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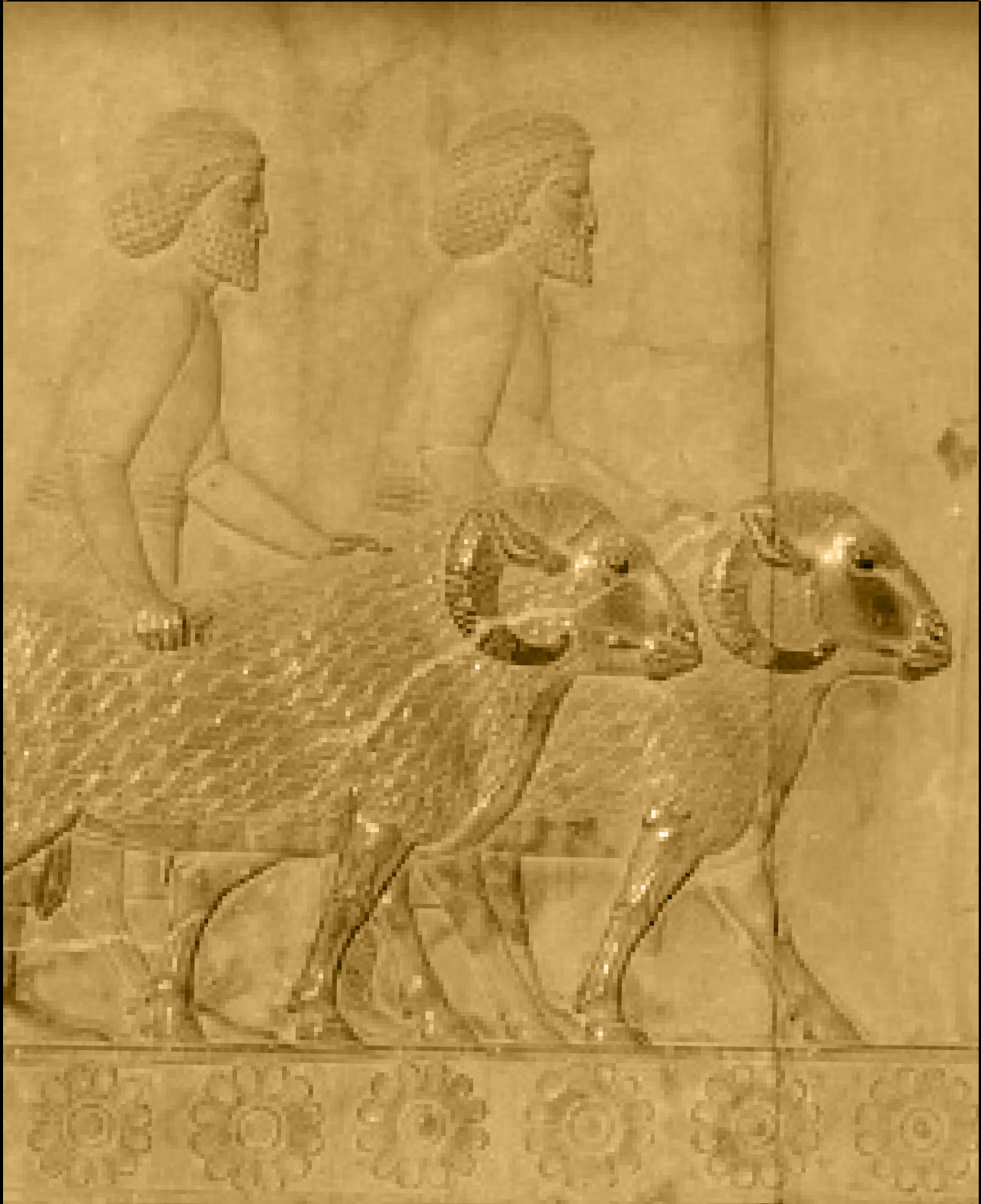
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Detail from above the entrance of Tehran's fire temple, 1286š/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad

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An Overview of the History and Development of the Parsi Priesthood in India up to the 19th Century

Firoze M. Kotwal

At the outset I would like to thank my mentor and tutor of pious memory Professor Mary Boyce for her magnificent and selfless contribution to the field of Zoroastrian studies by giving more than a million UK Pounds to set up a Chair for the study of Zoroastrianism. I would also like to thank Meherābān and Fareedoon Zartoshty for their generosity in supporting over the years the academic study of the faith of their ancestors and their contribution in making this chair possible.

In compiling the early history of Parsi priests of India, one encounters several variables in terms of placing with accuracy the time period during which these priests lived and the events associated with them. The scant material available has to be sourced from the colophons of fragile manuscripts, research into the *dīsāpōthī*¹ of priestly families and extant historical and legal documents, concerning

¹- i.e., list of death anniversaries, giving the day, month and year of death. The term *dīsāpōthī* is derived from Guj. *dis* “day, (of death) day, death anniversary” and *pōthī* “book”. Hence, a book listing the death anniversaries of departed persons with the day, month and year of demise. Zarathushtra’s day of demise, popularly known as *zarthōshtnō dīsō* “death-day of Zarathushtra” by the Parsi community, falls on Rōz Khorshed, *Māh* Dae of the Zoroastrian calendar which is considered as a solemn day of remembrance by his adherents. For detailed information on the term *dīsāpōthī*, see Meherjirana 1899, pp. 240-48; Meherjirana 1932, pp. 10-11, 60-62; Mirza H.K. 1987, pp. 25-33.

disputes between powerful priestly groups over moneys, ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and apportionment of ritual work.

The only priests, mentioned by name as having lived in Sanjan at the time, are to be found in the 16th century Persian account in verse form, called the Qissa-i Sanjān. The Qissa-i Sanjān incorporates the oral tradition as remembered many centuries later.

The priests named in it are a Daštūr Khushmašt and his son Khujašta.² We are told in the Qissa-i Sanjān, that two unnamed priests were sent overland to Khōrāsān to bring back the *ālāt*, i.e., ritual implements needed to consecrate a sacred fire. But again this information recorded in the Qissa-i Sanjān has come down to us by way of oral tradition transmitted to Bahman Kēkōbād³ by his mentor, Daštūr Hōshang Ervad Āsā⁴ a few hundred years after the advent of Parsis to India.

Furthermore, the interpolation of various names in different priestly Fihrišt⁵, and the exclusion of those names in different parallel contemporaneous documents, add to the confusion for the proper dating of events and personalities.

Perhaps the best example of the misperception which exists, in the dating of a priestly personality, is that of the famous priest Nēryōsangh, son of Dhaval. Parsi oral tradition has it that he was the leader of the first group of Zoroastrian Iranians, who fled Iran and to him is attributed the consecration and installation of the Atash Bahram in Sanjan. As per Parsi lore, it is he who explained to Jādī Rānā,⁶ the ruler of Sanjān, the main principles of the Zoroastrian religion.

There are two notable issues that cast doubt over the validity of this commonly held belief. The first, that Bahman Kēkōbād,⁷ the learned Sanjana priest, who wrote the Qissa-i Sanjān in Navsari in

2- The latter, it is said, delighted in performing the Yazīšn, Bāj and Barsom ceremonies. The Bāj and Barsom ceremonies are terms used to refer to high liturgies performed in the Dar-i Mihr.

3- Bahman Kēkōbād who is mentioned as Vēkjī/Ēkjī Kukā in old documents, was a celebrated Sanjana priest descended from Nāgan Rām, one of the three priests who brought the Sanjan Atash Bahram from Vānsdā to Navsari in the latter half of the 15th Century, see Kutār 1929, 21 and 31 (intro.); Kotwal/Hintze 2008, pp. 40-41 with n.62; Meherjirana 1947, vol.1, p. 363; Mirza 1974, pp. 80-81.

4- Daštūr Hōshang Āsā, an erudite Sanjana priest of Navsari, descended from Daštūr Khūrshēd Kāmdīn, one of the three priests who shifted the Sanjan Fire to Navsari, see Hodivala 1920, pp. 84-87. He was the venerable teacher of Bahman Kēkōbād, see *ibid.*, p. 97, n.6.

Kanga's conjecture that Daštūr Meherji Rānā was his *guru* is not correct, 1932, n. on p.19.

5- *Fihrišt* literally means "list, register, index." The priests, in general, maintain intact their genealogies in order to ascertain and verify the ceremonial rights vested in priestly families. Besides keeping records of the genealogy of the Bhagariā priests, the Bhagarsāth Anjuman keeps a record (*fihrišt*) of priests ordained in the Vadī Dar-i Mihr (*nāwars*) up to five generations, since an ordained priest has the right to perform the Navjōte, marriage, *uthamnā* ceremonies, etc., according to his turn. One not ordained as a priest has no such right. In any matter of dispute, the old and experienced priests refer to the *Fihrišt* and give their verdict, see Meherjirānā 1899, *dibāchō*, p.1; Kutār 1929, I, *dibāchō*, p.4; Meherjirānā 1932, *dibāchō*, pp. 99-101; Mirza 1974, p. 106; Udvādā Athōrnān Anjuman Committee 1987, pp. VII-VIII, *Appendix I*, p.25.

