



KAYĀNIĀN I. KAVI: AVESTAN KAUUI, PAHLAVI KAY

KAYĀNIĀN

i. Kavi: Avestan *kauui*, Pahlavi *kay*

Kavi is the Indo-Iranian term for “(visionary) poet.” The Avestan word is declined according to an archaic *i*-declension, which also includes Young Avestan *haxi*- “companion”: sing. nom. *kauuā* (YAv. *kauua*), acc. *kauuaēm* (< **kavayam*; cf. OInd. *sakhāyam*), gen. YAv. *kauuōiš*, plur. nom. *kauuاییō* (*kāuuاییas-cā*), gen. *kaouiqm* (cf. *haxa*, *haxāim* < **haxāyam*, *haxaiō*, *hášqm* < **haxyām*). There is an ambiguity in the acc. *kauuaēm*, which is also a form of the derived adjective *kauuاییa* found in *kauuaēm xʷarənō* (gen. *kāuuاییehe-ca*) “the *xʷarənah* of the *kauuis*” (see below, xii).

The term may be older than Indo-Iranian, if Lydian *kaveś* and the Samothracean title cited by [Hesychius](#) as *koīēs* or *kóēs* are related and, perhaps, to be compared with Scandinavian *skue* “see” and English *show*, German *schauen*, etc. (Watkins, p. 88).

Indo-Iranian poets also performed the sacrifices (*yaj-/yaz-*), the primary purpose of which was to fight darkness and evil and reestablish order in the universe by making the sun rise and the rains fall. Of the Iranian *kauuis/kays*, *Kauui Haosrauuh/Kay Husrōy* and *Kauui Vištāspa/Kay Wištāsp* play central roles in the universal eschatology, while the role of the others is more



generally to keep the forces of evil at bay.

In the oldest Indic poetry, the *Rigveda*, the term *kaví* refers to poets and priests and is frequently applied to gods (Agni, Indra, Soma, Mitra, Varuṇa, and others) performing this function. The *kavís* of old (*pūrva*, *pūrvyá*) were “singers” (verb *gṛ-*), “libators” (*hotar*), and sacrificers (verb *yaj-*); they “announce” (verb *śams-*) “words” (*vac*), “well-spoken words” (*sūkta*); and they serve as the gods’ charioteers (*vahni*) in the race to make the sun rise from the “rock” (*aśman*) and the world ocean. Their poems are made by their thoughts (*mati*, etc.), and they send their “poetic visions” (*dhī*) into the divine world. “Sustainers of *ṛtá* and discoverers of non-*ṛtá*, they set out on “great paths” (*mahás patháh*, *Rigveda* 2.24.7); and they find the hidden light and regenerate dawn (*Rigveda* 7.76.4). They are characterized by *krátu*, a kind of knowledge that permits them to perform their special functions: note *kavíkrátu* “having the *krátu* of the *kavís*” (*Rigveda* 3.2.4). The *krátus* of travelers are compared with charioteers or draft animals pulling chariots (cf. *Rigveda* 7.48.1, 90.5, etc.; see also Jamison, 2007, pp. 123-24).

In the *Old Avesta*, the generic term having become *daēvic*, the poet no longer refers to himself as *kauui*, but as “singer” (*jaritar* from *gṛ-*), “libator” (*zaotar* = OInd. *hótar*); he “announces” (verb *səṅgha-* = OInd. *śams-*) “words” (*vac*), “well-spoken words” (*hūxta*), fashioned in his thoughts (*manah-*), and he sends his “visionary thoughts” (*daēnā*; cf. OInd. *dhī*) into the divine world. Similar to the *krátus* of the Old Indic poets, the “(guiding) thoughts” (*xratu*) of the *saošiiants*, the successful Gathic poets, serve as the draft animals that pull the chariot of the sun, goaded by the poet’s announcements (*Yasna* 46.3; cf. *Rigveda* 7.77.2, 79.1).

