



DEHESTĀN

DEHESTĀN (in modern Persian administrative usage a rural district consisting of a number of villages), the name of a region in medieval [Gorgān](#) and a town in [Bādġīs](#) and another in Kermān (Yāqūt, *Boldān*, II, p. 492).

Dehestān in Gorgān. The region of Dehestān (or perhaps Dahestān) lay southeast of the Caspian Sea, north of the [Atrak](#) river and the present-day province of [Gorgān](#); it is now in the Turkmenistan Republic. Its name was probably derived from that of the Iranian steppe people the Dāai or [Dahae](#), a component tribe of which, the [Aparna](#), were progenitors of the Parthian ruling family (Bivar, p. 27; Lukonin, p. 686). Dehestān was somewhat vaguely defined by the classical Arabic and Persian geographers, and it is not unlikely that the physical configuration of the region, involving the Caspian shorelands and those along the course of the lower Atrak, has changed over the centuries. Maqdesī (Moqaddasī, pp. 358-59) described it as a rural area (*rostāq*) with twenty-four villages; its administrative center (*madīna*) was at Ākor, but in this frontier region facing the Turkish steppes the most flourishing settlement was clearly the *rebāt* (stronghold), which was furnished with gates, markets, and a mosque. Ebn Ḥawqal (pp. 383, 388-89, 398; tr. Kramers, pp. 373, 378-79, 388) located it 50 farsangs from [Abaskūn](#) and mentioned another Dehestān situated on a peninsula jutting out from the eastern shore of the Caspian. In *Ḥodūd al-ʿālam* (p. 60, comm. p. 193) the latter was called Dehestān-e Sor (Sar?) and described as a resort only of fishermen and hunters of falcons and aquatic birds.

The town/*rebāt* of Dehestān was a pre-Islamic foundation attributed to the



Arsacid Narsēh (Markwart, *Provincial Capitals*, pp. 12, 53-54) or to the Sasanian Qobād b. Fīrūz (*Nozhat al-qolūb*, p. 160; tr. p. 157). Its importance reflected above all its strategic position at a historic point of entry for steppe barbarians into civilized Iranian lands. At the time of the early Arab expansion north from Khorasan (late 7th century) Dehestān was held by a Turkish tribal group, the Šūl (Čöl?), ancestors of the celebrated Šūlī family of scholars in Arabic in the early ‘Abbasid period; in 98/715, in the time of the Arab governor Yazīd b. Mohallab, this group expelled the Persian *marzbān* of Gorgān, Fīrūz b. Qūl(?), and overran Gorgān (Ṭabarī, II, p. 1323; tr. XXIV, p. 48).

In late Samanid times Dehestān, along with [Abīvard](#) and [Farāva](#), two other frontier towns on the northern rim of Khorasan facing the Kara Kum desert, came within the orbit of the K̅vārazmšāhs (see [CHORASMIA ii](#)) and then, after the fall of the last indigenous Persian line in 408/1017, passed to the Ghaznavids. In 426/1035 the Ghaznavid sultan Mas‘ūd I (421-32/1030-41) was forced to assign Dehestān, Farāva, and Nasā to the Saljuq chiefs Ṭōğrel Beg, Čāğrī Beg, and Yabgū, who promised to act as frontier guards against further incursions from the steppes (Bayhaqī, ed. Fayyāz, p. 641; cf. Barthold, *Turkestan*³, p. 308; idem, 1962, pp. 105, 107). Thenceforth Dehestān remained in the hands of the Saljuqs until the decay of their power in the east, after which it was ruled by one Ektīār-al-Dīn Aytaq, who was forced, however, to flee to the K̅vārazmšāh Il-Arslan in 556/1161, abandoning Dehestān to be sacked by the Oghuz Turks (Barthold, 1962, p. 123). The region played some role in the campaigns of the K̅vārazmšāhs in eastern Persia during the subsequent decades (Barthold, *Turkestan*³, p. 338). Although it was mentioned several times in the 13th century (Jovaynī, ed. Qazvīnī, II, pp. 244, 274, III, p. 105; tr. Boyle, II, pp. 507, 538, 616), there is no record of its fate during the Mongol invasion.

In the 17th century the region was held by Turkmen tribesmen as vassals of the khans of Kīva (Barthold, 1962, p. 136), but gradually it ceased to be mentioned in the sources. From inscriptions on the mosque in the extensive ruins of what is now Mašhad-e Meṣrīān, built in the reign of the K̅vārazmšāh ‘Alā’-al-Dīn Moḥammad (596-617/1200-20), it seems clear that they were the site of the *rebāṭ* of Dehestān (Minorsky).



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V. Minorsky, "Mashhad-i Miṣriyān," *EI2* VI, pp. 716-17. Moqaddasī, pp. 24, 312.

Schwarz, *Iran* VI, p. 816. B. Spuler, "Dihistān 2," *EI2* II, p. 253.

Dehestān in Bādġīs. The town of Dehestān lay northeast of Herat in the Paropamisus mountains, where the modern shrine of K̲vāja Dehestān is located; it was described by 10th-century geographers as half the size of Pūšang and seems to have been the center of the southern part of the district of Bādġīs, though the governor (*solṭān*) lived at the smaller Kūġanābād (Eṣṭakrī, pp. 268-69; Ebn Ḥawqal, pp. 440-41; tr. Kramers, p. 426; Moqaddasī, p. 308; cf. *Nozhat al-qolūb*, p. 153; tr. p. 151). By the early 13th century Bavan (or Babna) had replaced Dehestān as the administrative center in the southern part of Bādġīs (Yāqūt, *Boldān* I, p. 512). The houses of Dehestān were built of mud brick, but the indifferent water supply, brought largely through underground channels (*asrāb*), limited agriculture there (Moqaddasī, p. 308).



Dehestān played no significant role in history, nor does it seem to have had much cultural significance. Sam'ānī did not record any scholar from there, and Yāqūt (*Boldān* II, p. 492) mentioned only Moḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abi'l-Ḥajjāj Dehestānī Heravī, probably a traditionist.

Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, p. 150.

Idem, *Wehrot und Arang*, Leiden, 1936, p. 40.

B. Spuler, "Dihistān 1," *EI2*, p. 253 (where the historical information is related to the Transcaspian Dehestān and not the one in Bādġīs).