6- Jādī Rānā is the name given by the Parsi immigrants to King Vajjad-dēva, the 7th ruler of the Shillahārā dynasty who ruled over Sanjan from 935-975 CE. Our ancestors landed in Sanjan in Vikram Samvat 992, Shrāvan Sud 9, (Friday) which is equivalent to Yazdegirdī Sāl 305, Rōz Bahman, Māh Tir (936 CE), see Hodivala 1920, pp. 65-91; also Mištree 2002, n.11 on pp.431-32. According to Hodivala the Shillahārā kings ruled for 252 years until 1085 CE.

7-Bahman Kēkōbād is his Iranian name. His Indianized name is Vēkjī/Ēkjī Kukā as is recorded in some of the copies of the Qissa-i Sanjān, see Kutār 1929, vol.1, *dibāchō*, p. 11, Meherjirānā 1947, vol.1, p. 1, n.1.

1599 CE makes no mention of a priest named Nēryōsangh Dhaval, when describing the installation of the Atash Bahram in Sanjan. The second being that the only Nēryōsangh Dhaval recorded in history is credited to be a 12th century Sanskrit scholar, who translated various Pahlavi texts, both sacred and secular, into Sanskrit. Also as per priestly tradition, the 12th century scholar priest Nēryōsangh Dhaval is listed as the grandson of Mobed Shāpur, son of Shehriyār, from whom all Parsi priests in India trace their present genealogy.⁸

Mobed Māhyār Māhmehēr of Uchh (1178-1185 CE)

The history of Parsi priests in India is inextricably linked with the Fire Temples established in India and the manuscripts which were brought down from Iran, at various points in time, with the idea of having them copied by a scribe, for the use of the learned priests of India.⁹ Evidence suggests that the copy of the Vendīdād brought from Sigištān (Seištān) in Iran in 1231 CE by Mobed Māhyār Māhmehēr of Uchh, was a copy made in 1185 CE by Ardašīr Wahman of a ms. originally written by Hōmāšt Shādān Hormazd of Seištān.¹⁰ It was given as a ‘pious gift’ (*ašōdād*) to Mobed Māhyār. It is from the ms. of Ardašīr Wahman that the learned Irani Priest Ruštām Mihrābān made a copy in about 1270 CE in India. Finally, Ruštām’s ms. was copied in duplicate by his great grand-nephew, the famous scribe Mihrābān Kayxusraw and is known as the L4¹¹ (written in Navsari in 1323 CE and now housed in the British Library, London) and the K1 (written in Cambay in 1324 CE and is now housed in the University Library, Copenhagen). Seištān had until 1498 CE a recorded congregation of 2700 Zoroāstrians.¹² The road from Seištān to India was well-known, because in the Persian Rivāyats translated by Dhabhar,¹³ a letter written by the Iranian priests state that the preferred route of travel was “from Qandahār to Sištān (which) is the nearest way and there is no danger on the road from Sištān to Yazd”. Mobed Māhyār was a Parsi Priest who lived there for a few years, studying the religion under the Iranian Dašturs of Seištān.

Thus we can extrapolate from the above that there was communication between the Zoroāstrians of Seištān and Yazd with those in India, and that as a gesture of goodwill the Zoroāstrian priests of Seištān presented Mobed Māhyār with a copy of the Vendīdād for ritual use in India. The fact that he spent considerable time to learn the rituals and doctrine of the faith suggests a need among the priestly class to send Parsi priests to Iran for training. This also leads one to draw the conclusion that perhaps

8- . Apart from western scholars, some analytical Parsi scholars such as S.H. Hodivala and Dārā S. Meherjirānā also hold the view, that as per available historical records, Nēryōsangh Dhaval lived in the 12th century CE. For a detailed discussion on Nēryōsangh Dhaval, see Meherjirānā 1947, vol. 1, pp. 475-482; 488-495; Kotwal 1990 p. 218 n.4.

9- The Vendīdād manuscript brought to India by Mobed Māhyār Māhmehēr of Uchh is the original manuscript of the Vendīdād from which copies were transcribed over the years and today it constitutes the manuscripts L4 and K1.

10- All known extant mss. of the Vendīdād copied in India since the last quarter of the thirteenth century, originated from the ancestral copy of Hōmāšt Shādān, see Mirza 1987, pp. 330-333. For a critical analysis of Zoroāstrian mss. worldwide, see Alberto Cantera 2012, pp. 165-415.

11- The original lost folios 2-30 of the ms. L4 housed in the British Library have been re-discovered in the Daštūr Meherji Rānā Library in Navsari in 2012 CE by Dan Sheffield. The folios previously formed an asset of the private library of M.R.Unvala presented to the Meherji Rānā Library, see Ursula Sims-Williams, 2012, p. 180, n.27.

12- See Dhabhar, 1932, p. 610.

13- See Dhabhar, 1932, p. 599.

in 12th century India, such training was either unavailable at that time or was not at a level that was required for proficiency in ritual practice.

The Five ‘Pols’ or Five Priestly Family Groups or Stock

In 1215 CE, sixteen years before Mobed Māhyār returned to Uchh, Hōm Bahmanyār, an ancestor of the author, came from Sanjān with his son Faredun, at the invitation of a priest called Mobed Kāmdīn, to cater to the ritual needs of the Parsis of Navsari. Mobed Faredun had 3 sons, Āsā, Māhyār and Chāndā, in whose names, 3 of the 5 *pols* of Navsari were named. *Pols* were gated areas in which households bearing common links of descent, lived in Navsari.¹⁴ Priestly jurisdiction was officially allocated by way of a document, to which the signatures of various priestly groups were appended, outlining the agreement arrived at and the protocol of ritual activities to be followed.¹⁵

The early division into the 5 *pols* was mainly for the priestly families associated with the Navsari Bagarsāth Anjuman and this took place 75 years after the first Sanjana priest Hōm Bahmanyār was invited to Navsari to serve the community. Hōm Bahmanyār accepted the invitation on condition that he would be given a half-share in all the ritual work. The members of the Kāmdīn Zarthōsht family who were in charge of the ritual work in Navsari, agreed in principle to share the work but the priests of Sanjan were upset and saw it as a case of divided loyalties. They directed Hōm Bahmanyār to choose between Sanjan and Navsari and he chose the latter. This formal agreement to share the workload between the families of Kāmdīn Zarthōsht and Hōm Bahmanyār, gave rise to the term Bhagarsāth or Bhagariās. The term Bhagarsāth/bhagariā “co-sharer” originates from Guj. *bhāg* “a share, a portion”, *bhāgiyō*, *bhāgīdār* “a partner”. Those priests of Navsari who share among themselves the proceeds from the ceremonies according to their turn are termed Bhagariā.¹⁶ This term is now used exclusively for the priests who owe their allegiance to Navsari.

In the 13th Century, a further division of ecclesiastical jurisdiction was agreed upon called *panthaks* and it was agreed that no priest would ever perform any ceremony in a *panthak* that he was not officially associated with. From Navsari the priests went to serve in Surat, from where they went to Gōdā-

14- Guj. *pol* means “a street or lane”. The practice of appending surnames to proper names came into existence in later times, see Meherjirānā 1939, *dībāchō*, pp.34-40.

15-The *pols* were an equitable way of staving off monopolistic tendencies and it allowed the various groups to share in the ritual work and earn a fair living. So, for example, the head of the Kākā Pāhlan *pol* who was a descendant of Rānā Kāmdīn, was given the task of making the heir of a deceased person recite the formula of *Sōsh* on the third day after death. See also Kotwal F.M./Hintze A., pp. 48-49; also Kotwal 1990, pp. 217-226.

16- The proceeds shared may be in kind, such as wheat, rice, coconut, sacred bread (*drōn*) or cash or both. Originally the term *bhagar* seems to refer to the contents of a utensil having 6 *drōns*, fruits and a variety of home-made sweets called the *Sarōš-Bāj* which the priest, who according to their turn, could consecrate the food offered, and could take it home after the ceremonies were done. In the old document of 1566 CE the Bhagarsāth Anjuman resolved that the priests should distribute the *Sarōš-Bāj* (Guj. *bhagar vātē*) only after consecrating them, see Modi 1903, pp. 151-55; Daštāvējō 1933, pp. 126-27; Kanga 1932, pp. 16-17; Meherjirānā 1939, pp. 122-23; Hodivala 1927, p.151; Kotwal 1990, p. 219, n.11.

The author’s grandfather Pirojshah Ādarji Kotwal daily brought home the *Sarōš-Bāj* in a wicker basket, after performing *Drōn* service in honour of the divinity *Sarōš* in the Vadī Dar-i Mihr. It seems very unlikely to connect the term *bhagar* with Phl. *bahr*, Pers. *bahra* “share, profit, gain”.

varā, Bharuch and Khambāt (Cambay) and together with the Bhagariās and Sanjānās, they formed the historic 5 *panths* of priests later in the 15th century.

