



## ESTĀLEF

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**ESTĀLEF**, a large Persian-speaking village of the Kōhdāman, 55 km north of Kabul, built on a foothill of the Paḡmān range of the Hindu Kush between 1,875 and 1,950 m above sea-level. It has been suggested that the name of the village derives (with metathesis) from Greek *staphilè* (bunch of grapes) and would therefore testify to local Hellenistic influences (Morgenstierne). Although vine-growing is old and widespread in this area, an alternative and possibly better etymology could be Parāčī *estuf* (cow-parsnip, *Heracleum spondylum*), a spontaneous forage-plant very common at lower elevations in the Hindu Kush (cf. Estufālō, a former Parāčī-speaking village of nearby upper Šotol valley; Kieffer, p. 107). In this case, Estālef would stand as a landmark in the former extension of the Parāčī language. No mention of Estālef is to be found before the early 16th century, probably on account of its poor accessibility—14 km off the main road between Kabul and Čārīkār (q.v.)—though it seems to have already been an important rural center at that time (*Bābor-nāma*, tr. Beveridge, p. 216).

Subsequent travelers have praised “the salubrity of its climate, the luxuriance of its orchards and the loveliness of its aspect” (Marshman, p. 133; Masson, III, pp. 120 ff.; Burnes, p. 147; Bernard, p. 83). Abundance of water of various origins (a tributary river of the Panjšēr, 51 springs, a few *kārēz*; Chassagne, pp. 2 ff.) provides for a rich irrigated agriculture based on wheat and a variety of fruit trees: walnuts and mulberries for local consumption; apples, cherries, apricots, plums, pears, peaches, and pomegranates supplying the Kabul market; grapes, mostly exported dried out of the country (Chassagne, pp. 22



ff.). Since the Mongol period the locality has been a favorite resort for Kabul upper and middle classes (*Bābor-nāma*, tr. Beveridge, pp. 406, 416; Gol-Badan Begam, pp. 44, 191; Grötzbach, 1981, pp. 177). It is most frequented in spring, when the locally abundant Judas-trees (*arḡavān*), are blossoming. Several bubbling carbonated springs of long established curative reputation add to its attractiveness; the most important is the Ġorāb spring, 4 km northwest of the village, which discharged 118 l/sec in February 1968 (Nāhež, p. 61; Yakoub, pp. 126 ff.; Abdulla and Chmyrev, p. 311). A small, unattractive hotel on the outskirts of Estālef accommodates visitors.

Although not a town according to official standards, Estālef presents many urban characteristics. Besides the administrative functions of headquarters of a small but densely populated district (*alāqadārī*) of the province of Kabul (204 km<sup>2</sup>, 29,455 inhabitants in 1358 Š./1979, a density of 144 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>), it has a very large *bāzār* (361 shops in 1972, among which a few are Sikh-owned; Chassagne, map) with an outstanding handicraft section of wide extra-regional influence and strict geographical segregation in eight discrete residential units (Szabo and Barfield, p. 200, map). Estālef actually derives most of its income from various craft productions. Besides wood, gold, leather, wool, and felt, two handicraft traditions of old fame deserve mention: one is the weaving of cotton *longīs* (turbans) and *satĀranjīs* (rugs, for which Estālef used to be the main producing center in Afghanistan, see COTTON iii); there were about 200 looms in 1972, with 20 shops selling their product (Chassagne, pp. 107 f.). The second, glazed pottery of mainly blue (from copper oxide), but also green (from lead oxide) and brown (from iron oxide) colors, ran 21 workshops (closed in winter because of the cold) and 13 sale shops in 1972 (Chassagne, pp. 92 and map). The potters' community, closely established in the upper part of the village (Szabo and Barfield, pp. 199 ff.), is organized into a strictly hierarchical and endogamous corporation, divided into eight descent groups, with an important mystical (Sufi) component that has never been thoroughly studied. During the last decades some handicrafts have totally (shoe-manufacture) or almost totally disappeared; for instance, of the numerous felt carpet workshops reported to have existed in the 1930s, 2 were still active in 1968 and only one in 1972 (Chassagne, p. 105). Pottery has shown more resistance thanks to the growing tourist market and introduction of modern technologies through French assistance (Dupaigne, p. 25); however, 4 potter's workshops closed down between 1968 and 1972 (Chassagne, p. 103). In the 1970s the only expanding handicraft was leather (tannery and manufacture of embroidered fur coats), an activity greatly supported by the



promotion of Estālef as a tourist center, a one day excursion target from Kabul. Rapid changes in the *bāzār* structure ensued: 154 shops displayed articles for tourists in 1355 Š./1976 against an estimated 60 in 1352 Š./1973 according to Grötzbach (1979, p. 59), but Chassagne (p. 133) enumerated 192 such shops in 1351 Š./1972.

Built in the form of a pyramid dominated by the shrine of Ḥaẓrat-e Ēšān, the potter's patron of Bukharan origin, the reputedly impregnable locality was used as a retreat for Afghan troops during the first Anglo-Afghan war. It was, however, taken, sacked and a third of it was burnt by a British brigade on 23 Ša'bān 1258/29 September 1842 (McCaskill in Stocqueler, pp. 285 ff.; Marshman, pp. 134 f.; Ferrier, pp. 375 ff.; Moore, pp. 19 f.). Recovery has been slow since the population dropped from an estimated (but possibly inflated) 15,000 inhabitants in 1258/1842 (McCaskill in Stocqueler, p. 285) to 8,000 in 1313 Š./1934 (Ahmad and Aziz, p. 39). It might have regained its former level by 1358 Š./1979, but was to decline once again during the subsequent war, especially after repeated Soviet air bombings in 1362-64 Š./1983-85.

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