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Kalash Religion

(Extract from: The Ṛgvedic Religious System and its Central Asian and Hindukush Antecedents. A. Griffiths & J.E.M. Houben (eds.). *The Vedas: Texts, Language and Ritual*. Groningen: Forsten 2004: 581-636

§1.5. The Hindukush area: Nuristanis and Dards

The eastern Hindukush is a wide stretch of land that one cannot transgress in a few days if one is intent on moving from Bactria to the Indian (Gandhāra) plains. The Central Afghan highlands offer extensive green pastures and water: Airiianəm Vaējah (WITZEL 2000a) was an ideal land for the cattle herding Indo-Iranians. There are similar highlands in Central Asia, visible in the settlement pattern of the pastoral Kirghiz, in the Pamirs and in Wakhan. Their economy may have closely matched that of part of the Iir. speaking tribes (cf. STAAL 2001), which would explain the relative closeness of the Muzh Mountains at the time of the takeover of **Sauma*.

However, sources for Greater Afghanistan are few and far between: the Avestan texts, esp. the *Vīdēvdād*, some Greek notes, Bactrian inscriptions and letters, some medieval Persian and Arab texts, and recent ethnographic materials, especially ROBERTSON's report about Kafiristan before forced Islamization in 1895. One can only extrapolate from this report based on a year spent in the Hindukush in 1890/1 and compare its data with reminiscences recorded by the anthropologists of the past century (JETTMAR 1975, 1986, BUDDRUS 1960, 2002, FUSSMAN 1977, BASHIR & ISRAR-UD-DIN 1996). However, we now know how much and how quickly a local religion can change even in these remote mountains (JETTMAR 1975: 394 sqq., whose summary is, by and large, followed in the sequel).

As for the influences pre-Vedic religion might have received in the mountains of the Hindukush and the Pamirs, we must extrapolate from such modern sources (but cf. Jettmar 1975: 179 sqq., BUDDRUS 2002). Just as in the other areas discussed so far (or as in Nepal, MASKARINEC 1998, Witzel 1997c: 520-32), we must assume many layers of developments and external influences. Nevertheless, the older Hindukush religions, their pantheon and their rituals can be reconstructed to some extent even from our recent sources, but this would lead too far here. There are, however, a number of typical features that allow to sketch the outlines.

To begin with, the valleys of Nuristan in E. Afghanistan inhabited by the Nuristani (Kafiri) speaking tribes that form a third branch of IIr., while the neighboring valleys of northern Pakistan are inhabited (apart from a few recent Nuristani immigrants that have arrived in Chitral over the past hundred years), by various Dardic (NIA) speaking Muslim populations such as the Kalash, Kho, Shina etc. Only the larger part of the Kalash, living in three of the western valleys of Chitral, have retained their old, pre-Islamic religion and rituals, while the rest of the Nuristani and Dardic speaking peoples have retained, as Muslims, only vestiges of their former beliefs. However, though the languages of the Nuristanis and Kalash belong to two different, not mutually understandable subfamilies of modern IIr., they share many common concepts, beliefs and often even figures of the pantheon, though normally under different names. The isolated Kalash have received strong religious influences from pre-Islamic Nuristan. For that reason, most of the religious traits of both areas can be treated together.

Both groups (and to a large degree also the other Dards, including the Kashmiris), also share some features that are general 'Himalaya-Pamir-Hindukush' and in all probability represent an ancient, common substrate (TUIE 2000, cf. BENGTON 1999, 2001, 2002). These must be separated from what *may* appear to be Vedic. In the sequel, Hindukush religion is described according to its traditional Nuristani (N.) features, but Kalash (K.) peculiarities are always indicated.

