

THE KASHAS OF THE IRÂNIAN BARASHNUM AND THE BOUNDARY LINES OF THE ROMAN LUSTRUM.*

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In many Parsee rites and ceremonies, furrows or boundary lines have to be drawn. These furrows

What is a Kasha?

or lines are called Karsha (کاشه)

in the Avesta, Kash (کاش) in Pahlavi and Kash (کش) in Persian. As they are popularly spoken of as *kashas*, we will use this word in this paper. The Avesta word Karsha is the same as Sanskrit Karshu (कर्षु). It comes from the Avesta root Karesh (Sanskrit कर्ष, Persian کشیدن) to draw.

(a) The principal ceremonies in which the kashas are drawn

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are the purification ceremonies. The principal purification ceremony is that of the Barashnum. This form of purification

has taken its name from the word 'bareshnum', which is the accusative singular of the word 'bareshnu' which means 'head'. In the description of this particular kind of purification in the Vendidad (Chap. VIII, 40), it is enjoined that the purification of the different parts of the body must begin from the head (bareshnu). Hence the word has given its name to the ceremony.

(b) The *kasha* or boundary lines are also drawn in the preliminary ceremony for the disposal of the dead. I have thus referred to this ceremony in my paper before this Society entitled "The Funeral Ceremonies of the Parsees: Their Origin and Explanation."¹

* Journal Vol. VIII, No. 7 pp. 520-30.

¹ P. 7; *vide* Journal of the Society, Vol. II, o. 7, p. 411.

“After placing the body on the slabs of stone or on the ground dug and prepared as above one of the two persons draws with a metallic bar or nail three “Kasha” or deep circles. This is intended to show that the ground within the circle is the ground temporarily set apart for the dead body and that nobody is to go to that part of the ground, lest he catch contagion.”

Thus, the object of drawing the *kashas* in the purification ceremonies and in the funeral ceremonies, is to draw, as it were, “Boundary lines,” within which the impurities, contagion or infection may be confined. It is to secure purity, safety and health to others, outside the lines or circle. In cases of infected districts, we now speak of “drawing the cordon.” In the Avesta language, that would be spoken of as “drawing the *kasha*.”

(c) There are other sets of ceremonies or rites in which also ‘*kashas*’ are drawn. They are generally known under the technical name of *pâvis*. The word *pâvi* comes from the word *pâv*, *i.e.*, pure. The word *pâv* is another form of *ba-âv* (*ba-âp* or *ba-âb*), *i.e.*, with water. As water is the principal thing with which an impure thing is purified, the word *pâv* is derived from *âv*, or *âp* or *âb*, *i.e.*, water. So, the word *pâvi*, which comes from the word *pâv*, means a boundary line which confines pure things within a limit and marks them off from impure things. So, the word *pâvi*, which is another form of *kasha*, and which also is a boundary line, has a signification, which, though similar, is reverse of that implied in the word ‘*kasha*’ of the purificatory and funeral ceremonies. By the word *pâvi*, is meant a boundary line which confines and preserves the purity of sacred things enclosed within it and which keeps away from it the impurities that are outside it.

These boundary lines (*pâvis*) of the third kind are drawn for the performance of liturgical ceremonies like the *Yaçna*,

the Visparad, the Vendidâd and the Bâj. In the Fire-temples where these ceremonies are performed, these *pâvis* are permanently drawn¹ by grooves in the stone work of the floor. In places other than the temples, which are temporarily prepared or set apart for the performance of these ceremonies, the *pâvis* are either dug in the ground or are prepared by spreading a quantity of sand over the place and drawing a furrow into it.

These *kashas* or *pâvis* of the Parsees are similar to the boundary lines of some of the ceremonies of the ancient Romans. These boundary lines of the Romans resemble more the *pâvis* of the Irânians than their *kashas*. They are intended to keep off impurities or evils from the place or places enclosed within the boundary lines.

The paper on "Lustratio" by Mr. W. W. Fowler in the book entitled "Anthropology and the Classics," edited by Mr. R. R. Marett, which has suggested to me the subject of my paper, gives us a good idea of the Roman *kashas* or boundary lines.

The Lustratio (purification) of the Romans resembles, to some extent, the Barashnum of the Irânians. Both are purificatory ceremonies. But, while the Irânians had confined their Barashnum to the purification of man, the Romans had extended their 'lustratio' to the purification of animals and even of cities and places. Among the Romans, processions, or "slow-ordered movements in processions so characteristic of the old Roman character,"² came to be associated with purifications. The processions, which are "characteristic still of the grandeur and discipline of the Roman Church in Italy," are, as it were, an heritage from ancient Rome.

¹ Vide "Le Zend Avesta," par Darmesteter Vol. I, Introduction p. LVIII, plate 1, for these *pâvis* in the Fire temple of the Seth Jejeebhoy Dadabhoy Parsee Fire-temple at Colaba.

² Anthropology and the Classics, by Mr. Marett, p. 169.

