



KAËTA

KAËTA, an Avestan word whose approximate meaning is ‘soothsayer.’ The only occurrence of the word is in *Yt.* 8.5 to the star *Tištrya*, where we find: “We worship . . . *Tištrya*, for whom the (following) yearn: cattle and draft animals, and men who formerly committed acts of violence, and *kaētas* who formerly practiced deception (*kaētāca parō družintō*).” Owing to the lack of meaningful context, Bartholomae (*AirWb.* 428) could only give “— ? —, probably a term for a hostile creature.” Fortunately, there are Middle Iranian cognates which suggest the semantic range of the word. Pahlavi *kytī kēd* is attested in contexts which show that the *kēd* was someone who could foresee future events.

The historical romance, the *Kārnamag ī Ardašīr*, recounts (*Kn.* 11.4-6) that Ardašīr was worried about his inability to control rebellious provinces:

And he reflected, “It should be asked of the sages and the wise, the *kēds* and the *kundāgs* (*az dānāgān ud frazānagān kēdān ud kundāgān*) whether it is such that it has not been destined from our *xwarrah* [see [FARR\(AH\)](#)] to maintain the rulership of *Ērānšahr*.” . . . And he sent one man from among his own trusted (men) before the *kēd* of the Indians (*kēd ī hindūgān*) to make inquiry about the restoration of *Ērānšahr* under the monarchy. Ardašīr’s man, as he came before the *kēd* of the Indians, as soon as (the *kēd*) saw the young man (and) before the young man spoke, he said to the young man, “You have been sent by the king of the Persians for this purpose: ‘The kingship of *Ērānšahr* will it come to me in the monarchy?’”

The *kēd* gives an involved prediction that Ardašīr’s grandson, Ohrmazd,



conceived secretly by his son Šāhbuhr and the daughter of Ardašīr's arch enemy, will inherit the monarchy. As this all comes to pass eventually, Ardašīr says, "It is just as the kēd of the Indians said!"

In the legend of Zoroaster (*Dk.* 7.2.5), people curious about the wonder of the entry of the xwarrah into the future mother of Zardušt "then approached the kēd," who explained that "the abundant possession of xwarrah of his material existence will derive from his body-xwarrah" (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, p. 601.17, and see Bailey, 1943, p. 36). Later in the legend we find (7.5.6; *Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, p. 645.2-3): *ēwag ān ī pas pas az pēš-kēdīgīh ī Zardušt abar-gōwišnīh ī dēn ō Wištāsp ud kišwarīgān paydāgīhast*. The syntax of the text as it stands is difficult to make out. However it becomes easier if we take *abar-gōwišnīh . . . kišwarīgān* as a gloss on *pēš-kēdīgīh*. Thus: "One (wonder) is that which was revealed after Zardušt's prognostication [the verbal imparting of the Dēn to Wištāsp and the inhabitants of the region]."

Finally, in Pahlavi, there occurs a gloss in the *Frahang ī Pahlawīg* (12.14; Nyberg and Utas, pp. 10-11, 46, 82; Henning, p. 92; Bailey, in *BSOS* 7/4, 1935, p. 978) *kyt' = +kyšd'r*, where the final alef of the first word appears to be an Aramaization and the reading of the second word is not at all certain. In Parthian occurs *qydyg'n u m'rygr'n* 'astologers and sorcerers' (Henning, p. 84; and cf. *kēdān ud kundāgān* of the *Kārnāmāg*). More remote cognates are SogdB *cytk* 'spirit, genius' and Khot. *cāya-* 'magic, sorcery' (Bailey, 1979, p. 100). Etymologically, *kaēta-* (IE *kwoit-ó-) is best understood as a nomen agentis a-stem to *□kait-/cit-* (OInd. *□cet-*) 'to perceive.'

It is evident from these contexts that a kēd was someone who could foretell the future, though nowhere are we told by what means such prognostications would be made. They may have included astrology. However, when the *Kārnāmāg* makes specific use of astrology in its narrative (see Panaino), the astrologer is called *axtar-mār*, lit. 'star-reckoner.' The Indian kēd could just as well have been a clairvoyant yogi as an astrologer. Further, the very word *pēškēdīgīh* 'prediction, prognostication' points to a general meaning as 'soothsayer.' Accordingly, Parthian *qytyg* is probably also 'soothsayer' rather than W. B. Henning's 'astrologer' (pp. 84, 92).

Related Avestan terms of uncertain meaning are *kayaḍa-* and *kāiḍya-* (*kayaḍya-*).



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