Mihrābān Kayxusraw lands in India in 1321 CE

Nearly a hundred years after Mobed Māhyār went to Seištān and brought to India a copy of the Vendīdād, an Iranian scribe, Mihrābān Kayxusraw, son of Mihrābān Spanddād, came from Iran at the invitation of a Parsi merchant, Chāhil Sāgan, who perhaps, owing to a shortage of ritual manuscripts, was interested in having them copied for the priests living in Cambay and the surrounding towns of Gujarat.

Between 1321 and 1351 CE, numerous manuscripts were copied by Mihrābān in the city of Cambay at the behest of his wealthy Parsi patron. Mihrābān Kayxusraw stayed for 30 long years in the villages of Gujarat, carefully copying manuscripts for the literary and ritual use of Parsi priests in India. Mihrābān came from Dizug, a city 38 miles south of Zāhedān in Seištān,¹⁷ after receiving a letter from Chāhil Sāgan inviting him to visit India and to bring with him manuscripts for copying. The Sanskrit Colophon (folio 328) at the end of the ms. K₅ gives this information.¹⁸ From this, one can deduce that some form of correspondence, exchange or travel over land between the Zoroastrian priests of Seištān and the Parsis of Gujarat had been maintained over the years or revived after Māhyār of Uchh went to Seištān more than a hundred years ago. Some of the oldest and the most important Zoroastrian manuscripts in existence today were transcribed by Mihrābān, and their existence bear testimony to the wealth which he, in a sense, gifted to the Parsi community. The ms. K₂₀, which contains a series of miscellaneous Aveštan and Pahlavi texts, was copied by Mihrābān in Iran from a manuscript of his great grand uncle Roštam Mihrābān, and in all probability, was brought by him to India. The MK manuscript (a part of the Jāmāsp Āsā collection) containing miscellaneous Pahlavi texts was copied by him in Thānā, suggesting a large Parsi population residing there in the 14th century. The J₂, the well-known Yasna manuscript with its Pahlavi version, was copied by Mihrābān, and it was later presented by Daštūr Jāmāspji M. Jāmāspāsā to the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The Ms. L₄, a codex of the Avešta with a Pahlavi version of the Vendīdād was copied in Navsari by Mihrābān from his great grand uncle Roštam Mihrābān's ms. and is now at the British Library, London.¹⁹ The ms. K₅, containing the Yasna with a Pahlavi version, was copied by Mihrābān in Cambay in 1323 CE and is housed at the University of Copenhagen, as are the K₁ and K₂₀ (the scribe of K₂₀ is unknown but in the K₂₀ ms., he has transcribed three colophons of the various Pahlavi texts written by Mihrābān Kayxusraw).

These manuscripts which form the largest corpus of religious texts, transcribed by a single person, have in turn sustained the priestly tradition in India by giving precise information, not only with regard to the prayers to be recited, but are instructive of the ritual actions to be undertaken, and provide a glimpse of the period during which it was written.

17- See Kotwal and Hintze 2008, n.40 on p.15

18- See Kotwal, F.M. 2010, pp.185-186.

19- The original folio 2-30 of the ms. L₄ which was presumed to be missing were re-discovered by Dan Sheffield in 2012 in the Meherji Rānā Library, Navsari. They formally belonged to Ervad Māneckji R. Unvala, the father of Dr. J.M. Unvala, see Ursula Sims-Williams, 2012, p. 180 with n.27.

The Great or Vadī Dar-i Mihr

In 1142 CE (511 AY), Rōz Dīn and Māh Tīr, a priest named Zarthōsht Mobed came to Navsari from Sanjān, accompanied by his two sons, Kāmdīn and Mobed and a few members of the community.

This group of Navsari priests under Zarthōsht Mobed established a Dar-i Mihr in a modest house which gradually became the focus of all religious activities. In time, the Bhagariā priests derived their authority from it. It was built as a modest structure and was seen as a temporary working Agiary, which in course of time came to be known as the Vadī Dar-i Mihr or the Great Dar-i Mihr.²⁰

The authority of the Vadī Dar-i Mihr extended to the surrounding villages and most legal documents were signed in the Vadī Dar-i Mihr, but it had no ever-burning fire. The priests performing “inner” religious ceremonies at their Vadī Dar-i Mihr brought embers for the ritual fires daily from a nearby house.²¹ Until the establishment of the Vadī Dar-i Mihr the only perpetually-burning, consecrated fire in India was the Ātaš Bahrām at Sanjān, and all young Bhagariā priests had their *nāvar* ceremony performed at the Vadī Dar-i Mihr.²²

Seventy three years after Zarthōsht Mobed’s arrival, another priest, viz., Hōm Bahmanyār, came to Navsari from Sanjān in 1215 CE with his son Faredūn to cater to the spiritual needs of the Parsis.²³

20- It was referred to as ‘Great’ because a priest who has been initiated as a *hērbēd* at the Vadī Dar-i Mihr could perform ceremonies in any Dar-i Mihr in India, and its *ālāt* could be used by priests of any *panthak* (diocese) in their Dar-i Mihr. The Vadī Dar-i Mihr was later extended and at its zenith, had 15 *yazišn-gāhs* in operation, allowing 15 pairs of priests to perform the *yazišn* ceremonies simultaneously, if need be. This suggests that there was a thriving priestly and lay population living in Navsari at the time. It is important to note that a Bhagariā priest loses his right to perform ceremonies in the Vadī Dar-i Mihr if he is ordained a *hērbēd* elsewhere.

The learned scribe Mihrābān Kayxusrāw seems to have written the ms. of the Vendīdād, known as L4, in Navsari in 1323 CE. In his Sanskrit colophon he states that “here today, the *stambhatirtha* of Nāgsārikā (an older name for Navsari), (the ms. is written) [*adhi stambha tirtha śrī nāgasārikāyā*]”. Mihrābān seems to have used the Sanskrit term *stambha tirtha*, “an active and important holy place, a pillar, a stronghold”, for the Vadī Dar-i Mihr where he seems to have lived in 1323 CE. Before coming to Navsari he had copied a few mss. in the “house of fire (*ātaxš xānag*)” at Thana in 1321-22 CE.

21- See Kotwal F.M. 1974, pp. 665-66. This practice continued till the year 1907 CE when Bai Mōtibāi Kāvasji Erachji Desai (Gōndalwālā) got a continually burning Dādgāh fire consecrated in the Vadī Dar-i Mihr for ritual purposes, see Meherjirana 1947, vol.1, p.146, n.89. In 1909 CE another Dādgāh fire was consecrated with the munificence of Seth N.M. Wadia for ritual purpose, see Giārā 1998, p. 108. Both Dādgāh fires are installed in separate rooms in a large fire-vase in order to facilitate priests in the performance of high liturgies. These are Dādgāh fires for ritual purpose only and hence they need not be installed in a *gumbad* (*sanctum sanctorum*) as a place of worship for Parsi Zoroastrians. Vatcha’s statement (vol. 1, 1874, p. 557) that Bai Mōtlībāi Māneckji Navrōji Wadia got an Ātash Ādarān fire installed in the Vadī Dar-i Mihr in 1220 AY (1851 CE) is incorrect. The concept of Ādarān fire in India was borrowed from Iran in later centuries and the traditional Bhagariā priests have not consecrated one in their old headquarters of Navsari.

22- Some famous non-practising *Hērbēds*, whose *nāvar* ceremony was performed at the Vadī Dar-i Mihr, included Nusserwanji Ruttonji Tata and his famous son Jamsetji Tata, the founder of the house of Tatas. Nusserwanji had close ties with the Meherjirana family and in fact the *nāvar* ceremony of Kaikobad Meherjirana, the father of the previous Meherjirana, was performed in the name of Ratanbai Bamji, the sister of Jamsetji Tata. Jamsetji Tata’s two sons, Dorabji and Ratanji, also had their *nāvārs* performed at the Vadī Dar-i Mihr and their names, to date, are recited with their ecclesiastical title of *Ervad* in the “list for remembering the names of the departed (*nām grahan*),” indicating their priestly status. It was a matter of tradition and honour for the Tata family heirs to have their *nāvar* ceremony done at the Vadī Dar-i Mihr.

23- The copyist of the Sanjānā and Bhagariā genealogies has inadvertently omitted the two names viz., Khūrshēd, son of Bahmanyār and Bahmanyār, son of Khūrshēd. These two names are well preserved in the colophons of old manuscripts.

The Sanjan Ātaš Bahrām in Navsari

In 1465 CE Mahmud Begadā attacked Sanjān and as a consequence, the Iranshah,²⁴ the sacred fire of Sanjān, was hidden in the caves of Bāhrōt for a short period and later moved to Bānsdā. On the urgings of Chāngā Āshā, a wealthy Behdīn of Navsari, the sacred fire was brought to Navsari in c.1477, by three intrepid Sanjānā priests, viz., Khurshēd Kāmdīn, Nāgan Rām and Chāiyyā Shāēr. It is from these 3 priests that the line of the 9 family groups (*nav kutumbi*) of Sanjānā priests today serve the sacred fire at Udvada. With the sacred fire enthroned in Navsari, it was decided that the Sanjānā priests would be the guardians of the sacred fire, while the Bhagariā priests of Navsari would take care of the ritual work of the entire community including that of the Sanjānās in Navsari.²⁵

In the middle of the 15th century, in order to facilitate a fair division of ritual work, the 5 *panths* or groups, using the shoreline of the rivers, carved out an autonomous region for each *panth*.²⁶

In 1543 CE a further document was signed between the Sanjānā and the Bhagariā priests, detailing the division of jurisdiction between these two powerful priestly groups. Although the original signed covenant does not exist, a copy is preserved in the Meherji Rānā Library in Navsari. This copy of the 1543 agreement is the oldest extant document among all the documents concerning the establishment of the various *panthaks*. It was copied by Daštūr Jāmāspji Meherjirana from the existing document and was held to be sacrosanct, and any defiance of the covenant by a priest met with retaliatory punishments.²⁷ Such adjustments of priestly jurisdiction laid the groundwork for the emergence eventually of the *panthak* system which exists today.

