

## THE ROLE OF FIRE IN PARSI RITUAL

By E. S. DROWER

### I. INTRODUCTION

In my book about the Mandaeans<sup>1</sup> I pointed out how closely Mandaean ideology and religious ceremonies follow those of the Zoroastrians. In the last chapter I attempted to draw conclusions from a comparison of the two, and suggested the likelihood that Mandaeans and Parsis had similar primitive forms, that at some period in the past they had emerged from societies closely linked in ideas, physical surroundings and traditions, and that changed geographical and cultural conditions were mainly responsible for the wide divergences between them. I pointed out also that analysis of the Parsi rituals indicated that water, which still plays a prominent part in Zoroastrian religious ceremonies, was probably at a former time at least co-equal in sanctity with fire. That is still my opinion. Rituals change far more slowly than the dogmas and liturgies which accompany them, and existing rituals, examined analytically, often have more to tell us about the history of a religion than any of its sacred books or traditions.

In writing on the Mandaeans I had to rely for information about the Parsis upon Sir Jivanji Modi's excellent book, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsis*.<sup>2</sup> This was unsatisfactory for my purpose, as details which priests familiar with their own ceremonies think of little account, or even unworthy of mention, are often extremely valuable to a trained observer. However, during a stay in India in the year 1941, I was enabled, through the help and courtesy of Parsi friends in Bombay, in particular Dastur F. A. Bode, to remedy this. I was taken over a fire temple, where priests staged for me several of the ceremonies I had wished to see in their proper setting, and I was also admitted to the school for young priests, where I was permitted not only to witness the rehearsal of some lengthy ceremonies, but even, owing to the character of these, to interrupt the novices at any part of the proceedings and ask questions. I also attended a marriage ceremony and the investiture of a child with the sacred thread. The notes which I made I here offer for what they may be worth, hoping eventually to utilise the information gained in a book of more general character, discussing the whole group of religions which show signs of intimate relationship.

### II. THE FIRE TEMPLE

#### *Main Features*

The Parsis in Bombay are a wealthy and charitable community (in proportion to their numbers they were more generous to Empire war funds than any other section of Indian society). The fire temples in Bombay are therefore well kept and well found. A conventionalised representation of a flame, usually in reddened plaster, rising above a dome, is an indication of the nature of these buildings. To them none but Parsis are admitted, and within the temples themselves Parsi laymen are not permitted to enter the fire chamber. Hence it was fortunate for me that a new temple had not yet been consecrated, although it was ready for use, and that owing to this and the kindness of Dastur Bode I was able to see and examine it thoroughly, and to hear his explanation of every detail of its construction and use.

On the outer (street) wall, facing north, was a reproduction in relief of the famous procession frieze at Persepolis. Steps led to the entrance of the temple, and passing through the doors we found ourselves in a long narrow entrance hall running the breadth of the temple, from which stairs at one end led to an upper storey. Crossing this outer hall, we went through a portal into the main hall of the temple. Facing us in the centre was the holy of holies, the fire chamber, the surrounding space being for worshippers. Leading off the main hall at our left and right (*i.e.*, the east and west) were two chambers, dedicated to the performance of certain rites. Beyond the main hall, at the south side of the building, were small rooms for service, entered by doors on each side of the south wall of the main hall. The material used for the building was a hard, artificial composite of a light colour.

The large chamber on the west of the main hall, which I shall describe in detail later, was connected by steps from a door at its south end with an open temple courtyard in which was the well essential to every fire temple: a well which must be fed by living, that is flowing, water. (Note should be taken of this fact, as it is a link between the Parsi and the Mandaean rituals.) The well was surrounded by masonry and paving, and the way to it and to the garden at the southern end of the courtyard was also paved. The garden, a plot of earth running along the southern wall, contained a date palm and a pomegranate tree: these also must be found in every fire temple. The path from building to well and

<sup>1</sup> E. S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, Clarendon Press, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> British India Press, 1922

garden was ritually protected by *pavi*<sup>3</sup>, that is to say by runnels cut in the paving down which purifying water may be poured, thus shutting out impurity from the priest when he passes to and from the well and trees in the course of his rites. The *pavi* not only protects the purity of the priest; it isolates him from contact with the outer world (in this and every other particular corresponding to the Mandaean *misra*, a runnel made in the ground). In the main hall of the temple *pavi* divided off areas intended for certain rituals performed in view of worshippers in spaces on each side of the fire chamber; in fact, throughout the building, *pavi* were found wherever rites were to be performed.

Returning to the main building, the stairs which led from the entrance hall took us up to a lecture hall on the first floor of the building, and further stairs connected with the roof of the temple, upon which was set the dome (*qumba*), exactly above the sacred fire. Apertures around the dome allowed the fragrant smoke to issue to the outer air.

Such were the main features of the temple I visited, but it was explained to me that there is no rigid plan as to construction and dimension, provided that the main features correspond to ritual requirements. I should, perhaps, have mentioned earlier that a small courtyard in which the sacred goat is kept led off the main courtyard in which were the well and garden. It was a mere convenience.

### *The Fire Chamber*

I will now describe the sanctuary, or fire chamber, which, like the Holy Sepulchre in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, is a building within a building. To return to the Mandaeans, one can more easily compare it with the *bit manda* (or *bimanda*), that is, the cult hut<sup>4</sup> within the *manda*, the latter name being applied to the whole fenced-in area containing the hut, *yardna* (pool of running water), and garden. The *bimanda* may only be entered by priests; it stands to the north of the *manda* enclosure, the fire chamber being, for reasons explained later, to the south of the main hall.

There are three grades of Parsi fire temples. The first is the *Atesh Behram*, at the consecration of which no fewer than sixteen kinds of fire are required, each with numerous sub-divisions; all these must be separately collected, purified and re-purified many times before being finally united into the fire for the sanctuary.

<sup>3</sup> *Pav* means "pure", "clean".

<sup>4</sup> However, the cult hut is colloquially referred to as a *mandi*. Priestly documents alone use the term *bit manda* or *bimanda* for the hut.

Amongst the types of fire so collected is fire from a burning ghat, *i.e.*, fire which consumes a corpse.<sup>5</sup>

The second grade is the *Atesh Adran* or *Aderan*, which at consecration requires four kinds of fire, with their sub-divisions, some thirty in all. The four main types are:

- (a) Priestly (*e.g.*, from the home of a high priest);
- (b) From the houses of those in authority (*e.g.*, governors), or warriors;
- (c) From the houses of *vastriars* (peasants, cultivators of the soil);
- (d) From the houses of artisans and tradesmen.

It will be seen that amongst these there is no fire from the burning of the dead.

The third grade is the *Atesh Dadgah*, a less sacred form of temple, in which even a layman is allowed to feed the fire. For the consecration of the last-named, ordinary household fire is used without special purification.

The purifications of the various kinds of fire differ in number and elaboration. In the case of fire from the burning ghat, the perforated ladle in which the sandalwood is placed is not allowed to come into contact with the fire, but is held above it so that heat alone may ignite the fuel, this fire being then purified for ninety-one days. The *Atesh Behram* also has need of "fire from heaven," *i.e.* fire kindled by means of lightning, a fire which is obviously difficult to obtain.

The temple which I visited was of the second order, the *Adran*, and, as already said, had not yet been consecrated. For this consecration it was not necessary to provide new fire, as it had been built to replace an old fire temple, doomed to be pulled down because it was in a quarter no longer inhabited by Parsis. The sacred fire would be transported when the new temple was consecrated. I was told that the fire would be carried in an urn borne by priests and accompanied by a procession. The transfer would take place at midnight when the streets are comparatively free from traffic, a *kasha*, or furrow to shut out pollution, being traced with a sharp instrument on each side of the procession as it moved along. On arrival at the new temple, the fire would be transferred, or "enthroned," in the new fire urn.

The sacred fire is looked upon as kingly, and above the fire vase in the fire chamber is suspended a round metal disc, the *chhatar* ("canopy," or ceremonial umbrella held over a king). Others call the disc the *taj*, or "crown."

The fire chamber is square, and on three sides, namely the west, north and east, has unglazed windows giving on the main hall, protected by a

<sup>5</sup> Of course a Hindu corpse, as Parsis either expose their dead to vultures or bury them.

light grille. Hence worshippers standing on these three sides can behold and show reverence to the fire. The south side has no aperture because the one direction towards which a Parsi worshipper may not turn his face is the north.<sup>6</sup>

The entrance to the chamber is on the west, and here there is a high threshold stone which the worshipper touches in adoration with forehead or nose when he brings his offering. Upon this stone, too, he lays the offering of sandalwood, *sukhed* or *agar*.