Common traits of these 'mountain religions' --- often extending all along the Himalayas --- include the following. There is the prominent role of shamans (*pshur*, *wrear*, *deal* N., *dehar* K., LIEVRE & LOUDE 1990) and related items: the use of flat circular drums, of various types of psychopharmaca (wine, fly agaric, rhubarb, mead, Pashto *hum* ~ Kalash *sámani*; cf. also NYBERG 1995), and a general pattern of goat sacrifice (already seen at Mehrgarh, near Quetta, 6500 BCE), with sprinkling of the blood of the victim. There also is a general pattern of belief in mountain fairies, now often called by their Persian name, *Peri*, but still called *Apsaras* in the Rājatarāṅgiṇī (3.465, 468-471 for King Raṇāditya's entering and disappearing in a mountain cave into the company of *Daitya* women). The Kalash distinguish between Suchi (*sīci*), who are helpers in the hunt and in the killing of enemies,¹ and the

¹ Note the role of the Apsarases as leading warriors to heaven: in the Epic (HARA 2001), in the Rājatarāṅgiṇī, for which cf. the Germanic Walkyries (WITZEL 1997b, n. 48); for the Kalash Varōti < *vātaputrī*, cf. *gandharva*

Varōti who are the more violent and angry male partners of the Suchi, reflecting the later Vedic (and typical medieval Kashmiri) distinction between Apsarases and Gandharvas. Certain mountains are the favored seats of the fairies, especially the impressive, 7708 m high pyramid of the Kailāsa-like Tirich Mir in the North of Chitral (~ *Meru* KaṭhB, *Meros* Arrian, *Anabasis* 1.6; *Sumeru*, Pāli *Sineru*; cf. **devameru*, Shina *dīamer* = Nanga Parbat, CDIAL 6533). In late autumn, the Peri descend to the high mountain meadows.²

A few key features that highlight the position of Hindukush religion in between the Iir., BMAC and Vedic religions will be summarized and discussed in some detail, as they by and large even now remain unknown to Vedic specialists, in spite of BUDDRUS 1960 and the selective summary "d'un domaine mal connu des indianistes" by FUSSMAN (1977: 21-35), who, even with an "esprit hypercritique comme le nôtre" (1977: 27), overstresses (post-Vedic) Indian influences (1977: 69; for a balanced evaluation of the linguistic features, see now DEGENER 2002). However, both Hindukush and Vedic mythology, ritual, and festivals, in spite of many layers of developments and mutual influences, tend to explain each other very effectively; cf. the similar case of Nepal (Witzel 1997c: 520-32).

§1.5.1. Mythology

Nuristani deities were praised in songs called *bem* (= Ved. *bráhma*n, BUDDRUS 2002: 123). There is a creator god, appearing under various names, no longer as Father Heaven, but as lord of the nether world *and* of heaven: Imra (*Yama Rājan), Māra 'death' (N.), Dezau (**dih*, CDIAL 14621, from N.) or Paidagarau (*paydagaráw*, K.). Sometimes he has taken over, like Zeus, some characteristics of Indra (he kills a snake, like the ṚV Indra). He also is the ancestor of humans or their creator (uncharacteristically, out of mud). However, just as Yama has a twin sister Yamī, so has Dezau (*ḍizáw*, K.):

vāyukeśa ṚV 3.38.6, and the Avestan mountain range *Vāiti.gaēsa* 'whose hairs (trees) are tossed up by the wind' (= modern Bādgīs), WITZEL 1972: 184 sq.

² Reflected in the Nīlamata Purāṇa and the Rājataranḡiṇī: both Piśācas and Nāgas stay for half a year each in the Kashmir Valley, see WITZEL 1994: 220 and n. 82; cf. Nuristani *nang* (= *nāga*, cf. FUSSMAN 1977: 36 sqq.), and the Prasun river (f.) *Lu-nang* (*lu* = *deva*, BUDDRUS 2002: 129); note also the mountains Nanga Parbat and (?) Nandā Devī, popular etymology < **naṅgā*? Cf. the many Kashmir mountains in *-nāg*.

Dezālik (*ḍizālik*, K.), the goddess of birth, similar to the Kafiri Nirmali (N. < *nirmalikā*).

Heaven consists of seven round disks, clearly an influence of the South Asian (probably, originally Near Eastern) preponderance of this number, as compared to Northern Eurasian nine (also seen in the ṚV and in Nepalese Shaman songs, MASKARINEC 1998, where 7 appears next to 9).