Daštūr Meherji Rānā c.1514-1591

In the 16th century, Navsari gained fame with the attention it received from the court of the reigning Mogul Emperor Akbar. Ervad Meherji's (the adopted son of his uncle Ervad Vāchhā) chance meeting with Emperor Akbar at Kānkrā Khādī, near Surat, in 1573 CE earned him a visit to the Mogul court in

24- The Sanjān Ātash Bahrām, popularly known as the Irānshāh Ātash Bahrām, by the Parsi community, is of later usage. Bahman Kēkōbād uses the term "Irānshāh" in *Qissa-i Sanjān* for the Ātash Bahrām as a common noun following in the footsteps of Irani priests, see Dhabhar 1932, pp. 176-77. For a detailed discussion on the term *Irānshāh*, see Meherjirana 1947, vol. 1, pp. 344-352; also Boyce and Kotwal, *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. XIII, pp. 531-533.

25- Later at their request, the Sanjānā priests were also given the town of Bulsār as their own diocese, and the Sanjānā Anjuman sent a priest by the name of Shāpur Rānā to serve the community there. Over time the Sanjānā priests in the town of Bulsār broke away from the Sanjānā priests of Navsari, and the Shāpur Rānā family of priests lost their right to serve the Irānshāh fire. Today Bulsār has 2 fire temples, one served by the descendants of Shāhpur Rānā and the other by those of Jāmāsp Bhāiji, another Sanjānā priest, who likewise separated from the Sanjānā priests of Navsari in 1684 CE, see Meherjirana 1939, pp. 31-32, 75-76.

26- So for example, the Bhagariā priests of Navsari were given the area between the river Pār and Variāv (river Tāpī) and the Sanjānā priests who served the sacred Irānshāh fire had control over the area between the river Dantōrā and the river Pār. For the division of five *panthaks*, see Kotwal and Boyd 1982, p. 212; Kanga 1932, pp. 3-5; Kotwal 1990, pp. 218-220.

27- A typical form of punishment meted out was to ask the priest to remove or put away his *padān* (a white double cloth mask covering the nose and the mouth and worn by priests during the ceremony). A priest could not perform rituals without the *padān* covering his face, so for all practical purposes, this punishment translated into the priest not being given the permission to practise for a prescribed period of time. It was also a form of economic sanction.

Delhi in 1578 CE.²⁸ According to tradition, Ervad Meherji impressed the Emperor with his learning and his exposition of the Zoroastrian faith and he was given a tax free grant of 200 *bhinghās* (Guj. *vinghu*, one *vinghu* is equivalent to c. 1/3 acre) of land in Navsari. He was the first priest to receive national recognition.

In March of 1578/79 CE the Parsi community of Navsari elected him as the First High Priest of Navsari²⁹ and acknowledged him as the head of the Bhagarsāth Anjuman in recognition of his services to the community.³⁰

The 15th century to 18th century – The Persian Rivāyats

When charting the history and development of the Parsi priesthood, the significant influence of the Persian Rivāyats must be accounted for. As can be gleaned from these letters that span a period of about 300 years (1478 to 1773 CE) the Zoroastrians of Iran, despite suffering immense deprivation, hardship and persecution, continued the transmission of the faith, as Professor Boyce has stated, with a constancy and vigour which was remarkable. Several letters were written by the Iranian priests of Sharifābād, Yazd and Kermān, in reply to the questions asked by the Parsi priests. In some letters they admonished the Parsi priests, asking them to improve their ritual observances, some were written mentoring them and advising them to update their ritual skills, and some lamented the harsh dispensation under which the Zoroastrians of Iran lived. In a particularly tragic letter written by the Iranian Dašturs on 11th November, 1635 CE to Daštūr Qawāmuddīn Padam Rāmyār and Behdīn Āsā Jamshēd of Bharūch (Broach), they write, “under the reign of Shāh Abbās the Dašturs of Iran had suffered such tribulations as was indescribable by tongue or pen and that two of them had been killed and lost their lives in consequence. The Jāmāsp Nāma and several other religious works had been taken away by force from them, and they were persecuted because still more books were demanded, though they had none to give.”³¹

In a letter written from Sharifābād in 1478 CE (847 AY) by Shāpur Jāmāsp Shahriyār and sent through Narīmān Hooshang, the Iranian priest laments that “the Hērbads do not well know (how to handle) the apparatus of their craft” and are not familiar with the rules of purity and impurity, and they therefore suggested in their letter that it would be necessary “that two wise Hērbads may come over (here) and learn the Pahlavi language and know ‘the Proper and Improper’ and then attend to the religion of Ohrmazd over there...”³²

28- In his *Persian Māhyār Nāma*, Daštūr Erachji S. Meherjirana states that Daštūr Meherji Rānā went to the court of Akbar on Rōz Hormazd, Māh Khōrdād, 947 AY (1578 CE), see Meherjirana 1947, vol. 2, p. 973.

29- See Paymaster 1954, p. 113.

30- It should be noted that while the honorific title of *Daštūr* has been used in the past, largely for priests with learning, Meherji Rānā by his appointment became the first *Daštūr* in Hindustān to be so appointed and his name is always recited first in the galaxy of late Dašturs in the Dhoop Nīrang prayer recited during private and public Zoroastrian ceremonies. Meherji Rānā passed away on Rōz Depādar, Māh Spandarmad, 960 AY (1-11-1591 CE). It is to be noted that when writing the name of the First Meherji Rānā, the name is written as two separate words to denote Meherji, son of Rānā. Subsequently, his descendants when using the name as a surname have written it as DaštūrMeherjirana.

31- See Hodivala 1920, pp. 330-331.

32- See Dhabhar 1932, p. 599.

This admonishment is interesting, because the letter is written 21 years after the Irānshāh Fire was brought to Navsari in c.1477 CE by the Sanjānā Mobeds and is a reflection of the state of affairs of the Parsi priests, who must have suffered immense loss and trauma after they fled from Sanjān with the sacred fire. It has been suggested by E.W. West that the questions asked in the Persian Rivāyats, concerning ritual format, prayers and practices, were probably written by Parsi priests in order to enforce and sanctify various religious practices which may have fallen into disuse, by obtaining their religious authority from the Iranian priests.³³

Here I would like to mention a few stalwarts among the Iranian scribe-priests who contributed in perpetuating not just the faith but the manuscripts that we have with us today, by faithfully copying manuscript after manuscript in what must have been very trying and difficult times. In Kermān, Marzbān Faridūn, Vehmard Faridūn and Daštūr Bīzan Daštūr Yazdiyār, the latter a signatory of the Rivāyat of 1511 CE (880 AY), were outstanding scribe priests. His father Daštūr Yazdiyār copied the Pahlavi *Mēnog i Xrad*.

Few today realize that Seištān in modern day Afghanistan was a seat of learning for nearly 400 years and the most well-known Daštūr, who resided there, was Shāhmard, son of Shād, the copyist of the Dēnkard. Therefore, it is not surprising that Māhyār Mehermāh of Uchh went to Seištān in the 12th century to bring back a copy of the Vendīdād, and that Mobed Mihrābān Kayxusraw who came as a copyist to Khambāt in the 14th century came from Seištān. His famous great grand-uncle, Roštām Mihrābān, who wrote numerous manuscripts, also came from Dizūg in Seištān (a place 38 miles south of Zāhedān, as informed by Prof. Jamsheed Choksy, of the Indiana University, USA), as did scribes such as Marzbān Spanddād.

Here I must mention the famous Daštūr-i Daštūrān Mihrābān Nōshīrvān of Turkābād who wrote a part of the Dēnkard was also one of the signatories in the Rivāyat of Kāus Kāmdīn in 1558 CE (927 AY). In a letter dated 1646 CE and brought to India by Behdīn Bahman Asfandyār, the Mobeds of Turkābād in Yazd had this to say about a gift they sent with Bahman Asfandyār for the Parsis in India. “Let it be known to the Dašturs, Hirbads and Mobeds that one manuscript of the Vendīdād is sent with Behdīn Bahman. Whenever there is no manuscript of the Vendīdād, then you should use it, if need be. We, Daštūr Khusro Daštūr Nōshīrvān and Daštūr Ruštām, have presented it to you without receiving its value, so that it may be known to you”.³⁴ The priests of old were so careful with manuscripts that as part of a colophon one priest made the ms. speak thus: “One should protect me from oil, one should protect me from water, one should protect me from loose binding, and one should protect me from going into another’s hand, thus say the book.”

