

Borders

Itineraries on the Edges of Iran

edited by Stefano Pellò

Transregional Intoxications Wine in Buddhist Gandhara and Kafiristan

Max Klimburg
(Universität Wien, Österreich)

Abstract The essay deals with the wine culture of the Hindu Kush area, which is believed to be among the oldest vinicultural regions of the world. Important traces and testimonies can be found in the Gandharan Buddhist stone reliefs of the Swat valley as well as in the wine culture of former Kafiristan, present-day Nuristan, in Afghanistan, which is still in many ways preserved among the Kalash Kafirs of Pakistan's Chitral District. Kalash represent a very interesting case of 'pagan' cultural survival within the Islamic world.

Keywords Kafiristan. Wine. Gandhara. Kalash.

Dionysus, the ancient wine deity of the Greeks, was believed to have originated in Nysa, a place which was imagined to be located somewhere in Asia, thus possibly also in the southern outskirts of the Hindu Kush, where Alexander and his Army marched through in the year 327 BCE. That wooded mountainous region is credited by some scholars with the fame of one of the most important original sources of the viticulture, based on locally wild growing vines (see Neubauer 1974). Thus, conceivably, it was also the regional viniculture and not only the (reported) finding of much of ivy and laurel which had raised the Greeks' hope to find the deity's mythical birth place. When they came across a village with a name similar to Nysa, the question appeared to be solved, and the king declared Dionysus his and the army's main protective deity instead of Heracles, thereby upgrading himself from a semi-divine to a fully divine personality. All this happened in an area then inhabited – one is led to speculate – by ancestors of the Kafirs of the Hindu Kush living in that part of Great Kafiristan.

These isolated mountain peoples in Northeastern Afghanistan, called *kāfir* (unbelievers) by their Muslim neighbours after Islam had conquered the region around them, inhabited the valleys of Kafiristan to the south of the main ridge of the Hindu Kush mountain range (fig. 1). They adhered to age-old shamanistic/polytheistic beliefs and led a socio-religious festive life in part enlivened by wine-based 'Dionysian' features, with their Indian deity Indr acting as their wine god, until they were Islamized by

force in 1895-1896 and *Kāfiristān* was renamed *Nūristān*.¹ Was there any relationship between the two wine gods? Greeks sources do not provide any information in these regards.

Dionysus must have felt 'comfortable' among the mountain peoples of Great Kafiristan and their vigorous life style, dominated by much feasting with wine, music and dancing. Under the likely assumption that groups of these mountain dwellers came into some contact with the Greeks, one can envision that they were deeply impressed by the images of power and splendour of the Greeks' camps, equipment, arming, and their wine culture with characteristic drinking vessels.² Possibly, they also participated in some Dionysian feasts held by the soldiers. Nothing of such contacts is really known, but M.L. Carter states that the troops «lingered there with the natives to attend bacchanalian celebrations» (1992, p. 53). One may also assume that the natives supplied the Greeks with locally produced wine, though not much of it could have been available, as it was made only from grapes laboriously picked high up in trees climbed by wild growing vines. Whatever, the stage was set for much of Greek influence to come in regions already 'flush' with wine, where the knowledge of wine-making was already wide-spread, communicated for a long time in the Eurasian network including the Ancient Wine Roads, forerunners of the Silk Roads (Kupfer 2014, p. 24).³

The impact of the wine culture in the regions presently discussed can hardly be overestimated, as this can be said, of course, with regard to all the regions strongly affected by viticulture at any time, going back to the 'dawn of viniculture' in prehistoric times, when the grapes were picked only from wild growing vines, as documented at many places in Iran and neighbouring regions (see McGovern 2014). Obviously, it was only after the vine's 'domestication' to grow in properly tended vineyards that wine was made available in large quantities such as for the Achaemenid rulers, who

1 In Chitral, NW-Pakistan, the related culture of the small minority of the Kalash Kafirs, the 'Kafirs of Pakistan', was spared Islamization and hence survived up to the present.

2 Indeed, several Kafir objects such as silver cups, tripod iron stands (figs. 17-18) and daggers (fig. 20) recall ancient Greek models - with e.g. the Kafir dagger *katara* resembling the Greek *akinakes*. More than two millennia later some Europeans invented the still wide-spread tale that the Kafirs/Nuristani are descendants of Alexander's Greeks who had slept with local girls or had settled among the locals, enjoying their life style and wine.

