



HAOMA II. THE RITUALS

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YASNA

Haoma yields the essential ingredient for the *parahaoma*, Pahl. *parahōm*, the consecrated liquid prepared during the main act of worship, the *Yasna*, and its extensions, the *Visperad* and *Vendidad*. Basic similarities between the Zoroastrian and Brahmanic *haoma/soma* rites (Haug, pp. 281-83; Henry; Thieme, pp. 71-77) establish their common origin, but marked differences developed between them. In Zoroastrian observance (except for the *Vendidad* service, probably not instituted until Sasanian times), the pressing may take place only between sunrise and noon, the “time of pressing” (Av. *hāvani-ratu-*, Pahl. *hāwan gāh*); and there are two preparations of *parahōm*, which are not identical. The second is repeatedly mentioned as a *zaoθra* “libation” in the Young Avesta, and some details of its preparation are given in the *Vendidad* and *Nērangestān*, as well as in certain Pahlavi books and *Persian Rivayats* (see Darmesteter, 1892-93, I, pp. xcii-xciii); and some Avestan manuscripts (Geldner, I, p. xxiv) have ritual instructions. Abraham Anquetil-DuPerron (I/2, pp. 81-260) gave some ritual indications with his French translation of the *Yasna* and Martin Haug (pp. 394-407) drew on unnamed Parsi priestly informants for a fairly full account of the rituals. In 1888 [Tahmuras Dinshaji Anklesaria](#) published the *Yasna* text with ritual notes in Gujarati. These were used by James Darmesteter (1892-93, I, pp. iii-iv, vi-vii) for ritual notes to his



French translation of the *Yasna*, for which he also consulted Anklesaria personally and other Parsi priests, and also drew on manuscript authorities. Uncharacteristically, however, this great scholar failed to mark the difference between the two *parahōms*, and Jivanji Jamshedji Modi in his account of the service (pp. 251-309) is not consistently clear on this (see p. 303). The rituals were again recorded with the text by the Kutar brothers and by Maneck Kanga and N. S. Sontakke, and subsequently Firoze Kotwal published a detailed account of the rituals as performed by the Bhagarias (q.v.; see Kotwal and Boyd, 1991). It is this account which is summarized here. Like Darmesteter, Kotwal noted small differences from the known Irani practice, and that of other Parsi priesthoods. The existence of minor variations in priestly usage is acknowledged already in the *Nērangestān* (see Tahmuras Anklesaria apud Darmesteter, 1892-93, I, p. xciv). Details of the Irani performance of the preliminary rites are given in the manuscript F23 (Dhabhar, pp. 15-17), published (as no. 36) by Kaikhosroo JamaspAsa and Māhyār Nawwābi.

These preliminary rites, Pahl. *nērangīhā ī arwēsgāh* “rituals of the place of worship,” are performed now by one serving priest, the *rāspī*. The Parsis call them the “preceding ritual,” *paragna*, a corruption of *paragra* (< Skt. *prakṛyā*; see Darmesteter, 1892-93, I, p. lxx, n. 1). For those of its rites which concern the preparation of the first *parahōm* three twigs of *hōm* are required (usually used dried), a twig of pomegranate, and pure water, drawn in Persia from a stream, in India from a well. The twigs are made “clean” by ritual laving, and “pure” by the utterance over them of the *xšnūman* of Hōm (see below), and they and the water are then consecrated by recital of more Avestan. The pomegranate twig is cut into pieces, which are put with the *hōm* twigs into a metal mortar (in the ancient rite, as the text shows, one of stone). The priest recites over it (as in *Y.* 25) the *xšnūman* of Zoroaster and of his *fravaši* (q.v.), which, according to the prophet’s hagiography, was brought to earth within a miraculous *hōm* stalk. He strikes the mortar and its pestle on the stone table before which he sits, and then the pestle against the inner rim of the mortar, to east, south, west and north, while reciting *Yasna* 27, which declares the forthcoming rite to be for smiting evil. He then pounds the twigs, pours over them some of the consecrated water, and empties the mortar, in three pourings, into one of two metal bowls. On this is set a metal strainer with nine holes. Between pourings he pounds the twigs again, then rubs the residue caught in the strainer against its holes, squeezes it dry, and drops it on the floor of the *pāvi* (ritual precinct). He rinses the strainer, puts it on the mortar, and places in it the *varas*, three hairs (Av. *varasa-*) from a bull’s tail wound



