



PAIRIKĀ

PAIRIKĀ, feminine, non-Gathic Avestan noun denoting a class of female demonic beings in the Avesta and often translated “sorceress, witch, or enchantress.” We shall deal with the Avestan term *pairikā-* (I.-E. **parikeh_a-*, OPers. **parikā-*, MPers. *parīg*, Sogh. *pr'ykh*, Manich. MPers. *parīg*, Khot. *palikā-*, Pers. *parī*, Pashto *pēraī*, Nuristanī *pari/bari/barai*, Arm. *parik*) chronologically, beginning with (1) the suggested etymologies, (2) the Old Iranian phase, then continue with (3) Middle and (4) Modern Iranian languages along with the pertinent texts, and finally we will examine the occurrences of the term in (5) extra-Iranian sources.

1. Possible etymologies. Various etymologies have been proposed for the word *pairikā-*; as the divergence of opinions clearly illustrates, they are all highly speculative. Geiger (1882, pp. 81 f., 112 f.) suggested that *pairikā-* represented “foreign women” (*die fremde Frauen*) and took it to be the fem. form of **paraka*; he compared the latter with Vedic *parakīya-* ‘belonging to others, enemies.’ Güntert (1913, pp. 201 f.), however, derived *pairikā-* from the Indo-European root **pelē-* ‘to fill,’ Latin *plēnus* ‘full.’ He considered it to be a cognate of Parcae ‘Fates’ of the Roman pantheon, who were originally birth-goddesses, and to have survived in Latin, for example, *pario* ‘to bring forth, bear.’ He, furthermore, considered *pairikā-* to be the demoness of fullness, the counterpart of the goddess Pārēndi- ‘Fullness.’ On the other hand, Thurneysen (1924, p. 143) connected the term with Old Irish *airech* ‘concubine, wanton woman,’ and he was followed by Silvestri (1974, pp. 99 f.) and Mallory and Douglas (1997, s.v.). Walde and Pokorny (1926) associated *pairikā-* with Greek



pallakis ‘concubine,’ *pallax* ‘youth, maiden,’ and *pallas*, the epithet of Athene. Gray (1929, pp. 195, 197) understood the word as “she who surroundeth, the surrounding one, enchantress,” which he analogized with Sanskrit *abhicāra* ‘enchantment, bewitchment,’ derived from *abhi-car-* ‘to go around.’ Hertel (1931, p. 42) and, later, Duchesne-Guillemin (1936, p. 77) offered the unlikely interpretation *pairi* + *kā* ‘around + shine, glow,’ hence “she who is surrounded by (daēvic) light.” Sarkārātī (1350 Š./1971, pp. 5 f.), accepting the Indo-European root **per-* ‘to create, to bear,’ offered an equally unlikely etymology: he assumed that the fem. suffix *-ī* was initially added to the root, hence **parī-*, which was then followed by the addition of another suffix, *kā-*, to form *pairikā-*.

2. *Old Iranian.* In the Avesta *pairikās* (Bartholomae, 1904, s.v.) often appear in conjunction with other demonic beings, for instance, in *daēuuanqm mašiiānqmca yāθβqm pairikanqmca* “demons and evil men, sorcerers, and sorceresses” (e.g., *Yašts* 10.34; 14.4, 62). Darmesteter (1887, pp. 173-77) considered *pairikā-* to be a demonic nymph who robbed men and gods of celestial waters. According to *Vendīdād* or the “Anti-demonic Law” (11.9), *Pairikās* must be fought, for they are the opponents of Fire, Water, Earth, Ox, and Plant. Also, similar to the jinns’ response upon hearing (Ar.) *bismillāh* “In the name of Allāh” in Islamic lore (Donaldson, 1930, p. 186), *Pairikās* fled when Zarathuštra uttered the *Ahuna vairya* prayer (Yt. 11.6). The term *pairikā-*, moreover, appears in two adjectival compounds: *aš.pairikā-* ‘accompanied by great, mighty sorceress’ (Yt. 19.41)—as suggested by Schindler (1987, pp. 338 f.) and followed by Hintze (1994)—and *pairikavant-* ‘accompanied by witches’ (Yt. 11.6). The first adjective *aš.pairikā-*, found in *Zamyād Yašt* (19.41), is an attribute of Pitaona, a fiend killed by *Kərəšaspa/Garšāsp* in a series of slayings by the hero—alternately and unnecessarily, Humbach and Ichaporia (1998) translate it “most devoted to witches.” The other adjective, *pairikavant-*, is found in *Sroš Yašt* (11.6): *āat druuatqm daēuuaiiasnqm yātušca yātumatqm pairikāasca pairikavatqm tbaēšō fratərəsqn fraduuarqn* “Then the hostility of the wicked demon-worshippers, sorcerers, witches, *Pairikās*, and those who are accompanied by *Pairikās* will be frightened (and) flee” (Kreyenbroek, 1985).

