

“A FEW NOTES ON AUSPICIOUS HORSES.”*

Read on 26th November 1902.

President—MR. KHARSETJI RUSTAMJI CAMA.

This is my second paper before our Society on the subject of the horse. My first paper was on “Horse in Ancient Iran,” and it was read before the Society on 30th January 1895.¹ In this paper, I propose submitting a few notes on what constitutes an auspicious horse from the point of view of the people of Gujerat. Most of these notes have been collected from the folklore as heard by me in Bulsar, in the year 1897.

Before coming to the subject proper of my paper, I would like to say, at first, a few words on the subject of horse-shoeing, as a horse-shoe also is considered an auspicious thing. These few words are suggested to me by a very interesting article entitled “The Folklore of Horse-shoes and Horse-shoeing,” by Dr. George Fleming, C.B., in the August 1902 number of “The Nineteenth Century and After.”²

The horse-shoe is considered an auspicious thing in this country as well as in Europe. In many a house in Bombay, we see a horse-shoe fixed on the threshold or on the door. About six months ago, a friend, who accompanied me on my morning cycle ride, suddenly got down from his cycle and picked up an old horse-shoe and placed it in his pocket, saying, it was an auspicious thing to find a horse-shoe thus on the road.

Dr. Fleming says³, that “The obscurity prevailing with regard to the early history of shoeing, and especially its origin is, as with some of the other arts, very great.” Dr. Fleming then traces references to horse-shoeing in the books

* Journal Vol. VI, No. 6, pp. 255-63.

¹ *Vide* above pp. 79-93. *Vide* Journal of the Anthropological Society, Vol. IV, No. 1, p. 1.

² “The Nineteenth Century and After,” No. 306, August 1902, p. 309.

³ *Ibid*, p. 311.

of the ancient Romans, Greek, Arabs and other nations. He has not referred to ancient Persia. Dr. Fleming then further says¹, that "there can be no doubt that horses were shod in the early centuries of our era, and very probably long before that time in this country and the Continent. But by whom was the art introduced? The Huns are stated to have had their horses shod when they invaded Europe. It would appear to be an established fact that nail-shoeing was practised by the Gauls long before they were conquered by the Romans, and it is even inferred that this kind of shoeing originated among the equestrian peoples of Central Asia, and was introduced into Europe by the Cimbri, who established themselves in the north of Gaul, Belgium and Brittany some centuries before the Christian era. The evidence is in favour of this recent origin."

I think that "this remote origin," referred to by Dr. Fleming, can be traced to ancient Persia, and that, that ancient country was the home of the art of horse-shoeing, as it was that of the horse and horse-racing. I will quote here what I said of horse and horse-racing in my paper on "Horse in Ancient Irân."²

"Ancient Irân, *i.e.*, the whole of Central Asia once ruled over by the ancient Persians is believed by many to be the first home of the horse. Again, as Sir Robert Kerr Porter says 'We have ample testimony from the old historians that the best cavalry of the East were derived from this part (Siahdan in Persia) of the Great Empire of Persia;'. . . . Again Irân is also believed to be the home of horse-racing which spread from there into Europe. Chariot-races played an important part in the Mithraic festivals that were celebrated in honour of *Khorshed* and *Meher*, *i.e.*, Sun and Mithras, the angel of light. The Olympic games of Greece took their chariot-races from the Mithraic festivals of Persia. When Rome took its Mithraic worship from Greece,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 312. ² *Vide* above p. 80. *Vide* Journal Vol. IV, No. 1, p. 2.

it seems also to have taken its horse-racing from that country. According to Plutarch, chariot-racing was first held in Rome in the time of Pompey and that was in honour of Mithras. With their invasion the Romans are believed to have introduced into England their well-known chariot-races. Thus we find that though England is now prominent in horse-racing, ancient Irân was the country, where it first began.

“Herodotus, the father of history, says of the ancient Persians that ‘Beginning from the age of five years to twenty, they instruct their sons in three things—to ride, to use the bow, and to speak truth’ (Bk. I, 136). According to Zenophon, horsemanship was established among the ancient Persians by the law of reputation. . . . It appears then, that of all animals, the horse was a special favourite of an ancient Persian from his very young age. He was, as it were, a member of the family of an ancient Zoroastrian, who not only prayed for himself and his family, but also for his horse.”

Thus, Iranian literature is replete with many references to the love of an Iranian for his horse. It appears quite natural then, that the country, that was the home of the horse and the home of horse-racing, and where horse was looked to, as it were, as a member of the family, and was prayed for, like other members of the family, should also be the home of the art of horse-shoeing. We have clear references in the Avesta, that the art was known in ancient Persia, long before it was known in Europe.