3 Kupfer thinks of an extensive wine-related exchange in Eurasia «since at least as early as Neolithic times; thus it existed long before the Silk Road, and perhaps could be labelled *Ancient Wine Road*». He assumes a «quantum leap in the history of evolution and civilization» by «the discovery and use of fermentation» of wine in particular in the rise of civilizations (2014, pp. 33 ff.). Jäger favours important influences of Iranian-speaking peoples on the development of wine cultures (2014, p. 44). His thesis should be expanded to include in particular Indo-Iranian peoples living in eastern Afghanistan and historical Northwestern India, thus in and around the Hindu Kush with its particular kind of wild vine called *vitus nuristanica*.

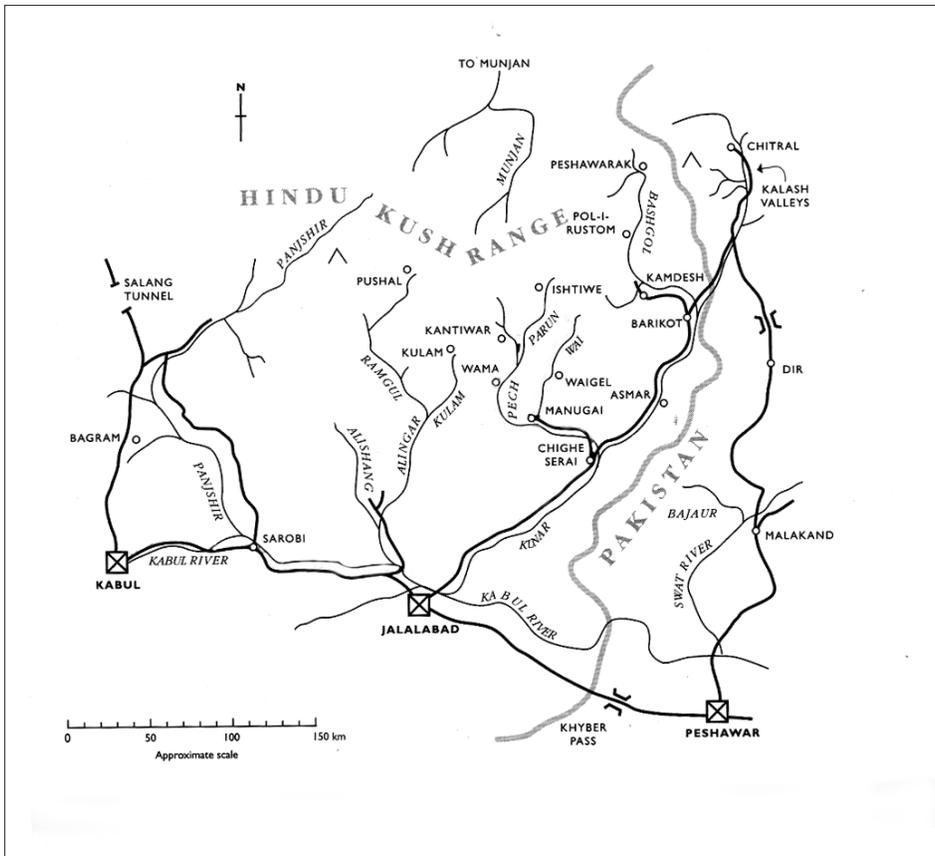


Figure 1. Map of Nuristan (source: Barrington et al. 2006, map B, p. 8)

used to partly pay with wine their officials and even many of their workmen. Wild growing vines in more distant mountain areas then lost their former importance for wine making due to the impact of Islam, but those in the southern outskirts of the Hindu Kush mountain range, certainly among the regions with the most favourable growing conditions, could keep their importance for local viticulture in valleys inhabited by the Kafirs of the Hindu Kush up to the end of the nineteenth century (and up to the present among the Kalash Kafirs). Climbing, by preference, holly oak trees, whose small leaves allow enough sunlight to reach them, these vines grow both kinds of grapes, which are then eaten in present Nuristan and still made to wine by the numerically much inferior Kalash Kafirs.