Equally significant are the occurrences of the specific *mūš.pairikā-* ‘rat sorceress’ in *Yasnas* 16.8 and 68.8. She is associated with Āzi ‘Greed,’ against whom the Waters are invoked. The rat belongs to that group of noxious animals which are collectively called *xrafstra-* (Schmidt, 1980, pp. 213 f.); thus, the most immediate sense of the “rat sorceress” may be she who steals and



destroys. Güntert (1913, pp. 202-4), however, associated this fiend with Sanskrit *muṣkā*- ‘testicle, pudenda, muliebria,’ Pers. *mošk* ‘musk,’ Gr. *mūs leukós* ‘white mouse, libertine,’ High German *maus* ‘mouse, connus.’ In his opinion, she represents the demoness of sensuality. In the *Tīr Yašt* (Panaino, 1990 and 1995), a hymn devoted to the star Sirius (Av. *Tištīria*), *Tištīria* overcomes and overpowers the Pairikās who “are assimilated [*sic*, analogized] to the shooting stars and figure as the chief adversaries of the fixed stars” (Panaino, 1990, p. 139). The *mūš.pairikā*- has, furthermore, been understood as the one responsible for the eclipse of the sun (Darmesteter, I, 1892, p. 144). In the same hymn, we also encounter another Pairikā, *pairikā.dužiiāriia*- ‘the witch of the bad year,’ whom the evil-speaking men call the witch of the good year (8.51-55). She, apparently, represents all the discomfort, that is, drought, scarcity, and malaise, associated with a bad year and is eventually defeated by *Tištīria*. In the Avestan hymn to Mithra (Gershevitch, 1967) we learn that the lord Mithra is “the nemesis of the Pairikās” (10.26), and he assists in the struggle against “the evil gods, men, sorcerers and witches, tyrants, hymn-mongers, and mumblers” (10.34). In *Farvardīn Yašt* (Geldner, 1886), the hymn devoted to the Frawaši, Pairikās are mentioned in the context of nightmares: “We worship the Frawaši of righteous Hušyaoθna descendant of Frašaoštra ... for resistance against bad dreams and bad omens and bad *ōifra* (?) and bad Pairikās” (13.104).

Again, in *Vendīdād* (1.9; 19.5), we come across another particular Pairikā, namely *pairikā xnqθaitī*. This fiend was counter-created by Anra Mainiiu ‘Hostile Spirit’ and attacks the hero Kərəšaspa (Nyberg, 1933) in the land known as Vaē.kərəta-, which was later identified with Kābul (*kāwul ī duž-sāyag* “Kabul of evil shade”) in the Pahlavi *Vendīdād*. She is eventually destroyed by Zarathuštra: *janāni pairikəm yəm xnqθaiti / zanom ān ī parīg kāmāgīh ān ī uz-dēs parastagīh* “I shall kill the Xnqθaiti sorceress / I shall smite that sorceress of desire, that of idol worship” (Vd. 19.5). Güntert (1913, p. 200) associated Av. *xnqθaitī*- with Greek *knēthō* ‘to scratch, tickle, itch’ (not unlike the offensive sense of Pers. *kāridan* ‘to itch’), which makes her the demoness of prurience. Charpentier (1933, p. 80), however, suggested the unlikely connection with Sanskrit *knath-* ‘to kill, harm’ (**knanthatī*) and translated the compound “murderous sorceress.”