Among the Parsees, the practice of the Barashnum purification arose from the idea of removing physical impurities, caught, or believed as likely to have been caught, by coming into contact with dead bodies or with other decomposing matter. So, among the Romans also, the original idea of *lustratio* or purification arose from the idea of the removal of impurity, caught by "some mysterious miasmatic contamination."¹

The words *februim*, *februaire* are Latin words older than *lustrare* or *lustratio*. From them comes the word February, which was the month of purification among the ancient Romans. *Februum* was the material or object which was used by the Romans on particular occasions for purification. "Water, fire, sulphur, laurel, wool, pine-twigs and cake made of certain 'holy' ingredients, and at the Lupercalia, strips of the skin of a victim" formed such purificatory materials among the Romans.

Among the Irânians, water, *gaómez* (cow's urine), fire or rather its product, ashes, and pomegranate twigs (*urvarâm*) formed the principal purificatory materials. The *draona* or the sacred cake was required by the priest who performed the purificatory ceremony. Thus, we find that among the purificatory materials of the two nations, water, fire and the sacred bread were common.

From the fact, that fire and water are useful to give physical purification, they began to be used later as symbols of purification, both physical and mental or spiritual. Take for example, fire. The very root of the word is *pu*, Avesta *pu* (𐬨𐬀), Sanskrit प् to purify. Latin *pu-nire*, French *pu-nir* and English words, like purity, punishment, penalty, and purge, come from the same root 'pu', i.e., to purify. Air was

From physical purification to spiritual purification.

¹ *Ibid.* p. 170.

purified, whenever and wherever fire was burning. Thus, fire, the physical purifier, became a symbol of purification. The symbolism was then extended to its product, ashes, also among the Irânians.

The very word 'lustratio' or 'lustrum' has some indirect connection with fire. It is derived from "lucere, to shine." That, on which the light of sun, fire, etc., falls, is purified. So, it is natural, that fire should play a prominent part in the "lustrum" of the Romans.

According to Mr. Fowler, the abovenamed terms "*februum* and *februare* belong to an age, when material contamination e.g., from a corpse or from blood—in other words, from things 'taboo'—could be got rid of by magical means, *lustrare* and *lustratio* to an age when the thing to be driven and kept away is spiritual mischief." ¹

Mr. Fowler draws a line, in the case of the Romans, "between a magical period and a religious period." ²

Physical purification.

I am inclined to draw a similar line in the case of the Irânian purification, and I would distinguish the period, not as magical and religious, but as physical and spiritual (*tani va ravâni*). It appears that, at first, the purification was meant as a remedy for physical impurities, such as those likely to be caught from contagion or infection from diseased or dead persons. One must remember here what Professor Darmesteter says of the Funeral Ceremonies of the Parsees, in the description of which, he makes a great use of a paper on the Funeral Ceremonies read by me before our Society: He says:—

"On verra qu'elles (les cérémonies funéraires) se résument en deux mots,—deux mots d'hygiéniste: isoler le centre d'infection, détruire ce centre. Ce qui distingue la conception Zoroastrienne de la conception européenne, c'est que nous ne nous occupons d'isoler et de détruire l'élément mort qu'en cas

¹ *Ibid*, p. 171.

² *Ibid*.

de maladie dite infectieuse: dans le Zoroastrisme la mort est toujours infectieuse et contagieuse.”¹

Of the object of Zoroastrian purification, Professor Darmesteter says: “La purification a pour objet de chasser cette contagion qui passe du mort au vivant, du vivant au vivant, et la théorie de l’impureté et de la purification se réduirait en fait à une théorie de l’hygiène, n’était que cette contagion est conçue comme l’œuvre d’êtres surnaturels, que nos microbes sont érigés en Daêvas.”²

Shearing off the superfluities, the Avesta teaching of purification comes to the axiom of “Cleanliness is Godliness.” Professor Darmesteter says on this point “L’axiome *Cleanliness is next to Godliness* serait tout a fait Zoroastrien, avec cette différence que dans le Zoroastrisme *Cleanliness* est une forme même de *Godliness*.”³

From all these points, we see that the original idea of purification in Zoroastrianism was that of purification from physical impurities. But, latterly, a spiritual signification began to be added. Physical purity was considered to be an emblem of mental and spiritual purity. Even when there was no chance of physical contagion or infection, and so, even when there was no necessity of a physical purification, the rites and ceremonies of purification were gone into for mental or spiritual purification. A Zoroastrian, nowadays, when he goes through the purification of *nân* (Sanskrit *snân*, literally a bath), says that he goes through it for his *pâki-i-tanva*, *yaozdathrya-i-ravânrâ*, i.e., for the purity of his body and for the purification of his soul.

Mr. Fowler, in the passage quoted above, speaks of things ‘taboo’ among the Romans, such as a corpse or blood and says that material contamination from them was got rid

Things “taboo” from which physical purification was sought.

¹ “Le Zend Avesta” par Darmesteter, Vol. II. Introduction, p. XII.

² *Ibid*, p. X—XI.

³ *Ibid*, p. X.

of by, what he calls, magical means or purification. Among the Parsees, the things or sources 'taboo,' which give material contamination and which require purification, are the following:—

1. All dead matter, especially the corpse of a man or a dog, and things or persons that come into contact with these.
2. Women in their menses.
3. Women in child-birth.

