



HUŠT

HUŠT, a Zoroastrian-Persian term of unknown etymology, designating the area (in known practice a town-quarter, a village, or a group of villages) assigned to a priest called the *hušt-mōbed*. He performs, or arranges to have performed (when more than one priest is required), all the religious services needed by Zoroastrians of his *hušt*, and receives payments for these, from which he lives. According to a passage in two of the *Persian Rivāyats* (ed. Unvala, II, pp. 35.3-4, 444.11-12; tr. Dhabhar, p. 421) there was to be a distribution (*baḵš*) of *hušt* every fifteen years, and the priests were then to receive *hušt* “in accordance with their priestly attainments (*hērbadī*)” and to “take the profit (*nirumad*, Pahl. *nīrmad*).” There is no suggestion (as surmised by Dhabhar) of a casting of lots, the system being, it seems, devised so that the more experienced and able priests should be given the better (that is, in the main, the richer) *hušt*, on the decision of the high priest and college of priests. Fees for services were regulated by this body, but naturally the residents of a prosperous *hušt* would be apt to ask for extra observances, generating more income, which could make the life of their priest more agreeable.

This system in essentials appears old, since it is reflected in that of the Parsi *panthak* (although the correspondences are not exact). A *panthak*, like a *hušt*, is an area; and the *panthakī*, like the *hušt-mōbed*, is the priest in charge of that area, who serves its residents’ religious needs and lives from the fees they pay him. The best-documented group (*panth*) of Parsi priests is that of the Bhagarias (q.v.), whose records show that their priestly assembly (*anjōman*), presided over by their high priest, used to send priests from their center in



Navsari to other towns and villages on contract (though not for any specified length of time). These appointed (*gomāšta*) *pantha-kīs* had to make an annual payment in cash and kind to the Navsari *anjōman*, to which they applied for the services of assistant priests, as they needed them, and for all ritual requirements. In time this system ended, with *panthaks* becoming hereditary, which led to longstanding links between lay and priestly families. In Persia the system of allocating *hušt* also gradually broke down, and by the latter part of the 20th century the number of priests, even in the Yazdi area, had dwindled so sharply that those remaining had spread their work over a number of *hušts*, aided increasingly by *dahmōbeds*, instructed members of the local laity.

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