three times round a metal ring and tied three times with the sacred (reef) knot. This represents the hair sieve used originally. There follows a ritual straining of the already strained liquid over the *varas* in triple pourings between the mortar and two bowls, in a sequence repeated three times, so that finally the liquid is contained in the bowls. The priest then rearranges the ritual table, setting out three more *hōm* twigs and another pomegranate twig, and leaves the *pāvi* to procure milk, in Persia from a cow, in India from a goat (see Modi, pp. 278-79; Kotwal and Boyd, 1991, p. 71, n. 39). *Draxt ī āsūrīg* (q.v., vv. 47-52) suggests that this may be an old difference between Parthian and Persian practice. The milk is drawn into a vessel already half-filled with consecrated water. After returning with it to the *pāvi*, the *rāspī* picks up the residue of twigs, which he puts on a log by the fire to dry.

A second priest joins the *rāspī* as the celebrant, *zōt*, of the *Yasna*. This service has its own internal preliminaries, followed by the *Srōš drōn* (Y. 3-8). Then comes recitation of the *Hōm yašt* (Y. 9-11), which contains what appear to be very ancient elements. It lacks the formal features common to other *yašts*, but has the same intention, namely to honor an individual *yazata* (divinity). With Haoma is revered the plant *haoma*. The Avestan is recited without special ritual down to *Yasna* 11.8, when the *rāspī* takes one of the bowls containing *parahōm*, pours a few drops from it onto the *barsom*-tie, and hands it to the *zōt*. With *Yasna* 11.10 the *zōt* praises and prays to Haoma, then drinks the *parahōm* in three sips.

The liturgy for the second *parahōm* preparation begins with *Yasna* 22, called the “beginning of the *hōmast* section,” *hōmast* being probably the corruption of a Pahlavi phrase, written ideogramatically, meaning “*hōm*-pounding” (Kotwal and Boyd, 1991, p. 104, n. 112). During recitation of *Yasna* 25 the *zōt* puts the *hōm* twigs into the mortar. He pours on them a little of the milk mixed with consecrated water, adds the bits of pomegranate twig, and finally more consecrated water, saying in Avestan “these *zaoθras* are for the Good Ones,” that is, the Waters. The rituals that follow are essentially those of the *paragṇa*, but with even more thorough pounding and straining, the residue of crushed twigs being twice returned to the mortar for another triple pounding. The *varas* is not used in this second rite, but lies on the table in its metal dish. The ritual lasts into the beginning (Y. 28) of the *Ahunavaitī Gāθā*. *Yasnas* 29 and 30 are recited without special ritual, but during *Yasnas* 31 and 32 the *zōt* again pounds the twigs three times, straining some of the liquid into one of the bowls after each pounding, and each time returning any crushed residue to



the mortar. Finally, during *Yasna* 33, he empties the mortar through the strainer and squeezes out the last residue, dropping it on the *pāvi* floor. The *rāspī* picks it up and puts it beside that from the first *parahōm* preparation. During recital of *Yasna* 34, the bowl now containing all the *parahōm* is set on the base of the empty, inverted, mortar and covered with the metal milk-dish, a three-tiered arrangement which remains untouched during the ritual of the *ātaš zōhr* “offering to Fire” (q.v.), made formerly during the recital of *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti* (Y. 35-41; see Boyce, 1970, pp. 68-69). There is little ritual during the recital of the remaining four *Gāθās*, the two *Srōš yašts* (Y. 56, 57), or the linking texts. At *Yasna* 62, the *Ātaš niāyeš* “prayer for Fire,” the *rāspī* puts on the fire the now-dried residue of twigs from the two *parahōm* preparations. Although this is done at an appropriate point in the liturgy, it is not a *zaoθra* of the pressed *hōm* twigs to fire, but a ritually proper way to dispose of combustible consecrated materials (after the service the *barsom*-tie etc are similarly burnt, see Kotwal and Boyd, 1991, p. 129, n. 156). In a Pahlavi codex (ed. JamaspAsa and Nawwābi, no. 32, p. 120) the instruction is: “(at) *urwarəm vā* the pounded *hōm* and *urwaram* (are) to be given to the fire (*ātaxš dādan*).”