The fire vase is of metal (in the case of the temple I visited "German silver," but any metal may be used), and stands in the centre of the chamber on a low stone table (*khwan*), placed upon a low stone slab protected from pollution by a *pavi* surrounding the whole. A *pavi* also runs along the entire perimeter of the fire chamber, while the threshold stone is protected by a surrounding *pavi* connected with that which runs round the chamber. The fire urn is about four feet four inches high, and its top 36 inches in circumference. It has two handles, as has the shallow tray which rests upon it; this tray is to hold the sacred fire and ashes, for the urn itself does not contain the fire, but merely acts as a stand for the fire tray. The priest in charge of the fire receives the gift of sandalwood brought by a worshipper into a small ladle (*chamcha*), transfers it to the fire, and then, with the same ladle, removes a little of the sacred ash and offers it to the worshipper, who puts it on his forehead.

In the north-east centre of the fire chamber, and also in the south-west angle, stand trays on tripod stands. On these two trays are a shallow bowl (*fulian*) for frankincense and metal tongs (*chipia*), and above each tray hangs a bell, which is sounded when the five *Bui* ceremonies take place. *Bui* is the ceremonial feeding of the fire which occurs at the beginning of each of the five periods into which a day of twenty-four hours is divided: i.e., at *Havan* (early morning till noon), at *Rapithavin* (noon till 3 p.m.), *Uziran* (3 p.m. till twilight), *Aiwisruthrem* (nightfall till midnight), and *Ushahin* (midnight till dawn). The *qiblah*, or direction which should be faced when at prayer, is nominally towards the sun, but in practice a worshipper faces east from midnight till midday, and west from noon to midnight. A lamp, however, may be used as a *qiblah*.<sup>7</sup>

On the east wall of the fire chamber two cow-headed maces are suspended, and swords should also hang

in the sanctuary. The name of the sacred mace is *gurz*.<sup>8</sup> On the south wall of the chamber are two cupboards, the lower part of each forming a narrow chest in which the *alāt*, or sacred implements, are kept. The sides of these boxes are of metal and the bottom of stone, for wood, being porous, is not ritually clean; the shelves above the boxes are, however, of wood.

### The "Yazishna-gah"

I have already referred to the room reached from the main hall by an entrance on the western wall, and said that it conducts to the temple courtyard. This chamber, called the *Yazishna-gah*, or *Urvisgah*, is second in sanctity only to the fire chamber itself. It is for the performance of the higher rituals—the *Pav mahal* ceremonies, especially the *Yasna* ritual. The room is oblong in shape, and as one enters from the main hall one comes upon a passage way which goes directly to the steps and courtyards beyond. This gangway is separated from the rest of the chamber by a *pavi*. The remaining and greater part of the chamber is shut off by a very low wall, which stops when it meets the gangway, and each half of the space so shut off is further divided into three sections by *pavi*. Water is poured down these runnels to purify them and preserve the areas they enclose from pollution: they also serve to carry off water which flows over during the ritual. In this room I witnessed the preliminary ceremonies for the *Yasna* (see Section III).

The chamber to the east of the main hall, an oblong room protected by *pavi*, has no features especially worthy of mention. In this chamber the priests had most kindly set out for me all that was required for the *Afringan* ceremony (see Section V).

### General Comments

What was most striking in the fire temple (and indeed in every Parsi ceremony that I was privileged to witness) was the extreme cleanliness and spotlessness of all that was to be seen. The priests wore garments that were snowy white, the floors were immaculate, and the whole place was flooded with light. This was not merely because the temple was new, for the same dazzling cleanliness and order were apparent in the priests' school. No stained windows or dark corners impart to the fire temple that "dim religious light" associated with Gothic church and Hindu temple alike; the yellow flame of the holy fire or of the lamp fed by vegetable oil must compete with clear sunlight.

<sup>6</sup> The Mandaean must always face the north when praying, but tradition says that at one time the worshipper faced the rising sun at dawn. The rule is now strict, the *qiblah* (or direction to be faced) being the Polar Star.

<sup>7</sup> The Yazidis of Iraq also regard the sun as their *qiblah*, wherever it may be at the time of prayer, which occurs five times a day, but, like Parsis, they may substitute a lamp.

<sup>8</sup> The Mandaean word for mace is *gurmaiza*.

### III. THE "PARAGNA" CEREMONY

When I entered the *Yazishna-gah*, the western chamber of the fire temple described above, one half of the room was arranged for the *Paragna* ceremony, the ritual preparation for the *Yasna* ceremony which should naturally follow it. The officiating priest is the *zoti*, and throughout it is he and not the *raspi* (fire priest) who acts the leading part; the ceremonies have to do with water rather than with fire. He sat cross-legged on a stone *khwan*, which acts either as stool or table and is covered with a small rug, and faced the south. Before him was a second *khwan*, upon which the various objects and implements employed in the rite were laid out so that I might examine them. I was shown the *haoma* twigs, imported from Iran. Whether this shrub is or is not the original *haoma* plant is not known: my informants denied that it had any intoxicant quality such as was attributed to the Vedic *soma* plant, but ascribed curative properties to the shrub. The ritual objects laid on the *khwan* were:

- (1) Five *tashta*, shallow dishes (corresponding to the Mandaean *niara*).
- (2) A metal mortar on a foot, and a pestle, the *havanim* and *lala* (Mandaean *hawan* and *dast d hawan*).
- (3) Five *fulian*, metal drinking bowls or cups (in size and shape resembling the Mandaean *kaptha*).
- (4) *Barsom*, a bundle of twenty-three metal twigs about six or seven inches long (obviously replacing some fragrant shrub: cf. Mandaean myrtle).
- (5) The *kapla*, a knife with a metal handle (knives with wooden handles are forbidden in Mandaean ritual).
- (6) The *varas ni viti*, a silver (or other metal) ring into which a hair of a white sacred bull (*varasia*) had been inserted, the knotted ends projecting about an inch.
- (7) The *mahrui*, two metal tripods supporting crescents.

On the low dividing wall before the priest, who faced south, stood a metal plate upon which were laid four wafers (*draona*). Each was the size of a small pancake and a little thicker. They must be made by a person of priestly birth, of wheaten flour mixed with water from the sacred well and clarified butter, and are baked in the temple. Two showed round marks arranged in three rows of three, when held against the light. These were the "named" wafers (*nam*), and when making the marks the words *humata*, *hukhta*, *hvarshata* ("good thoughts, good words, good deeds") were thrice pronounced. The unmarked wafers are called *frashast*.

Also on the wall was a glass containing coconut oil (clarified butter may also be used, since all "cow

products" are holy and pure), floating on water and containing a wick, to be used as a lamp. This is lit as a *qiblah* for the officiant, who, as noted above, sits facing the south.

Beyond the stone table on which the ritual objects were laid, and between this and the well, a small fire vase stood on another table or *khwan*; had I been witnessing a genuine ceremony it would have been lit and tended by its own priest, the *raspi*. Beside it, on other *khwan*, were laid the fuel, the ladle and tongs. The *raspi* (none was present) should sit facing the officiant, i.e., facing north.

To the right of the officiant, also on a *khwan*, was the *kundi*, a round water vessel which acts as deputy for a spring of water. In it all the implements used are immersed. The *kundi* must have been thrice filled until brimming over, at the well, only the third filling being acceptable.

The *kundi* having been filled as described and set in its position, the priest must collect the date-palm leaf and pomegranate twig required for the *Haoma* ceremony, which precedes the *Yasna* ceremony and forms part of the *Paragna*, or preparation ceremony as a whole. He must first cover the lower part of his face with the *paiman* or *padan*. (This differs from the Mandaean *pandama*, used in precisely similar manner, in that it is separate from the turban, whereas the *pandama* is part of the turban.) The *padan*, a square of white linen or muslin material about as big as a pocket handkerchief, is secured by strings to the turban and neck and is intended to protect the rites from pollution by breath, spittle, etc. When the priest is ready, he descends the steps which lead out of the chamber into the temple courtyard, keeping within the *pavi* and carrying in his hand his water pot (*kalasia*) full of water, which had previously been re-washed and thrice filled to brimming (like the *kundi*), and also the ritual knife (*kapla*). All this was performed for me precisely as it would have been carried out in an actual ritual.

The priest approached the date palm (a young tree no more than a man's height), and taking a leaf into his hand he poured water thrice over both leaf and hand, cut a piece off the point of the leaf (which he discarded), and then severed it from the frond, reciting meanwhile. He then again washed the leaf, and, holding it, went on to the pomegranate tree. Here he stripped off the leaves from a twig after washing it and his hand thrice (by pouring water over them), cut off and discarded the end of the twig, severed the twig, put it with the palm leaf and placed both in his goblet-shaped water vessel.

