



DEHQĀN

DEHQĀN, arabicized form of Syriac *dhgn'* (Margoliouth, p. 84a), borrowed from Pahlavi *dehqān* (older form *dahīgān*). The original meaning was “pertaining to *deh*“(< OPers. *dahyu*), the latter term not in the later sense of “village,” but in the original sense of “land.”

i. In the Sasanian period.

ii. In the Islamic period.

i. IN THE SASANIAN PERIOD

The term *dehqān* was used in the late Sasanian period to designate a class of landed magnates (*Mojmal*, ed. Bahār, p. 420) considered inferior in rank to *āzādān*, *bozorgān* (*Zand ī Wahman Yasn* 4.7, 4.54), and *kadag-xwadāyān* “householders” (*Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* 15.10, where *dahīgān* should be read for *dādagān*). According to some early Islamic sources, the rank of the *dehqān* in the Sasanian period was also inferior to that of the *šahrīgān* “chief of the small cantons” (Ya‘qūbī, *Ta‘rīk* I, p. 203; Mas‘ūdī, ed. Pellat, I, sec. 662; Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, p. 140).

The origin of the *dehqān* class is usually attributed in both Zoroastrian Pahlavi books of the 9th century and early Islamic sources to Wēkard/t, brother of Hōšang, the legendary Iranian king (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, pp. 438, 594, 688; Bīrūnī, *Ātār*, pp. 220-21; Mas‘ūdī, ed. Pellat, I, sec. 662; Christensen, pp. 68, 134,



151, 156). In some sources the innovation is credited to Manūčehr (Tā'ālebī, p. 6; Ṭabarī, I, p. 434; Bal'amī, ed. Bahār, p. 345; Ebn al-Balkī, p. 37). Nevertheless, as the term *dehgān* is not attested in early Sasanian documents but is sometimes mentioned in the Pahlavi books and frequently occurs in descriptions of late Sasanian administration in early Islamic sources, it is admissible to suppose that *dehqāns* emerged as a social class as a result of land reforms in the time of Kōsrow I (531-79). He is reported to have admonished future kings that they should protect the *dehqāns*, just as they would protect kingship, because they were like brothers (Tā'ālebī, *Ġorar*, p. 6). According to one source (*Mojmal*, ed. Bahār, p. 73), his own mother had been the daughter of a *dehqān* descended from Frēdon. In the late Sasanian period *dehqāns* and princes (*wāspuhragān*; Ar. *ahl al-boyūtāt*) used to have audience with the king on the second day of the Nowrūz and Kōrram-rūz (also Kōrrah-rūz, Navad-rūz) festivals; the latter, celebrated on the first day of the tenth month (Day), was their special feast day, on which the king ate and drank with the *dehqāns* and cultivators (Bīrūnī, *Ātār*, pp. 218, 225; for this feast, see idem, I, 1954, p. 264; Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, pp. 239, 254; Qazvīnī, p. 83).

Management of local affairs was the *dehqāns'* hereditary responsibility, and peasants were obliged to obey them (cf. Ṭabarī, I, p. 434; Bal'amī, ed. Bahār, p. 345; Ebn al-Balkī, p. 37), but their landed estates must have been smaller than those of noble landowners. They probably represented the government among the peasants, and their main duty was to collect taxes (Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 112-13). They were divided into five subgroups according to social status, each distinguished by dress (Mas'ūdī, ed. Pellat, I, par. 662).

The Arab conquest (q.v.) of the Sasanian empire began with sporadic attacks on the lands of the *dehqāns* of the Sawād, the cultivated areas of southern Iraq. After the defeat of the Persian army and the gradual disappearance of the nobles who administered the country, the local gentry, that is, the *dehqāns*, assumed a more important political and social role in their districts, towns, and villages. Some were able to protect their settlements from the conquering armies by surrendering and agreeing to pay the poll tax (*jezya*). For example, the *dehqān* of Zawābī in Iraq made a treaty with the Arab commander 'Orwa b. Zayd, in which he agreed to pay a tax of 4 dirhams for each inhabitant of his district. Bestām, *dehqān* of Bors, also in Iraq, agreed with Zahra to construct a bridge for his army. When the Arab forces arrived at Mahrūd near Baghdad the local *dehqān* agreed to pay a sum of money to Hāšem b. 'Otba, in order to deter him from killing any of the district's inhabitants. Šīrzād, the *dehqān* of



Sābāt, a village near Madā'en (see [CTESIPHON](#)), was able to save 100,000 peasants from the Arabs. There are similar reports for other parts of the Sasanian empire, for example, Sīstān, Herat, and Balk (Balāḍorī, *Fotūhā*, ed. Monajjed, pp. 307, 318, 324, 484, 516; Ṭabarī, I, pp. 2421, 2426, 2461; Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, p. 102). *Dehqāns* who refused to collaborate with the Arabs either fled or lost their lives (e.g., Balāḍorī, ed. Monajjed, pp. 324, 420, 422, 464, 466, 514; Ṭabarī, I, pp. 2421-23). The fact that the last Sasanian king, Yazdegerd III (632-51), sought support from the *dehqāns* of Isfahan and Kermān is evidence of the rising power of this class at the end of the Sasanian empire (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 2875-77).