The liturgy for the *āb zōhr*, “offering to the Water(s)” (q.v.), begins with *Yasna* 62.11. During the recital of *Yasna* 62, 64, 65 and 68, the *zōt* repeatedly pours the *parahōm* between the two bowls and the now reverted mortar, so that all three vessels hold exactly the same mixture of *parahōm*, which itself contains every drop of the consecrated extract and the milk (except that used in *barsom*-lavings). The service having ended with *Yasna* 72, the *zōt*, attended by the *rāspī*, carries the mortar to the stream or well from which pure water had been obtained, and makes libation from it, in three pourings, invoking Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā (see ANĀHĪD). The *parahōm* remaining in the mortar and bowls is usually given to the person(s) who engaged the priests to perform the ceremony (Kotwal and Boyd, 1991, p. 129, n. 154). Drinking it in a state of ritual purity is believed to be highly beneficial for body and soul. A little is therefore sometimes reserved to be given to the new-born or dying (Modi, pp. 306-7; Boyce, 1966, p. 115, n. 5; idem, 1970, p. 64; Kotwal and Boyd, 1991, p. 18). If not needed, this may be poured away over the roots of fruit trees (Tahmuras Anklesaria, apud Darmesteter, 1892-93, I, p. 441, n. 8).

This second preparation of *parahōm* appears to be connected with the Old Avestan part of the liturgy. It has been suggested that *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti*, as well as the *Gāθās*, was composed, in whole or in part, by Zoroaster (K. Hoffman apud Barr, p. 285, n. 7; Gershevitch, 1968, p. 18; Narten, pp. 35-37),



and that in it ancient elements were modified by him in accordance with his new teachings (Boyce, 1992, pp. 87-94; idem, 1995, pp. 25-26). If this is so, it may reasonably be supposed that he made modifications also in the rituals, one being very possibly the addition of milk to the *parahaoma*. This would explain why this ingredient is always mentioned in Young Avestan references to this *zaoθra*. The doctrinal significance of the milk is plainly that the animal creation is thus represented. The intention of the *zaoθras* to fire and water appears to be to purify and strengthen the inner forces (*mainyu-*) of these two creations and through them the inner forces of the earth, plants, and animals, so that they may better withstand the polluting attacks of evil. It seems very possible that Zoroaster replaced with this rite an old one, like that maintained by the Brahmans, in which priests imbibed the *parahaoma*, sharing it with the gods; and that he did this because he regarded *haoma* as potentially dangerous in its potency to people (cf. his probable denunciation of it, as *mada-*, in Y. 48.10). An extract from it was drunk by warriors to stimulate their battle lust, and (on Vedic evidence) it was prominent in the cult of warlike Indra, to Zoroaster a *daēva* (see [DAIVA](#), [DĒW](#)). If then he restricted its use in his own act of worship to yielding a libation to the Waters, it must be supposed that, as his religion spread, priestly converts in ever increasing numbers were reluctant to abandon the old rite, believed to give the celebrant an increase in awareness and power, and so this came to be reinstated as a preliminary to the one he had established (see Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, pp. 159-60. Cf. the observations by Schlerath, p. 139). The use of the *varas* in it only suggests the profound conservatism of those who, on this hypothesis, gained its reacceptance. In living observance the ingredients in both preparations of *parahōm* are present in very small quantities, while the Parsis keep *hōm* twigs for at least thirteen months before use to shed any impurity incurred on the journey from Persia (Kotwal and Boyd, 1991, p. 72, n. 43, cf. Anquetil-DuPerron, II, p. 533; Haug, p. 399).

Pahl. *Drōn ī hōm*, Pahl/Pers. *Hōm Drōn*, Pers. also *Drōn-e Zabān* (of the tongue)

This short service (see [DRŌN](#)) was still solemnized in Persia during the 1960s. A few details of its rituals are given in a service book published in Bombay without date by Kaykosrow son of Hērbad Kōdābaḡš, son of Jamšid of Mobāraka near Yazd. For a full description, based on observation and on oral instruction by Dastur Kōdādād Nēryōsangi of Yazd, see Mary Boyce (1970, pp. 72-77). No reference to this service is recorded among the Parsis. Its purpose is to consecrate for Hōm the portion assigned to him from each animal sacrifice,



