



## KARAPAN

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**KARAPAN** (or Karpan), designation of members of a class of daivic priests opposed to the religion of Zarathustra. These priests were a part of the general society in which Zarathustra was active, as reflected in his *Gāthās*, but they seem to have receded into legendary status already in the formulaic *sāθraṃ kaoyam karafnqmca* “of tyrants, *kawis* and *karpan*s” of more recent *Yašt* compositions; and in the Pahlavi literature they figure prominently only in the legends of Zarathustra.

In the *Gāthās* the term scans metrically as a disyllabic stem *karpan-*. Only the nom. sg. *kar<sup>a</sup>pā* and nom. pl. *kar<sup>a</sup>panō* are attested in Gāthic, while Standard Avestan has only the gen. pl. *kar<sup>a</sup>fnqm* (cf. *mar<sup>o</sup>θnō*). Chr. Bartholomae (*AirWb.*, col. 455) compared OInd. *kālpa-* masc. ‘ritus,’ thus approximately ‘ritualist.’ However, the existence of the OInd. verb *□kalp-* or its derivatives in Iranian is quite dubious (see Mayrhofer, 1986, p. 324). Still, a formation parallel to *māθrān-* would not be impossible; though one would expect *\*kar<sup>a</sup>pānō* in the plural. V. I. Abaev’s (1956) attempt to connect with Av. *xrafstra-* was in error. Most likely is W. B. Henning’s comparison (1951, p. 45) of Xwar. *karb-* ‘to moan, mumble.’ Rather than originally a pejorative designation ‘mumbler,’ as supposed by Henning, it would have referred to a priestly functionary, as shown by M. Schwartz (1985, pp. 479-81), who cogently derived the term from *\*□karp-* (OInd. *□krap-* /*kṛp-* ‘to pray for, implore; lament’) with the meaning ‘supplicator, hymnist.’ Alternatively, if Henning’s ‘mumbler’ were to be retained, the *karpan* would have been similar to the Vedic *adhvaryu*, who recited in an undertone while performing his duties.



Although it may be pure coincidence, in the *Dēnkard* (IX.3.20; ed. Madan, p. 618.2-3) we find *dandīd Brātrōrēš ī karb* “Brātrōrēš the karb muttered.” However that may be, *kar<sup>a</sup>pan-* may best be taken as a primary derivative in *-an-* (IE *-en-*). Since Vedic *ṅkrap-* is a *seṭ-*root, its derivatives *kṛpaṇyá-*, *kṛpaṇyú-* and *kṛpaṇá-* suggest that the vocalization of our word may have been *\*kṛpan-/kṛfn-*. A secondary derivative, *karapō.tāt-* (*karpatāt-*) fem. ‘*karpan*-ship’ is also attested. The Pahlavi glosses give only *karb* (*klp*).

Central to Zarathustra’s complicated conceptual system was the Cow, who, because of his metaphorical use of language, can be the cow in the pasture or hieratic poetry or both simultaneously (see [ZOROASTER](#), online). At Y. 44.20 Zarathustra asks if the Daiwas have ever been good rulers, “through whom the *karpan* and the *usij* [another priestly designation; OInd. *uśij-*] have given the Cow to Wrath, and whom (?) the *kawi* made to lament for (her) soul.” At 32.12 a certain *karpan* is singled out as an abuser of the Cow: “Mazdā speaks bad (words) to those who ruin the life of the Cow with sayings of bliss [see Schwartz, 2006, p. 87, n. 6], because of whom Grāhma the *karpan* chose the rule of the \*violent and the Lie over Truth.” The Cow also figures at 51.14: “the *karpans* are not allies, contrary (as they are) to the laws of pasturage, intolerant of the stranger’s cow.” In alliance with evil rulers the *karpans* also afflict men. Thus, 48.10: “When will he smite the piss of this drunkenness by which, maliciously, the *karpans* inflict racking pain (on people) and by which, deliberately, the evil rulers of the countries (rob them)?” Again, now specifically allied with *kawis*, Y. 46.11: “By virtue of their powers the *karpans* and *kawis* yoke to evil deeds a mortal in order to destroy existence.” Zarathustra’s attitude toward the *karpans* and the *kawis* appears to be that, although they had held legitimate offices in society, “they [viz. Grāhma and the *kawis*] squandered the *karpanship* and the *kawiship*” (Y. 32.15). An exception, of course, was Kawi Wištāspa, who exercised good rulership by becoming Zarathustra’s patron and protector. Irrespective of the usage of *kaví-* in OIndic, *kawi* was a princely title (as *AirWb.*, col. 442; Schwartz, 1985, p. 479). The reason that they are cited together with the *karpans* is that each exercised power in their respective domains of the temporal and the sacred.

The association of the *karpans* with wielders of temporal power (*xšaθra*) carries over to the repeated formula of the *Yašt*: *sāθraṃ kaoyam karafnaṃca* “of tyrants, *kawis* and *karpans*,” where the first two terms form a kind of hendiadys for those exercising misrule, in contrast to those abusing the sacerdotal function. Restricted as they are to only formulaic status, the



*karpan*s had become only a distant memory by the time they are mentioned in the *Yašts*.

Turning to the Pahlavi literature, we find the term *karb* restricted almost exclusively to the legend of Zardušt, where, both individually and as a group, they figure prominently in attempts to murder the young Zardušt. Individual *karbs* are named in the sources. Such names may possibly have some root in historical reality, though this is impossible to verify; and, in any case, they are so much a part of the “romance” genre of literature that their activities are altogether in the realm of fantasy. Prominent among those mentioned by name are *Dūrāsraw* the *karb* and Tūr ī \*Brādrōrēš, both of whom were particularly adept in the art of sorcery. For the literature see the following: *Dēnkard* VII, especially chap. III (tr. West, 1897, pp. 35-50; Molé, 1967, pp. 28-41); *Zatsparam*, chaps. IX-XII; *Zand ī Wohuman Yasn* III.3; *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, chap. 36).

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