

Enigmatic Verses in Bahirām Yašt, Viiāmbura demons and their Devilish Ritual.

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Bahirām (Av. Vərəθraγna, Pahlv. wahrām, Parthian.wryhrm, NP bahrām, Armenian vahgan/vram, Sogdian wshn, other derived variants include Bahirām, Bahrām, and Behrām). is the most venerated divinity among the Parsi and Irani Zoroastrians. Vərəθraγna means ‘smiting resistance’ and a long yašt is dedicated to this divinity who appears in ten forms as ‘a fast moving wind’ (14,2-5), ‘a warrior’(14,27), as ‘youth of fifteen’ (14,17), as ‘a bull’ (14,7), ‘a white horse’ (14,9), ‘a camel’(14, 11), ‘a boar’ (14,15). ‘a bird’ (14,19), ‘a ram’ (14,23), ‘a goat’.

Bahirām Yašt was last edited by Wolff (1910) and Lommel (1927). No new edition has appeared.

The verses discussed are from 54 to 56 (given below).

These are roughly octosyllabic lines and depicts the practices attributed to Viiāmbura demons and demon worshipping people. The practices closely depict those of the “Kafirs” of Kafiristan (now Nuristan) in the Hindu Kush.

Schwartz first brought this to our attention¹ but his article was not well received as it left out several aspects of Kafir Religion and Ritual.

We will first examine the paragraphs 54 to 56 and then examine the demonic ritual.

Bahirām Yašt (Yt.14, 54-56)

Paragraph: 54.

vərəθrafnō. ahuraδātō.

nōit . narō. yesniiō.vahmiiō.

gəušca.uruua. dāmi.dātō.

yat . nūrəṃ. viiāmbura. daēuua.

mašiiāka. daēuuaiiāzō.

vohunīm. vā. tācaieiθti.

frašaēkəṃ. vā. frašicaθti:

**Veretraghna (Bahiram yazad) , the Ahura Created, is he
not worthy of worship and praise , O men ?**

As also the Soul of the Cow, Creator created

Because now the Viiāmbura Demons,

The people who are demon-worshippers,

Cause the blood to flow

And pour it out and out pouring it (heavy stream)

¹ M.Schwartz, 1990, 'Viiāmburas and Kafirs' Bulletin of Asia Institute, p.251,

Paragraph: 55

yat . nūrəṃ. viiāmbura. daēuua.

mašiiāka. daēuuaiiāzō.

auui.ātrəṃ. ābarə□ti.

aētaiiā. uruuaraiiā.

yā. vaoce. hapərəsi. nqma.

aētəṃ. aēsməṃ.

yō. vaoce. nəməδka. nqma.

Because now the Viiāmbura demons,

(These) people who are demon-worshippers,

Bring to the fire

Some of the plant which they call *hapərəsi* ‘juniper²,

(and) That fuel which they call *nəməδka* ‘salt³’

Paragraph: 56 *yat . nūrəṃ. viiāmbura. daēuua.*

mašiiāka. daēuuaiiāzō.

frā. parštīm. nāmaiiei□ti.

vī. maiδiiqṇəṃ. frānaiiei□ti.

vīspa.ha□dāma. rāzaiiei□ti.

² G Morgenstierne in 1932 identified *hapərəsi* as “juniper” on the basis of cognate words in later Iranian languages, “Notes on Baluchi Etymology”

³ Henning in 1939 suggested *nəməδka* as “salt” (*Sogdica*, London). The Avestan word *nəməδka* is reflected in the meaning ‘salt’ in the Iranian Middle Persian *namak*

jana. hō. saiḍin. nōit . janəṃ.
haḍa. hō.saiḍin. nōit . haḍəṃ:
yat . nūrəṃ. viiāmbura. daēuua.
mašiiāka. daēuuaiiāzō.
uši. pairi.dāraiiei□ti.
daēma. hō.pairi.uruuaēsaiiei□ti

Because now the Viiāmbura demons,
(These) people who are demon-worshippers,
Bend the back,
Twist the waist
Stretch the limbs
They seem to be hitting, but not hitting,
They seem to be sitting, but not sitting,
Because now the demonic Viiāmbura
people who are demon-worshippers,
Tear off the ears,
And rip off the eyes

In the above 56 the last two lines refer to slaughtering of the victims. However “Bending the back, Twisting the waist, Stretching the limbs, They seem to be hitting, but not hitting, They seem to be sitting, but not sitting” describe a state of possession. Bending the back, twisting this way and that and stretching forth the limbs, the possessed would

appear to strike out to repel imaginary adversaries. And to squat as though to sit, but not completely sitting.

Thus our text fits the description of the Viiāmbura cult of five behaviors:-

1. The worship of *daēuuas* (cf. Old Indic *deva* - 'a god') i.e. divinities considered demonic in Avesta,
2. Sacrifices involving spilling of blood,
3. The burning of Juniper,
4. Bodily convulsion, including striking out no apparent object,
5. Partial motion of sitting.

G. Morgenstierne wrote "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 juniper for sacrificial purpose.ⁱ

The Indo-Iranian term **daiva* occurs in the Kafir languages e.g. in Waigali *de, dey* 'god' as also the name of the chief Indo-Iranian divinities, *Indra* specifically rejected in Avesta. 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 and summarized by P.Snoy (1962)ⁱⁱ

Further details are found in K.Jettmar (1975).ⁱⁱⁱ

Jettmar's summary of the practices of the Kafirs is reminiscent of our Avestan text, and filmed by Snoy showing the local shaman going into trance after inhaling fumes of juniper, leaps upon torso of decapitated victim and begins to drink blood gushing forth, and dancing (see Jettmar, p. 277, cf. Snoy, pp 129-130). One can compare removal of eyes and ears of the victim reported for the Viiāmburas in Yt.14,56 and add this to the more specific correlations between the date of Yt.14.53-56 and the Kafirs' demonic ritual discussed above. This all confirms Jettmar's insight concerning antiquity of the Kafiric practices.

Appendix:

Kafir ritual reported by Mountstuart Elphinston (1817) and G.S. Robertson (1896):

Juniper smoke and sprinkled water 'purify' the sacrificial place 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(dey), (Av.daēuua) is invoked ... During or after killing the priest (Av.viiāmbur) goes into trance.

According to Georg Buddruss, the trance priest of the Kafirs is called Pashki/Paški ‘seer’ who is present at the sacrifice and through inhalation of juniper smoke fell into trance

ⁱ Morgenstierne, 1973, *‘Indo-Iranian Frontier Languages’*, Institutate for sammenlignende..., pp.151-152, Oslo

ⁱⁱ Snoy, 1962, “Die Kafiren Formen der Wirtschaft und geistegen Kultur’ {dissertation}, Frankfurt, am-Main

ⁱⁱⁱ Jettmar, 1975, ‘Die Rligionene des Hindukusch’ Stuaatgart.