namely “the two jaw bones with tongue and left eye” (Y. 11.4; on the symbolism of this see Duchesne-Guillemin, 1966, pp. 25-26). The *yazad* is represented (Y. 11.3, 6) as cursing him who withholds this portion, for it was believed that unless domestic animals were killed with full rites, their spirits would not be properly released, and either they, or Hōm himself, would be there to accuse their killers of this sin when their souls were judged (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, pp. 149-50; idem, 1966, p. 109, n. 4 for Pahl. and Pers. references). Until recently, at festivals and funerary occasions there would regularly be such sacrifices, with the *Hōm drōn* performed for lay people by the priest of their *hūšt* (the area assigned to a priest); and the *Nērangestān* (Kotwal and Kreyenbroek, II, chap. 47) gives some instructions about its solemnization during the *Yasna*, but away from the ritual precinct. For it three *hōm* twigs are used instead of the three chips of wood of other *drōn* services, and the tongue of the sacrificed animal is put on the *drōn* with the other offerings. While reciting the Pāzand prologue to the service, the priest takes the tongue in his right hand (his left is holding the *barsom*) and circles his closed hand round his right eye, passes it along his right jaw, and up round the eye again, preferably three times. He then replaces it, and solemnizes the service in the usual way, using, while reciting *Yasna* 3-8, the *xšnūman* of Haoma, which in its “greater” form occurs in *Yasna* 10.21: “We worship tall, golden-green Haoma! We worship radiant Haoma, furtherer of the world! We worship Haoma *dūraoša-* (*haoməm zairim bərəzantəm yazamaide haoməm frasmim fradaṭ.gaēθəm yazamaide. haoməm dūraošəm yazamaide*). After *Yasna* 7.15 he repeats the Pāzand prologue and ritual with the tongue; and during the recital of the *Ahunwar* (q.v.) after *Yasna* 7.25, and at the words *aēsma baoiḍi* “fuel, incense” in *Yasna* 8.1, he places the three *hōm* twigs, one after the other, with incense, on the fire. The tongue is then roasted on the flat ritual ladle and returned to the *drōn*. The service completed, the priest puts the tongue with a piece of the *drōn* in a metal bowl, to be given with recital of one *ašəm vohū* (q.v.) to a dog (see DOGII, p. 468). In some Pahlavi lists of obligatory observances (Boyce, 1970, pp. 76-77), *Hōm drōn* is used as a term for blood sacrifice with full rites.

A COMMUNAL NOWRUZ RITE

Until the 1960s at Nowruz in the strongly conservative village of Šarifābād near Yazd, and presumably once throughout the Iranian community, all who could, laity and priests, partook of the second *parahōm* consecrated that day during a *Visperad* service (Boyce, 1977, pp. 233, 235). This was to gain strength



and vigor for the coming year, and prefigures a rite foretold for *Frašō.karəti* (q.v.), when the blessed will partake of a *parahōm* prepared from the mythical “White Hōm,” which, with the fat of the sacrificed mythical bull, Haḍayans (q.v.), will confer immortality on their resurrected bodies (*Dādestān ī dēnīg*, Purs. 36.100, 47.16; *Zādspram* 35.15). The White Hōm, also called Gōkarn (Av. Gaokərəna-) grows at the source of the world river, Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā, and “derives its contentment from the *āb zōhr*” (Williams, ed., *Pahl. Rivāyat* 46.14), that is, from all *parahōm* libations made with the natural *hōm*.

THE YAZATA HAOMA

The Yazata Haoma, known in Persia as Hōm Izad, in India as Hōm Yazad, is the divinization of the force or spirit (Av. *mainyu-*) within the *haoma* plant (cf. Boyce, 1992, pp. 52-53; Lommel, p. 187). In the *Hōm yašt* Haoma manifests himself to Zoroaster “at the time of pressing” in the form of a most beautiful man and exhorts him to gather and press *haoma* (Y. 9.1-2). He is frequently hailed as “the Golden-Green One” (*zairi-*), also as “golden-green-eyed” (*zairi.dōiθra-*). He is “righteous” (*ašavan-*, q.v.), “furthering righteousness” (*aša-vazah-*), and “of good wisdom” (*hu.xratu-*, cf. Skt. *sukratu-* “wise” of Soma; see *AirWb.*, cols. 246, 254-55, 1681, 1772-74, 1819). Through the potency in his plants he grants “speed and strength to warriors, excellent and righteous sons to those giving birth, spiritual power and knowledge to those who apply themselves to the study of the *nasks*” (Y. 9-22). As the religion’s chief cult divinity he came to be perceived as its divine priest. Ahura Mazdā is said (Y. 9.26) to have invested him with the sacred girdle, the *aiwiyāṅhana-*, “star-adorned, spirit-fashioned—the good Mazdā-worshipping religion,” and it is declared (Yt. 10.90) that he “was the first to offer up *haomas* with a star-adorned, spirit-fashioned mortar upon high Harāiti,” the *yazata* of mountain plants upon the highest mountain peak. Ahura Mazdā is also said (Yt. 10.89) to have installed Haoma as the “swiftly sacrificing *zaotar*” for himself and the Aməša Spəntas (q.v.), that is, for all other beneficent divinities. His sacrificing to Mithra, Sraoša, and Drvāspā (q.v.) is specifically mentioned (Yt. 10.88; Y. 57.19; Yt. 9.17). To sacrifice swiftly was required out of compassion for the animal, and as compassionate sacrificer and *yazata* of plants on which animals browse (cf. Boyce, 1977, p. 260), Haoma is worshipped as protector of all beneficent animals, and is associated with Vohu Manah (see BAHMAN) and his divine fellow-workers, Māh, Gəuš Urvan (see GĒŪŠ URUUAN), and Rāman (*Persian Rivayats*, ed. Unvala, I, pp. 263, l.17-264, l.4, tr. Dhabhar, p. 264). He also aids Tištrya (Tištar), Wāta (Wād) and Apam Napāt (q.v.) in bringing rain