In the partial Sanskrit translation of the Avesta, edited by Bharucha (1910, Y. 16.8; Yt. 1.6, 10; 4.4), Pairikā is rendered *mahārākṣasī* ‘great demoness’ (*nota bene*: the typographical error “ix.8” in Gray, 1929, p. 195, should be emended



to “xvi.8”). We must bear in mind, though, that the *rākṣasīs* represented a class of demonic beings whose functions were far bloodier than those of the Pairikās in the Iranian pandaemonium; for example, the Vedic fiends devour men and steal sacrifices, deeds which are alien to the Iranian fiends. Finally, it appears that in its earliest form, Pairikā bore some similarities with the demoness generally called *succubus* and found in a number of other cultures, such as Sumerian Lillake, biblical Lilith, Slavic Rusalka, who deprive men, particularly religious men, of their bodily fluid at night.

3. *Middle Iranian.* The sources written in the Middle Iranian languages indicate the emergence of some ambivalence in defining the nature of Parīg (< Pairikā). In most sources, similar to those in Old Iranian, Parīgs preserve their evil nature, while in at least three texts they become benign and perhaps even benevolent, through the process which Asmussen (1982) has called “demonization.”

In her still demonic guise, Parīg appears in numerous sources: (a) in the Pahlavi “translation” of the *Vendīdād* (Anklesaria, 1949, pp. 7, 373), Av. *pairikā.xnqθaitī* is rendered *parīg* <ī> *kāmagīh* ‘sorceress of desire’ and glossed as the patroness of ‘idolatry’ (*uz-dēs parastagīh*); (b) in the *Bundahišn* (Anklesaria, 1956, pp. 58 f.; 62 f.), or the Book of Primal Genesis, the *muš parīg* ‘rat sorceress’ makes another appearance (see above), but now she is described as bearing a tail (MPers. *dumbōmand*). From reading the same text (pp. 136 f.) we learn that during the initial stages of populating the earth, Jam (Av. Yima) copulated with a demon (*dēw*)—which *may* be a mistake for *parīg* and rectified in the Persian retelling of the myth (see Section 4, below)—and his sister slept with another demon; these unions resulted in the creation of the monkeys, bears, and the forest-dwellers. In the same pages it is further explained that the Negroid race owes its origin to the coition of a young man and a *parīg* which occurred during the reign of Aži Dahāg; (c) in *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* (Jaafari-Dehaghi, 1998, p. 126) Ahriman is credited with the creation of *wasān parīgān ī tamīgān gōhrān* ‘numerous sorceresses of dark substances’ (36.44); (d) in *The Anthology of Zādspram* (Gignoux and Tafazzoli, 1993) we also come across a Parīg in the shape of a dog (4.13-26) that is cut in two by the hero Srīd (Av. *Θrita-*), resulting in the release of a thousand more Parīgs from each half, which in turn tear up the hero; (e) in her generic form in Pahlavi texts such as *Dēnkard* VII (Molé, 1.19; 2.63; 5.8), *The Supplementary Texts to the Šāyest-nē-šāyest* (Kotwal, 1969, 12.12), *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* (Williams, 1990, 8e1, 4; 8f3; 18c2-4), and *Gujastag Abāliš*

(Barthelémy, 1887, 9.9), not unlike in the Avesta, she often appears in the company of other demonic beings, for example, *dēwān* ‘demons’ and *jādūgān* ‘sorcerers.’

In the Manichean literature we find *parīg* (Boyce, 1977, s.v.), and, as seen in the Manichean Turfan texts (Andreas-Henning, 1932, pp. 179, 182, 184), the *parīgān* are always mentioned together with *dēwān*. In Sogdian, we encounter *pr'ykh* (Gharib, 1995, s.v.) in the company of other demons (Benveniste, 1940, nos. 1003, 1113; 1946, 6.197). In Sogdian Buddhist texts, *pr'yš* ‘servant woman’ is thought to be related to *parīg* (Bailey, 1979, p. 234), and in Khotanese one finds *pālīka-putra-*, which was understood by Bailey (ibid.) as the “sons of a *pālīka*,” that is, sons of a woman of lesser birth or a servant woman.