The next step was concerned with the milk. An assistant was waiting with the temple goat (which lived in the outhouse leading off the courtyard), and held the goat whilst the priest, facing the south,

poured water three times from his vessel over the udders of the animal and over his own hands. (I may mention that though this goat was white, a goat of any colour will serve.) He thereupon produced three spurts of milk which fell on the ground, then milked the goat so that three spurts fell into the water left in the goblet. This milk and water is called the *jivam*. Having done this, he poured a little of the *jivam* over the hindquarters of the goat and returned to the *Yazishna-gah*, keeping within the *pavi*.<sup>9</sup>

#### The "Haoma" Ceremony

The *Haoma* ceremony which followed is intricate, and I was glad to be able to interrupt it with an occasional question. It begins with the *pav* or purification. When he had seated himself again on his *khwan*, the priest poured water into the *kundi* three times, so that, being already full, it overflowed the sides and washed the *khwan* on which it stood. Whilst doing this he chanted the appointed prayers. Next he poured water over the table before him six times, and then removed all the implements from the *kundi* into which he had placed them before going out into the courtyard. As each was removed, one by one, he poured water thrice over it, repeating a formula as he did so. The water so used was poured from a small water pot. This concluded the purification, or *pav*.

The next step was concerned with the palm leaf. Taking it in his left hand, the priest divided it with his knife into six vertical strips: these he twisted and plaited together, knotting both ends whilst reciting. This plaited palm leaf, known henceforward as the *aiwianghona*, he placed upon the two *mahrui* stands so that it rested between the two crescents which surmount them.<sup>10</sup> (The *mahrui* stands were on the left side of the ritual table, at the edge nearest the priest: see Fig. 2). The priest also selected a single *barsom* metallic twig and laid it above the two cups called the *zaothra fulian*, or *zor fulian*.

Now he took the *varas* ring, dipped it thrice in

water whilst reciting the hundred and one names of God, and put it into its own *fulian*, on the right side of the two just mentioned above. Next he took up the *zor fulian* with the *barsom* twig, moved them about over the surface of the water in the *kundi*, and half filled them with water, then filled them completely. Next he took them out, let them rest on the brim of the *kundi*, and thence transferred them to their place on the *khwan*, the twig being still placed above them.

The priest then took a *tashta* and two cups, and poured water from one cup into the other. The cup with water in it he set down first, and above it the *tashta* (henceforward called the *jivam tashta*, as it is used later on for the *jivam*, or milk and water), while the second cup was inverted and placed above the *tashta*, and the *barsom* twig on top of all. This part of the ritual is called the *Zor* ceremony, and this *barsom* twig is henceforward called the *jivam tai*.

The priest now took up the *jivam tai* and the bundle of twenty-two other *barsom* twigs, holding the former in his right hand and the latter in his left, and touched the bundle at each end with the single twig nine times. I should mention here that recitation during all these ritual acts is perpetual, but as I am concerned here with ritual rather than with the words accompanying the actions, and these words seldom had any connection with the actions, I shall only make an occasional reference to what is said.

The priest next removed the *aiwianghona* from the *mahrui* stands and twisted it thrice round the bundle of *barsom* twigs, thrice dipped the bundle so bound into the *kundi*, then secured it with two knots, just as the *kusti* or sacred girdle is fastened round a Parsi's waist.<sup>11</sup> He then cut off the ends, and set the bundle between the crescents of the two *mahrui* stands, placing one single twig, from the twenty-two, on the base of the *mahrui* stands. Next he returned the *jivam tai* to its place above the *jivam tashta* and the two cups.<sup>12</sup>

The *haoma* ceremony proper now began. The *haoma* and pomegranate twig (which is called

<sup>9</sup> I imagine that the milk offered to the earth and that sprinkled over the goat's hindquarters are intended to ensure the fertility of both.

<sup>10</sup> This interesting piece of ritual has several links with the Mandeans. With the latter, the date palm is called the *sindirka*, i.e., the tree of Sin (the moon), the crescent moon being associated with growth and increase. *Sindirka*, as dates are invariably called in the books describing the ritual meals, must be present at all ritual meals, including that eaten at a wedding. The illustrated roll known as the *Diwan Abathur* contains a picture of a tree called "The Tree which nurtures Infants," presumably synonymous with the Tree of Life, which is surmounted by a crescent, indicating growth. It is said to feed children in paradise with heavenly milk. Dates are a staple food in Iraq and Lower Persia.

<sup>11</sup> Modi points out that the plaited and bound bundle is symbolical of the union of many into one. The word *aiwianghona*, he says, conveys this meaning of union. Similarly, the Mandaean *laufa* means "union" or "communion," and *lofani* is the name given to the ritual meal for the dead, signifying that the souls who have left this world and those who still remain in it are knit together in communion, and still form part of one Life.

<sup>12</sup> Note the manner in which fresh life is transferred ritually by these details. The fresh palm leaf gives life to the lifeless *barsom*, water gives life to them all. The pouring from one cup to another may be symbolical of transference.

*urvaram*) had been placed by the priest, before he began his rites, on a small stone beside the slab on which he sits.

He now took up the *haoma* twigs, holding them with the fingers of his right hand, purified them and his hands thrice with water poured over them from a vessel, then dipped both hands and twigs four times into the *kundi*, thrice from north to south, and once from south to north. Next, taking the mortar, he inverted it and placed it before him, laying upon its base three pieces of *haoma* twig and one piece of the pomegranate twig, *urvaram*. He then removed the *varas* ring from its cup, and taking the *jivam tai* in his left hand and the ring in his right, dipped the ring into the top cup of the two *zor fulian* that were with the *jivam tashta*. He then returned the *varas* to its cup.

Next, lifting the *haoma* and *urvaram* twigs from the base of the inverted mortar and grasping the latter with his right hand, he 'rang' it thrice against the stone slab (*khwan*) before setting it upright before him. Taking the *haoma* twigs in his right hand, he put them into the mortar, and then, in similar manner, the *urvaram*, putting that too into the mortar with a little water (*zaothra* water) from the *zor fulian*. He took the strainer from the *kundi*, where it had lain submerged, and placed it upon a *fulian* intended for the *haoma*, near the *mahrui* stands. Again putting his hand into the *kundi*, he took out the *lala* (pestle), and rubbed it round the inner rim of the *kundi*, taking care in making the circuit to begin at the north of the vessel and move round west, south and east to north again.

He then touched the *khwan* with each end of the pestle, and after that made the mortar resound with a bell-like note by striking it in four places, east, south, west and north. When striking the north side he added three more strokes, for the north is supposed by Parsees to be the home of evil spirits.<sup>13</sup>

Never ceasing his recitations, the priest pounded the *haoma* and *urvaram*, struck the sides of the mortar four times, repeating a second formula, hit the sides of the mortar again, and a third time during a third recital, then moved the pestle round and round the interior.<sup>14</sup> During these poundings, he thrice poured

in a little *zaothra* (or *zor*) water, i.e., water from the *zor fulian* with the *jivam tashta*. After this he took out small pieces, first of *haoma* and secondly of *urvaram*, from the mortar, and touched with them first the *barsom* twigs, secondly the *tashta* placed ready for the *jivam*, thirdly the *fulian* for the *haoma*, and fourthly the *khwan*. He then returned the twigs to the mortar, also the pestle, poured a few more drops of the *zor* water into the mortar and began to pound the twigs again, reciting the while and striking the sides of the mortar. Some of the resulting juice he poured over the pestle through the strainer into the *haoma* cup. (The recital here is the four times repeated "*Yatha ahvairyō*," "The will of the Lord is the law of holiness," etc., the mortar being struck at the end of the fourth recital.) Finally, the rest of the *haoma* juice is poured through the strainer into the *haoma* cup.<sup>15</sup> He then removed the strainer from the cup, washed it, and placed it over the mortar. Fragments of broken twig were taken out and put aside: the pestle was washed and returned to the *kundi*.

Taking the *varas* again, the priest placed it upon the strainer, and poured *zaothra* water over the *varas* so that it fell into the mortar. The cup containing the water is held with the left hand in so doing, and as he poured he rubbed the knots of hair on the ring with his finger. Next, he held the strainer with the *varas* on it in his right hand, while with the left he took the cup containing the *haoma* juice, and, repeating "*Humata, hukhta, hvarshita*" thrice, he poured *haoma* juice through the strainer so that a little was distributed over the *khwan* and various cult objects. At "*humata*" the juice fell on the right of the slab, at "*hukhta*" he dropped the juice into the *zaothra* cup (which had now been emptied, as he poured the last of its contents into the mortar through the strainer), and at "*hvarshita*" the *haoma* water dropped into the mortar again. He then returned the *haoma* cup to its place by the *mahrui* stands, and above it he placed the strainer with the *varas* in it. What was in the mortar was poured through the strainer into the *haoma* cup, the *varas* was replaced in its own cup, and the strainer removed and placed in the *kundi*.