More importantly, there is an Indra-like figure, often actually called *Indr* (N., K.) or *Varendr* (K., *waræ̃n*, *werín*, **aparendra*). As in the Veda, the rainbow is called after him: Ved. *indra-dhanīṣ*, N.: Kati *indrō~*, *i~drō~*, K. *indrē~*, etc. (CDIAL 1577); when it thunders, Indra is playing Polo (or, when Munjem moves, BUDDRUSS 2002: 125); Kal. *indōcik* 'lightning' < *indradyotyā* (CDIAL 1576); and the earthquake is called **indreṣṭi* 'impulse from Indra', Kati *indrī.c.*, *indrīṣṭ* (CDIAL 1582).

Indra appears, however, in various forms and modern 'disguises'; we have to assume many local developments and cross-wise influences from one local tradition on the other during the past 3000 years, as clearly seen in the god Balumain (§1.5.1, 5). The Kafiri Giwīṣ/Giwē'ṣ/Gyīṣ (< **gaviṣa* 'wishing for cows') is a daring, always successful killer and hero and reflects Indra's Ṛgvedic character well (ṚV *gaviṣ*, cf. *gaviṣṭi*); some other of his 'incarnations' stress fertility that he brought about or personifies, and also Indra's connection with rain when he appears as Wushum, Shomde (N.) and as Sajigor (Sajigōr, K.), who is indeed called Shura Verin (*šīra werín* < **śūra *aparendra* 'the hero, the unrivaled Indra'). *Waræ̃n(dr-)* or *In Warīn* (K.) is the mightiest and most dangerous god; the location of his shrine was assigned by bow shot, which recalls Indra's *Bunda* bow (see §1.4, above). Another god, Munjem 'malik' (*munjem* < **madhyama* 'middle'; *malék* < Arab. *malik* 'king') is the Lord of Middle Earth and killed, like Indra, his father, a demon. He pressed him down, took his head to the upper valley, his feet to the lower valley and covered him with earth,³ all of which is reminiscent of the Puruṣa/Ymir and Chin. (< Austric) Pangu myths. Most interestingly, Mahandeu (*mahandéo*, K.) and Mon/Mandi (*Māndi*, N., < **mahān deva*), too,

³ The same story is found among the Nuristani Prasun: Munjem kills his father and buries him, his head up in the valley and his feet down (BUDDRUSS 2002: 125); cf. further §1.7. on the founding legend of Srinagar; SNOY (in JETTMAR 1975) compares some Sherpa and Panjshir myths (lower Panjshir Valley = 'the feet of Panjshir'). JETTMAR (1975: 78), however, denies the cutting up of Munjem's father.

is a war god, a negotiator with the highest deity, and he is everywhere and accessible like Indra. Mon/Mandi has a golden body, appears as Zebu bull and collects clouds (cf. the bull/horse form of Tištriia, opponent of the demon of drought, Apaoša).

Even the recently popular Balumain (*baḷimain*, K.) has taken over some of Indra's features: he comes from the outside, riding on a horse. Mahandeu had 'cheated' him, like other Indra figures, from superiority.⁴ Balumain is a culture hero who, among others things, taught how to celebrate the Kalash winter festival (Chaumos).

Like the Ir. *Indra *Vṛtraghan, the Hindukush Indra has a demon-like counterpart, *Jeṣṭan* (K., < **jyeṣṭha?*), seen on earth as a dog; the gods (Devalog, cf. N. *dilū*) are his enemies and throw stones at him, seen as the shooting stars.

There are many other deities, which cannot be treated here;⁵ however, the goddess *Jeṣṭak* (*jéṣṭak*, K. < **jyeṣṭhā*, or **deṣṭrī?*), the Dis(a)ni (< *dhiṣaṇā*) of the Kafirs, is important: she is the goddess of the hearth and of life force; she protects children and birth giving women, as are the Jach (*.j.a.c.* < *yakṣ(in)ī*, K.), a whole category of female spirits of the soil or of special places, fields and mountain pastures.