Literary Activities of the Parsi Priests

Prompted by their Irani counterparts, the Parsi priests did not lag behind in their literary activities. The most prominent example is furnished by Nēryōsang, the son of Dhaval, who lived in the twelfth

33- See Paymaster 1954, pp. 66-67.

34-The message is followed by a list of names of 42 priests and behdīns of Turkābād, who appended their signatures to this letter written by Māhvindād, son of Behrām Ardešīr Māhvindād Ruštām, the High Priest of Yazd, in 1626 CE (995 AY). This Vendīdād manuscript which forms part of the Mulla-Firoze Library is presently housed in the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute Library, Mumbai.

century CE. He seemed to have studied Sanskrit under a Hindu *pandit*, i.e., a learned man, in Sanjān and applied it usefully by translating into Sanskrit important Pahlavi texts such as *Ardāg Wīrāz Nāmag*, *Mēnōgī Xrad*, *Škand Gumānīg Wizār*, etc. The illustrious descendants of Sanjānā priests who moved to Navsari with the Sanjān Fire have contributed handsomely to the preservation of the Zoroastrian religion and Parsi history. Bahman Kēkōbād Sanjānā wrote in 1599 CE the *Qissa-i Sanjān* in Persian verse-form tracing the history of the Parsi founding fathers since their landing in Sanjān, to the installation of the sacred fire in a fine house in Navsari. Other Sanjānā priests who deserve to be mentioned are Barjōr Kāmdīn, Hōrmazdyār Frāmarz, Dārāb Hōrmazdyār, Ruštam Shahriyār, Hōshang Āsā, Shāpur Hōshang, Ērach Khurshēd, etc. whose manuscripts adorn the famous libraries of Europe and India. The Bhagariā Sanjānā priests³⁵ who settled in a suburb called Farāmpurā in Surat are credited with having a line of learned priests. The first five high priests of the H.B.Wadia Ātash Bahrām, viz., Edalji Darabji Sanjana, his brother, Behrāmji Darabji Sanjana, Behrāmji's son, Pēshōtan and grandson Dārāb and Ruštam Sanjana, all belonged to the Bhagarsāth Sanjānā family.³⁶ There is a galaxy of eminent Parsi priests who deserve express mention such as Meherji Rānā and his father Rānā Jēsang, Dārāb Pāhlan and his father Pāhlan Farēdūn, Jāmasp Āsā and his son Jamshēd Jāmāsp, Āsdīn Kākā, Jāmāspji M. Jāmāspāsā, Kāus Ruštam Jalāl and his son Mulla Firoze,³⁷ Aspandyār Kāmdīn, Māhwindād of Khambāt (Cambay), Vīkā Behrām, and many others. The learned scribes mentioned above all belonged to the priestly class.³⁸

The Quarrel between Bhagariās and Sanjānās

The Parsis, on the other hand continued to flourish in India making every effort to strengthen their faith. Navsari became the epicenter of Parsi religious life and the various priestly groups lived harmoniously for nearly two hundred years. But growing prosperity led to ecclesiastical disputes and quarrels over how to share the ritual work. The Sanjānā population of priests having increased, found it hard to live only from the moneys made from the services and offerings made to the sacred fire, and began to encroach on the Bhagariā group's right to do all other religious work.

Wanting a greater share of the ritual work, the Sanjānās in 1740 CE filed a suit against the Bhagariā priests at the court of the Gāekwāds, and the elders of the Poliā Desai and Vadā Desai families, together

35- For their genealogical history, see Kotwal 1990, p.224, n.32.

36- Of all *dašturships* in India, the *dašturship* of the Wadia Ātash Bahrām is pre-eminently known for learning and scholarship.

37- Kāus Ruštam Jalāl (i.e. illustrious) went to Iran from his native place Bharuch with his 8-year old son Pēshōtan. The Irani Dašturs bestowed on Pēshōtan the title of *Firūz* for successfully acquiring scriptural knowledge, see Vatcha 1874, n. on p.309.

38- The only '*lay Daštur*' of repute was Khūrshēdji R. Cama who laid the foundation of philological school in India. Among his first illustrious students who earned worldwide fame were Tahmurasp Anklesaria, Mīnōcher Vatcha, Edalji Antia, Sheriārji Bharuchā and Kāvasji Kāngā.

with Daštūr Jāmāsp Āsā, went to fight the case in the town of Songhad.³⁹ On 27th September, 1740 CE the case was won by the Bhagariā priests. One of the Bhagariā leaders who went to Songhad was Mobed Bachāji Mehernōshji, an ancestor of the Dordi family, and the Grand Old Man of India, Dādābhai Naorōji, was the sixth direct descendant of Bachāji Mehernōshji Dordi.

Disappointed with the outcome of the case, the Sanjānās left Navsari in 1740 CE with the holy Ātash Bahrām fire and went to Valsād/Bulsār where their stay was short-lived. The two main Sanjānā priests involved in the move were Ruštōm Sheriyār of the present Mirzā family and Bhīkhā Ruštōm of the present Daštūr family of Udvada. After leaving Navsari, one of their first acts was to appoint the two priests Bhīkhā Ruštōm and Ruštōm Sheriyār as their High Priests.⁴⁰

The Irānshāh was finally installed in the small village of Udvada in the modest house of Ervad Mehernōsh Hōrmazd Bhāthelā, the grandson of the famous Daštūr Dārāb Hōrmazdyār and nine priestly families declared their right to care for the sacred fire. In Udvada they set up an *Udvādā Athōrnān Mandal* to care for the needs of their priests and to take administrative decisions.

The Priests who founded the Navsari Ātash Bahrām

With the exit of the Sanjānā priests who took with them the Irānshāh Fire, the Bhagariās felt the need to install an Ātash Bahrām Fire, and the Daštūr who performed the first *bōy* ceremony, i.e., the offering of fragrance to the sacred Navsari Ātash Bahrām was Daštūr Sōhrābji Ruštōmji Meherjirāna, who took his *barashnūm* in the Vadī Dar-i Mihr. From Khūrshēdji Desai's own records it has been authenticated that the Ātash Bahrām was consecrated by the Bhagarsāth Anjuman in 1765 CE under the leadership of Khūrshēdji and was established with the liberal help of the Parsi community. Khūrshēdji Desai and the scions of the Seth family of Surat, belonging to the Bhagarsāth group of priests, contributed generously towards the building, preparation and maintenance of the Ātash Bahrām. The total cost of consecrating the new Shrī Ātash Bahrām of Anjuman (*shrī ātashbēhērām parthā anjumannā*),

39- Kukā Meherji of the Polīā Desai clan fought the case although he was 82 years old. A group of Sanjānā priests opposed this legal case and in fact wrote a letter to Gangāji Bāwā Gāekwād in Songhad to say that they would not support this case and that if the judgment called for fines to be paid, they would not pay it as they were not a party to the dispute, see *Daštāvējō* 1933, Part II, pp. 55-56; Meherjirānā 1939, pp. 88-89. Another dispute occurred between the Surat-based Bhagariā priests and those working in their headquarters in Navsari. As per the understanding, the Bhagariā priests of Navsari had a right to share in the ritual work of their clientele in Surat. But the Surat priests who had over time become independent and wealthy took the matter to the court of the Nawāb in Surat. All the court expenses for the Navsari priests were paid by Khūrshēdji Desai, a prominent citizen, and the Bhagarsāth Anjuman later repaid the moneys with interest. For the help given by the Mōtā Desai and the Polīā Desai to the Anjuman in the legal case, they were awarded the right to take commission out of the moneys paid for ritual work in Surat and that right, called *vadchārī*, was enjoyed by them for a hundred years, see *Navsārī Prakāsh*, dt. 27.1.1924, pp. 6-7; Meherjirānā 1939, *dībāchō*, p.44. Both Desai families enjoyed the privilege for 100 years.

40- Life for the Sanjānā priests in Valsād was even more fraught with difficulties under the descendants of Jāmāsp Bhāiji who made them sign through their clientele a harsh agreement with regard to ritual work. In a move which was seen as being insulting, the priests of Valsād insisted that no priest whose *nāvar* had been done in Navsari could practice in Valsād. They further insisted that the Sanjānās should take the *barashnūm* again in Valsād and perform the larger *khūb* and only they could then perform the *bōy* ceremony, as the Irānshāh was in their jurisdiction. These conditions proved to be very draconian and within 2 years the Sanjānā priests moved out of Valsād taking with them the holy Irānshāh Fire to Udvada in 1742 CE.

as per the account-ledgers meticulously maintained by Khūrshēdji Desai was Rs.1339 and 10 Annas.⁴¹

Mullā Fīrōze Kāus Jalāl of the Dādysēth Ātash Bahrām, Mumbai

The first Qadīmī Ātash Bahrām of India was consecrated in Mumbai in 1783 CE by Dādībhāi Nōshīr-wānji Dādysēth and the most pre-eminent High Priest of the Qadīmīs was Mullā Fīrōze. Mullā Fīrōze's real name was Pēshōtan and for his learning he was given the title of Mullā Fīrōze. His father Kāus was a priest from Bharuch and his *nāvar* ceremony was performed at the Vadī Dar-i Mihr in Navsari. Mullā Kāus received the title Jalāl, meaning 'illustrious' and his son Mullā Fīrōze, after whom the famous Mullā Fīrōze Library was named, lived in Iran for many years, and when they returned, they enriched the Parsi community by bringing back a number of manuscripts from Yazd. Father and son were extremely influential and had ties with the British ruling elite in Bombay. The Dādysēth Ātash Bahrām which was established in Bombay in 1783 CE was the first Qadīmī Ātash Bahrām in India.