In her benign guise she appears as a proper noun (i.e., *Parīg*) in the Pahlavi *Vendīdād* (viii.31, 35; xiii.48) and *Nērangestān* (pp. 39^v.15; 178^r.8), indicating someone who is a venerable commentator of the Avesta. This would be a rare evidence for the existence of a female commentator among Mazdean theologians, unless the proper noun *Parīg* refers to a man—an unlikely occurrence in light of Old and Modern Iranian onomastics. Another benevolent appearance occurs in the Pāzand *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* (Messina, 1939, p. 40), where the woman (*zan*), an offspring of the good Hošang, is compared to a *Parī* (*čūn parī*).

4. *Modern Iranian*. Except in the Mazdean religious texts written in Persian, by the time we reach the Modern Iranian phase and the literature written in the pertinent languages, we see only a shell of this ancient relic. By now, she has lost almost all of her negative attributes and has turned into a beautiful creature, *parī* ‘fairy, nymph,’ and often appears alongside the less benign jinns (*jenn o parī*). On some occasions, *Parīs* are referred to as (Pers.) *az mā behtarān* “they who are better than we” (Dehḵodā, s.v.), which, as noted by Nicholson (1930, p. 355) and Christensen (1941, p. 79), reminds one of “the good people” of European fairydom and *puṇya-janas* ‘good people’ of Hinduism (Mackenzie, 1913, p. 68).

In the epics written in Modern Persian, particularly in Ferdowsi’s *Šāh-nāma*, one encounters *Parīs* in several stories, for instance, “Reign of Jamšīd,” “Zāl and Rūdāba,” and “Bīžan and Manīža.” As noted by Christensen (op. cit., p. 63), for Ferdowsi *Parī* is “always a charming and pleasant figure.” In the other epic *Sām-nāma*, a work dated to the 13th century and attributed to Ḳwajo-ye Kermanī, we read of the deeds of the hero Sām (Av. *Kərəšaspa*), who also falls



in love with Parīdoḵt ‘Daughter of Parī,’ a daughter of the Chinese emperor (Şafā, 1322 Š./1943, pp. 334-38). Furthermore, in the panegyrics and lyric poetry belonging to classical Persian literature, Parī is invariably represented as a benevolent or at least benign supernatural creature (Dehḵodā, s.v.). In Persian folklore, Belqīs or the Queen of Sheba is considered to be the offspring of a Chinese emperor and a Parī. In *The Arabian Nights* (Burton apud Gray, 1929, p. 196), we encounter Parīzāda ‘Born of Parī,’ a heroine found in one of the final stories of the book. Moreover, Chand and Nā’inī, the editors of Dārā Šokōh’s Persian translation of the *Upaniṣads*, render Sk. *Yakṣa*-, often a harmless being, as Parī (Tehran, 1381 Š./2002, p. 665). Finally, more evidence indicating the benevolence of Parī is found in the realm of rituals; modern-day Zoroastrians of Kermān and Yazd celebrate the ritual known as *sofra-sabzi* ‘The table-cloth spread on green grass’ or *ziyāfat-e doḵtar-e šāh-e pariyān* ‘feast of the daughter of the king of fairies’ (Asmussen, op. cit. p. 117).

There are also numerous Persian compounds which contain *parī*; some are feminine proper nouns, for example, *Parī-sā*, *Parī-čehr*, and *Parī-vaš*, while a few others may betray the survival of shamanistic practices in Iranian culture: *parī-ḵwān* ‘invoker of Parī,’ *parī-gerefta*, *parī-band*, *parī-afsā* ‘he who has captured Parī’ (Dehḵoda, s.v.).

As noted earlier, a few Persian sources reflecting the Mazdean tradition have preserved the demonic nature of Parī. For example, in *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz* it is stated that the kindling of a Bahrām Fire at midnight results in the annihilation of myriads of sorcerers and Parīs (Dhabhar, 1932, pp. 56, 62). Also, echoing *Bundahišn* (see section 3, above), it is noted that Jam copulated with a Parī, which resulted in the creation of the ape, the bear, the limber-legged ones, and those having ears like a shield (ibid., p. 257).