§1.5.2. Ritual

Hindukush ritual has many Ir. and IA features, too (*pace* FUSSMAN 1977: 34). Kafiri religion had priests (N. *wutō*, *utō* < *hotṛka?* CDIAL 14176; note K. *iṣṭikavan* 'priest', from *iṣṭikhék* 'to praise a god', still found by

⁴ In the Kafiri south, Indra remained the patriarch of a divine family: Gish is his brother (cf. the Epic Upendra?), Disani his daughter, Pano his son, Bagisht (a water deity) his nephew, whose myth, recorded by G. Morgenstierne, is found at <http://www.nb.no:9000/nirmali/nirmali/Imra/Kareik/Bagisht-at.mov>.

⁵ For example, Praba(zōn) < ṚV *pravabhrá*, another form of Indra, is generally feared and no woman is allowed near his shrine; his *pru* (*pū.*~) festival is connected with the grape harvest and the making of new wine, which is poured, like Soma, into the fire and only then is allowed to be drunk. Note that wine is ritually pure, and more so even than snow or spring water (TRAIL & COOPER 1999: 90, s.v. *ḍa*, 320 s.v. *uk*), for which compare the Kashmirian ritual (Nīlamata 465): new wine (*navya madya*) is drunk *on the snow* after the first snow fall; cf. WITZEL 1994: 243, n. 253. --- Or, some spirits take form of small children: the upper part of their body is black, the lower one red, for which cf. the Vedic Rudra.

MORGENSTIERNE in 1929),⁶ bards and shamans. However, in Kalash religion the priests are missing now (only some shamans, *dehár*, remain). Instead, there is a special role for half-grown boys, who are treated with special awe, and who combine, like Brahmācārins, pre-sexual behavior and the purity of the high mountains, where they tend goats for the summer months. The same degree of purity cannot be attained by men who interact with women and other impure entities in the villages.

Purity is very much stressed, just as in the Veda or in Hinduism. In Kalash religion it is centered around altars, goat stables, the space between the hearth and the back wall of houses (as modern Himalayan/Newar practice), and also in periods of festivals; the higher up in the valley, the more pure the location. By contrast, women (especially during menstruation and birth), as well as death and decomposition, and the outside (Muslim) world are impure, and, just as in the Veda (and Avesta), many cleansing ceremonies are required, even for the average householder, if purity was infringed upon.

In Kalash ritual, the deities are seen, as in Vedic ritual (and in Hindu Pūjā), as temporary visitors. Other than Nuristani shrines, Kalash ones (*dūr* 'house' < Ved. *dīr*; *malosh*) are located, with the exception of the women's house (Jeṣṭak Han), under the open sky at trees (juniper, oak, cedar), and they are characterized by a wooden board or a stone altar. There always is an opening, apparently to the other world of the gods (as in shrines for the Newar deity Nāsa Dyo). In 1929 MORGENSTIERNE still saw the effigy of a human head inside such holes; cf. the (lost) 'head of the sacrifice', so important in Vedic ritual (HEESTERMAN 1967, WITZEL 1987); cf. further old Celtic practices.

Fire is generally used at rituals, but next to the altars, and not *inside* an altar as in Vedic religion; blood is sprinkled there, unlike in India where it is regarded as polluting, except for Tantric or tribal rituals. Horses, cows, goats and sheep are sacrificed.

Hindukush ritual makes use of several forms of sacred drinks, especially wine (vines grow locally, and are attested already by Alexander's Greeks, who thought of Dionysos). Indr, or similar gods, have a vineyard; he defends it against invaders, and an eagle appears. When the invaders shoot at him with arrows, he creates a rock slide, killing them. This may reflect a faint Kafiri echo of the old IE and IIr. myth of the eagle bringing the sacred drink. Crows, however, represent the ancestors, and are frequently fed, also at tombs

⁶ Incidentally, if *wutō* < **hotṛka*, this would be an indication of the IIr. age of this important ritual term: it is also found in Avestan *zaotar*, the title of Zaratuštra in the Gāthās.

(with the *left* hand), just as in the Veda and in parts of modern India and Nepal (WITZEL 1986: 163).

