf, and the tombs of Sultan Maḥmūd and of the poet Sanāʾī at Ḡaznī were reckoned as *bast*s. But the most celebrated *bast*s were located at Qandahār and Herat (Farhādī).

At Qandahār, the Masjed-e Ḵerqa contains a fragment of a cloak attributed to the Prophet Moḥammad. This was brought from central Asia by Aḥmad Shah Dorrānī, whose tomb lies nearby. In September, 1881, Amir ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān ordered that ʿAbd-al-Raḥīm Āḵūnd Kākar—who had, together with other mullahs, proclaimed a *takfīr-nāma* against him—be "pulled out" of that sanctuary. He then killed him with his own hands (Munshi Sultan Mahomed Khan, ed., *The Life of Abdur Rahman Amir ofAfghanistan*, London, 1900, I, p. 216). In December, 1959, there was a large-scale protest against the unveiling of women encouraged by Dāʾūd's government. Obvious manifestations of modernization (a local cinema, a girl's school, government buildings) were attacked. Ṣeddīq Wazīrī, governor of Qandahār, was replaced by General Khan Moḥammad Khan, who used force to soothe the revolt (Reštīya). According to the official version, landowners and *arbāb*swanted to take *bast* in the Masjed-e Ḵerqa for their usual protest against taxation. Riots were said to have resulted from the government's refusal to acknowledge *bast* (this official version is followed by L. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Princeton, 1973, pp. 536f.). Near Herat, *bast* was traditionally provided at the sanctuary of Ḵᵛāja ʿAbd-Allāh Anṣārī located at Gāzargāh (on the shrine, see F. Saljūqī, *Gāzargāh*, Kabul, 1962 and 1976, and *Āryānā* (special issue), 1355 Š./1976; Golombek, *The Timurid Shrine at Gazar Gah*, Toronto, 1969). During the civil war of 1929, various places were used as *bast* in Sunni-Shiʿite conflicts at Herat (Gāzargāh, Mūy-e Mobārak, Ḵerqa-ye Šarīf; Farhādī).

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Search terms:

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