Among the Romans and the Irânians, we find the following cases of 'taboo' and purifications common to both.

1. The Flamen Dialis, a priest of Jupiter, "an official of a highly organized religious system," was "afflicted with an extraordinary number of Taboos."¹
 - A Parsee priest who officiates within the inner circle of the fire-temple is similarly afflicted by various *taboos*.
2. Among both the nations, the women in child-birth required purification. The same was also the case with the newborn child.
3. After a funeral, the whole family was required to go through an ordinary purification.

There is one particular and principal difference between *februaire* and *lustrare*, the Roman processes of purification, and the Barashnum and the *Nân*, the Irânian processes of purification. Among the Irânians, the purification was an individual matter. Not so among the Romans. Among the Irânians, it were individual men who had come into contact with impurities that went through the purification. We do not find the whole community or village or city going through a purification process, in a body or a group. This wholesale process of a whole city being purified, brought with it the process of processions and processional rites

¹ Anthropology and the Classics, by Mr. Marett, p. 172.

among the Romans, the like of which we do not see among the Irânians.

Mr. Fowler thus explains the Roman process. "In order to understand clearly how this necessity of getting rid of hostile spirits came to suggest those solemn processional rites which we associate with the word *lustratio*, we must fully appreciate the fact that the earliest settlers in Italy who had any knowledge of agriculture found it a country of forest-clad hills; the river valleys were marshy and unhealthy, and the earliest settlements were in clearings made in the wood-land.

. . . The first thing, then, to be done was to make a clearing, and this was a most perilous task, for when you cut down trees and dig up the soil, how were you to tell what unknown spirits you might be disturbing and aggravating? They might be in the trees and the plants, they might be in the animals whose homes were in the trees and the ground, the rocks and the springs And when your clearing was complete, and you had settled down with your own household spirits . . . there was yet another difficulty of the greatest importance, *viz.*, to keep those wild ones still dwelling in the wood-land around you from encroaching on your clearing or annoying you in your dwelling

The permanent difficulty was to mark off your cultivated land from the forest and its dangerous spiritual population, in some way by which the latter might be prevented from making itself unpleasant. You must draw a definite line between good spirits and bad, between white spirits and black. Here it is that we find the origin of a practice which lasted all through Roman history, passed on into the ritual of the Church, and still survives, as at Oxford on Ascension Day, in the beating of parish bounds. The boundary of the cultivated land was marked out in some material way, perhaps by stones placed at intervals, like the *cippi* of the old Roman *pomerium*, from the wood-land lying around it; and this

boundary-line was made sacred by the passage round it (*lustratio*) at some fixed time of the year—in May as a rule, when the crops were ripening and especially liable to be attacked by hostile influences—of a procession occupied with sacrifice and prayer.”¹

The boundary-lines in the above Roman process of marking out the lines, within which evil influences cannot work,—a process which led to the extension of the process of “*lustratio*” to other spheres—resemble the Kashas in the Irânian purification of the Barashnum.

As Mr. Fowler says: “This religious process, the fencing out of hostile spirits by a boundary-line, and the discovery of the proper formulæ for preserving it and all within it, may and indeed must have been the work of ages. But once discovered, the principle of it could be applied to any land or other property of man, and also to man himself.”²

What Mr. Fowler means to say is this: The process of drawing out the boundary-lines round a city or a village, to keep off evil influences from the city or village, was extended to farms, to the property of man and then to man himself. In fact, what he means to say is that, at first, the process of lustral purification applied to large acres of land, then to farms, then to individual man. I think it is more probable that the process was the reverse. The original idea was that of purifying a man individually from foreign impure influences, physical and spiritual. That idea was latterly extended to larger spheres, to land and to farms, villages, and cities. Among the Irânians, it began with man and remained confined to man and his personal belongings.

The lustral rites of the Romans gradually spread and “we know that there was at Rome a lustral rite called *Amburbium*,

¹ “*Anthropology and the Classics*,” pp. 174-77.

² *Ibid* p. 182.

which probably took place at the beginning of the month of purification (February)."¹

Mr. Fowler, on the authority of Livy, describes a Macedonian method of the lustral process for purifying an army. The method was "to march the whole host in spring before a campaign between the severed limbs of a dog."¹ This reminds us of the use of a dog in the Irânian purification rite of the Barashnum.

The event of a whole army passing through the purificatory

How the process of purification led to "Reviews of troops" and to "Census." process of the lustrum was taken advantage of for holding a grand review of troops. Hence the word lustration came to mean 'a review of troops.'

Similarly, the event of a whole city "passing through the purificatory process of the lustrum was taken advantage of for holding a general census of the population. Hence the quinquennial periods of the Roman lustrum were the periods for taking the public census.

In this connection, one must note, that a similar case existed among the Hebrews. Just as the Romans took advantage of their quinquennial period of 'lustration' or general purification and took the census of their population at their Campus Martius, so among the Hebrew also, their purificatory ceremonies had some relation with their census. In fact, 'Numbers,' the very name of the Old Testament book, which refers to the purificatory ceremonies above referred to, shows, that it was so called, because the people were numbered.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.