In general, solemn Kalash ritual seems to be of *potlatch* type (*namĪs* < Arab.), as KUIPER has proposed for the Ṛgvedic one. By organizing rituals and festivals (up to 12 are mentioned, the highest form being *biramōr*) with many offerings of goats and also cattle, one gains fame and a greater voice in the local assemblies. It seems that just as in the ṚV, the offered cattle join the herd of the offerer after death, and perhaps his rank is preserved as well. --- Importantly, the former local artisan class was excluded (K., N.) from public religious functions (cf. FUSSMAN 1977: 68), just like the Vedic Śūdras.

§1.5.3. Festivals

Finally, in order to better understand Hindukush religion and to compare it with Iir. and BMAC religion, it is important to take a brief look at the division of the year and the major rituals/festivals (*khawsāṅgaw*, K.) associated with it. A common division seems to be that into two moieties, Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter. For example, Māra (~ Yama Rājan) is welcomed in Spring, and Munjem (~ Indra) in the Fall. Among the Kalash, the pastoral god Sorizhan protects the herds in Fall and Winter and is thanked at the winter festival, while Goshidai does so until the *Pul* festival (*pū.* < *pūrṇa*, full moon in Sept.) and is thanked at the Joshi (*joṣi*, *žōšī*) festival in spring. This reminds of the two (ritual) halves of the year (*uttarāyaṇa*, *dakṣiṇāyana* in the *gavām ayana*),⁷ of various similar instances in the Himalayas,⁸ and the division of the year into a dry and a moist part in the BMAC, Avesta and ṚV (as discussed above).

⁷ Note that this may be the origin of the term *sam-vatsa-ra* 'year' : when all calves, cows have been brought together, at the end of the yearly pasture period in the hills, followed by the end of the cycle of sunrises (dawns = cows/calves). Cf. ṚVKh 5.5.6: *saṃvatsare svapaso yajñiyam bhāgam āyan*. Note, however, also the other terms of the Vedic five year cycle: *pari-*, *idā-*, *id-vatsara* and *vatsara*, Ved. Ind. II 412, EWAia s.v., FALK 2002: 78, FALK 1982.

⁸ Cf. n. 42. Just as in Kashmir, the deities also change in Kalash land: in late Autumn, the Peri descend to the mountain meadows and they are asked to return to the peaks in spring (JETTMAR 1975: 390); Balumain visits in December. JETTMAR (1975: 78) compares the male part of the year in Fall/Winter and female one in Spring/Summer with Tajik beliefs, and notes that the water, stored in ice/snow, is released in Spring to fertilize the female

The most important Kalash festival is the Chaumos (*cawmōs*, Khovar *chitrimas*, importantly < *cāturmāsyā*, CDIAL 4742),⁹ which is celebrated for two weeks at winter solstice (c. Dec. 7-22). It has significant repercussions in the foundational myth of the Kalash (and Nuristanis), which will follow. At this festival the visitor god Balumain appears. Impure and uninitiated persons are not admitted. Purification is achieved by a waving a fire brand over women and children and by a special fire ritual for men, involving a shaman waving juniper brands over the men. The 'old rules' of the gods (Devalog, *dewalōk*) are no longer in force, as is typical for year-end and carnival-like rituals. Differently from other festivals, drum and flute are now forbidden, and only the human voice is allowed. The ritual takes place at a Tok tree, a place called Indrunkot, or *indréyin*, clearly indicating the older concept of Indra as focus of this festival; in fact, Indrunkot is sometimes believed to belong to Balumain's brother, In(dr), lord of cattle. Balumain is offered specially baked bread, often in the form of sacred animals, such as the ibex. This is later taken up to his mountain seat by 'shepherd king' (*buḍālak*) and offered along with goat milk.

In the ritual, a fire is constructed out of superimposed, crossing twigs ('a fortress') much like a Vedic one, and a goat, especially its heart, is offered into the fire. Ancestors, impersonated by the young boys (*ōnjeṣṭa* 'pure') are worshipped and offered bread (cf. DOLLFUS 1989:69 sq.) The children hold on to each other and form a chain (Ved. *anvārambhaṇa*) and snake through the village. (This chain should represent the Vedic *tantu* string of the ancestors, WITZEL 2000b.).¹⁰ A fox chase is included as the fox is Balumain's dog. (In the Altai the bear is the 'dog' of the mountain god).