The *tashta* to contain the *jivam* was put near the *mahrui*, and the *tashta* for the *draona* (or *darun*, the sacred bread) was set in place for the *Yasna* at the top of the slab. The priest took the few *haoma* and

<sup>13</sup> According to Modi, while striking the north side of the mortar both celebrant and fire priest should repeat: "May the Evil Spirit be broken. May 100,000 curses be on Ahriman."

<sup>14</sup> To one who has watched a Bedouin coffee-maker at work, this has intimate reminiscences. The coffee-maker, when pounding the beans in the mortar, strikes the sides rhythmically. This serves two purposes: first, to shake off the powdered coffee which adheres to the pestle; and second, as a bell, to give notice to the camp that coffee is being prepared.

<sup>15</sup> The whole *haoma* ceremony corresponds closely with the preparation of the Mandaean *misha*, which, like the Parsi *haoma*, is compounded of two ingredients: in the case of the *misha*, sesame seed, and dates, which, after pounding by the priest, are strained into a cup. The strainer for the *misha* is a white cloth. The *misha*, like the *haoma*, figures later in the ritual meal for the benefit of the dead.

*urvaram* twigs at the foot of the *mahrui*, placed them in a cup called the *para haoma*, and covered it with a *tashta*, after having poured over the twigs a little of the *haoma* juice. This was for use in the *Yasna* ceremony.

The next step was that the priest took the *jivam tai* which was with the *zor fulian* into his left hand, and the *varas* ring into his right, and completed the consecration prayers for the *varas*.<sup>13</sup> He dipped the *varas* into the *zaothra* cup, after which he rose from his seat, took the *haoma* cup and placed it in the niche in the wall behind him. From this niche he took down the *jivam* (milk and water) which he had placed there on his return from the courtyard, poured it into the *tashta* set ready for it, put the sacred wafers on the dish which he had just put into place, and completed his prayer. The preparation for the *Yasna* was now accomplished, and had this been a genuine ceremony, the *raspi* or fire priest should by now have entered and begun the ritual for purifying the fire.

The points to be observed in the ritual of the *haoma* ceremony are these. First, water and not fire is the leading element. The elaborate ceremonies are all concerned with revivification, with vegetation, and, of course, symbolically with life after death. Precisely the same motives run through the Mandaean ceremonies performed in front of the cult hut before the actual reading of the *masiqta*, or ritual meal for the dead. These I have described fully in my book upon the Mandaeans. The well and the *kundi* replace the *yardna*, or pool of running water in the *manda*, in which all cult objects must be thrice immersed before use. The *pavi* are paralleled by the *misria*, the *draona* by the *pihtha* and *fatiria*. The *varas*, the sacred ring, corresponds to the gold ring of the Mandaean celebrant, which must be brought into contact with the *misha*.

The bull's hair is lacking with the Mandaeans, as is the milk; indeed, the entire cult of bull and cow is with the Mandaeans limited to a prohibition of the killing of these animals. In the Mandaean ceremony, it is true, the fire must be of fuel thrice dipped in the *yardna*, but it is servant rather than master of the ceremonies, and is used for roasting the sesame seeds for the *misha*, for purifying the knife with which the sacrificial dove is slain, the dove's neck after the sacrifice, for roasting the dove's flesh, and for baking the sacred bread. No sacrifice now takes place with the Parsis: in a cult dedicated so clearly to life, death and blood are naturally repugnant. Modi, however, states (p. 300) that "meat" formerly figured at the ritual table, and thinks the bull's hair is a substitute. The *barsom* is clearly related to the Mandaean myrtle, for ancient Zoroastrian rituals

indicate that it was the "branch carried to the nose," i.e., that the inhaling of its fragrance was part of the Zoroastrian ceremonies. As the fresh quality so essential in the ritual is lacking in the wire twigs, they are given artificial freshness by being brought into magical contact with the freshly plucked palm leaf, the milk (a life fluid), water, and other symbols of life. The intrusion of the dove into the Mandaean ritual is an interesting feature, and the fact that it is called the *Ba* points to possible influences from Egypt, since it is symbolical of the spirit of the dead man. Thus do familiar threads of ritual meet and entwine to produce ever new patterns.

#### IV. THE "YASNA" CEREMONY

In the preceding chapter I have described the *Paragna*, or ceremonies used as a preliminary to the *Yasna* ceremony. To see the latter performed, I went to a school for young Parsi priests situated some miles out of Bombay, near the airport of Jhu. To reach it we passed through lodge gates and went uphill through a garden, the school being at the top of a rise, with a view of the sea. The building is built in the form of a V, and comprises living quarters for the students, with plenty of excellent baths, gymnasias, and a sanatorium, in addition to the class rooms and large lecture hall and library. Part of the lecture hall is arranged with *pavi* or ritual runnels like a Parsi fire temple, and it is here that the young priest-to-be learns the elaborate ritual which he is to perform when he has received his final initiation.<sup>14</sup> The texts to be recited (in what is to the student, be it remembered, a dead language) have to be learnt by heart, and a considerable time is spent on commentaries; but secular education is in no way neglected, and the priest-student receives a thorough grounding in the subjects taught in ordinary schools, so that, should his vocation not lie after all in the priesthood, he is well equipped to take his place in the modern world. From time to time outside lecturers visit the school, and I was told that the standard demanded of the resident teachers is a high one. Spotless cleanliness and meticulous hygiene prevailed throughout the building, including the kitchens. Time was short, and my visit necessarily cursory, yet my impressions were similar to those I had received in the fire temple, namely, of light and of scrupulous cleanliness.

The courtesy of my hosts in allowing me to be a spectator at a rehearsal of ceremonies which have, so far as I know, never before been witnessed by infidel

<sup>13</sup> This consecration is known as the "*Baj* of the *varas*."

<sup>14</sup> What this initiation consists of, and how similar it is to the initiation of a Mandaean priest, I have described in my book on the Mandaeans (*q.v.*).



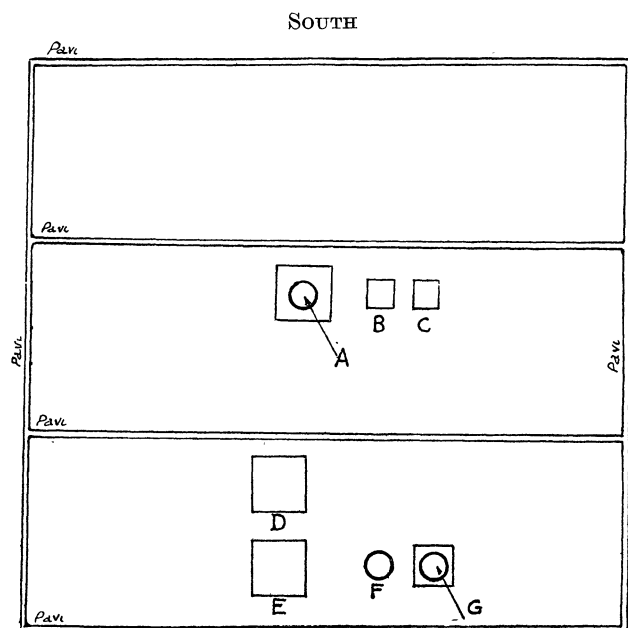


FIGURE 1.—DIAGRAM SHOWING POSITIONS FOR THE "YASNA" CEREMONY

A, fire vase on its *khwan* (table); B, C, tables for fuel and incense; D, *khwan* used as altar (*urvis*); E, *khwan* on which the *zoti* sits; F, the water pot (*kalasia*); G, the *kundi* (vessel of water) on its *khwan*. (The diagram shows the scene as it was at the rehearsal, but in an actual performance of the ceremony an additional *khwan* would be placed for the use of the *raspi*, or fire priest, between *khwan* A and the *pavi* to the south of it.)

eyes, was such that I find it difficult even now to express my appreciation. All was ready for the *Yasna* ceremony when I arrived, the *Paragna* being supposed to have been already performed, so I may take up the thread of narrative where I left it in the last section. I shall refer to the officiating novice as *zoti* and to the novice performing the part of fire priest as *raspi* throughout. There were three spaces enclosed by *pavi*, as shown in Figure 1.

