THE ROLE OF FIRE IN PARSI RITUAL

By E. S. Drower

I. INTRODUCTION

In my book about the Mandaeans 1 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. 2 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

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1 E. S. Drower, The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran, Clarendon Press, 1937.
2 British India Press, 1922
garden was ritually protected by pavi\textsuperscript{3}, 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 *mīrā, 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 Mandaean, one can more easily compare it with the *bit manda* (or *bimanda*), that is, the cult hut\textsuperscript{4} 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 *Ateš 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.

Amongst the types of fire so collected is fire from a burning ghat, i.e., fire which consumes a corpse.\textsuperscript{5}

The second grade is the *Ateš Atrann* 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 *vastrias* (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 *Ateš Dodghah*, 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 *Ateš 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 *Atrann*, 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 *tāj, 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

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\textsuperscript{3} Pavi means “pure”, “clean”.

\textsuperscript{4} However, the cult hut is colloquially referred to as a *manda*. Priestly documents alone use the term *bit manda* or *bimanda* for the hut.

\textsuperscript{5} 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 one direction towards which a Parsi worshipper may not turn his face is the north.6

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), Aivisruthrem (nightfall till midnight), and Usahin (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.7

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.8 On the south wall of the chamber are two cupboards, the lower part of each forming a narrow chest in which the alat, 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 Urvisgh, 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.

6 The Mandaeans 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.

7 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.

8 The Mandaeans word for mace is gurmaiz.
III. The “Paragna” Ceremony

When I entered the Yasishna-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 zotí, 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 tashka, shallow dishes (corresponding to the Mandaean niara).

2. A metal mortar on a foot, and a pestle, the havanim and lala (Mandaean havan and dast d havan).

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 vara 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 (druna). 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, hvarshta (“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 yadan. (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 yadan, 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 gavi 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 jīvam. Having done this, he poured a little of the jīvam over the hindquarters of the goat and returned to the Yazishna-gah, keeping within the pavi.9

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 pāv or purification. When he had seated himself again on his khwan, the priest poured water into the kundī 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 kundī 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 pāv.

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 aivianghona, he placed upon the two mahru stands so that it rested between the two crescents which surmount them.10 (The mahru 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 zaotra 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 kundī, and half filled them with water, then filled them completely. Next he took them out, let them rest on the brim of the kundī, and thence transferred them to their place on the khwan, the twig being still placed above them.

The priest then took a tashtha 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 tashtha (henceforward called the jīvam tashtha, as it is used later on for the jīvam, or milk and water), while the second cup was inverted and placed above the tashtha, 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 jīvam tāi.

The priest now took up the jīvam tāi 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 aivianghona from the mahru stands and twisted it thrice round the bundle of barsom twigs, thrice dipped the bundle so bound into the kundī, then secured it with two knots, just as the kusti or sacred girdle is fastened round a Parsi’s waist.11 He then cut off the ends, and set the bundle between the crescents of the two mahru stands, placing one single twig, from the twenty-two, on the base of the mahru stands. Next he returned the jīvam tāi to its place above the jīvam tashtha and the two cups.12

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

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9 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.

10 This interesting piece of ritual has several links with the Mandaeans. 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.

11 Modi points out that the plaited and bound bundle is symbolical of the union of many into one. The word aivianghona, he says, conveys this meaning of union. Similarly, the Mandean lavaf means “union” or “communion,” and lopani 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.

12 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 tashka. 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.13

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.14 During these pounding, he thrice poured in a little zaothra (or zor) water, i.e., water from the zor fulian with the jivam tashka. After this he took out small pieces, first of haoma and secondly of urvaram, from the mortar, and touched with them first the barson twigs, secondly the tashka 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 ahu vairyo; “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.15 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 tashka to contain the jivam was put near the mahrui, and the tashka for the drama (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

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13 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.”

14 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.

15 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 a 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 tashda, 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 sor fulian into his left hand, and the varas ring into his right, and completed the consecration prayers for the varas. He dipped the varas into the zoothra 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 tashda 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 rapsi 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 masiqa, 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 mioria, the draona by the pitha and faliria. The varas, the sacred ring, corresponds to the gold ring of the Mandean 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 Mandean 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 Mandean 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 Mandean 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 Juhu. 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, gymnasium, 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. 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

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13 This consecration is known as the “Raj of the varas.”