Priests who founded the Shehenshāhī Mōdī Ātash Bahrām of Surat

The Shehenshāhī Mōdī Ātash Bahrām was consecrated in 1823 CE under the able guidance of Edalji Dārābji Sanjānā of the Wadia Ādariān in Mumbai. The first *bōy* ceremony was performed by the High Priest Dašturji Kaikhusru Dādābhāi. At the time Hormusji Bomanji Wadia was living (d. 1826 CE) and his sister Bai Jaijee was the widow of Dadabhai Nōshīr-wānji Mōdī and she was keen to build an Ātash Bahrām in his name and so Hormusji extended help to her and made all the arrangements needed to consecrate the fire.⁴² The fire of lightning needed for the consecration of the Ātash Bahrām, was procured from Calcutta. In a letter which appeared in the *Bombay Samāchār* newspaper dated 9th June 1823, details were given by Navroji Sohrabji Umrigar, the agent of Hormusji Bomanji Wadia in Calcutta. He wrote that Seth Ruštānji Cawasji Banaji and six friends were by a river bank when a passing evening storm blazed with lightning and struck a tree which caught fire and on seeing it Navroji himself carried the burning branch home and preserved it and offered sandalwood and incense to keep the fire burning. Two Parsis were enlisted to carry the fire by ship to Bombay. This fire of lightning was used when consecrating the Surat Modi Shehenshāhī Atash Bahram.

41- The sandalwood and frankincense (*sukhad-lōbān*) required at the time of unification of 16 fires were provided by Khūrshēdji Desai at the cost of Rs.11/- (Rs.10/- for one maund of sandalwood and Re.1/- for frankincense). The crown (*tāj*) for the Ātash Bahrām was donated by Behdīn Jīvanjī Jamshēdji of Bharuch and the marble throne (*taxt*) by Seth Munchērji Kharshēdji of Surat. The copper fire-vase (Pah. *ādōšt*, Parsi Guj. *afargānyu*) for the Ātash Bahrām was donated by Behdīn Lāl Bahmanji Athugar of Surat whereon it was installed until 1866 CE, when a large Chinese silver-vase valued at Rs.10,000/- was donated by Behrāmji Nusserwānji Seervai. In order to commemorate the auspicious event, Behrāmji Nusserwānji Seervai endowed a public Jashan on Rōz Khordād Māh Khordād which is celebrated annually in the grand hall of the Ātash Bahrām, see *Navsāri-Prakāsh* dt. 18th and 25th November and 2nd and 9th December, 1923; Kanga 1932, pp. 81-88.

42- Before the commencement of the consecration rites the then Ervad Edalji Sanjānā asked a team of 11 *mobeds* of Surat who were participating in the consecration to take afresh their *barashnūm* in the Vadī Dar-i Mihr and to bring the *ālāt* on foot from the Vadī Dar-i Mihr for the consecration of the Ātash Bahrām as per the established protocol to honour the original headquarters of the Suratīā priests.

The Vakil Qadīmī Ātash Bahrām of Surat

Seth Peštonji Kālābhāi Vakil, a well-known lawyer in Surat, was a follower of the Qadīmī sect. On recovering from a serious illness he wished to build a Qadīmī Ātash Bahrām in Surat. When this became known the Wadias and Modis filed a case against him asking the Court to restrain him from building the Ātash Bahrām in Surat. While the protracted legal battle was being heard, it is said that a bolt of lightning struck a tree in Surat and Peštonji taking permission from the court collected the lightning fire and later used it to consecrate the sacred fire.

In 1823 CE after a prolonged legal case the Qadīmī Ātash Bahrām was consecrated in Surat. The first *bōy* to the newly installed sacred fire was performed by Sōhrābji Jamshēdji Nāllādāru. He belonged originally to the Mīnōchehr-Hōmji group of priests in Navsari.⁴³

Priests of the Banāji Līmji Agiary at Fort, Bombay

In mapping the establishment of the Ādarāns and Ātash Bahrāms of Bombay, one is able to track the various priestly families, the control they had over the fire temples and the causes they supported. The oldest existing consecrated fire temple in Mumbai, the Banāji Līmji Ādarān, was sanctified by the Bhagariā priests of Navsari. This fire temple also served as a priestly seminary, and all young priests living in Bombay were trained here. Daštūr Jamshēdji E. Jāmāspāsā was the Panthaki (priest-in-charge) of the Banāji Līmji Ādarān. Banāji Līmji who hailed from Bhagvā-Dāndī near Surat, had an Ādarān fire consecrated in Bombay as early as 1709 CE in his estate called Banāji Pol, for Parsi devotees to pray and conduct ceremonies.⁴⁴ This pointed to the growing influence of the Bhagariā priests in Bombay in the 18th century.

Banāji Ātash Bahrām Bombay

The youngest grandson of Kavasji Behrāmji Banāji Līmji, was attracted to the Qadīmī sect and followed it together with members of his family. His son Farāmji was a staunch Zoroastrian who wanted to establish a Qadīmī Ātash Bahrām in Bombay. The holy fire was consecrated in memory of his father Kāvasji and mother Jāiji in 1845 CE under the leadership and supervision of the learned Shehenshāhī Daštūr, Jamshēdji Edalji Jāmāspāsā of the Banāji Līmji Ādarān. Daštūr Jamshēdji instructed the Qadīmī

43- In Surat of the 19th century, the Qadīmī movement which began in 1745 CE had gained ground, and the Qadīmīs were largely rich merchants who used their wealth to challenge many of the old ways. Sōhrābji Nāllādāru was a man of few means and was burdened with debt and demanded Rs.5000/- from the wealthy Qadīmīs. Taking this opportunity, the Qadīmīs offered to pay off his debt, provided he served the Ātash Bahrām as their Qadīmī *bōywārā*. Nāllādāru agreed, but subsequently the Qadīmīs asked him to follow certain Qadīmī traditions, such as praying and doing rituals as per the Qadīmī *rōz* and *māh* and to start the practice of folding the legs of the dead. The former was agreeable to Ervad Nāllādāru, but he refused to allow the folding of the legs at death, saying it was not as per the norm. They asked Nāllādāru to show documentary evidence of the procedure, and according to tradition his Qadīmī sponsors tore up the documents and ordered Nāllādāru to return the moneys they had paid to clear his debt or to tow their line. Such attempts to subjugate the *Mobeds* by the rich merchant class of Behdīns became more frequent in time.

44- Before this the Dar-i Mihrs were used as places for conducting rituals only, and not as a *qibla-gāh* (a place of worship that houses a consecrated fire) for individual prayers, see Vatcha 1874, pp. 325-326. The Banāji Līmji Ādarān was established by the Shehenshāhī priests long before the Qadīmī movement started in Surat in 1745 CE, see Meherjirana 1947, vol. 1, pp. 181-182. However, for the *nāvar* ceremony, they would be sent to the Vadī Dar-i Mihr in Navsari.

Mobeds to consecrate a Varasyā (white unblemished bull, which has not been castrated) and to perform the rituals by putting on an *ījār* (tight leggings) on trousers in accordance with ancient religious practice. Under his instructions they successfully accomplished the task of consecrating an Ātash Bahrām for the followers of the Qadīmī sect in 1845 CE. The holy fire was installed by the Qadīmī Mobed Bējonji Ruštomji Mākīhatānā who was appointed as high priest by the trustees of the Ātash Bahrām.⁴⁵ It is to the credit of the Banaji family that proper ecclesiastical procedure was followed by them and meticulous ritual instructions were taken from the learned Shehenshāhī priest in order to fulfill their desire to establish the second Qadīmī Ātash Bahrām. Although the Qadīmī movement was not liked by the Bhagariā priests they extended a helping hand to the Banaji family in this endeavour. This was dictated not by factional considerations but by following the authority of the learned Daštūr of the day.

