

## IRANIAN INFLUENCE ON THE CULTURE OF THE HINDUKUSH

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German ethnologists called the Kafirs a megalithic people ("Megalithvolk")<sup>1</sup> or Kafiristan a "megalithic centre"<sup>2</sup>, that is to say, the culture of the Kafirs was considered as a phenomenon strictly separated from the great civilizations of Western Asia. It seemed to be part of a cultural stratum which is otherwise accessible to us only by archaeology of far back periods (3rd - 2nd millennia B.C.) or ethnography in distant regions (e.g. South-east Asia and Indonesia). This tendency can be observed even in recent studies made by Snoy and myself.

On the other hand, indologists tried to trace survivals of the religion of the Aryan immigrants to India in the folklore of the mountains.<sup>3</sup>

I think such efforts are legitimate. But I would propose to start from a more cautious hypothesis. I think that every explanation of the religion of the Kafirs and the Dardic peoples has to take into regard that the singularity of Kafiristan and other mountain areas indeed is preconditioned by geography but became really effective when the surrounding lowlands were conquered by the expanding force of Islam.<sup>4</sup> A bar was laid which was not opened before the conversion of the mountain valleys themselves. For Kafiristan proper this means an isolate development between the 11th and the 19th centuries A.D. Before the 2nd millennium A.D. the exchange of men and ideas went much easier.

Of course even during this period of separation Kafiristan was not a closed system, but the contacts were restricted by permanent warfare with the Muslim world deeply influencing the social system of the Kafirs.

Accordingly the explanation of the documents of Kafir religion needs a careful analysis of all information presented by archaeology and written sources for the spiritual history - Geistesgeschichte - of the surrounding areas until the end of the 1st millennium A.D.

1) Jensen 1956, p.178.

2) Baumann 1955, p.370.

3) e.g. Buddruss 1960, p.208.

4) cf. Masson-Romodin 1964, pp.131-223, and especially Lohuizen - de Leeuw 1959.

This is necessary for the Eastern Dardic areas too. There we should discern between the main valleys and the backwaters of inaccessible regions. The isolation was never this complete or this permanent.

Let us now pass over to the special topic of this lecture, the Iranian influence. I think that many evident parallels between Iranian and Dardic institutions and ideas are not due to a common heritage going back into Indo-Iranian antiquity but to diffusion in the course of a long and complicated symbiosis. I only can illustrate my thesis by a few selected examples.

1. An unexplained detail in the iconography of the wooden statues manufactured especially by the Kalash tribe is that the rider sometimes is depicted sitting on the back of a two-headed horse.<sup>1</sup> Originally my idea was that this simply meant a sign of still higher rank than the normal rider statues. However it is strange to see that coins of the Kushana period minted in the name of Kanishka on the back side have a deity with a Phrygian cap riding on the two-headed horse. According to the legend of the coins it is the central deity of the Iranian pantheon Ahura Mazda.<sup>2</sup> I think this should be a hint that we have to study the iconography of all coins from the Saka, Kushana and Hephtalite periods. Perhaps we shall find more parallels of this kind.<sup>3</sup>

2. Many mythical stories of the Kafirs contain the element that sun and moon were in the hands of giants and had to be set free by the force and cant of the gods. We are told that Mandi puts sun and moon on his shoulders and mounts his horse. At Imra's request he hands them over, and Imra makes them wander over the sky. In Robertson's work we find a passage that Imra fixed sun and moon to the sides of his body and rode on into the mountains.<sup>4</sup>

Now I would like to connect this motif with the reliefs on the memorial steles of several Indian tribes, e.g. the Bhils. In many cases they show the image of an armed rider over whose shoulders