14 What this initiation consists of, and how similar it is to the initiation of a Mandean priest, I have described in my book on the Mandaeans (q.v.).
A, fire vase on its khwan (table); B, C, tables for fuel and incense; D, khwan used as altar (ureia); 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 Mandaeans liturgy, which are repeated many times during the corresponding ceremony of the masigta. Both the masigta and the yasna ceremonies, however, have the same object; they are performed for the benefit of the dead, and may be said to fulfill two 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.15

The two novices wore the customary dress of the Parsi priest, which, as I have said, corresponds closely with that of the Mandaeans 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

15 "On the Zoti taking his stand on his stone slab, as referred to in the Paragna ceremony, both the priests recite in Baj the Pasend Dibakeh... reciting the name of the particular vazata with whose Khshnuman the Yaqna 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 masigta, a yasna can be performed as an anticipatory ceremony, for a person still living.
water over them from a water vessel (kalasias) dipped into the kundi,18 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 on 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 Yazatas17 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 were 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 myazda19 (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)19 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 tashka (platter for the bread) had stood. The zoti had placed it outside the pavi, presumably for consumption by the (absent) congregation.

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18 As in the preparatory ceremonies (the Paragna), the kundi represents the well of running water. The kalasias is goblet-shaped.
17 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.
19 “O ye men! Ye who have deserved it by your righteousness and piety! Eat of this Myazda. . . .” (Modi, op. cit., p. 324.)
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. 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, 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 tashtha. 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 tashtha, 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 tashtha.

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 tashtha, 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 tashtha 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.

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 tashtha, 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 baj (i.e., humming with closed lips). He then began to pound, both priests reciting, and during the words of the formula Yatha ahu vairyo 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

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29 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.

30 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!”

32 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.

33 “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 Khwān. 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 barsum 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 barsum 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 bāj, 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 tashūta, 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 aasam 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 khwān. 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 tashūta 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-seventh24 (this chapter being the Sraosh Yasht, in praise of Sraosha25), the rites to help the departed soul were at an end. The final ceremonies were concerned with what, when writing of the Mandaeans, 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 tashūta, placed it behind the mortar, then, holding the barsum bundle, stood up upon the khwān upon which he had been seated, he and the raspi reciting together.

The sixty-second chapter, which is the Fire Litany (Atesh Nyaiš), had now presumably been reached. The zoti poured water from the haoma cup thrice over the barsum, then, holding the jivam tai, thrice alternately touched with it the base of the mortar and the barsum. After that, the jivam tai was thrice dipped into the jivam, and brought into contact with the barsum, after which the zoti thrust the jivam tai half down into the bundle of barsum 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 barsum 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 khwān, 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 tashūta 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

24 Lady Drower believes that a number of chapters were recorded by Darmesteter in a French work published about 1892.—Ed.
25 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 tashka, 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 tashka, 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 tashka 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 tashka and the barsom (still in his hand) several times, placed the cup on the right above the cup on the left, and then, touching tashka 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 tashka 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 aviranghana 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 mahru stands (now prone). The zoti descended from his khwan and gave the hamasor, 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 gurbana (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 kusha, which is "given" not once but several times during the masitaq, is undoubtedly related both to the "kiss of peace" and the hamasor. 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 baj, 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 yarina) 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 masitaq 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 qaninhas (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 Mandaeans; 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 calendardivision in Persia, probably in the days of Darius, in Babylonia of Magian times, and in neighbouring countries such as Sogdia. With the ancient Persians and the Magians the five intercalary days, called Farvardan or Panja, were especially devoted to the cult of the dead and the ancestors.

The Mandaeans, who call the five days Parwanasia 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 Mandaeans 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 Ros (New Year) “in our time coincides with the sun’s entering the sign of Aries, which is the beginning of spring.” 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 (kuasti), 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 (urwaram) 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 asem bai (fragrant fuel) occupied its usual place at the south of the enclosure.

The priest first recited the Bag 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.
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 chashmi (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 Yasa 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 Baj.”) As this occurs at the beginning of the ceremony it should be recited aloud and not “in baj” or with closed lips (see Modi, p. 380). It is in the Zend 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 Afrigan 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 (chipa), 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 Afrigan formule were then recited, together with the afrin (blessings) on the living. The Baj 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 Baj 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 myasda (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 Yasata.

The Mandaeen Zidqa Brikha, with its many variants of procedure and its food, fruits and drinks, is the obvious parallel to the Afrigan. 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 Afrigan is paralleled by the myrtle which, in the Mandaeen 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 Afrigan ceremonies, the zoti, or officiating priest, is the principal actor, whilst the rospe 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.