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Source: *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, 1990, New Series, Vol. 4, In honor of Richard Nelson Frye: Aspects of Iranian Culture (1990), pp. 251-255

Published by: Bulletin of the Asia Institute, a Non-Profit Corporation

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24048371>

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M A R T I N S C H W A R T Z

*hiiat̥ nā Friiāi . . . daidīt̥*

In this paper I shall try to show that *Yašt* 14.54–56 attributes to the “Viiāmbura” people practices closely paralleled by those formerly found among the “Kafirs” of Kafiristan (presently Nuristan, in Afghanistan) and the peoples continuing Kafir religion in the Hindu Kush.

This is the text of *Yt.* 14.54–56 (incorporating editorial suggestions of Bartholomae and myself), transcribed according to K. Hoffmann’s system, given in roughly octosyllabic lines, with my translation:

54. *vərəθraγnō ahuradātō*  
*nōiṭ narō yesniiō vahmiiō*  
*gəušca uruua dāmi.dātō*
- yaṭ nūrəm viiāmbura daēuua*  
*mašiiāka daēuuaiiāzō*  
*vohunīm vā tācaiiēiṭti*  
*frasaēkəm vā frasicanṭi*
55. *yaṭ nūrəm viiāmbura daēva*  
*mašiiāka daēuuaiiāzō*  
*auui ātrəm ābaranṭi*  
*aētaiiā uruuaraiiā*  
*yā vaoce hapərəsi nqma*  
*aētəm aēsməm yā vaoce*  
*nəmaḍkā nqma*
56. *yaṭ nūrəm viiāmbura daēuua*  
*mašiiāka daēuuaiiāzō*  
*frā parəštəm nāmaiieṭti*  
*vī maiḍiiānəm pairi.dāraiiēiṭti*  
*vīspa haṇḍāma rāzaiieṭti*  
*janāḥhō saidin nōiṭ janən*
- \*hadāḥhō saidin nōiṭ hadən*  
*yaṭ narəm viiāmbura daēuua*  
*mašiiāka daēuuaiiāzō*

*uši pairi.dāraiiēiṭti*  
*daēma hō pairi.uruuāēsaieṭti*

Is not Vrthaghna, the Ahura-created,  
O men, worthy of worship and praise,  
As also the Soul of the Cow,  
Creator-created?

Because now the devilish Viiāmburas,  
People who are devil-worshippers,  
Cause the blood to flow or  
Pour it out in an outpour.

Because now the devilish Viiāmburas,  
People who are devil-worshippers,  
Bring to the fire  
Some of that plant which they call juniper;  
That fuel which they call “salt”.

Because now the devilish Viiāmburas,  
People who are devil-worshippers,  
Arch the back,  
Twist the waist,  
Stretch all the limbs.  
They seem to be hitting, but they don’t hit,  
And seem to be sitting, but they don’t sit.

Because now the devilish Viiāmburas,  
People who are devil-worshippers,  
Tear off the ears  
And rip out the eyes.

With regard to 55, the identification of the substances called *hapərəsī* and *nəmaḍkā* merits discussion. Avestan *hapərəsī* was identified as ‘juniper’ (first by G. Morgenstierne, 1932, 40–41 [= 1975, pp. 151–52]) on the basis of cognate words in later Iranian languages, e.g. Middle Persian *aburs*, Baluchi *apurs*, Yidgha *yovurso*, Shughni *ambuṣc*, Khufi *ambāws*, Sarikoli *Imbarc/s*, and Yazghulami *əmbis*. The East Iranian forms show

the productive feminine ending *-ā-* replacing original *-ī-* as commonly (Morgenstierne, 1975, p. 102).