Some three hundred years after those Greeks' 'visit' to the region, then a part of Great Kafiristan, and less than a century after the fall of the Greek

Bactrian kingdom, which for some time had also expanded from Afghanistan into much of (historical) Northwestern India (with Taxila as its centre), where an Achaemenid province known under the (Hellenized) name of Gandhara had existed before, an astoundingly popular development of Buddhism took place there. Countless Buddhists, those-to-become as well as sculptors and stone cutters from near and far founded monasteries or retreated into them, settled near them and worked for them. Eventually the plains and many of the valleys were literally dotted with monastic establishments and stupas richly decorated with Buddhist statues and reliefs summarily called the Buddhist art of Gandhara, which impressed Europeans with such Hellenistic features that the designation 'Graeco-Buddhist' came into use.

The reasons for such an upswing of Buddhism in historical Northwestern India were certainly manifold, starting with the lure of wine-based and spirited cultures embedded in lush valleys with temperate climate and abounding with fertile fields, orchards, vineyards, and with 'air-conditioning' forests around, as existing in the mountain outskirts such as, at its best, in the Swat valley.⁴ There is also the change, possibly having started there, from the centuries-old awe regarding images of Buddha, who therefore was not represented before, to more popular tendencies favouring such imagery, as if inspired by nearby Greek foundations with their natural looking stone images of deities and leading men.⁵ That circumstance then led to the 'swamping' of Buddhist monasteries and holy sites with respective imagery in stone, clay and stucco, and it must have contributed largely to the vast Buddhist expansion which appears to have been carried, among others, by unfettered image-worship probably accompanied by wine-based 'lustfulness' in spite of the Buddhist preaching of 'lustlessness'.

With Buddhism thus firmly established there in the first centuries CE, based on the rich local agriculture and also on Greek and other influences from townships such as Taxila and Peshawar, based also on the good income from trading with goods from West, Middle-central, East and South Asia as well as from pilgrimage, remarkably strong missionary tendencies developed and led to the Buddhist expansion along the trade routes forming part of the so-called Silk Roads across the mountain barriers into Middle and Central Asia and finally East Asia. Gandhara thus became the spring-board for the momentous spreading of one of the world's most successful revolutionary spiritual movements and redemption concepts along

4 That valley constituted, together with the small part of Kashmir belonging to Pakistan, the most favoured summer resort of Pakistan until its recent short lived, horror-spreading domination by the Taliban.

5 The question whether the first images of Buddha were created in Gandhara or in Mathura in northern India continues to be hotly debated.



Figure 2. Door jamb from Butkara (Swat) with an erotic couple above a Buddha figure (Faccenna 1964, pl. CCLXXXIX)

roads which had already become an important network of trade routes spreading since long time also the knowledge of wine culture and thus conceivably denominated Ancient Wine Roads.

All the Buddhist messages of salvation by abstention, spread by very numerous monastic centres with their often colossal images of Buddha and innumerable Buddhist monks and pilgrims mixing with the population, had hardly affected the local wine-drinking cultures with their Dionysian feasts and orgies combined with much music, dance, and eroticism. Accordingly, many Buddhists may well have fallen prey to the lures of wine



Figure 3. Male figures pressing grapes with their feet and a stick, filtering and possibly also tasting wine and resting inebriated, as seen to the left. Relief, Peshawar Museum (Ingholt 1957, p. 104, fig. 175)



Figure 4. Dionysiac scene with a fat, nude Silenus and another figure riding on lions, a man standing in a vat and pressing grapes with his feet, a man pouring wine out of a skin bag into a krater, and several male and maenad-like female figures set in sceneries of vines. Relief, Lahore Museum (Ingholt 1957, p. 157, fig. 397)



Figure 5. A Dionysiac scene with men and women dancing and playing musical instruments, possibly made tipsy by the wine which is being poured out of a shouldered skin bag into a large krater-like vessel. Relief, private collection, Switzerland (Jäger 2015, fig. 1)

and wine-enhanced erotic desires, and the resulting sensuous facets in the appearance of Buddhism may have participated not only to its great spread across the mountains, but also to more esoteric creeds spiced by erotic features, leading towards Vajrayana-Buddhism.