The men must be divided into two parties: the pure ones have to sing the well-honored songs of the past, but the impure sing wild, passionate, and obscene songs, with an altogether different rhythm. This is accompanied by a

earth, cf. above, on BMAC iconography. Note also the role of Indra at year's end, and that of other visitor gods, such as the *marebito* of Japan.

⁹ This etymology is important as it could indicate Vedic ritual influence. But, by contrast, *hotṛka/zaotar*/Nur. *wutō* is already Ir. (see §1.5.2.); note also: Joshi (*joṣi*, Khovar *chilinjušt*) festival in spring < *yajuṣya*, CDIAL 14768.

¹⁰ But note also the sexual connotations (JETTMAR 1975: 386). --- It may also echo that of the heavenly river, connecting heaven and earth, symbolized by the Sarasavatī in the Anvārambhanīya Iṣṭi, WITZEL 1984: 253, n. 71. The winter dances are echoed by the same type of dance --- but this time by women --- during the Joshi festival in spring.

'sex change': men dress as women, women as men (Balumain also is partly seen as female and can change between both forms at will).¹¹ Modern dress, such as of tourists, is included now.

At the central point of the ritual, Balumain gives his blessings to seven boys (certainly representing the seven of the eight Devalog who actually received him), and these pass the blessings on to all pure men. At this point, the impure men resist and fight. When the *nagayrō* song with the response *han sarías* (< *samrīyate* 'flows together', CDIAL 12995) is voiced, Balumain showers all his blessings and disappears. At this crucial moment --- it seems that of solstice, i.e. change of the year --- the pure get weaker, and the impure try to take hold of the (very pure) boys, pretend to mount them "like a hornless ram", and proceed in snake procession (see above). This action creates mixture and fusion (like Balumain's change between male and a female form), so important for the fertility and life of the year beginning now. Things then return to normal.

Much of this reminds of the solstice festival in neighboring Tibetan Ladakh (DOLLFUS 1987) as well as in the Veda, of the Mahāvratā and the form it has taken in the second pressing of the Soma ritual (WITZEL 1997a: 398-400, 404), and also of reflections in myth. The one that corresponds to 'Indra's opening of the Vala', a typical New Year myth, is found among the Nuristani in two main versions, summarized here.

§1.5.4. Creation myths

First, the recovery of the lost Sun and Moon by the gods (ROBERTSON 1896: 385, 28; further Prasun and Urtsun versions, following JETTMAR 1975/1986 (who used BUDDRUSS' unpublished materials; however, see now BUDDRUSS 2002).

There was no sun, no moon. It was very dark. A demon (Espereg-era) brought sun and moon into his house, right and left of a waterfall.¹² The god Mandi changes into a boy, and goes to the mother of Espereg-era. Mandi is not allowed to open a certain door. He tries to do so, pushes in his finger, this turns golden; finally, he breaks the door and

¹¹ Note that the shaman, too, often has a female double that accompanies him throughout life; cf. the alternating male/female lineages of the Kham Magar shamans (OPPITZ 1991).

¹² Cf. Mithraic and Iranian-related Armenian myths about David of Sassoun; further BUDDRUSS 2002; ultimately, the descent of waters as Sarasvatī/Gaṅgā may be intended (WITZEL 1984: 217 sq., BUDDRUSS 2002: 128, 130); see next note.

sees the waterfall, the sun, the moon and a horse. He puts the Sun on his right shoulder, the Moon on his left, and rides out of the house. The dark world becomes bright. Espereg-era follows them, Mandi cuts off all his seven heads, drags him to the right side of the valley and covers him up.

The God Mara tells him to share sun and moon with the rest of the world; he carries them up to heaven, where they are ordered to go about in circles. Mara then creates humans, gives them cattle, teaches them, goes up to heaven and disappears.

The other version is more concerned with the actual conquest of the 'house' of the sun (Kati in Bumboret, Urtsun and Lutdeh; Prasun version following BUDDRUSS, as reported by JETTMAR 1975).