To make references clearer, I also give a diagram of *khwan* D—i.e., the ritual table spread with cult objects which serves as altar (Fig. 2).

Before describing the ceremony itself, I must call the attention of my readers to one fact which stands out prominently: that although these ceremonies are obviously intended as fertility and life-bestowing magic, the accompanying recitation of the *Yasna* can only occasionally, or otherwise by a tortuous explanation, be said to have anything to do with the work in hand. The same may be said of the prayers of the Mandaean liturgy, which are repeated many times during the corresponding ceremony of the *masiqta*. Both the *masiqta* and the *yasna* ceremonies, however, have the same object; they are performed for the benefit of the dead, and may be said to fulfil two

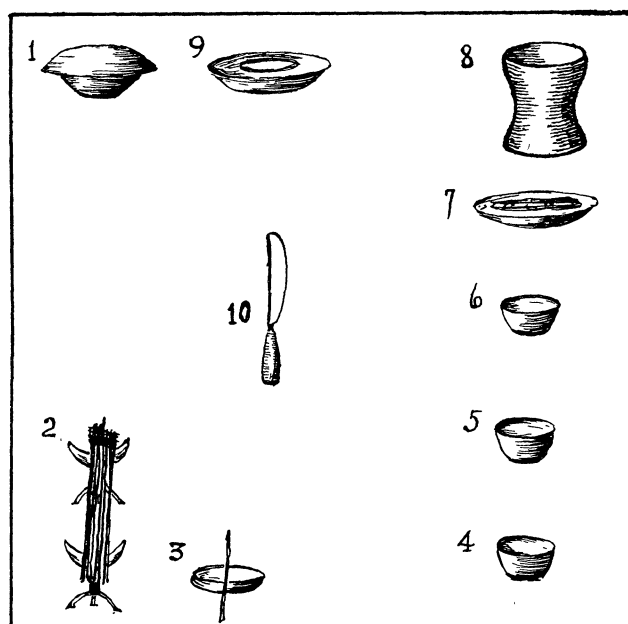


FIGURE 2.—DIAGRAM SHOWING ARRANGEMENT OF CULT OBJECTS ON THE ALTAR (D) IN THE "YASNA" CEREMONY

1, *para haoma* (spare *haoma* and *urvaram* twigs covered by inverted *tashta* or bowl); 2, *mahrui* (crescent-topped stands), on which lies the *barsom* (a bundle of metal twigs), tied together at the south end with *aiwianghona* (plaited palm leaf); 3, *jivam tashta* (bowl of milk and water) with *jivam tai* (a *barsom* twig) laid across it north and south; 4, *fulian* (cup) for *haoma*; 5, *fulian* for *zor* water; 6, *fulian* for *varas na viti* (ring with hair of the sacred bull); 7, *tashta* containing fragments of *haoma* and *urvaram*; 8, *havanim* (mortar) (the *lala* or pestle is in the *kundi*—see Fig. 1, G); 9, *tashta* containing a *draona* (wafer) *ndm* ("named"); 10, *kapla* (knife).

purposes: to facilitate the passage of the departed soul into its new life, protecting it from hostile and defiling influences, and to nourish that soul, strengthening and purifying it.<sup>15</sup>

The two novices wore the customary dress of the Parsi priest, which, as I have said, corresponds closely with that of the Mandaean priest; but as this was not a genuine ceremony, they did not wear the *padan*, or face veil.

At the opening, both youths stood outside the space enclosed by *pavi* and chanted together, facing south. They then stepped inside the *pavi* and chanted facing east, before taking up their respective stations south and north. The *zoti* purified his hands by pouring

<sup>15</sup> "On the *Zoti* taking his stand on his stone slab, as referred to in the *Paragna* ceremony, both the priests recite in *Baj* the *Pazend Dibâcheh* . . . reciting the name of the particular *vazata* with whose *Khshnuman* the *Yagna* is to be celebrated and the name of the person (living or dead . . .) for whom the ceremony is to be performed" (Modi, *op. cit.*). Like the *masiqta*, a *yasna* can be performed as an anticipatory ceremony, for a person still living.



water over them from a water vessel (*kalasia*) dipped into the *kundi*,<sup>16</sup> chanting the while. Both were then ready to begin the ceremony, and the first step was the purification of the *khwan* upon which the fire vase stood. The *raspi* fed the fire with pieces of sandalwood, the *zoti* chanted the "homage to fire," and, bearing in his hand the vase of water, poured water thrice over the slab, walking round it to do so, east, south and west. He then poured water over his hands again, and, reciting, mounted to his *khwan*, discarding his sanctuary slippers as he did so and lifting first the right foot and then the left. Throughout, neither priest ever allowed the bare sole of his foot to touch the ground within the *pavi*: only when on his *khwan* was the priest barefoot. Upon his *khwan* the *zoti* stood facing the south, with the great toe of his right foot placed over the great toe of the left. The *raspi*, too, shuffled out of his slippers, standing not on a *khwan* but on the ground, and in such a manner that he did not touch the ground with his bare foot, but stood on (not in) his slippers; like the *zoti* he faced south, placing his right great toe over his left. This curious action is described by Modi as standing "on one foot."

The *zoti* then recited the *Dibacheh*, i.e., the names of the *Yazatas*<sup>17</sup> associated with the *Yasna* ceremony, and also that of the person for whom the ceremony was supposedly performed. This recitation is made with closed lips in a hum, that is to say, "in *bāj*" ("suppressed tone").

The *zoti* now prepared for the recitation of the *Yasna*, which went on through the subsequent proceedings, but with abbreviation of the chapters, as it was the accompanying ritual that I wished to see. As there are seventy-two chapters or *ha* of this sacred book, a complete recital would have taken considerably longer.

First, however, he took the *barsom* twigs, poured water from the *kundi* over them thrice, and passed them through the crescents of the *mahrui* stands, upon which they had been resting. The *zoti* and *raspi* then chanted alternately, and again the *zoti* passed the *barsom* through the crescents whilst both chanted together. A third time the twigs were passed through the crescents; then more water was poured over them.

The recital of the first chapter of the *Yasna* now began. The *zoti* continued to pass the *barsom*

through the crescents at intervals (about eleven times in all) and, finally, took his seat cross-legged on his *khwan*.

The second chapter had already begun. Sitting in his place, the *zoti* kept two fingers of his left hand touching the bundle of *barsom* on the *mahrui* stands. At the beginning of every chapter he should take water from the *kundi* in his hand and throw it over the *barsom*.

The *raspi*'s duty is to chant with the *zoti*, to make responses at intervals and to feed the fire. As shown in Fig. 1, two small stone slabs stand to the west of the fire urn, with a third for other fuel. These two slabs are for the *aesam* (or *aesma*) *bui*, i.e., pieces of sandalwood and frankincense, three being placed on one slab and one on the other. The *raspi* placed one on the fire at the beginning of the seventh chapter and others later. With the eighth chapter, the *Draona-chashni* or ceremonial eating of the sacred bread was performed. At the beginning of this chapter, the *raspi* put another piece of *aesam bui* on the fire, and then, going over to the *zoti*, stood beside him and recited the invitation to those who deserve the *myazda*<sup>18</sup> (sacred food) to partake of it. The use of this word *myazda*, which means literally "provision," or "provision for a journey," and is of Aramaic origin, is significant; the curious parallel to the Christian "invitation" to partake of the sacraments should be noted.

The *zoti* then recited the formula prescribed before the actual "partaking," a kind of grace or thanksgiving, and, breaking off a small piece of the *draona* (sacred wafer), dipped it in a little of the clarified butter with which the *draona* had been anointed (before the ceremony)<sup>19</sup> and dropped it into his mouth from above, so that it did not come into contact with his lips. In a real ceremony, at which worshippers are present, the *draona* can be passed out of the sacred enclosure at the conclusion of the *bāj* (muttered prayer) which he then recited, and may be consumed by such lay Parsis as are present and consider themselves worthy.

The *raspi*, who on return to his place had faced west, now put another piece of *aesma* fuel on the fire, whilst the *zoti*, after washing his hand, poured a little water from the water jar over the place on the *khwan* where the *draona tashta* (platter for the bread) had stood. The *zoti* had placed it outside the *pavi*, presumably for consumption by the (absent) congregation.

<sup>16</sup> As in the preparatory ceremonies (the *Paragna*), the *kundi* represents the well of running water. The *kalasia* is goblet-shaped.

<sup>17</sup> The *Yazatas* are divine beings (but Zoroaster is considered to be a *Yazata*). Similarly, the Mandaeans begin their lists of holy men, and the departed (ending with the name of the recently deceased), by the enumeration of divine beings, whom they consider the ultimate ancestors of the race.