It should not surprise, therefore, to find numerous Buddhist Gandhara reliefs showing also very non-Buddhist images of wine drinking, revelries and eroticism (figs. 2-5), as already commented on in 1992 by M.L. Carter, who focused on the Dionysian features of the popular folk religion of the region, already discussed by her with reference to Kushan art in an earlier article.⁶ More recently, A. Filigenzi, a long time member of the Italian Archaeological Mission to Swat, Pakistan, picked up that topic in a still unpublished article⁷ with special reference to Swat, which may well have been an area where more than anywhere else the wine cultures of Great Kafiristan flourished near Buddhist monasteries, where a special impetus may have inspired the development of esoteric beliefs eventually leading to the formation of Vajrayana Buddhism. Tellingly, the Swat Valley can be identified with the holy land of Uḍḍiyāna referred to in Tibetan Tantric sources.

Filigenzi also stresses the impact of wine and wine-related dances and sensuality on the local socio-economics in spite of the Buddhist damnation of all that. She draws attention to numerous stone tanks carved out of the rock, which must have served as wine-presses and vats such as those of the Kafirs and in the Pashai habitat, to the numerous chalice-like ceramic objects and distilling vessels excavated at different archaeological sites in Swat, datable to the first-third century CE, also known as the 'Kushan period' (disregarding here the local proto-historic finds which include bowl-like drinking vessels).⁸ Her paper focuses in particular on some reliefs of unknown but certainly Gandhara origin showing scenes of wine drinking, of erotic content and of Dionysian looking dances next to Buddhist images or on separate stone pieces. As already imaged by Carter, this appears to reflect a non-Buddhist tribal and cultural environment in the sense of Great

6 She attempted «to explain this puzzling and seemingly inappropriate element in Gandharan Buddhist art as an outgrowth of the popular folk religion of the region, particularly in the cool highlands surrounding the Gandhara plain where grapes were cultivated and wine drinking was documented from the time of Alexander's invasion» (Carter 1992, p. 51). There was certainly much wine drinking already long time before Alexander. Carter refers to several characteristic reliefs which are also used by Filigenzi to illustrate her paper. With Carter's additional references to the culture of the Kafirs and the relevant findings in Edelberg (1965), she shares many insights with the present author.

7 When read in Vienna on 8 October 2014, on the invitation of a local NGO, the title of her paper was slightly changed to «Dionysos in India. Stereotypes about Inebriation in the Buddhist art of Gandhara». I am very grateful to Dr. Filigenzi for allowing me to refer to her findings before their publication.

8 Among the numerous references given by Filigenzi, only those to Olivieri (2008 and 2011) and Falk (2009) are included among the references here.

Kafiristan, where the consumption of wine and revelries must have been widespread. One can thus suppose important interactions in both the economic and cultural field with the monasteries and their urban background as well links to the outside world. Therefore, reasoning with Filigenzi, the monastic communities were probably forced to some liberal attitudes, not only with respect to the use of wine for medical reasons. As most monastic communities are known worldwide for their roles not only in trading and providing shelter, with the Buddhist ones along the Silk Road providing best examples, but also in wine making, the suspicion is thus great that also the Buddhist monastic settlements in Gandhara had fallen victim to the lure of wine and even wine making (see Falk 2009).

As to the social and religious background of the wine-loving and dancing people depicted in those non-Buddhist scenes, one can imagine that they were local laymen, and among them, according to Filigenzi, sponsoring members of the local aristocracy represented as more ceremonial wine-drinkers. Wine consumption was probably even more popular, combined with dancing, among the sculptors and stone cutters working for the monasteries and their sponsors as well as with the nearby mountain peoples, who may well be regarded, as already stated, as ancestors (in the widest sense) of the «Kafirs of the Hindu Kush», who then became famous for withstanding until most recent times, in part even to the present, all the alcohol-prohibiting Islamization around them.