From the Meher Yasht, we learn, that the art of shoeing the horse was known in ancient Irân, long before the dates of the earliest references to the art given by Dr. Fleming.

We read in this Yasht (X. 125)—

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Translation.

“Four stallions draw that chariot, all of the same white colour, living on heavenly food and undying. The hoofs of their fore-feet are shod with gold, the hoofs of their hind-feet are shod with silver; all are yoked to the same pole, and wear the yoke and the cross-beams of the yoke, fastened with hoofs of Khshathra vairya (i.e., metal) to a beautiful. . .”¹

The word for hoof in the above passage in Avesta is *safa*
 𐬰𐬎𐬎 Pah. 𐬨𐬀𐬰, Per. سناب or سم, Sansk. शङ्ख, Germ.
 Hulf, Eng. hoof. So the English word *hoof* comes from the
 ancient Aryan word *safa*.

We have another passage in the Avesta, which shows, that
 lead was used for horse-shoes, and that it was gilt with gold.
 We read in the Srôsh Yasht (Yaçna LVII. 27).

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¹ Darmesteter, S. B. E. XXIII., p. 152.

Translation.

“Four white brilliant, handsome, pure, sagacious, spiritual horses swiftly carry him. Their hoofs are of lead overlaid with gilt of gold.”

The above passage of the Meher Yasht shows, that not only was the art of horse-shoeing known in ancient Irân, but that it had advanced in its evolution from a low state to a higher state, when precious metals like gold and silver were used to supply ornamental shoes. The passage further shows, that not only the art of horse-shoeing, but that of harnessing the horse, had developed to a higher state of perfection.

Dr. Fleming says that “extravagance was sometimes manifested when these articles were made of gold and silver.” It may be so in Europe and the western countries. But it appears from the Avesta that there was an additional object. In ancient Irân, these precious metals were, to a certain extent, looked to with an eye of sacredness. It may be from the idea, that what is dear, is to a certain extent sacred. The utensils of ritual and religious ceremonies are spoken of as golden. That this use of gold and silver in horse-shoes was intended from an idea of sacredness, is shown by the fact that the horses which are spoken of as being shod with golden and silver shoes, are said to be yoked to the chariot of Mithra, the God of Light, whose festivals led to the introduction of horse-racing into Europe.

Dr. Fleming refers to the ancient Cimbrai, Huns and other tribes, as introducing the art of horse-shoeing into Europe. It is possible, that they became the medium of introducing the art into Europe from Persia. The ancient Huns are referred to in the Avesta. They are spoken of as Hunus.¹ They, like the other hostile tribe of the Danus were hostile to the ancient Irânians. The Danus, who are spoken of in the Avesta (Yt. V. 73; XIII. 38) as a hostile tribe, seem to

¹ Yasht, XIII, 100, XIX. 86.

have given their name to the distant western country of Denmark and to rivers Danube, Don, Dneiper and Dneister. Similarly the Huns or the Hunus of the Avesta gave their name to distant countries like Hungary in Europe and Hanza in Afghanistan. It is possible, that the Huns coming into frequent contact with the ancient Irânians learnt the art of horse-shoeing from them and carried it to Europe during their later inroads into that continent. The hostility of the Huns to the Iranians seems to be as old as the time of Zoroaster himself, because Vishtâsp, the then King of Persia, who proved to be what Constantine was to Christianity, and Asoka to Buddhism, is said to be defending Zoroastrianism against these Hunus.¹

Again, one must remember that the Meher Yasht, or the Yasht in honour of Mithra, is an old writing. As the Mithraic worship of the ancient Irânians was the parent of the Mithraic rites and mysteries of the Greeks and the Romans, this Yasht in honour of the angel Mithra must have been written long before the introduction of Mithraic rites into Europe. So, the allusion to the art of shoeing in that old writing shows, that the art must have been known in Irân from very old times. As the ancient Irânians lived in mountainous districts, and as the horse was an animal very dear to them, it is quite natural that they resorted early to means to protect their hoofs from being worn out and injured by long rides in mountainous districts.

Dr. Fleming says², that "Among the Celtic tribes, the Druids, according to Rossignol, Thierry, Martin, Pictet and Echstein, reserved the monopoly of working in metals, and the occupation of the iron-worker or blacksmith being therefore claimed by that primitive priesthood, we can understand that it might then have possessed a sacred and mysterious character that invested it with much importance

¹ Yasht, XIII. 100, Yt. XIX. 86.

² "The Nineteenth Century and after," No. 306, August 1902, p. 318.

and entitled the shoer of horses to high rank and notable privileges¹ Up to the seventeenth century, kings, princes and nobles considered it necessary to know something of horse-shoeing, practically at least."