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- 1) Cf. Shakur, Pl.VII/2, for the specimen in the Peshawar Museum. In fact the animal has two heads and four legs in front, but then the bodies run together, so there are only two hind-legs. This may be recognized in a better photograph in the Catalogue of the exhibition "5000 Jahre Kunst in Pakistan" 1962/63, Nr. 574.
  - 2) Cf. Rosenfield 1967, pp.82-83; Duchesne-Guillemin 1960, Pl.VII, 132, 193. When I told this R.Goebl he said that he made the same observation years ago.
  - 3) As far as I see there is no statue of this kind from the Kafir area proper, but perhaps the Kalash have preserved an iconographic detail formerly common in a larger area. Cf. Edelberg 1960, and Siiger 1951.
  - 4) Snoy 1962, pp.86-89; Robertson 1896, p.385 and 387.

sun and moon are placed. Many illustrations of such monuments were collected by Koppers.<sup>1</sup> Koppers already saw that the iconographic details are taken over from more civilized neighbouring peoples: Rajputs and Gujaras. I am indebted to Professor Hermann Goetz for the suggestion that such memorials belong to a tradition going back to the late Gupta period. The first to propagate this mode were martial tribes entering India from the Northwest, like the Gujaras, later on disappearing in the big melting pot of the Rajput castes. In the religious heritage of such groups the solar deity had a special place.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps on such stelae the dead hero was represented in the shape of Yama. The god Yama was a deity of death on the one hand - but he was also considered a son of Surya.

We have to keep in mind that on the area of present-day Afghanistan astral deities played an important role during the later half of the 1st millennium A.D. Sun and moon are depicted as armed warriors in the frescoes on the walls of the monastery of Fondukistan.<sup>3</sup> Even in the frescoes of Soghdian towns such astral deities are rather frequent.<sup>4</sup> Even more important is a passage in an astrological treatise (Br̥hatsamhitā XI, 61) mentioning that tribes living on the northwestern border of India like Pahlawa, White Huns and Avagāna had a special affinity to the mythical dragon whose tail is Ketu and who is said to devour sun and moon periodically, causing eclipses. This motive is still preserved in the popular traditions of the Gilgit Agency. We are told that the celestial bodies are swallowed by a dragon, but they may escape by a cut in his neck.<sup>5</sup>

It was always a question how Yamarāja could become the central deity of the Kafir pantheon.<sup>6</sup> I propose to look for the explanation in this very milieu.

3. Already in the beginning of the 19th century, Mountstuart

Elphinstone was told that the Kafirs "drink wine, both pure and diluted, in large silver cups, which are the most precious of their possessions". In 1953, almost 60 years after the conversion to Islam such cups were seen for the first time by a European, Lennart Edelberg. He was able to collect important information about them and finally he could acquire some specimens, now in the museums of Kabul and Aarhus.<sup>7</sup>

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1) Koppers 1942, e.g., fig.10.  
2) Cf. v.Stietencron 1966, pp.226-272.  
3) D'jakonov 1954, pp.147-149.  
4) Belenickij 1954, pp.68-71.  
5) Cf. Census of India 1931, XXIV, p.323, and Ghulam Muhammad 1907, p.108-109.  
6) Morgenstierne 1953, p.163.  
7) Cf. Edelberg 1965, pp.153-155.

I want to draw attention to the fact that there is a considerable similarity between the wine-goblets of the Kafirs and the cups which appear in the hands of the feasting community on wall-paintings of pre-Islamic Middle Asia. They can be observed at Pjandžikent.<sup>1</sup> Even more convincing are the affinities to the silver and gold vessels held by the ladies which we see on the paintings of the south wall of the eastern hall at Varachša.<sup>2</sup> The men's goblets are somewhat different.

Al'baum is convinced that such cups used in Tocharistan in a ritual or even religious context<sup>3</sup> were highly appreciated and imitated by the ruling class of the nomadic warriors in the steppes. A hoard consisting of such vessels made from embossed silver and gold sheets was found at Malaja Pereščepina (near Poltava), one specimen in a nomadic burial in Northern Ossetia.<sup>4</sup>

It seems reasonable to suppose that such goblets were also exported towards the Southeast for the ceremonial use of a nobility of Hephtalite descent ruling in Gandhara. They were copied by the common people and were finally brought to the mountains where the tradition lingered up to the present day.

