

## Textual Evidence of Women Priests

The text known as *Hêrbedestân* deals with the conditions affecting advanced priestly studies. Like the *Nêrangestân* and *Vendidâd*, the text appears to represent an ancient Zoroastrian learned, rather than liturgical, tradition. It was originally transmitted orally and committed to writing at an unknown date. Whereas liturgical texts were usually recited by at least two priests, who could check each other's recitation, learned texts were taught by a single priestly teacher, whose mistakes were not corrected. This could result in a decline in the accuracy of the transmission; many Avestan passages in the *Hêrbedestân* are obviously corrupt.

The topics discussed in the *Hêrbedestân* are arranged in twenty chapters: Of particular note is Chapter 5 which is about **female students and the women in charge of sacred fires. Chapter 6 is devoted to the question of female students, a question complicated by the fact that, in order to study under a priestly scholar, women must travel**, which means that they need male escorts.

*Hêrbedestân* (school for priests, religious school), a Middle Persian term designating (1) Zoroastrian priestly studies and (2) an Avestan/Pahlavi text found together with the *Nêrangestân* manuscripts.

The term *hêrbedestân*, which derives from Middle Persian *hêrbed* (q.v.), is generally translated as "courses of (advanced) priestly studies" or "religious studies." It refers to courses of study offered by a priestly teacher (*hêrbed*). The evidence of the *Zand î Wahman yasn* (2.2-4) shows that, at least until the time of Sasanian Khosrow I Anôširavân (r. 531-79), attendance at the *hêrbedestân* was open to priesthood and laity alike. Advanced Zoroastrian priestly studies focused on the Pahlavi translation and exegesis of Avestan texts (*Zand*), which future scholar priests were required to study profoundly and in some cases to learn by heart. For lay people, on the other hand, such studies may have consisted essentially of listening to the explanations of the *hêrbed* (see Kotwal and Kreyenbroek, 1992, p. 17). Perhaps as a result of Mazdak's revolt, Khosrow I found it necessary to bar the laity from studying the *Zand*, thus restricting attendance at the *hêrbedestân* to the priesthood.