



BESTĀM (1)

BESTĀM (or Bestām), an Iranian man's name, now obsolete, which as a result of its popularity in past centuries has become a fairly commonplace name or component of place names.

Presumably the name is derived from Old Iranian **vistaxma*, though no such word is found in the Avesta and the Old Persian inscriptions, or apparently in the Sasanian inscriptions. There is general agreement with Justi's interpretation of it (*Namenbuch*, p. 372b) as roughly "wielder of far-reaching power" (New Pers. *setam*). In Armenian it appears both as *Vstam* (Hübschmann, *Armenische Grammatik*, p. 85 no. 189) and *Vēstam* (probably < **Vaistaxma*); in Greek as *Bestám* and *Bestán* (perhaps also earlier, in Aeschylus, as *Hystáichmas*); in New Persian either as *Gostah(a)m* with the usual change of the initial consonant (*Šāh-nāma*) or as *Bestām*, most often written *Bestām*.

The name was borne by a considerable number of historical personalities (partial list in Justi's *Namenbuch*, pp. 371f.), including even some Arabs. In the *Šāh-nāma*, *Gostah(a)m* is the name of the sons of the Pishdadid kings *Nowdar* and *Gaždaham*, of King *Bahrām Gōr's dastūr* (minister), and of King *Ķosrow II Parvēz's* uncle; the latter is called *Bestām* in Arabic sources and in some verses of the *Šāh-nāma* (see [bestṛām o bendōy](#)). Also mentioned in the *Šāh-nāma* is the city of *Bastām*.

The former popularity of the personal name is reflected in its continued toponymic use today. Places called *Bestām* or *Bastām* are found mainly in



western and northwestern Iran (see Razmārā, *Farhang* I, III-VI, VIII, s.v.). The name occurs in compound toponyms such as Māh-Bestām, which apparently used to mean the entire region around Qūmes (Schwarz, *Iran*, pp. 445 n. 5, 821 n. 12); Bastāmābād, a village in the district, now province, of Īlām (Razmārā, *Farhang* V, p. 53); Bastām Beyg, a village near the Kurdish town of Mahābād, the former Sā’ūj Bolāq (Razmārā, *Farhang* IV, p. 91). Particularly famous in the Middle Ages was the city of Bestām (also vocalized Bostām) in the Qūmes region, now the province of Semnān and Dāmḡān (Schwarz, pp. 820ff.); poets and writers spoke of it as the “spreading (city of) Bestām”—a play on words associating the name with the Arabic root *basata* “to spread.”

In some cases there has been an obvious confusion of Bestām with *bostān* “garden,” another word that occurs quite frequently in toponyms (see Schwarz, p. 820 n. 8), and this has sometimes caused vowel change from *e* or *a* to *o* (Bostām). Ṭāq-e Bostān, the name of the famous grotto with rock reliefs near Kermānšāh, is undoubtedly such a case. The early geographer Ebn al-Faqīh (p. 216.2, quoted by Schwarz, pp. 487f.) gives the name as Vastān, and this old form has been more or less preserved by the local Kurds who call the place Ṭāq-e Vasān (with the normal change of *st* to *s* or *ss*). The endings *ān* and *ām* are interchangeable (New Pers. normally *ām* to *ān*), but the initial *v* has been retained by the Kurds, whereas the arabicized *bostān* (from *būstān* “fragrant garden” < Mid. Pers. *bō’astān*, Arm. *burastan*) always had the initial *b*, (see W. Eilers, *Geographische Namengebung in und um Iran*, Munich, 1982, p. 16).

The identity of the Sasanian prince or nobleman who gave his name to Ṭāq-e Bostān, in view of the number of recorded bearers of the name, probably will never be known for sure. The corruption of the original place name to *bostān* by folk etymology is readily intelligible, as a large and copiously watered garden adjoins the grotto. Ṭāq-e Bostān is a fountainhead (*sarāb*, *ābsar*).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.