That Avestan *nəmaδkā-* means 'salt' was first suggested by Henning (1939, p. 8). The fact is that *nəmaδkā-* would be the regular reflex of (and only of) Old Iranian *\*namaθkā-*, reflected in the meaning 'salt' throughout Iranian: Middle Persian *namak*, *\*namehk* (*nmyhk*); Khwarezmian *nmθk*, Sogdian *nm<sup>2</sup>δkH* (*\*nəmaθk*); Pashto *mālga*; Yidgha *nəmālgo*; Sanglechi *nəmēδg*; Sarikoli *namodī*, etc. However, H. W. Bailey has attempted to identify *nəmaδkā-* as the equivalent of West Ossetic *nimætk<sup>2</sup>u*, East Ossetic *nymætk<sup>2</sup>ū* 'Viburnum lantana' (1985, p. 872; 1969, p. 292; 1957, p. 53–54, with definition 'mealy tree, gordovina' and 'a sorbus'). This isolated form disagrees with Avestan *nəmaδkā-* and the Middle and New Iranian forms for 'salt' in its *-u/ū* instead of the expected Ossetic *\*-æ/Ø* and in its *k<sup>2</sup>*, common in Ossetic words of Caucasian origin. In fact *-tk<sup>2</sup>u/ū* is found also in Ossetic *fætk<sup>2</sup>u/ū* 'apple', which, as noted in V.I. Abaev's (1973, pp. 203–04, and cf. 79–80) critical treatment of Bailey's etymology, should be derived from a Caucasian suffix found in names of plants. Against *nəmaδkā-* being a plant stands the Avestan text itself, for while *hapərəsī-* 'juniper' is characterized as a plant (*uruuarā-*), in the parallel line *nəmaδkā-* is characterized as a fuel (*aēsma-*).<sup>1</sup>

In 56 the first three lines are usually assumed to refer to the mistreatment of sacrificial victims, in continuation of the reference to bloody slaughter. However, the bending of the victim's back, the wrenching apart of its torso, and the stretching of all its limbs (the usual interpretation) would be odd as sacrificial operations. I believe that the key to the proper interpretation of the entire stanza 56 is contained in the next two lines, obscure hitherto. Adopting the emendation of *hada hō* to *\*hadāṅhō* (or rather *\*\*hadāṅhō*, cf. *saidin* for expected *\*saidin*) so that parallelism is obtained with the preceding *janāṅhō* allows the analysis *janāṅhō*: *janən* :: *hadāṅhō*: *hadən*. The verb *had-*, for all its apparent inscrutability, is in fact well known; it is the cognate of Old Indic *sad-*, Latin *sedeo*, English *sit*. The reason *had-* has remained unidentified is due in part to the fact that it is otherwise attested in Old Iranian with preverbs, and in part to its contextual obscurity. With regard to the first problem, it is instructive that in Vedic occasionally *sad-* occurs without preverb (preposition), and, given the variety of preverbs with which Old Iranian *had-* occurs, it is

hardly beyond all expectation for *had-* to appear without preverb. Motivation for exclusion of preverb in the Avestan passage may be rhythm or rather meter: Apart from allowing rhythmic parallelism (isosyllabism) with *janāṅhō . . . janən*, *hadāṅhō . . . hadən* (as against *\*niš(h)aδāṅhō . . . niš(h)aδən*) permits an octosyllabic line, which seems far more normative than a decasyllabic line. The meaning 'sit' may now be understood from consideration of the entire stanza.

If I am correct, we have here the description of the wild contortions of a state of possession. Bending the back, twisting this way and that (*vī . . . fšan-*, cf. the cognate Greek *spādō*, whence *spasmós* 'spasm'), and stretching forth all their limbs, the possessed would appear to strike out (carried along by the spasms, possibly also repelling imaginary demons) and to squat as though to sit, but not complete the gesture. Thus our text's description of the Viiāmbura cult foregrounds five idiosyncrasies: 1) the worship of *daēuuas*, i.e. divinities (cf. Old Indic *deva-* 'a god') considered demonic by the Iranian tradition of the Avesta; 2) sacrifices involving copious spilling of blood; 3) the burning of juniper; 4) bodily convulsions including e.g. striking out with no apparent object, and 5) initial or partial motions of sitting or squatting.