<sup>18</sup> "O ye men! Ye who have deserved it by your righteousness and piety! Eat of this *Myazda*. . . ." (Modi, *op. cit.*, p. 324.)

<sup>19</sup> The Nestorians place oil on the wafer during the ante-Qurbana service.

The first part of the *Yasna* ceremony was thus completed.

The second part was concerned with the *haoma* juice, which, it will be remembered, was so carefully prepared in the *Paragna* ceremony. The *Haoma Yast*, that is, the ninth, tenth and part of the eleventh chapters of the *Yasna*, were now to be recited.

The *raspi* still stood facing west, but now went towards the *kundi* and poured water over his hands. He then went to the right of the *zoti*, took the *haoma* cup, and, returning to the fire, put a fourth piece of *aesam bui* on the fire. Continuing round, he went to the *mahrui* stands and held the *haoma* cup on the end of the bundle of *barsom* resting on the crescents.<sup>20</sup> The *zoti* then received the *haoma fulian* from the *raspi* and, finishing his recital of the *haoma* prayers, the *zoti* drank from the cup thrice, not touching his lips but pouring the *haoma* into his throat. He then poured water over both his hand and the cup, and, filling the cup from the *kundi*, recited with closed lips, sitting.

Whilst reciting *Ashem Vohu* <sup>21</sup> four times, the *zoti* took the filled cup of water, and poured first over the place where it had originally stood on the *khwan*, secondly over the feet of the *mahrui* stand to the north, thirdly over the feet of that to the south, and fourthly over the *khwan* near the *jivam tashta*. After that he reversed the cup, set it down near the *mahrui* stands, and filled the water jar near the *kundi*. The recitation, I was informed, had now reached the thirteenth *ha*, or chapter, of the *Yasna*.

The *zoti* then took up the bundle of *barsom* (round which is the *aiwianghona*, or plaited palm leaf) and, taking the projecting ends, tied them with two more knots into a small loop, in order to fasten it to the horn of the crescent, by slipping the loop over it (see Fig. 2). By the fifteenth chapter, this was accomplished.

The *zoti* then poured some of the *jivam* into the cup he had placed at the foot of the *mahrui*, and some of it back again into the *jivam tashta*, above which was the *jivam tai*, or single wire *barsom* twig placed there during the *Paragna* ceremony. During the transfer of the liquid he held the twig, and at its conclusion he replaced it above the *jivam tashta*.

The sixteenth chapter was now reached. The *zoti* took the mortar (*havanim*), reversed it, and dipped it into the *kundi*. Whilst reciting from the eighteenth chapter he lifted the *jivam tai* from the

*jivam tashta*, and, dipping it into the *jivam*, touched the *aiwianghona* with it, re-dipping and touching several times.

By this time he had reached the twenty-second chapter. Again he touched the *aiwianghona* with the *jivam* twig, dipped in the *jivam* repeatedly, and the recital of the twenty-third chapter began. The *zoti* now moved the cup near the feet of the *mahrui*, and the *tashta* in which were broken twigs of *haoma* and *urvaram*, and held them together, with the knife above them, touching the south end of the *barsom* on the *mahrui* stands, after which he returned both to their places.<sup>22</sup>

The recital of the twenty-fourth *ha* now took place. The *zoti* took the mortar out of the *kundi*, placed it reversed before him, and then began the second preparation of *haoma* juice, which goes on during the recital of chapters XXV to XXVIII.

He knocked the reversed mortar thrice on the *khwan*, producing a bell-like note, then, setting it upright before him, put into it first a *haoma* fragment from the *tashta*, secondly a drop or so of *jivam*, thirdly *urvaram*, and fourthly some *zor* water. Next he removed the strainer from the *kundi*, where it had lain immersed, and let some water from the wet strainer fall on the contents of the mortar. He put the strainer above the *haoma* cup, while the *raspi* placed another fragment of the *aesam bui* fuel on the fire (at the end of the eleventh *ha* he had added two new pieces of the fragrant fuel).

The *zoti* rubbed the pestle round the *kundi*, touched both ends of the pestle on the *khwan*, and after that struck the four sides of the mortar ringing blows, with three extra on the north side. (All this was a repetition of part of the *Paragna*.)

He threw a little water out on to the ground from the *kundi*, whilst holding the pestle in his left hand and reciting in *bāj* (i.e., humming with closed lips). He then began to pound, both priests reciting, and during the words of the formula *Yatha ahv vairyo*<sup>23</sup> the *zoti* rang the pestle repeatedly. Meanwhile the *raspi* tended the fire. The *zoti* went on pounding during his recitation of a second and third formula, ringing the pestle against the side as before. He now poured into the mortar a little *zor* water from the *zor* cup on his right, following this up by moving the pestle round the interior of the mortar thrice.

Taking some of the pounded mixture within, he

<sup>20</sup> I am inclined to think that this journey of the *raspi* symbolises the sun's journey after setting until it rises again, i.e., is a symbol of life after death.

<sup>21</sup> i.e., the formula: "Holiness is the best of all good: it is also happiness. Happy is the man who is holy with perfect holiness!"

<sup>22</sup> This possibly mimics a fresh cutting of the sacred plants. The proceedings from this point seem to be a repetition of part of the *Paragna*.

<sup>23</sup> "The will of the Lord is the law of holiness: the riches of Vohu-Mano shall be given to him who works in this world for Mazda and wields according to the will of Ahura the power he gave him to relieve the poor."

brought it into contact first with the *aiwianghona*, then with the *jivam*, next with the *haoma* cup, and lastly with the *khwan*. This action performed, he returned it to the mortar and began to pound again, ringing the pestle against the sides, at the same time ending his recitation for this section of the ritual.

The next step was to pour the fresh *haoma* thus compounded through the strainer into the *haoma* cup, reciting the proper formula. The *zoti* then placed the strainer above the mortar, and thrice poured a little from the *haoma* cup through the strainer into the mortar, thereafter holding the cup so that it touched the north end of the *barsom* bundle where it projected beyond the crescent of the northern *mahrui* stand. At this point, recitation of the twenty-seventh *ha* was supposedly completed.

The recital of the *Gatha* began, whilst the *zoti* pounded and rang the pestle in the mortar with his right hand, resting two fingers of his left lightly upon the *barsom* on the *mahrui* stands. The second pounding of the *haoma* was now at an end, so the pestle was returned to the *kundi*, while the *zoti* recited in *bâj*, then poured the *haoma* through the strainer into the *haoma* cup, and the rest of the *zor* water into the mortar, finally pouring this also through the strainer into the cup. He then reversed the mortar, and the *zor* cup, which he put back in its place.

When all the liquid had passed through the strainer into the *haoma* cup, the *zoti* put the pounded twigs remaining above into their *tashta*, lifted the strainer, placed it on the base of the reversed mortar, turned up the *zor* cup and placed that above the strainer, and transferred the *haoma* in the cup to the *zor* cup while the *haoma* cup in its turn was reversed and placed by the *mahrui* stand.

The *raspi* came towards the *kundi*, poured water over his hands, took the strainer with the cup on it into his left hand and, returning to the fire vase, tended the fire with the remaining *aesam bui*. Going again to the *zoti*'s end of the sacred enclosure, he first touched the *mahrui* stands with the cup and strainer, and then placed them on the *khwan*. The *zoti* lifted the cup and put it on the reversed mortar again, but the strainer he returned to the *kundi*. That done, he lifted the *jivam tashta* and set it above the cup on the strainer, with the *jivam tai* on top. The thirty-fourth chapter should now have been completed.

After the recitation had taken place of all the chapters up to the fifty-seventh<sup>24</sup> (this chapter being

the *Sraosh Yasht*, in praise of Sraosha<sup>25</sup>), the rites to help the departed soul were at an end. The final ceremonies were concerned with what, when writing of the Mandaean, I have termed "deconsecration."

The *zoti* touched the *aiwianghona* several times with the *jivam tai* twig, then removed the knotted loop of the former from the crescent which held it, while the *raspi* recited at his left hand. The *zoti* put the reversed and emptied cup in an upright position, untied the knots which he had tied in the *aiwianghona* in the thirteenth chapter, and, during the recitation of the sixtieth chapter, took the empty cup, filled it with water from the *kundi*, and placed it before him between the mortar and himself. He took down the *jivam tashta*, placed it behind the mortar, then, holding the *barsom* bundle, stood up upon the *khwan* upon which he had been seated, he and the *raspi* reciting together.