The evil *kauuis*, however, together with the “glutton” (? *grāhma*), deposit their *xratu*s in the glutton’s tangled web (*Yasna* 32.14), and it is by their incorrect sacrifices that the titles or functions of *kauui* and *karapan* have been ruined (*Yasna* 32.15; Skjærvø, 2001, pp. 352, 358-59; on the “quoting” function of the derivatives in *-tāt-*, see idem, 2007, p. 903; idem, 2009a, pp. 167-68). By their evil work, they destroy the new existence (*Yasna* 46.11). Thus they contrast in detail with the successful sacrificers, and there is no reason to doubt that they too are sacrificers, albeit unsuccessful ones. The Old Indic *usíj*, another kind of priest, was also demonized as Old Avestan *usixš*, mentioned together with the *kauui* and *karapan* as mistreating the cow (*Yasna* 44.20; see Skjærvø, 2001, p. 354).



The term *kəuuīna*, traditionally thought to refer to a “princeling” whose favor, apparently, Zarathustra failed to win (*Yasna* 51.12), is more likely to refer to a “poetaster,” and its epithet *vaēpiia* (cf. OInd. *vepī* “inspired” [+ song: *gir*]) to the trembling and shaking (OInd. verb *vip-*) in pretended poetic ecstasy, rather than to his sexual practices (Avestan *vaēpaiia-* and *vifiia-*, to have active and passive anal intercourse; see [HOMOSEXUALITY I. IN ZOROASTRIANISM](#)). Note the common juxtaposition of Rigvedic *kavī* and *viprā* (e.g., *Rigveda* 6.15.7, 8.44.21, 9.18.2; see Jamison, 2007, p. 124) and, especially, *Rigveda* 3.3.7, where Agni is said to be the *uśīj* with good *kratu* among the inspired (*vip*) gods.

In the Old Avesta, only Vištāspa has the epithet/title *kauui*. His name is mentioned three times in connection with the divine reward, which agrees with his mention at the end of the hymn to Anāhitā (q.v.) as a model of those who won the race (*Yašt* 5.132). Once, apparently, he has the epithet *zaraθuštri* (*Yasna* 53.2), which, in the Young Avesta, is an epithet of the priest, usually paired with *mazdaiiasna* (e.g., *Yasna* 12), probably “Zarathustrid” in the sense of “following the tradition of Zarathustra.”

The notion that the title *kauui* (Middle and New Persian *kay*) refers to sovereignty is based upon an interpretation of the Pahlavi and Perso-Arabic texts. There, the sequence of heroes and *kays* is presented as a chronological sequence of rulers (*kayān*; see, e.g., Skjærvø, 1995, pp. 189-91; Kellens, 1999-2000, pp. 744-51) and Kauui Vištāspa as the benevolent ruler who received Zarathustra’s new religion, and this led 19th- and early 20th-century Western scholars to assume that the Avestan term, too, meant “prince” or “ruler,” an opinion that survives to this day. There is little or no evidence for this, however. It is noteworthy that Bal’ami thought that Pahlavi *kay* meant “good” (*niku*; ed. Bahār, p. 524; ed. Maškur, p. 46, and Zotenberg, p. 407, have *malek-e nik* “good king”). The *Mojmal al-tawāriḵ* reports another tradition (p. 29): “Kay” was applied to all the kings in this line by analogy with Kay Qobād, who had this title (*laqab*) from Zāl, meaning “origin” (*aṣl*). K̅vārazmi (p. 100) defined *kay* as *jabbār* and *kayān* as *jabāber* “giant(s),” followed by Mirḵvānd (I, p. 568), who remarks at the beginning of his narrative of the Kayanids that *kay* was how they said *jabbār* (giant) in Pahlavi, a meaning the word has in Manicheism (see below). Asadi Ṭusi defined *kay* as “greatest king,” citing a verse from Daḳiḳi (p. 177; also in Šams-e Faḳri, p. 381) and also has an entry *kāv* “a courageous and tall and fit fighter,” citing no authority (p. 170, but doubtful according to Dabirsiāḳi in n. 1; see on the use in Manicheism, below) and *gav* [!] “fighter,” citing Ferdowsi (ed. Khaleghi, II, p. 173, v. 690; also in



Šams-e Fakri, p. 394).