Precisely these features characterize the "Kafir" paganism formerly flourishing in Nuristan (once called Kafiristan) in northeastern Afghanistan, and still attested among the "Kalash Kafirs", and in closely allied forms among other peoples of the Hindu Kush. G. Morgenstierne wrote in 1932 (40–41 = 1973, pp. 151–52): "In the Avesta the *hapərəsī-* is said to be brought to the sacrificial fire by worshippers of the *daēvas*. In this connection it is worth noticing that the pagan Kafirs still use the juniper for sacrificial purposes." I myself, over fifteen years ago, in writing my recently published article on the religion of the Achaemenid period (1985, p. 680), compared the Viiāmbura practices with the present-day inhalation of juniper by Hunza shamans (as a trace of Kafiric practice), and the bloody sacrifices of the Kalash Kafirs, and their squatting movements (the last mentioned without discussion). Note also that the Indo-Iranian term *\*daiva-* for 'divinity' occurs in the Kafir languages (e.g. in Waigali *de*, *dey* 'god'), as also the name of one of the chief Indo-Iranian divinities, Indra, specifically rejected as a *daēuua* in the Avesta; as is well known, this divinity is still worshipped (as Indr) among the "Kalash Kafirs." Of specific relevance for the

Viiāmburas are the details of Kafir ritual reported by Mountstuart Elphinstone in 1817, and by G. S. Robertson in 1896, summarized in P. Snoy (1962), which I shall now quote in translation (insertions in square brackets are my own, as are italics):

*Juniper smoke* and sprinkled water 'purify' the place of sacrifice and the sacrificial beast. . . . The sacrificial fire is kindled with juniper twigs. . . . The animal is slain by slitting its throat. Some of the *blood is placed in the fire and upon the altar, then the head is separated from the body*, and briefly held in the fire. Before the killing the god is invoked. . . . During or after the killing the priest goes into trance (213–14).

Already Elphinstone refers to the trance priest, the *Pshur* [i.e. *pšə*, the correct Kati form] who holds his head over the smoke of the sacrificial fire and in this way gets inspired by the supernatural beings. According to Robertson the temporarily inspired priest is present at all sacrifices, and is thereby often set upon by [evil] spirits and must see to it that they do not steal the sacrificial meal. The trance priest also takes part in holidays. . . . His function it is, to communicate to man the wishes and commands of the gods and spirits. . . . [Georg] Buddruss has orally informed me with regard to the Pashki [i.e. *Pāškí*] ('seer'), the trance priest of the Prasun Kafirs, that the latter was present at sacrifices and through the inhalation of juniper smoke fell into a trance ending in unconsciousness. One awaited his pronouncements. . . . He also had to establish the supernatural causes of illness [brought before him] and the appropriate countermeasures. In his dance the Pshur wore mainly filthy clothes and no shoes. He *gestured wildly* during the trance, but he could also keep himself calm and fix his immobile gaze upon an invisible object. Concerning a Kantiwo Pshur, Robertson reports that during this staring rigidness his right arm and right leg shook strongly. The Prasun Pshur *would customarily fall upon one knee* and speak in a tremulous voice.

Further details, including rich materials about shamans of peoples of the Hindu Kush, who speak non-Kafiric languages, but whose religion is essentially Kafiric or under strong Karific influence, are found in K. Jettmar (1975). First it may be noted that Jettmar's summary of the data concerning the old practices of the East Kati people of Kafiristan is reminiscent of our Avestan text:

When the smoke of the sacrificial fire rises *and the blood of animal flows*, then [the "Pshur"] . . . loses his consciousness, stares into space, a part of his body falls into *convulsive trembling*. . . . He says he sees the gods, but also the demons. He feels . . . desperate to repel them. . . .

With regard to the trance priest of the eastern neighbors of Kati, the Kalash, Jettmar writes:

The Dehar of the Kalash functions chiefly in the course of the great festivals, especially during its sacrificial activities. . . . *The odor of juniper in the sacrificial fire, the sight of the steaming blood*, the songs and dancing of the bystanders . . . launch him into ecstasy, during the course of which he *behaves as erratically and as bizarrely as his colleagues among the other Dardic peoples* (365).