4. However it must be stressed that these observations do not mean that all Iranian influences belong to the post-Christian era. In the Swat valley Stacul was able to give us a chronological sequence through several millennia by excavating a rock shelter near Ghāligai.<sup>5</sup> Four of the periods observed are characterized by pottery with definite western or northern Iranian traits. According to the chronology of Stacul they belong to the time between 1500 - 300 B.C. This could mean that during this span migrations from the West reached in several waves the borders of the Indian subcontinent. Most of the metal objects used by Heine-Geldern for tracing the way of the Aryans rather belong into this context.<sup>6</sup>

Some pieces have an Anatolian or Transcaucasian appearance. So we may ask whether the bands were under chieftains of Thracο-Phrygian origin.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps it was this kind of military expedition which gave birth to the myth of Dionysos' glorious ride through Asia bringing

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1) D'jakonov 1954, p.104, Tabl.X.

2) Al'baum 1960, pp.126-162.

3) The building where they were observed at Pjandžikent was a temple.

4) Al'baum 1960, p.178.

5) Stacul 1967, 1969a, 1969b, 1970.

6) Heine-Geldern 1956. I would like to add other finds, e.g., the golden stag from the Hazara district (Allchin 1968, p.150) and the hoard of bronze objects from Darel including a trunnion axe (Jettmar 1961).

7) Cf. Cuyler Young Jr., 1967, p.26.

wine and wine-drinking to the ancestors of the Kafirs.

5. On the other hand highly archaic looking elements with a specific Iranian touch may turn out to be recent loans.

In Punyal, one of the Ismailitic enclaves of the Gilgit Agency, there are collective tombs. Adolf Friedrich discovered a well preserved monument of this kind, an isolated building near the village Bubur with a subterranean chamber for the exposure of the deadbodies. It was still in use only 40 years ago. On the other side of the Gilgit river there were found other vaults in a ruined state.

I could collect additional information during my stay there in 1964. Publishing the material<sup>1</sup> I explained the peculiarities by the fact that Bubur is not far from the mouth of the Ishkoman valley, an important route of traffic to the Wakhan and the Pamirs. Nearby a hoard of bronzes was found perhaps indicating an immigration of Sacian groups during the 1st century B.C. They may have been on the way from Middle Asia to India.<sup>2</sup> Among the Sacian (North Iranian) tribes of Middle Asia there is a long tradition of collective tombs with freely accessible chambers for the decomposure of the deadbodies (parallel to the Zoroastrian practice), so I concluded that we may consider the Bubur complex as a survival of this early impact.

After my lecture at Moesgård - which forms the basis of this article - Wazir Ali Shah from Chitral, present at the session, pointed out that the former dynasty of Chitral, before the line of the recently deposed Mehtars and perhaps identical with the Sangli dynasty mentioned by Hashmatullah Khan<sup>3</sup> had a vault of quite similar construction. It was still preserved during his life-time but was demolished because of its flagrant un-Islamic character.

Now I was told that in Punyal the first construction of this kind was made for a man who tried to establish a local rulership only twelf generations ago, shortly before or after the introduction of Islamic faith. It is quite possible that such a man copied the royal institutions of Chitral, among them the burial rites. Punyal had been under Chitrali dominance several times between the 14th and the 16th century. The Ismailitic missionaries too came from this direction - and they had started from the Badakhshan. So it seems possible that customs which existed as survivals among the Tadjik population had a rather untimely diffusion into the Dardic area. Further arguments for this thesis I mentioned already in 1967.<sup>4</sup>

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1) Jettmar 1967, pp.69-72.

2) Litvinskij 1963, 1964.

3) Jettmar 1957 I, p.190.

4) Jettmar 1967, p.71.

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