The sixty-second chapter, which is the Fire Litany (*Atesh Nyaish*), had now presumably been reached. The *zoti* poured water from the *haoma* cup thrice over the *barsom*, then, holding the *jivam tai*, thrice alternately touched with it the base of the mortar and the *barsom*. After that, the *jivam tai* was thrice dipped into the *jivam*, and brought into contact with the *barsom*, after which the *zoti* thrust the *jivam tai* half down into the bundle of *barsom* wires which he held. Thrice again he repeated the dipping and touching, with the *jivam tai* half in; finally, he thrust the *jivam tai* completely down into the bundle with the other wires.

It will be remembered that one *barsom* wire twig (*tai*) was laid along the bases of the *mahrui* stands. The *zoti* now removed this, lifted up the south *mahrui*, laid it down with its crescents to the east, then lifted the second in like manner, and put the *tai* over them.

At the beginning of the sixty-fifth chapter, the *zoti* knocked the mortar thrice against the *khwan*, removing the *zor* cup from the top of the mortar with his left hand, and turning the mortar right side up again. With his left hand he poured water from the *zor* cup into the mortar, then poured from the *jivam tashta* and from the *haoma* cup also into the mortar, after which, whilst reciting the Water Litany, he mixed what was left of the *zor* and *haoma* by pouring from the one vessel into the other.

He then rose and stood, with the *raspi*, facing the *kundi*. At the conclusion of the recitation, he

<sup>24</sup> Lady Drower believes that a number of chapters were recorded by Darmesteter in a French work published about 1892.—Ed.

<sup>25</sup> Sraosha is the angel particularly charged with the care of the human soul in life and after departure to the next world. "His help or co-operation is required by the soul during its passage to the next world, especially during the first three days, when it is passing to a new plane of activity from the plane of this world to that of another" (Modi, p. 435).

returned and sat down in his place, and the *raspi* went to his. Taking the *haoma* cup, the *zoti* touched the rim of the mortar with it and then the *barsom* twigs, repeating the action continually until he reached the end of a formula. He then rubbed the cup round the rim of the mortar, holding the *barsom* in his left hand and bringing it, too, into contact with the rim, after which he poured a little from the cup over the *barsom* into the mortar, again rubbed it round the rim, and repeated these actions, three times in all. The *zoti* next took the *jivam tashta*, put it over the mortar, and poured into it liquid from both cups, then touched the rim of the mortar and the *haoma* cup with the *zor* cup, east, south, west and north, poured a little from left to right and from right to left into the *jivam tashta*, then liquid from the cup on the right into the mortar. (As the contents were by now thoroughly intermixed, the liquid was the same in all the vessels concerned.) He dropped liquid into the latter cup again from the other two, and laid the reversed *jivam tashta* above the mortar.

The recitation of the sixty-eighth chapter now took place. This section honours the sun and is called the Sun Litany (*Khurshed Nyaish*). Both *zoti* and *raspi* stood facing the east while it was in progress, and on its completion the *zoti* returned, sat down, touched the cups with the *jivam tashta* and the *barsom* (still in his hand) several times, placed the cup on the right above the cup on the left, and then, touching *tashta* and *barsom* alternately with the cups and pouring liquid over the *barsom* from the upper cup into the lower, replaced them one above the other. He took the *barsom*, held it upright with both hands, touched the *khwan* first with the lower end of the bundle and then with the upper, and after that both cups in like manner, and the *jivam tashta* also.

The *zoti* then rose, and the *raspi* poured water over his own hands and went to his place, making the circuit of the fire and returning to stand at the left of the *zoti*.

The seventy-second, and last, chapter was now recited. Holding the *barsom* in his left hand, the *zoti* stood up on his *khwan*, knotted the *aiwianghona* a third time round the *barsom* (thus completing the ritual threefold knot of the sacred girdle which the palm-leaf plait represents), and handed the *barsom* to the *raspi* on his left. The *zoti* placed the palms of his hands together, and the *raspi* laid the *barsom* back on the *mahrui* stands (now prone). The *zoti* descended from his *khwan* and gave the *hamazor*, or ritual hand-clasp, to the *raspi*. This consists in placing the hands together, held upright and flat, in such a manner that each man finds his hands palm to palm with the hands of the man he is saluting. It is similar to the ritual

hand-clasp of the Nestorians, exchanged after the *qurbana* (mass), except that in the case of the latter the hands of each man are afterwards brought to his lips in a kiss. The Mandaean *kushta*, which is "given" not once but several times during the *masiqta*, is undoubtedly related both to the "kiss of peace" and the *hamazor*. It involves grasping the right hand, followed by each man lifting his own right hand and kissing it. (Be it noted that in neither case is the hand of the other man kissed.)

The *zoti* and *raspi* then went to the third *pavi*, beyond the sacred fire enclosure, faced east, completed their *bâj*, and performed the *kusti* ceremony (i.e., untied the sacred girdle, extended it to full length, and then re-tied it by passing it thrice around the body, with two knots in front and two behind). The *raspi* re-entered the fire enclosure, placed incense on the fire and purified his left hand again with water; then, the *zoti* having rejoined him, both went with the mortar to the well, where they poured into the water what was left of the sacred liquids, which are thus restored in a consecrated state to the original source. Similarly, the Mandaeans throw whatever is left of sacred liquids or food into the river (or *yardna*) at the conclusion of any ritual meal.

The fact upon which I wish to lay emphasis is that in the *Yasna* ceremony, as well as in the *Paragna* which must precede it, the fire priest plays a subordinate part. He is no more than a server, and in fact his work in tending the sacred fire may be compared with that of the Mandaean assistant priest and boy server. In the Mandaean ceremony, as the priests performing the *masiqta* cannot go outside the *bit manda* or cult hut until the conclusion of the ceremony, the part of the *kundi* is taken by the two *qaninas* (bottles or flasks filled direct from the sacred spring). Of these, one is taken into the *bit manda* at the beginning of the ceremony, and the other is brought in during its performance by the server.

The purpose of the rite, as I have said, is the same: throughout its performance an identical sequence of ritual is closely followed, it is easy to detect a common purpose in the fertility magic employed, and water used as a magic purifying and revivifying agent plays a prominent part. The *pavi* enclosures are paralleled by the furrows traced on the ground by the Mandaeans. It is clear that at some distant time (previous, necessarily, to any period in which the fire altar is prominent) the two cults were closely related.

## V. THE CEREMONY OF THE FIVE TWIGS

Of all the Parsi ceremonies that I was privileged to witness the Ceremony of the Five Twigs is, perhaps, the most illuminating, on account of its connection

with the number five. The number five is indeed highly suggestive; it occurs prominently in Christian ritual meals, as I have already indicated in my book on the Mandaean; since then, by examining other Oriental Christian rites, I have amplified my evidence.

The basis of ritual meals is seasonal, since early magic was undoubtedly concentrated upon the fertility of the soil: the fertility and health of man, by an easy transference of ideas, being associated with that of the earth which nourished him. The Egyptians from a remote period, and the peoples of the Two Rivers as far back as the days of the Sumerians, had religious cults closely associated with the revival of vegetation by water at certain periods of the year. The Semitic invaders of Sumer and Akkad borrowed from the fertility cults of the land, invested their tribal gods with the generative and restorative characteristics attributed to local deities, and identified them with their own solar gods. This syncretisation scarcely affected the ancient seasonal magic: the old pattern persisted. The New Year festival, a festival which celebrated the earth awaking to new life, followed that pattern. It included a mourning for the dead or imprisoned spirit of fertility, joy at his resurrection or release and his subsequent marriage, and, finally, a feast. In Babylonian times these ceremonies occupied twelve days.

In Egypt one of the calendars concurrently observed, namely that connected with Osiris, grain and the fate of the soul after death, consisted of twelve thirty-day months, with five extra days not counted into the months. It was this division which seems to have supplanted other methods of calendar-division in Persia, probably in the days of Darius, in Babylonia of Magian times, and in neighbouring countries such as Sogdiana<sup>26</sup>. With the ancient Persians and the Magians the five intercalary days, called *Farwardan* or *Panja*, were especially devoted to the cult of the dead and the ancestors.

The Mandaean, who call the five days *Parwanāia* or *Panja*, also make them the occasion for ritual meals for the dead, and prayers addressed to their ancestors and to the spirits of light who are the ultimate ancestors of man. With the Mandaean *Panja* falls in *Nisan*, April, as did the Babylonian New Year's Feast. Al-Biruni, writing in the tenth century A.D., comments that *Nau Roz* (New Year) "in our time coincides with the sun's entering the sign of Aries, which is the beginning of spring."<sup>27</sup> Modern Parsis, however,

hold their New Year's feast in the autumn. The intercalary days, known as the *Panj-i-meh*, which occur between the old year and the new, are held in high veneration.