5. *Extra-Iranian occurrences.* In the folklore of the peoples formerly known as the Kāfirs of the Hindu Kush mountains (currently Nuristān), one encounters *paris*, *baris*, or *barais* (pl. *bariān*, *barizāt*) (Snoy, apud Jettmar, 1975, p. 219), which exist in both sexes. Accordingly, the king of the fairies lives in his golden palace in Tirich-Mir Peak in Chitral, while their other forts are located on Boni Zoom Peak in N. Chitral. Since these Parīs, also known as *nangini* ‘mothers,’ are the owners of herds of markhor and ibex, a successful hunter must first entreat them by uttering formulae such as: “Oh mother adopt me as your son and I request you to give me one of your goats. Be kind and treat me as your guest!” (Hussam-ul-mulk, 1974, pp. 96 f.). Parīs were also thought to control the weather by causing gales and rain. They are invisible and often

bathe on the banks of natural lakes in high mountains. A list of the Kāfir fairies includes: *Kangi* ‘The Domestic One,’ *Halmasti* ‘The greedy fast dog,’ *Jaštan* ‘The funny little fairy, pixie,’ *Pherutis* ‘Hissing among smoldering ashes,’ *Murghatipi* ‘Bird fairy,’ *Khaphesi* ‘The deaf and dumb fairy,’ *Dow* ‘Giant,’ *Bohten Dayak* ‘Stone-Throwing fairy,’ *Čumur Deki* ‘Iron Legs,’ *Gor* ‘Witch,’ *Bar Zangi* ‘The Huge Monster,’ and *Nang* ‘Cyclops.’ The fairies, jinns, and other kindred spirits are, furthermore, referred to as *berio zandar* ‘Outsiders’ (ibid., pp. 97-101). Also, in retaliation for injuries inflicted on them by humans, Parīs cause various diseases such as “possession,” *Mergi* ‘epilepsy,’ and *Kodakān* ‘fits of convulsions among children.’ In earlier times, the people communicating with Parīs were called *betans*, who entered a trance state or *betan ungeik* ‘Betan getting wild,’ in order to perform their task of healing (ibid., pp. 104 f.). Nowadays, the healer who “cures” some of the diseases caused by Parīs is called *parī-kwān* ‘invoker of fairy.’ This title has erroneously been recorded as *parī-kān* ‘Master of Fairy’ by many scholars, for example, Hussam-ul-mulk (ibid., pp. 105 ff.), but with the exception of H. Findeisen, who reports on the existence of the (Ger.) *Feen-Rufer* ‘fairies-caller’ in Xinjiang Province, China (1951). It is through the ritual known as *parī kameik* ‘invocation of Parī’ that a *parī-kwān* can summon these supernatural beings. We also know of a group of women called *perižuni* (Jettmar, op. cit., p. 443) in Nuristan, whose function is to relieve the patient from Parī-inflicted diseases.

Iranian Parīg, moreover, entered Armenian lexicon as *parik* (Russell, 1987, p. 449), and her nature is rather similar to that found in the Persian milieu. Eventually, in Armenian she also came to denote “ballerina” (Hübschmann, apud Asmussen, op. cit., p. 117). According to Bailey (op. cit., p. 234), Hebrew *plgš*, *pylgš* and Targum *plqt*, *pylqt* ‘servant woman’ are ultimately derived from Iranian *pairikā-* (*parīg*). Furthermore Persian Parī, modified to *Peri*, appeared in a number of well-known literary works written in the European languages, the most celebrated example of which is Th. Moore’s book-length poem *Lalla Rookh* (1817). The tale revolves around a princess’s journey from Delhi to Kashmir to meet her betrothed. Along the way Feramorz (*sic*, Frāmarz), the king of Bukhara and her husband-to-be—disguised as a poor poet—recounts the historical tales of insurrections and ecstasy, of revolutionary heroes and passionate women, which were much appreciated by the readers of the Romantic period. In the second tale, “Paradise and the Peri,” the Peri, as a fallen angel seeking entry into heaven, must perform a good deed, which she does by saving a boy from a pederast.



The appearance of Peri is not limited to the written words; using Moore's poem as the basis, the German composer R. Schumann (1810-1856) composed an oratorio for soloist, choir, and orchestra entitled *Das Paradies und die Peri* 'The Paradise and the Peri,' which he considered to be his "most important work in every sense of the word" (Meier, 2004, p. 97). Apparently Richard Wagner, too, had shown some interest in the same poem (ibid., p. 98).

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