The love of wine by the ancestors of the Kafirs of the Hindu Kush was certainly known for millennia and thus also to the Greeks of Alexander who, however, did not leave us any related information. It was only much later, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that the first known reports were written, provided by Timur Leng and then Babur, the first Moghul ruler. The latter even mentioned with reference to southern Kafiristan «strong yellowish wines ... all brought from up the Kafiristan-water and from Pich-i-kafiristani».⁹ Some information on the Kafirs is contained in the late eighteenth-century manuscript *Sayr al-Bilād* by Moghul Beg,¹⁰ and in the early nineteenth century, M. Elphinstone was able to collect some substantial data when charged with researching on the Kingdom of Caubul. As told by informants sent into Kafiristan, he reported that the Kafirs «drink wine, both pure and diluted, out of large silver cups, which are the most precious of their possessions. They drink during their meals, and are elevated, but

9 With the notion 'Pich-i-kafiristani', i.e. the Kafirs of the Pech Valley, Babur indicated the centre of the Kafir wine production which was in and near the Pech Valley in southern Kafiristan. Another wine centre was in Dara-ye-Nur Valley, a side valley of the Kunar Valley. Babur was also good for absurd statements such as that «wine is so commonly used there that every Kafir has his leathern wine-bag (*khig*) at his neck, and drinks wine instead of water» (1922, 1, p. 212). Naturally, wine was carried in goatskin bags for any reason such as for sale.

10 The manuscript was translated by Raverty and published in Raverty 1888.

not made quarrelsome, by this indulgence» (1839, p. 384). The mention of silver cups must have caused much attention and even amazement, but they remained undocumented and thus of doubtful existence until 1953.

Charles Masson, the British adventurer and explorer who in the 1830s roamed through Afghanistan and around, wrote that the «Káfrs» or, rather, «Síáposh»,¹¹ were «fond of [...] singing and drinking wine» out of «drinking cups and bowls [which] are ornamented and embossed in a costly manner», thereby referring certainly to silver cups. He reported that he had seen Kafirs «bringing wine in skins, and so sour as to be undrinkable. It is said, however, that they have good wine, and that the better classes, in default of jars, preserve it in cisterns, hewn in the rock» (1842, 1, p. 228). Alexander Burnes, the British political agent in Kabul in the late 1830s, heard of Kafir Kafirs drinking «light and dark» wine from silver cups and thought them to be «trophies of their spoils in war» (p. 211). «One would [...] in that case have expected that the greatest numbers of cups would have been found among the strongest tribe in Kafiristan, the Kam people in lower Bashgal» (Edelberg 1965, p. 196).

However, this was not the case, when (Sir) George Scott Robertson, a British Indian government commissioner, in 1890-1891 resided one year among the Kam Kafirs in the Basghal Valley, in particular in Kamdesh, in eastern Kafiristan (to the west of the Afghan-Pakistan border). His book *The Káfirs of the Hindu-Kush* is the only existing major field report. However, this first-hand knowledge of the Kafirs is limited to those living in the east and, to a very small degree, to the numerically inferior Parun Kafirs dwelling in the centre. He collected very little or no information on the Waigal and Ashkun Kafirs living in the south and south-west, that is those inhabiting valleys with wild growing vines. The Kati speaking Kafirs in Northwestern Kafiristan, closely related to those in the east, were out of his reach altogether. Accordingly, we understood under Kafirs only the eastern Kati speakers and their culture as described by Robertson. Only recent research clarified that the many social-cultural differences between the Kafirs speaking the Kati, Waigali/Ashkun and Paruni languages, all classified as Indo-Iranian in a special archaic sense,¹² indicate the former existence of three distinct Kafir cultures corresponding to these three main idioms. One of them, namely the culture of the Parun Kafirs had no viticulture due to the lack of locally growing wild vines.

During his stay among the Kafirs residing in the Bashgal Valley, Robertson saw mostly wooden cups and occasionally shallow tin bowls used

11 'Síáposh' or 'black-clad' is the epithet once given to the Kafirs living in the Bashgal Valley (with the village of Kamdesh) in easternmost Kafiristan, while their western neighbours, the Parun Kafirs, were known as 'Safedposh' or 'white-clad'.

12 Morgenstierne (1961) classified these 'Kafir' languages as belonging to a very early offshoot of the Indian branch of the Indo-Iranian language group.