The reason, why the priestly class should have had the privilege of horse-shoeing in ancient times, seems to be the fact, that horses, horse-chariots and horse-racing, &c., were at first connected with religious festivals like the Mithraic festivals, and semi-religious gatherings like the Olympic Games.

Having spoken of horse shoes, we will now speak of auspicious horses.

The belief, that certain horses have auspicious marks on their bodies, and certain, inauspicious, is a very ancient belief. The belief was also prevalent in Persia. Of the horses brought before Rustam for his selection, Firdousi says:—

همه پیش رستم همی راندند . . . بروداغ شاهان همی خواندند

i. e., They drove all of them before Rustam and described the royal marks over them.

Some of the marks over a horse are considered auspicious and some, inauspicious.

The marks are formed by a peculiar cluster of hairs of different colours. The Gujarati word for the marks is (ભમરો) Bhamrô.

The following horses are inauspicious:—

1. The horse with a *Gôm* is inauspicious. The mark on the belly near the part of the body, round which the belt is put and which is known as ગોમ *Gôm*, is considered to be inauspicious, if not in its proper position. A Gujarati proverb says:—

ગોમ પડવે યુમ

નહીં તે લાવે સોનાની લુમ.

i. e., the mark *Gôm* may bring on misery (upon the owner of the horse); or if not so, it may bring in heaps of gold.

¹ *Ibid*, p. 315.

2. वाकर मुत्रो *Vanker mutro*, (lit. passing the stream of urine in a curved line) is a horse with a mark over the generative organ.

3. धांकणीया *Dhānkanīo*, i.e., one with a cover. Such a horse has a cluster of hair of two different colours. The black hair has a cluster of white upon it which covers it or *vice versa*. A horse with such a mark is inauspicious.

4. बेहरां ड़ेड. *Behenrāfōd*, lit. a breaker of water pots. Such a horse has two clusters of hair one over the other, one of which must be larger than the other. If the larger mark is over the smaller, it is called बेहरां ड़ेड, because, just as a large heavy pitcher of clay full of water, placed over a similar small one, crushes the lower pitcher, so the mark of a larger cluster of hair standing over a smaller one, indicates crushing misery to the master. But, if the larger cluster is below the smaller one, then there is nothing of inauspiciousness.

A woman with such marks of clusters of hair over her body is called वर खात *varkhār*, lit. one who would eat many husbands, i.e., such a woman is likely to have many husbands one after the other. A person marrying such a woman is believed to die early.

5. गण कुट्ट *Galkatoo*, lit. one who cuts a throat. A horse with two separate clusters of hair one near another over the throat is known as *galkatoo*. Such a horse is supposed to bring his master into a difficulty that might cost him his life.

6. आंसु धार *Ansoodhār*, lit. one shedding tears. Such a horse has a mark near the eyes. The possession of such a horse is supposed to bring such a grief to the owner as might make him shed tears.

The following horses are auspicious :—

1. देवमंड *Devmand*. Such a horse has a peculiar mark over his chest.

2. बेहरां चहुडाडि *Beherā chahuddoo*, lit. one having a number of pots, one over another. The marks of this horse

are the contrary of those of a બેહરાં ફેડ, above referred to. In his case the larger cluster of hair is under the smaller one.

3. પંચ કલ્યાણ *Panch kalyān*, lit. five kinds of happiness. Such a horse has whitish marks over the feet and a mark over the forehead. A horse that is પંચ કલ્યાણ overcomes the evil influences of all other bad marks.

Oxen also, are, like horses, auspicious or inauspicious. A Gujarati singer says:—

સોકી સાંપણીઆ ને આંડો

પહેલે આય ઘેર ધણી ને પછી ધરનો દાંડો.

i.e., an ox that is *soki*, *sānpaniō* and *bāndō* at first brings about the death of his master, and then ruins the whole family.

A *soki* ox is one, which has two marks over his neck, close to one another. It is so called from સોખ. *i.e.*, a second wife, taken in marriage notwithstanding that the first wife is living. Just as such two wives bring about quarrels and ruin in the family, these twofold marks indicate ruin.

A *sanpaniō* (lit. snake-like) ox is one that has a serpent-like mark over his body.

A *bāndō* ox is one whose tail is very short. An ox whose tail does not reach the lower part of his leg (તેડાં) is said to be *bāndō*.

A પુથાળો *puthālo*, *i.e.*, fat ox is considered to be an auspicious ox.

A Gujarati proverb runs:—

મરદ મુથાળો

બજ પુથાળો

ગાળી ઉલારી

બધરી કુળારી.

These lines mean, that a good husband is one who can extend his influence and control over others. A good ox is one that is fat and well formed. A good cart is that which slopes a little towards the hind part. A good wife is one that belongs to a good family.