While a large pool of blood is formed, the Dehar goes into trance through the smell of the burning juniper and the vapors of the blood. He hears Mahandeo . . . (348).

After reporting, from H. Siiger, a trance taking place immediately after a sacrifice, where the Dehar went into powerful convulsions of his entire body, Jettmar describes a parallel scene in which (pp. 366–67) "the possessed Dehar, after a quite similar introduction, as he turned toward the altar, *began to jump around and wildly to strike out all around himself (herumspringen und wild um sich zu schlagen)*." Even the laity, continues Jettmar, may take up the dance and become possessed, have visions of otherworldly beings, go into convulsions, start beating the air, etc.

Further to the east, among the Shina speakers of the Gilgit Agency, the local shaman, the Daiyal, was witnessed by Jettmar (and filmed by Snoy) to go into trance after inhaling fumes of a juniper torch, stare out into space, intermittently sing or dance, prophesy, etc. In his initial trance, the Daiyal optimally leaps upon the torso of the decapitated victim and begins to drink the blood which gushes forth, as though it were milk (Jettmar, p. 277; cf. Snoy, pp. 129–30 for blood as milk). The decapitation of the victim is the usual practice in the Kafiric sacrifices of the Hindu Kush according to Jettmar, pp. 371 and 273, and Snoy, pp. 204–05, who note that the slaughtered goat represents the "alter ego" of a human being. One may perhaps compare the removal of the eyes and ears of the victim reported for the Viiāmburas in Yt. 14.56, end, and add this to the more specific correlations between the date of Yt. 14.53–56 and the Kafiric traits discussed above. This all confirms Jettmar's insight concerning the antiquity of the Kafiric practices:

The deepest experiences which they have are manifestly in the [ritual] dance, in the sight of the flowing sacrificial blood, and in the strong odor of burning juniper. If one analyzes the meaning contained in their

rites, one comes upon powerful themes of archaic character [355; cf. the conclusion of the work, pp. 478–79 with n. 53].

I would like now to note some other data in Jettmar's material as relevant to ancient (Indo-) Iranian beliefs. In a tale collected in Brokpa villages in Baltistan by Jettmar (279–80), the legendary shaman Ali Beg is taken in a trance from his home by seven Peris, and is led away on a three-legged ass to the home of the Peri "people" on the peak of Diamir, near where there is a sea of milk. Ali Beg is dismembered and his flesh and bones washed in a stream of milk; nevertheless he resurrects and reconstructs himself, and obtains from the seven fairies the three-legged ass for his soul to ride during the trance. With this fairyland mountain peak, located near a sea of milk (cf. also Jettmar, pp. 223–24), with which is associated a three-legged ass, may be compared the Avestan peak of Mount Harā, a place of supernatural perfection upon which the seven Holy Immortals built a home for Mithra (Yt. 10.50–51), who is worshipped there by Haoma (Yt. 10.88); it is from there that the deceased righteous ascend (*Vidēvdād* 19.98); and it is praised by the worshippers of the river goddess Ardvi Sura Anahita (Yt. 5.98), who sends her streams down from there. Below it liquids are dispersed from the sea Vourukaša (\**Varu-kṛta-*), whose name is translated literally into Middle Persian as *Frāxw-kard* 'having broad inlets', for which the Parsi scholastic tradition has the very noteworthy Sanskrit gloss *kṣīrasamudraḥ* 'the sea of milk'. "In the middle of the sea Vourukaša stands the Righteous Ass" (Yasna 42.4, which belongs to the especially ancient Yasna *Haptaṅhāiti*, where the ass is designated for veneration). Further details on this ass are preserved in Pahlavi, in *Gr.Bd.* XXXIVd, where it is called 'the three-legged ass', *xar ī si pāy*; it is described as a kind of unicorn (white, with a golden horn) standing in or walking around the sea Vourukaša.<sup>2</sup>