In the early Islamic period, as in late Sasanian times, the *dehqān* had the task of collecting taxes. They were also responsible for cultivation of the land, maintaining bridges and roads, and providing hospitality to certain travelers (Ṭabarī, I, p. 2470). The lands of *dehqāns* in regions of the Sawād where the population had accepted Islam were left to them, and they were exempt from the poll tax (Balāḍorī, p. 325).

It may be inferred from various reports that in early Islamic times some *dehqāns* functioned almost as local rulers, especially in eastern Persia, and that any man of wealth or social prestige might thus be called *dehqān*. Sometimes the same person was called *dehqān* in one source and *marzbān* (governor) in another. For example, in one report Ṭabarī referred to men with the title *marzbān* of Kermān and Marv and in another called the same men *dehqān* (I, pp. 2872-77; cf. Dīnavarī, p. 148: *āmel* of Marv; Gardīzī, 102: *sālār* and *dehqān* of Marv). Balāḍorī (p. 466) mentioned the revolt of the *dehqān* of Šūš, whereas Dīnavarī (p. 140) called the same person *marzbān*. Dēwāštīč (q.v.), the last ruler of Panjikant, had the title of "lord" or "king" in the Sogdian documents excavated at Mount Mugh but was designated *dehqān* by Ṭabarī (II, p. 1446; *Dokumenty* II, pp. 132 ff.). In Persian poetry before the 12th century the title *dehqān* meant "ruler, amir, lord," especially in eastern Persia (e.g., Mas'ūd-e Sa'd, p. 374; Nāṣer-e Kōsrow, p. 107; Sūzanī, pp. 200, 224, 311, 326, 436, 485). *Dehqāns* were sometimes mentioned together with princes, grandees, local rulers, learned men (*aḥbār*), knights, and army commanders (Ṭabarī, I, p. 3249, II, 1237; Naršakī, pp. 9-13, 54, 84-85; *Mojmal*, p. 328; cf. Balāḍorī, ed. Monajjed, p. 505).

The Arabs often consulted *dehqāns* on political and social affairs, and in some instances the latter were able to intervene on behalf of one of the parties to a conflict (e.g., Ṭabarī, II, pp. 1420, 1569). In the first half of the 9th century Sahl



b. Sonbāt, who first sheltered Bābak Ḳorramdīn (q.v.) in his castle but later betrayed him to Afšīn (q.v.), was a *dehqān*. Another *dehqān*, Ebn Šarvīn Ṭabarī, was appointed to bring Bābak's brother 'Abd-Allāh to Baghdad as a captive; on the way 'Abd-Allāh asked to be treated in the manner of the *dehqāns*, and Ebn Šarvīn gave him wine (*Mojmal*, ed. Bahār, p. 357; Ṭabarī, III, p. 1231). *Dehqāns* enjoyed great respect and prestige at the court of the Samanids (204-395/819-1005). The poet Rūdakī, in an ode (*qaṣīda*) describing a banquet at the court of Naṣr b. Aḥmad (301-31/913-43), mentioned a *dehqān* called Pīr Šāleḥ, who sat with the nobles (*ḥorrān*) facing the ranks of the amirs and the grand vizier, Moḥammad Bal'amī (*Tārīk-e Sīstān*, p. 319). In the early Islamic centuries many important political figures of eastern Persia were *dehqāns* (e.g., the Samanid amir Aḥmad b. Sahl b. Hāšem, q.v.) or descendants of *dehqān* families (e.g., the Saljuq grand vizier Neẓām-al-Molk, q.v.; Gardīzī, p. 151; Ebn Fondoq, pp. 73, 78).

In the first centuries of Islam many *dehqāns*, as the heirs of Sasanian gentry, led comfortable, even luxurious lives similar to those of their forebears. Jāḥeẓ (*Boḳālā'*, p. 71; tr. p. 98) mentioned the table etiquette observed by the *dehqāns*. According to Balāḍorī (ed. Monajjed, p. 524; cf. Ṭabarī, II, pp. 1417-18), Sa'īd b. 'Abd-al-'Azīz, governor of Khorasan under the Omayyad caliph Yazīd II (101-05/720-24), was called *koḍīna* (lady, wife of a *dehqān*; cf. Sogdian *ywt(ʿ)yynk*) because of his elegant garments and his flowing hair style. *Dehqāns* used to offer presents to the caliphs and local rulers at the Nowrūz and Mehragān festivals, just as their ancestors had done in Sasanian times. Ṭabarī (II, pp. 1635-38) described in detail those offered to Asad b. 'Abd-Allāh Qasrī, governor of Khorasan, at the Mehragān feast at Balk in 120/738. Hārūn al-Rašīd (170-93/786-809), on his way from Baghdad to Ṭūs, fell ill in a village in Bayhaq and had to stay there four months as the guest of a *dehqān*, who served him with magnificence and offered him precious gifts when he departed (Ebn Fondoq, pp. 47-48).