The gods assemble. In the upper part of the Valley there is a house, near heaven, where a demon lives. He has much wealth. If he is killed the world will become well. The gods decide to fight him. They call God Mandi who gathers other gods as he marches up the valley, finally including also the female deity Disni. Halfway up, they sit and deliberate. They discover the house. Mandi goes there, sees an old woman and asks her about the house. "It is a house, between up and down; inside there are seven brothers (called *Dizano*, cf. *Dezālik* of the Kalash) who have many things: the sun and moon, gold, silver, water, fields where they sow". The Old woman explains how to make the rope visible by which the house hangs between heaven and earth.

Man(d)i goes back to the gods but forgets, three times, what he had been told; finally, another god follows him (cf. the vulture and Saramā, JB 2.240-2) and reports back to the gods, who tease Mandi. The gods shoot arrows at the house, but as it is of iron, the arrows are repelled (cf. the *ayas* forts in the Veda). They ask Disni to sow seeds, which ripen quickly, and are threshed. The chaff attaches itself to the thread and it is visible in white.

Mara makes two-pointed arrows which cut through the copper, silver-, gold and iron thread. The 'flour castle' crashes down to earth. The gods jump against its door, but it does not open. Dis(a)ni tells Mandi to look at her thighs¹³ which are white and full. Mandi gets excited, jumps against the door and breaks it. He enters with a dagger and kills all seven demons. The gods draw them outside and bury them.

§1.5.5 Kalash myths of winter solstice

The act of reviving the Sun is repeated by the Kalash in the Chaumos (*cawmōs*) festival at Winter solstice; this is now dominated by the god Balumain (*baḷimain*). He is the typical 'visitor god' from far away, and is rarely seen. Such visiting deities are also found in Kafiristan (noted by MASSON in 1844), and are also common, as *marebito*, in old Japan. Apparently, Mahandeu had cheated Balumain from superiority, when all the

¹³ Cf. the Jpn. Iwato myth, with Uzume dancing, exposed, and stamping loudly on an upturned bucket (cf. WITZEL 1995b); cf. in the Mahāvratā: young women carrying water vessels go around three times, stomping their right feet, shouting '*madhu*', then pour out the water.

gods had slept together (a euphemism, K.) in the *Shawalo*¹⁴ meadow; therefore, he went to the mythical home of the Kalash in Tsiyam (*tsíam*), to come back next year like Indra at year's end (RV 10.86, WITZEL 1997a: 394; cf. 1997c: 520 sqq.). If this had not happened, Balumain would have taught humans how to have sex as a sacred act. Instead, he could only teach them fertility songs used at the Chaumos ritual, exemplified by the explicit, chorus-supported male/female exchanges of 'dialogues' such as RV 10.86.

He arrives in Kalash land in early December, before solstice, and leaves the day after. A myth tells how he was at first shunned by some people, who chased him with their dogs, and therefore were annihilated. He comes from the west, the (Kati Kafir) Bashgal valley. But, in spite of this, the mythical country of the Kalash, in the east or south, is also connected with him. Clearly there are several layers of mythology, the later one being the introduction from Kafiristan. He always comes riding on a horse, as also said in the secret songs addressed to him.

He was awaited by seven Devalog of the Kalash land (cf. the seven Ādityas?) and they all went to several villages, e.g. Kamadeo, where he was received only by dogs and therefore destroys the village. The people of Batrik village, however, received him with seven pure, young boys whom he took with him (therefore one only sends men and older boys to receive him nowadays). Several items mentioned in his ritual reception allow to identify him, at least in part, with Indra.

Sometimes Balumain is seen as female. When he turns right, he is male, when he turns left, he is female. The shaman, in trance at the sacred Tok tree, identifies and addresses Balumain with Kushumai (*kuṣumáy*), the goddess of fertility, and the festival 'king' honors her. There is a myth about Kushumai's staying away from Balumain's reception, back on her own mountain. Balumain turned towards her, and he in fact became Kushumai, and is now addressed as such.