## Notes

1. According to the information furnished by Dr. Omidsalar concerning folk practices in the vicinity of Isfahan, when harmel is burned apotropaically, some salt accompanies each seed. It is this act which is foregrounded in the first line of the verses recited as

part of the ceremony, *esband o namak* 'harmel and salt' (Flattery and Schwartz, §68, n. 7, no. 5). In addition, it is reported (Mizrahi, 1959, p. 58) that among Iranian Jews a measure against the evil eye is to take a fistful of *esfand*, move it in a circle over the head of the smitten person and the members of his household, pass it over all the corners of the house, and throw it into the midst of the fire with the shout, *cašm-e došmanhā-ye mā kūr šavad* 'may our enemy's eye be blinded.'

The burning of salt with harmel may be paralleled by the burning of salt with juniper attributed to the Viiāmburas. Some representation of a food offering would have been put into the juniper flames, cf. the Kafir-Dardic practice of placing in the fire not only blood, but also such substances as ghee, wine, flour, and bread (thus formerly the Kafirs, Snoy, 213; milk and flour more recently among the Kalash, Jettmar, p. 371). The addition of salt to the fire could have been thought of as adding savor to the offering. Cf. in this connection *Exodus* 30:35 (incense obligatorily salted) and further *Leviticus* 2:13. It is relevant to note that until recently the importation of salt was practically the only linkage between the valleys of Kafiristan and the neighboring regions (Snoy, 23; further Jettmar, 49 and 181).

D. S. Flattery notes (private communication) that salt is not capable of combustion (let alone producing the coloration of the flame attributed to salt by Henning [1935, p. 39], who may have had in mind a novelty chemical preparation of "salts"); thus salt cannot have been used literally as a fuel. Flattery speculates that perhaps some substance similar in name or physical appearance to salt may be referred to in our Avestan text, possibly (in light of Bailey's etymology) the pollen of the mealy *Viburnum lantana*.

2. Two further myths given by Jettmar (279) relevant to shamanism deserve further comment. The myths are found among the Burushaski speakers of the Hunza, the Kafir-Dardic basis of whose shamanism is shown, among many other things, by the use of Shina as the trance language of the shamans. Both myths are about the shaman Shön Gukur (whose uncle, Huke Mamu, is his constant rival). I translate from Jettmar:

[1] "In a trance (or, according to another version, brought by the Peris) he arrived at the peak of Diamir. In returning he brought with himself the sheaves of grain and the grapes. When the onlookers saw him flying towards them in a trance, they suddenly fell silent, the music stopped, and down he plunged. When the music started again, he came dancing into their circle, the booty [Beute] of the Peri kingdom in his raised hands—the grapes and grain, which from then on belong to mankind. Blood was pouring over his face; in his fall one eye was knocked out."

[2] "He fell asleep in the land of the fairies, and could only be revived by his uncle's power of the magical song, but he crashed into a juniper tree, and thus lost an eye."

Jettmar comments, "Sicher ist also, dass der dardische Prometheus für seinen Diebstahl zahlen musste" (279, cf. also 282). Whether or not for the first tale the Hunza tradition indeed views the benefits brought mankind by Shön Gukur as stolen goods, as the "Beute" of "a Diebstahl," the second version, which indeed Jettmar takes as an "andere Fassung" of the same tale, lacks any "Promethean" elements. The elements both versions have in common may be stated together as follows: Shön Gukur goes in a trance, ascends to fairyland (Periland); his journey back is impeded by someone else's not performing a song, and the shaman comes crashing down to earth, losing an eye in the process. Both narratives are based on the fact that accompanying rhythmic singing supports and stabilizes the shaman during his trance, so that he does not become lost in trance, and can return smoothly to the everyday world. While the stories may contain, at the most basic level, a projection of a much feared form of self-injury from falling in a faint, it is not coincidental that the "seer" loses a physical eye in his impaired visionary trance, and it is noteworthy that, in the second version, it is juniper, the medium of the trance, through which the shaman loses his eye.

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