Aside from their political and social significance, the *dehqāns* played an important cultural role. Many participated in the courts of caliphs or governors, and after the establishment of the Persian dynasties in the east they served kings, princes, and amirs as learned men who were well informed on the history and culture of ancient Iran. Bayhaqī (p. 299) reported that Zīād b. Abīhi (d. 56/675), while still governor of Baṣra, had in his service three *dehqāns*, who told him stories of Sasanian grandeur and pomp, causing him to think Arab rule much inferior. In the *Tārīk-e Sīstān* (p. 106) a number of wise



sayings, similar to the Pahlavi *andarz* (q.v.), are attributed to a certain Zoroastrian *dehqān* named Rostam b. Hormazd, who reportedly uttered them at the request of ‘Abd-al-‘Azīz b. ‘Abd-Allāh, an Omayyad governor of Sīstān (cf. *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Moscow, IX, p. 211 vv. 3380-83). The 9th-century author Jāḥeẓ (1385/1965, I, p. 115, II, p. 125) also quoted some pieces of folklore from *dehqāns*. In both Arabic and Persian sources the names of many learned persons and men of letters, including theologians, who were *dehqāns* or decendants of *dehqān* families are mentioned (Ebn Fondoq, pp. 116, 149). Some were patrons of Islamic religious scholars; for example, Ebn Fondoq (p. 185) mentioned a wealthy *dehqān* from Sabzavār who, in 418/1027, founded a religious school for a Qur’ān commentator named Ebn Ṭayyeb. The majority of *dehqāns* favored Persian culture, however, and some were patrons of renowned Persian poets. Rūdakī (p. 458) related that the *dehqāns* gave him money and riding animals. Farroḳī in his youth served a *dehqān* in Sīstān and received an annual pension from him. According to one tradition, Ferdowsī himself was a *dehqān* (*Čahār Maqāla*, ed. Qazvīnī, text, pp. 58, 75).

Most of the credit for preservation of the stories in the national epic, the *Šāh-nāma*; pre-Islamic historical traditions; and the romances of ancient Iran belongs to the *dehqāns*. Abū Maṣṣūr Ma‘marī (q.v.), who compiled the prose *Šāh-nāma-ye abū-maṣṣūrī* (346/957), now lost, wrote in his preface, which does survive, that in gathering his material he summoned a number of *dehqāns* from various cities of Khorasan (pp. 34-35). Ferdowsī often cited *dehqāns* as sources, apparently oral ones, for his narratives (e.g., *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Moscow, I, p. 28 v. 1, II, p. 170 v. 15, III, pp. 6-7 vv. 8, 19, IV, p. 302 vv. 19-20, VI, p. 167 v. 25). Other poets, too, referred to traditions from the *dehqāns* (e.g., Asadī, p. 21 v. 1; Īrānšāh, p. 17; Neẓāmī, pp. 436, 508). The term *dehqān* thus also came to be defined as “historian, versed in history” (*Borhān-e qāte‘*, ed. Mo‘īn, II, p. 905). The profound attachment of the *dehqāns* to the culture of ancient Iran also lent to the word *dehqān* the sense of “Persian,” especially “Persian of noble blood,” in contrast to Arabs, Turks, and Romans in particular (e.g., *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Moscow, I, p. 21 v. 128, IX, pp. 307 v. 7, 319 vv. 105-06; Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow, pp. 83, 156, 288; Farroḳī, pp. 274, 282, 314; Abū Ḥanīfa Eskāfī apud Bayhaqī, ed. Fayyāz, p. 856; ‘Onṣorī, pp. 137, 239). According to Ṭabarī (I, p. 1040), Marvazān, governor of Yemen in the time of Ḳosrow I, had two sons, one Ḳorraḥ-Ḳosrow, who liked to recite Arabic poetry, and another, unnamed, a knight (*aswār*) who spoke Persian and lived in the manner of the *dehqāns*. Sometimes the word *dehqān* meant a Zoroastrian (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Moscow, IX, pp. 97 v. 1483, 134 v. 2106; Farroḳī, p. 294; Neẓāmī, p. 238; Ḳāqānī, p. 411;



Mo'ezzī, pp. 604, 612; Qaṭrān, p. 254).

With the development of the *eqṭā'* (q.v.) system of land grants from the 11th century and the decline of the landowning class, the *dehqāns* gradually lost their importance, and the word came to mean simply a farmer (e.g., Nāṣer-e Kōsrow, p. 118; Ebn Fondoq, pp. 28, 266), though even in the 12th and 13th centuries it was still occasionally used in its original sense (e.g., Jovaynī, pp. 53, 55; Najm-al-Dīn Rāzī, p. 514).

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(AḤMAD TAFAZZOLĪ)

ii. IN THE ISLAMIC PERIOD. See [AGRICULTURE](#), [EQTĀ’](#), [FARMING](#), [LAND TENURE](#).