Balumain is the typical culture hero. He told the people (of Batrik) about the sacred fire made from junipers, about the sowing ceremony for wheat that involved using the blood of a small goat he had brought with him, and he asked for wheat tribute (*hushak*) for his horse. Finally, Balumain taught how to celebrate the winter festival (see above). He was visible only during his first visit, now he is just felt to be present.

¹⁴ Which in Kalash means 'spotted' (*šáwaḷa*), like a snake; not possible < Skt. *śabala*, rather, from N. Kati *šawilī* 'pregnant': the place is situated on the western boundary of the Kalash valleys with the Kati Kafirs, on a high pass.

§1.5.6. Hindukush influences: a summary

In sum, the Hindukush area shares many of the traits of IIr. myths, ritual, society, and echoes many aspects of Ṛgvedic, but hardly of post-Ṛgvedic religion (*pace* FUSSMAN 1977). They may be summarized as follows.

In myth it is notably the role of Indra, his rainbow and his eagle who is shot at, the killing of his father, the killing of the snake or of a demon with many heads, and the central myth of releasing the Sun from an enclosure (by Mandi < Mahān Deva). There are echoes of the Puruṣa myth, and there is the cyclical elevation of Yama Rājan (Imra) to sky god (WITZEL 1984: 288 sqq., *pace* FUSSMAN 1977: 70). Importantly, the division between two groups of deities (Devalog) and their intermarriage (Imra's mother is a 'giant') has been preserved, and this dichotomy is still re-enacted in rituals and festivals, especially the Chaumos.

Ritual still is of IIr. type: Among the Kalash it is basically, though not always, temple-less, involving fire, sacred wood, three circumambulations, and the **hotṛ* (? , N. *wutō* 'high priest'). Animal sacrifice, at square fire places, is very prominent; it is carried out by decapitation (as in ṚV, SCHMIDT 1973) and by offering parts of it into the fire or into holes (cf. Avest. *maya?*, and perhaps even with the 'lost head of sacrifice', still seen by MORGENSTIERNE). Sacred drink (wine < **Sauma* < mead), is prominent; consumption is allowed only after Indra (as Praba) has been offered to. Ritual often is a potlatch-like merit festival (KUIPER) meant to gain status and to confirm rank. There are year-end rituals (*cawmōs* < *cāturmāsyā*), involving the two moieties of the gods (Devalog and others) and of society with a Mahāvratā-like carnival, and there are other seasonal festivals within the two halves of the year.

Society stresses the aspect of purity (as in India, Iran); this affects the position of women, and results in the exclusion of artisans from ritual (like the Śūdras). There is exogamy of clans, and intermarriage is allowed again, as in the Veda, only after 7 or 4 generations. As in IIr., there is a great importance of oaths, sworn at special ritual places.

Some features already have their Vedic, and no longer their Central Asian form (e.g. dragon > snake), and there is clear South Asian influence as well, such as the prominence of the number 7 (7 heavens, 7 gods, 7 boys in ritual).

One may wonder, however, about the exact nature of the Yakṣ(iṅ)ī and Shuci as local Hindukush or as S. Asian female spirits. The stress on the purity of the mountain regions, as habitat of fairies (Varōti < *vātaputrī*), and the black/red demons (like Rudra) seems to be local. Many of the Hindukush

features further elucidate what we observe in the ṚV (Gandharva, Rudra, Apsaras, Yakṣa ṚV+) and especially in the AV, as features of the deities, demigods and spirits living on the (high) mountains. Some items clearly belong to the ancient mountain cultures of the Hindukush-Pamir-Himalayas (*pace* FUSSMAN 1977), and have not been taken over, or only fragmentarily so, into Vedic religion. Examples include the shamans (except for the ṚV Muni) and their rituals (except for a trace in the Vājapeya, and maybe some healing ceremonies in the AV); the role of boys and adolescents as semi-priests (note the description of the Brahmācārin in the AV); the centrality of goat sacrifice and blood, of sacred twigs (juniper), and of megalithic monuments.

In sum, all of these features of Hindukush religion are in need of further, much more detailed study, not just by anthropologists but certainly by Vedic specialists. While the Iranian side of IIr. religion is not followed up further in this context, a brief closer look is taken at the Indian side, as seen in the Ṛgveda.