(*Greater Bundahišn* 6(B).3; *Zādspram* 3.8; *Dēnkard*, bk. 3, chap. 1.12.5), so that plants and animals may thrive.

In *Yasna* 9.3-11 Zoroaster is represented as asking the *yazata*: Who first pressed *haoma*, and for what reward? He is told Vīvahvant, whose reward was to have Yima Xšaēta (Jamšēd) as son; Āθwya (see ĀBTĪN), to whom θraētaona (Ferēdōn) was born; and θrita, whose sons were Urvāxšaya and Kərəsāspa (Karšāsp/Garšāsp, q.v.). These sons figure in both priestly and heroic traditions, as does Fraŋrasyan (Afrāsiāb, q.v.), in whose story, too, Haoma is assigned a part. In identical verses in *Yašt* 9 (v. 17) and *Yašt* 17 (v. 37), Haoma, named between the Pēšdādiān θraētaona and Kavi Haosravah (Kay Ҷosrow), like them entreats Druvāspa and Aši (q.v.) for a boon, that he may bind Fraŋrasyan and lead him to Haosravah, so that the latter may kill him to avenge Syāvaršan (Siāvakš/Siāvaš). This feat is alluded to in *Yasna* 11.7, where the sacrificer is exhorted to cut Haoma’s share swiftly, lest the *yazata* bind him as he bound Fraŋrasyan, deep in the earth, “metal-encircled.” The last words refer to Fraŋrasyan’s famed *han-kana* (*Yt.* 5.41; see Darmesteter, 1883), a miraculous underground kingdom ringed by metal and secure from all mortal attack. In *Yašt* 19:17 it is Haosravah who is said to have bound Fraŋrasyan, but probably once Fraŋrasyan’s story became contaminated by the legend of the *hankana*, which gave him an impregnable refuge, it had to be a divinity who would drag him out to his death, a task then assigned to mighty Haoma. The story, fully euhemerized, is preserved in Ferdowsi’s *Šāh-nāma* (ed. Khaleghi, IV, p. 313 ff., tr. Warner, IV, p. 260 ff.), where Hōm appears as a holy mountain-dwelling solitary, immensely strong, who binds Afrāsiāb with his sacred girdle and drags him from his *hang*, which is described here as a deep cavern (see [HANG-E-AFRĀSIĀB](#)). In a Persian *rivāyat* (*Persian Rivayats*, ed. Unvala, I, p. 263, 12-13, tr. Dhabhar, p. 263) it is Haoma’s fellow cult-divinity Gōšurun (Av. Gəuš Urvan) who binds Afrāsiāb, which suggests a basic priestly concept of the power inherent in the ritual offerings to overcome evil.

This development in this one legend did not affect Haoma’s veneration as *yazata*. Proper names were given in his honor. There is Av. *Haomō.xvarənah* “Having fortune through Haoma” (*Yt.* 13.116). Elamite tablets yield *u-ma-ka* and *umakka* for OPers. *Haumaka, *Haumāka (Mayrhofer, nos. 8.1715, 1716), and in Middle Persian a *hwmk* for Hōmag is attested (Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 130), while Sogdian has *γwm* (Ancient Letters, q.v.) and *γwmd’t* “Given by Haoma” (*Mugh documents*; see Henning, 1965b, p. 252; idem, 1977, p. 627). A *yasna* may be devoted to him, and it is suggested that it should be done in times of famine,



or before battles, or for help in sickness (*Persian Rivayats*, ed. Unvala, I, p. 284.14-16, tr. Dhabhar, p. 278). Probably because a *yašt* to him exists, he alone of the “non-calendar” divinities may be taken as patron *yazata* by an individual at initiation, and he may be venerated on any day with the recital of *Yasna* 9 and 10. Among traditionalists he is still especially prayed to by women wanting children and those desiring illustrious sons. Modern reformists have abandoned his observances.

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