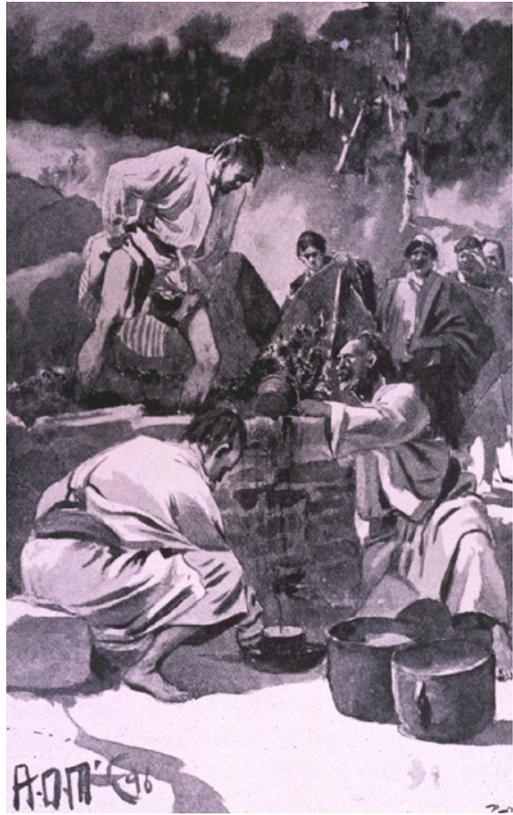


Figure 6. The treading of grapes in Kamdesh (Robertson 1896, pl. at p. 558)

for wine drinking. On festive occasions the «dancers refreshed with wine ladled from a tub with wooden cups. The same not particularly generous fluid was also circulated among the spectators constantly [...] The grey-beards and seniors, all importance, sat round the dancing platform drinking wine and talking politics» (1896, pp. 223-224.) Only at large gatherings «wine is sometimes handed around in shallow tin bowls, but these are rare as compared to those made of walnut-wood» (p. 501).¹³ Tellingly, as the consumption of mostly watered-down wine was probably moderate for lack of sufficient supply and possibly also for reason of status-like behaviour, Robertson did not observe any drunkenness (p. 559). There is no reference to silver cups, and, indeed, such cups were only discovered as part of the Waigal/Wama culture in 1955.

¹³ These 'shallow tin bowls' were certainly different from the eye-catching chalice-like silver cups used in the Waigal Valley and in Wama and the «large silver cups» mentioned by Elphinstone (1839) and Burnes (1842).

Unfortunately, Robertson tells us little about the local viticulture and nothing with respect to the growing of vines and the picking of grapes. He describes a wine press on a flat-topped boulder, with its side walls made by small boulder and stone walls about two and half feet high, with their interstices filled with clay. The somewhat semi-circular press measured some five and a half feet in length and some four feet at its breadth. «The floor sloped naturally, and at the lower end, in front, an aperture had been left, partly closed by a little brushwood, from under which a deeply-grooved piece of wood [...] protruded, and afforded an outlet for the expressed juice» (pp. 556, 559). Then a big man was asked to tread the grapes, after his feet had been washed carefully. «He enjoyed himself thoroughly, with so much vigour that he had to be frequently checked to prevent the juice from overflowing the vessel» (fig. 6, pp. 558 f.). Then the juice was collected in large wooden cups and poured into goatskin bags with the help of a wooden funnel. After eight to ten days it became wine, which then was drunk without any straining, and therefore the Kafirs always blew into the cups or bowls in order to remove the scum from near their lips. Robertson observed wine drinking on several festive occasions and as a guest of an influential Kafir, who offered him wine which «was strong and good, and was declared to be three years old» (p. 234). He also stated that wine could be kept in goatskins for years, readily available when feasting.

Robertson also observed the pressing of the remaining semi-solid residue with the help of flat stones placed on small heaps of residue and «a long pliable pole used as a lever»: one end of it was anchored in the ground and its free end pulled down by a number of men, thereby pressing the underlying stones. «The dried residue is made up into cakes» tasting «most unpleasant», but «highly appreciated by Kafirs who believe that it possesses most sustaining qualities» (pp. 559 f.).

Robertson was thus the first and last foreign eyewitness to the important role of wine in the local Kafir lifestyle during the abundant feasting on a variety of secular and religious festive occasions. As status-seeking dominated every aspect of life, attained through elaborate honorific feasts, also called 'feasts of merit', and, on a minor scale, through homicidal acts affecting potential or real enemies (the victims being other Kafirs or Muslims both male and female), there was ample opportunity for celebrations and singing and dancing – and wine drinking as long as there was any available. Apparently there was a need for more of this in the distant past, as the Waigal Kafirs allegedly paid «a yearly tribute of four cows and four measures of wine» to the Kam Kafirs, before they settled down in Kamdesh and the lower Bashgal (1896, p. 158).