H.B. Wadia Ātash Bahrām & the Anjuman Ātash Bahrām

Before the H.B.Wadia Ātash Bahrām was consecrated, an Ādarān had already been built in 1805 CE in memory of Bomanji Naoroji (Lowji/Navji) Wadia, the son of Lowji Nusserwānji Wadia, the first carpenter-cum-dock builder who had come to Bombay at the request of British East India Company. After the Great Fire in the Fort area in 1803 CE a number of Parsi families had shifted to the Dhobi Talao area. To facilitate their religious needs in that area, the Wadia family decided to build an Ādarān. The Bhagariā priests involved in the consecration ceremonies were guided by Edalji Dārābji Sanjānā. The trustees of the Wadiaji Ātash Bahrām appointed him as Daštūr, who by virtue of his learning, was considered the most erudite prelate of his times.⁴⁶

The Wadia family of ship-builders who were the founders of the Ātash Bahrām, were powerful wealthy merchants, supportive of the Sanjana Bhagariā priests, who were renowned for their learning and scholarship. By virtue of their scholarship, the priests were keen to play a leading role in religious matters in Bombay. It had long been an established practice among the Bhagariā priests of Bombay, that if the *nāvar* or *marātab* of a child had to be done, he was taken to the Vadī Dar-i Mihr in Navsari, for his initiation into priesthood under the authority of the prevailing Vadā Daštūr Meherjirana. However, Edalji Dārābji Sanjānā, the family-priest of the house of Wadias was keen to establish the position of the newly founded Wadia Ātash Bahrām, consecrated in 1830 CE. He asked permission of the Bhagarsāth Anjuman of Navsari to perform the ceremonies pertaining to the initiation of priests in Bombay. This was refused by the Anjuman and the issue was raised once again when Edalji's nephew Pēshōtan

45- Despite the establishment of the Dadabhai Noshervanji Dadyseth Ātash Bahrām in 1783, the Banaji family preferred to take instructions to create *ālāt* from their family priest Daštūr Jamshēdji E. Jāmāspāsā who was seen as a pious and learned priest. The second Qadīmī Varasyā was consecrated at the Patel Dar-i Mihr in Mazgāon under the guidance of Daštūr Jāmāspji Mīnōcherji Jāmāspāsā of the Anjuman Ātash Bahrām and the third under the leadership of Daštūr Sohrābji Ruštomji Mullā-Firōze at the Dādysēth Ātash Bahrām, see Vatcha 1874, p. 342; Meherjirana 1947, vol. 1, p. 156, n. 94; ms. no. F93 of Meherji Rānā Library, pp. 20-21.

46- Although their surname suggests that they were aligned with the Sanjānā priests who took care of the Udvada sacred fire, they were in fact, Bhagariā priests. One of their ancestors, Pēshōtan, who was originally a Sanjānā priest, was adopted by his maternal grandfather, a Bhagariā priest named Jīvā Shāēr Chāndā Āsdīn, and consequently admitted into the Bhagariā fold, see Kotwal 1990, p. 224, n. 32; Meherjirana 1899, p. 148; Meherjirana 1939, p. 6. When the H.B. Wadia Ātash Bahrām was established, it had a number of highly proficient priests serving the Ātash Bahrām, and among them, playing a dominant role, were the Sanjānā family of Bhagariā high priests.

Bahramji Sanjānā became the High Priest. Pēshōtan was an Avestan and Pahlavi scholar and had translated the Dēnkard volumes I to IX from 1869-1897 CE. (His son Dārābji Pēshōtan Sanjānā, who became High Priest after him, translated the rest of the Dēnkard Volumes, completing the project in 1928 CE.)

Annoyed by Meherjirana's refusal to grant him authority to initiate priests, Pēshōtan Sanjānā, who was supported by members of the Wadia family, defiantly sought to establish their own power centre in Navsari by building an abode of fire.

Dārābji Meherjirana informed them that without his permission, a fire temple could not be established in Navsari. A meeting was organised by the Trustees of the Wadia Ātash Bahrām to meet with Meherjirana and persuade him to accede to their demands. The Trustees of the Wadia Ātash Bahrām attended the meeting. A call had been made to invite all the *burzōrg* (i.e., old and experienced) Bhagariā *mobeds* of Navsari, who attended in full force. The oral tradition as recounted to the author describes a solemn meeting attended by several white bearded stalwart priests of Navsari who were clear in their support of Meherjirana and refused to allow a fire temple to be built without his permission. They were of the firm opinion that the *Vadpan* or seniority of Navsari in all religious matters had to be upheld even if it meant that they would have to collect moneys from every Bhagariā priest in India to fight the Sanjana Bhagariā priests in court. With this pronouncement the matter had been cast in stone.

The founders of the Wadia Ātash Bahrām decided to challenge Meherjirana, by building a fire temple in the headquarters of the Bhagariā priests in Navsari. Meanwhile Bejanji Dhunjibhai Kapadia who sympathised with the Bombay-based priests, donated Rupees 10000 to build the fire temple and the Ādarān fire was enthroned on 24th December 1888, at Kāngā Wād (Street), a district within the Navsari jurisdiction of the Bhagarsāth Anjuman.

When the Kāngā Wād fire temple was built, a case was filed by the Bhagarsāth Anjuman under the leadership of Daštūr Dārābji Meherjirana. The Navsari *mobeds* stated in court that the building of the fire temple had not been sanctioned by the Navsari Bhagarsāth Anjuman and that it was not allowed as per the tradition and the documents signed in the past by various priestly groups.

Dārābji Meherjirana fought to prevent the fire temple from becoming functional. The case was won by the Navsari priests and the matter went into appeal in the court of the Gaekwad in Baroda, then the highest Court of Appeal. The court finally ruled against the Bombay-based priests encouraged by the Trustees of the Wadia Ātash Bahrām and ordered that the sacred fire would have to be moved to a place outside the jurisdiction of the Navsari Bhagarsāth Anjuman, as its presence violated the ancient settled treaty agreed upon by the priestly families living in Gujarat. The Judgement held that the decision was given in order to safeguard the rights of the Navsari priests. On 21st March 1900 CE the Kāngā Wād fire was moved to Surat and housed in a separate building within the Dādābhāi Nōshīrwānji Modi Ātash Bahrām complex. Dādābhāi's wife Bāi Jājīee was the sister of Hormusji Bomanji and hence the fire was moved to the Modi Ātash Bahrām in Surat.

Nevertheless the priests of the Wadia Ātash Bahrām who tended the holy fire resigned in 1883 CE. They stated that they were being compelled by the Trustees and their High Priest, Pēshōtan Sanjānā, to perform the *nāvar* and *marātab* ordainments of the sons of Bhagariā priests against the long-cherished tradition of Navsari. The Bhagariā *mobeds* who resigned were given asylum by the Trustees of the Dādyseth Ātash Bahrām, and were allowed to continue their daily rituals and other religious activities from within the precincts of the Dādyseth Ātash Bahrām.

The Bhagariā priests who had left the HB Wadia Ātash Bahrām were in a sense without a fire

temple of their own. As a result, it was decided to establish another Ātash Bahrām in a sense to rival the increasing power and authority of Daštūr Pēshōtan Sanjānā and the powerful Wadia family.

Jāmāspji M. Jāmāspāsā, was the Panthaky of the Cama Baug Agiary, and he lent support to the Bhagariā priests. With the help of influential members of the Bhagariā sect, and the concurrence of the Navsari Bhagarsāth Anjuman, the Anjuman Ātash Bahrām was established in 1897 CE in close proximity of the Wadia Ātash Bahrām.⁴⁷ This was done to facilitate those priests who had left the Wadia Ātash Bahrām and needed a permanent place to carry out their ritual work.

Before the enthronement of the Ātash Bahrām fire, a Dādgāh was consecrated, so that the inner liturgies could be performed. In this, they received tremendous support from Daštūr Dārābji Māhiārji Meherjirānā and the Bhagarsāth Anjuman of Navsari which passed a resolution against Daštūr Pēshōtan Sanjānā. The nature of the high inner rituals required to be done for the consecration of the Ātash Bahrām made it inevitable for the priests to take *barashnūm* afresh. The *ālāt* was brought on foot from Navsari.⁴⁸ This meant that the ritual sanctity and authority of the Vadī Dar-i Mihr prevailed despite the dispute that had arisen. The Ātash Bahrām was built with public subscription under the leadership of Jāmāspji Jāmāspāsā in 1897 CE and he was installed as the first High Priest of the Anjuman Ātash Bahrām. The first *bōy* ceremony was performed by his son Kaikhusru Jamaspji Jāmāspāsā.

Daštūr Jāmāspji Edulji Daštūr Jāmāspāsā, High Priest of Poona, the Deccan and Mālwa

Jāmāspji Edulji Daštūr Jāmāspāsā came from another line of the Jāmāsp Āsā family, and he became the Daštūr of Poona and theirs was the richest of all high priest seats. His ecclesiastical writ was extensive and he received large annuities from 36 dioceses all over India. The cities of Secunderābād and Hyderābād also came under his spiritual sway. He was installed as a priest on the recommendation of the Parsi Punchayet of Bombay in 1824 CE when the Patel Agiary had only a Dādgāh. The hereditary title of *Sardār Daštūr* was given to his son Nōshīrwān Jāmāspji by Field Marshal Lord Robert Napier in 1873 CE for services rendered to the country during the mutiny of 1857.⁴⁹ The sixth and last Daštūr Hōrmazdiār Nōshīrwān was installed in 1957 CE, and since his death a few years ago, no new *Daštūr*

47- The Bhagarsāth Anjuman of Navsari, the Sēth family of Bombay, the wealthy Bhagariās, Daštūr Jāmāspji Jāmāspāsā together with the Bhagariā priests from all over India and the Parsi community worked in unison to bring about the creation of a new Ātash Bahrām, popularly known as the Anjuman Ātash Bahrām in Bombay.