Since ritual meals for the dead and in honour of ancestors were associated with the five days, it is natural that the number five should appear prominently in connection with them; falling at a time of renewed vegetable life, they were especially auspicious for ceremonies intended to impart new life and strength to the departed.

I was able to see the Five Twigs (*Panj Tai*) ceremony at the priests' school. At the outset, the *zoti* sat within his *pavi*-enclosed space, facing the south as usual. On the *khwan* before him were two water jugs, five *barsom* twigs, two light metal chains and behind these a *fulian* (cup).

He began by pouring water over the *khwan* from one of the jars, then over the five twigs all together, and over the chains. He next tied the twigs with the two chains, arranging the chains so that the twigs were divided into groups of two and three, yet bound together, one chain being at the top of the bundle and the other below it. Each chain was bound thrice round the bundle and knotted as in tying the sacred thread (*krusti*), and before he began to tie them the *zoti* touched the tops and ends of the twigs with the chains.

Four *darun* (small round loaves of sacred bread) were then placed on the *khwan*. The priest arranged them in two pairs, the "named" (see p. 78) being on the left of the *khwan*, and the "unnamed" (*frashast*) being on the right. A little ghee (melted butter) was placed on the lower left-hand (named) *darun*, and a pomegranate seed (*urvaram*) on the top right-hand (unnamed) *darun*.

The water jar used for the purification stood at the right of the priest in the place usually occupied by the *kundi*, while the fire vase with stands for the *aesam bui* (fragrant fuel) occupied its usual place at the south of the enclosure.

The priest first recited the *Bāj* prayer in a humming tone with closed lips; the enumeration of names would normally include that of the dead person in whose honour the ceremony is performed. (This prayer was also used in the *Yasna*, q.v.) At the conclusion of his recitation, the priest poured water over his hands from the left-hand pot left on the *khwan*, held the united twigs in his left hand, and put them in the water. Next, taking one unnamed *darun* in his right hand, he touched the other three with it, after which he exchanged the named *darun*, on which was the ghee, with the unnamed *darun* on the bottom.

<sup>26</sup> See S. H. Taquizadeh, "Old Iranian Calendars," *J. Roy. Asiatic Soc.*, 1938.

<sup>27</sup> *The Chronology of Ancient Nations* (Sachau transl.).

Thus the unnamed *darun* with the ghee was now placed at the right of the bottom pair, thus :

① ②

③ ④

When they were so arranged, he broke off a small fragment of bread from the *darun* with the ghee (4), dipped it in the ghee, and dropped it into his mouth without touching his lips. Next, he took a fragment from the left-hand *darun* of the lower pair, which I have called (3), dipped that too into the ghee, and consumed it in similar manner. Thirdly, he broke a piece from the left-hand *darun* of the top pair (1), dipped it in both the ghee and the water in the cup and then consumed it. Fourthly, he dipped a fragment from the right-hand *darun* of the top pair (2), upon which was the pomegranate seed, into the ghee and the water and consumed it. Fifthly, he took the pomegranate seed itself, from *darun* (2), dipped it into the ghee and the water, and consumed it.

The ceremony was then over; the priest rose from his *khwan*, performed the *kusti* (i.e., re-tied his sacred girdle) and went out. The consecrated bread was ready to be broken into small pieces and distributed to those who would have been present had the ceremony been genuine.

Note that the *chashni* (the "tasting," or as we would say "partaking") kept true to the pattern of five.

## VI. THE "AFRINGAN" CEREMONY

This was partially performed for my benefit, with explanations to fill the gaps, in the fire temple. Like the *Yasna* and the *Panj Tai* ceremonies described above, it is intended primarily for the welfare of the dead.

The ceremony should begin with the recitation of the *Dibacheh*. (I have referred to this prayer before as "the *Bâj*."") As this occurs at the beginning of the ceremony it should be recited aloud and not "in *bâj*" or with closed lips (see Modi, p. 380). It is in the Pazend language and, in the words of Modi :

"(a) It announces the name of the *Yazata* or heavenly being in whose honour, or for whose glorification or invocation, the service is celebrated or the ceremony performed; (b) it announces the name of the person (living or dead) in whose honour or memory the service is held, and the name of the person at whose instruction it is held."

As I have mentioned before, ritual meals for the benefit of the dead may also be used in an anticipatory fashion during a person's lifetime. The *Dibacheh*, in fact, corresponds in purpose and pattern with the Mandaean prayer *Abahathan* ("Our Forefathers"),

with its prayers, first for the spirits of light, for illustrious ancestors and saints, for the whole community, living and dead, and at intervals for "this soul of N." (i.e., the recently dead person). It emphasises the fact to the Mandaean, as to the pious Parsi, that the departed are not cut off from the living, but can both benefit, and derive benefit from, ceremonies to which both are bidden.

For the *Afringan* ceremony a carpet was spread on the ground, and above that a white sheet which partially covered it. The priest (*zoti*) sat not on a *khwan* but on the carpet, and on the sheet before him was placed a tray containing fruit, fresh and dried (amongst which a pomegranate is essential), water, milk, flowers, a cup of lemonade or sherbet, and a plate of nuts. Behind these (i.e., to the south) was the place of the fire priest, and also on the sheet there was the fire vase, a lamp of cocoanut oil (ghee may be used), fire tongs (*chipia*), fuel on its stand and a ladle (*chamcha*) for the sacred fuel. The fire priest (*raspi*) was not present, but as he only plays a very secondary part during the ceremony (as indeed in the other ceremonies I have described), his role was filled in by explanation. Indeed, I gathered that he might be dispensed with.

The priest (assumed to have performed the preliminary purification and re-tying of the girdle, necessary to all these ceremonies) first took eight flowers and arranged them in two rows of pairs. The first three pairs were laid horizontally, and the bottom pair vertically, thus :



The *raspi* should then come to the *zoti*, who should hand to him the lowest flower on the right-hand side, while he himself takes and holds the lowest flower on the left. Both priests should then recite the *Kardeh*, which invokes blessings upon "the ruler of the land." At its conclusion the priests should exchange flowers. During the recital of the "blessings" the *zoti* first takes the lowermost flowers, next the flowers on the right and left, and touches with them the four corners of the water vessel, east, west, south and north (describing a cross in so doing). Next he touches the four angles of the fire vase with the tongs in a similar manner, and then returns the flowers to the tray. Dastur Bode said that the three *Afringan* formulæ were then recited, together with the *afrin* (blessings) on the living. The *Bâj* for the dead, he explained, is recited on the day of death, on the fourth morning after death, and then at various intervals, such as the thirtieth day after death and the anniversary. When the *Bâj* is finished and the

*hamazor* (see above) performed, *chashni* (tasting or partaking) of the fruit and drink takes place.

Modi says of this ceremony that the *myazda* (food and drink) originally included sacred bread (*darun*), and that wine is usually amongst the sacred drinks, which he identifies with the *madhu* or mead of the Avesta. He also gives a list of the flowers proper for the ceremony in connection with various *Yazata*.

The Mandaean *Zidqa Brikha*, with its many variants of procedure and its food, fruits and drinks, is the obvious parallel to the *Afringan*. The *Zidqa Brikha* differs substantially in that *hamra* (the fruit juice and water is so called, although it is not wine, or a fermented drink) is essential to the ceremony, and that a model of the phallus in dough must also be present. The part which the flowers play in the *Afringan* is paralleled by the myrtle which, in the Mandaean ritual, assumes a more prominent part. Viewed broadly, however, the correspondence is close. The life magic of green and growing vegetation, of fruit and of "wine" are all present, the sacramental eating and drinking have the same purpose, namely,

to "provision" the soul, to strengthen it by proxy; and the departed and the living are knit together in a mystical communion symbolised by the earthly meal.

## VII. SUMMARY

In the *Yasna*, *Panj Tai* and *Afringan* ceremonies, the *zoti*, or officiating priest, is the principal actor, whilst the *raspi* or fire priest plays a subordinate part. Ablutions, mimic revival by water, all the symbols of living vegetation, have nothing to do with fire. The sole function of the sacred fire during these ritual proceedings is to provide "a sweet odour" when fragrant fuel is cast into it.

It is water which is the magic, regenerating, and purifying agent. Not one of the implements or objects used is passed through the fire; all are in perpetual contact with water. Before they begin to officiate, the priests must take a purifying bath. Even the fire temple, with its well of running water, its *pavi* for the purifying water, and its sacred trees, bears witness to the essential part played by water in the Parsi rituals.