In the Young Avesta, the *kauuis* are listed together with the *karpans* (Avestan *karapan-/karafn-*, Pahlavi *karb*; see [KARAPAN](#)), sorcerers, witches, false teachers (*sāstar*), and other evil beings. Here, the term denotes unsuccessful priests who have joined with the forces of darkness and evil (the original, literal, meanings of these terms may no longer have been known). The term *karpan* has been connected with Choresmian *karb-*, apparently “mumbler” (Henning, 1951, p. 45; see also Skjærvø, 2001, pp. 353-54). In the 19th century, it was connected with Old Indic *kalp-*, which expresses ritual ordering (e.g., Bartholomae, *AirWb.*, col. 455). The verb *kalpaya-* takes *yajña* “sacrifice” as direct object (*Rigveda* 8.58.1, 10.52.4), and Agni is once said to be priest, sacrificing and ordering the *ṛtus* (cf. Avestan *ratu* “ritual models” of the cosmos, *Rigveda* 10.2.3).

In the Young Avesta, *kauui* is used in the singular only as epithet or title of a small set of heroes who sacrifice to various deities and, in the plural, together with *karpan* to denote unsuccessful sacrificers who side with the forces of darkness and evil. It is never used instead of or parallel with *dañ hupaiti* (lord of the land), which is probably the term closest to our “king.” Similarly, in the Pahlavi texts, *kay* is never interchangeable with *šāh* or *dahībed* (ruler, lord of the land), and Persian *kay* is never used to mean “king” or “prince” as a homonym of *šāh* (there is no “Kayān Kay”). Both Pahlavi and Persian *kayān* refer exclusively to the *kays*.

There is also no direct evidence that Old and Young Avestan *xšaθra* refers to secular command. Only the Pishdadid heroes in the Young Avesta (Haošiiānha, etc.) are said to ask for *xšaθra-* “(royal or ritual) command” or are said to have “ruled” (*xšaiia-*), the objects of the rule being members of the evil creation: *daēuuas* (see [DAIVA](#)) and men, sorcerers and witches, and the like. Their *xšaθra-* is therefore not necessarily different from that of the Old Avestan poetsacrificer, who, by his sacrifice, (re)generates for himself and Ahura Mazdā the command that permits them to overcome the powers of evil and darkness (see *Yasna* 8.5-6). Only in the Old Persian inscriptions (e.g., DB I) does the word (*xša.a*) clearly refer to the secular political power of the king, the ruler (*xšāyaθiya*), whose *xša.a* was given to him by god as his chosen earthly representative.

In Manicheism. The word was used in Iranian Manichean texts in the form *kaw* and *kāw* in the sense of “giant”; for instance, the *Book of Giants* (see



GIANTS, BOOK OF THE) was the *Kāwān*. The term is also applied to the Twelve Eons, second of the Five Greatnesses, a group of inhabitants of the Light Paradise (Waldschmidt and Lentz, pp. 553-54), as well as to the messengers or prophets who appeared at intervals in the history of the world to bring Gnosis to mankind, the last of whom was Mani, also invoked as *kāw* (Durkin-Meisterernst and Morano, p. 155, sec. 497b; see also the review by Skjærvø). Christian Sogdian *par kawyāq* “by (their) being *kaws*” renders Syriac *ganbārāṭt* “like *gabbārs*” (Sims-Williams, ed., 1985, pp. 142, 144, 152).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See at end of KAYĀNIĀN XIV. THE KAYANIDS IN WESTERN HISTORIOGRAPHY.