48- The *ālāt* was sent on foot from Navsari and it took 13 days for the priests carrying the *ālāt* to reach Bombay covering about 150 miles. The author's great grandfather Ervad Ādarji Kershāspji Kotwal was one of the three priests who came with the *ālāt* to Bombay. The author was informed by his paternal grandmother, Maneckbai Pīrōjshāh Kotwal that his great granduncle Jamshēdji Ādarji Kotwal was one of the *mobeds* who had participated in the consecration work of the Anjuman Ātash Bahrām in Bombay. In the meantime in 1896 CE, Bubonic plague had broken out in Bombay. Hence, Jamshēdji being the elder brother of the author's grandfather Pīrōjshāh, was called back to Navsari by his father Ādarji and instead, his younger brother Pīrōjshāh was sent to Bombay to continue with the consecration work of the Anjuman Ātash Bahrām.

49- In 1843 CE Sardār Daštūr Nōshīrwān rebuilt the Fire Temple from his own funds, and the Patel hall in 1867 CE was named after Sōhrābji Ratanji Patēl, the founder of the Fire Temple. Nōshīrwān's younger brother Hōshangji who succeeded him was proficient in several languages including German, Hebrew, Sanskrit and Marathi and was the assistant Professor of Oriental Languages at the Bhandārkar Institute in Poona. He obtained his honorary Ph. D. degree from the University of Vienna. Hōshangji was succeeded by Daštūr Kēkōbād Ādarbād as Daštūr in 1908 CE, then Nōshīrwān Kēkōbād and his son Hōrmazdiār Nōshīrwān.

has been installed. Unfortunately, this seems the case for most Dašturs in India which fall vacant as there are not enough learned priests who can be appointed as *Daštur*.

Jamshēdji Sōhrābji Kookādāru

It would be appropriate here to say a few words about Ervad Jamshēdji Sōhrābji Kookādāru⁵⁰ who is seen as a latter-day saint by many in the Parsi community. Kookādāru was posthumously addressed as a Daštur by his followers and there are several legends attached to him. The period between 1898 and 1900 CE proved to be a time of great loss for the Parsi community. During this period, Daštur Erachji Meherjirānā died as well as Daštur Jāmāspji Mīnōchērji Jāmāspāsā, Daštur Kookādāru and the scholar-priest Pēshōtan Behrāmji Sanjānā.

Daštur Dr. Māneckji Nusserwānji Dhāllā, High Priest of Karāchī

Daštur Dr. Māneckji Dhāllā was a learned scholar and the high priest of Karachi. He came from a conservative family, but his studies in America changed him and he earned the appellation of being the Protestant Daštur. In America he was introduced to a Protestant view of Zoroastrianism and he considered ethics to be the highest form of religion.

Dhāllā studied at Columbia University under A.V. Williams Jackson and received a Master's degree in 1906 CE; subsequently he was awarded a Ph.D. Despite Dhāllā's unambiguous claims that he had "renounced conventional religion" and that his "fascination for ritualistic religion" had faded, yet in reality he held back.⁵¹ Dhāllā was an emotive and powerful orator, and even today his writings exert considerable influence specially with the reformist caucus.

Daštur Sōhrābji Hōrmasji Kutār, High Priest of the United Kingdom

Daštur Sōhrābji Hōrmasji Kutār was a much loved High Priest of U.K. He was a pious priest of mild manners, whom the author had the pleasure to know. In matters of religion and ritual practice, Daštur Kutār was very careful to preserve the traditions and often consulted the author on religious issues. In fact, when he was initiated into the priesthood, the author's grandfather Ervad Pīrōjshāh Ādarji Kotwal was one of the 2 priests who did his initiation in Navsari. Daštur Kutār was made a *nāvar* on Rōz Dīn, Māh Tir, in the Vadī Dar-i Mihr in 1928 CE. His *nāvar* was done in the memory of Jehāngīrji Merchant.

Daštur Kutār belonged to the illustrious Kutār family from the Chāndā Farēdūn stock and his ancestor was the indefatigable scribe of several manuscripts, Daštur Dārāb Pāhlan. Manuscripts copied by him are found in libraries the world over.

50- He seemed to have been a skilled astrologer and was able to predict the death of Queen Victoria and High Priest Daštur Jāmāspji Mīnōcherji Jāmāspāsā of the Anjuman Ātash Bahrām. He bore the surname Mādan and belonged to the Kākā Pāhlan *pol*.

51- When asked to perform the Navjote of a child of a well-to-do Parsi from Karachi who was married to a non-Zoroastrian, he refused, much to the anger and surprise of the family concerned. Despite not believing in rituals he had made it known that on his death all the rituals should be performed. The author's brother Kershāsp informed that Dhāllā had his wife's ceremonies performed for the whole year in Navsari through his sister-in-law. The author's brother Kershāsp participated in the ceremony. Despite his reformist leanings, Dhāllā was a noble soul. The author received a German-silver cup in Avešta Recital from him at a huge gathering in Khurshēd Wādī, Navsari, when the author was 8 years old.

He was a traditional priest keen to uphold the practices of the past and to sanctify the traditions with his own actions. To illustrate this, when Daštur Kutār was to be appointed High Priest, he asked for time to visit the Navsari Vadī Dar-i Mihr. There under instruction from an old and experienced mobed, Hīrāji Kāngā he underwent his Marātab ordainment at an advanced age. Only then did he accept the Dašturship of U.K. and Europe. In the 1960s there was growing reluctance to use *nīrang* (consecrated *āb-e zar* “gold water”) in England, specially when children were being initiated. Daštur Kutār took it upon himself, with help from the scholar-priest Pēshōtan Anklesaria, to procure 2 batches of *nīrang* from India and have it tested in petri dishes by Dr. Saunders, a bacteriologist at St. Nicholas’ Hospital in London. This is what Professor John Hinnells has to say in his book *Zoroastrians in Britain* :

“The late High Priest, Daštur Kutār, a medical doctor, sent some *nīrang* for pathology tests to assure his people that it was not harmful to them. When the results supported his contentions, he explained that the powerful spiritual forces of the consecration ceremony... rendered the harmful bacteria ineffective, yet preserved its purifying properties”. “Daštur Kutār”, Hinnells observed “thereby sought to integrate his spiritual heritage with his scientific training”.⁵²

Navruz Dīnshāhji Mīnōcher-Hōmji, High Priest of the Fasli Ātash Kadeh

Daštur Mīnōcher-Hōmji’s father Dinshāhji was a staunch Shehenshāhī priest and a teacher at the M.F. Cama Athōrnān Institute in Andheri. His son Navruz was an articulate and learned priest having been trained by his father, and was soon made Nā’ib Daštur of Secunderābād and Hyderābād.⁵³ At the time Mīnōcher-Hōmji was a practising Shehenshāhī priest. However, his father-in-law Major Sōhrāb Bāmjī was a great believer of the Fasli Sāl movement and it is he who coaxed him to become a High-Priest of the Fasli Ātash Kadeh in Mumbai.⁵⁴ Daštur Mīnōcher-Hōmji succeeded to this seat after Daštur Frāmroze Ardeshīr Bōde left the Fasli Ātash Kadeh.

Bōde was a Bhagariā priest and it is he who convinced Hamābāi Petit, who had inherited a large fortune, to become Fasli and encouraged her to build the Fasli Ātash Kadeh of which he became the First High Priest. Over a period of time Bōde became the voice of the liberals, but the authoritative presence of the other learned priests of Mumbai kept him in check.

Present High Priests of India

Presently in India there are only 6 High Priests. Daštur Kaikhushru N. Daštur Meherjirānā, High Priest of Navsari; Daštur Kaikhusru M. JāmāspĀsā and Daštur Firoze M. Kotwal of Mumbai; Daštur Pēshōtan H. Mīrzā⁵⁵ and Daštur Khūrshēd K. Daštūr, joint High Priests of Udvada; and Daštur Cyrus

52-See Hinnells 1985, p. 263.

53- Traditionally, Secunderābād came under the jurisdiction of the Poona Dašturs attached to the Patel Fire Temple and the final religious authority rested with them. So he could not be appointed officially as the High Priest without sanction from Poona and so he was made a Nā’ib Daštur as a compromise (Pers. *nā’ib* means ‘deputy’).

54- The Fasli Ātash Kadeh is considered to be a white elephant by majority of the Parsi community

55- It is sad news that a good and righteous soul, Daštur Dr. Pēshōtan Hormazdiar Mīrzā, had passed away on Rōz Gōsh, Māh Bahman 1385 AY (26th June 2016 CE) in Mumbai at the age of 72 and consigned to the Daxma (Tower of Silence) the same day.

N. Daṣtur, High Priest of Surat.

The author prays to Ahura Mazda to beſtow upon the Parsi community a cadre of learned prieſts who are well-versed in Zoroaſtrian rituals and the theology of the faith, and who can aĉt as spiritual guides to thoſe who have gone aſtray, ſo that they may be happy when living and they may cross the Bridge of the Separator (*Chīnwad Puhl*) with a ſtout heart and attain the Beſt Exiſtence (*vahiſtəm ahūm*) in the ſpiritual world.

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