As already stated, the Kafir viticulture was part of very old Indo-Iranian cultures in a wider region which saw the crossing of Indo-Aryan peoples from Middle/Central Asia to India, and which has a rich vegetation including wild vines. Hidden in badly accessible mountain valleys of the Hindu



Figure 7. The village of Wama 400 m above the Pech River, with the Indrak'un garden to the left (photo: M. Klimburg, 1973)

Kush and only occasionally disturbed by hostile outsiders such as in particular their Muslim neighbours, the Kafirs had managed for millennia to keep to their animistic and polytheistic beliefs together with a large spectre of specific socio-cultural concepts and traditions, until they had to face the destruction of their civilisation. In the winter of 1895-1896 they were subjugated by the Afghan army ordered to smash the Kafir cultures and Islamize the population. Accordingly, the army and the mullahs in its train saw to a wholesale destruction of the Kafir temples and idol imagery as well as rooting-out of all the millennia-old beliefs and very rich, multi-faceted 'heathen' traditions, including their homicidal tendencies which had threatened constantly their lives outside of their communities, and, of course, their viticulture. Kafiristan was renamed *Nūristān*, 'Land of Light' (or 'Enlightenment'), and the formerly militant Kafirs became the comparatively peaceful *Nūristānī*. Only a small, distantly related side branch known as the Kalash Kafirs survived in Chitral, which then was part of Northwestern British India, at present in Northwestern Pakistan. Among them, known under their tourism-stimulating name Kafirs of Pakistan, one still finds a thriving viticulture.

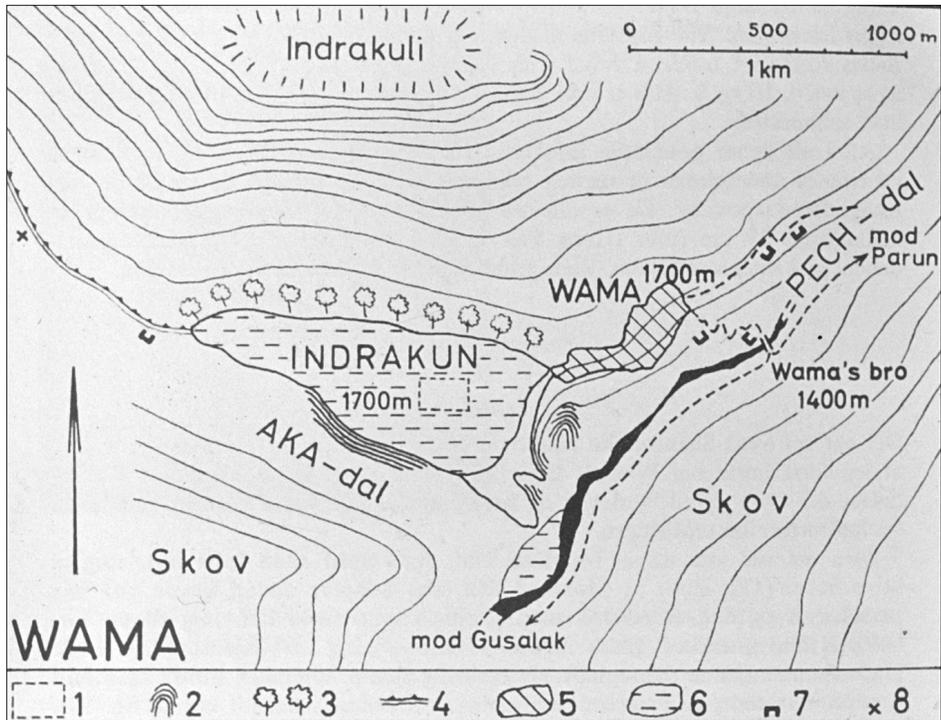


Figure 8. Map of Wama and the Indrak'un garden (Edelberg 1965, fig. 9)

After that drama of 1895-1896 no field research except for a short 'tour de prospection' by the Deutsche Hindukusch Expedition in 1935 (see Scheibe 1937) took place for a half-century until 1948, when Danes started their numerous field trips, with Lennart Edelberg as their main explorer.¹⁴ Already during his first trip Edelberg made an important discovery, when an informant led him into the mythical community-owned forest/orchard/'vineyard' and wine-making centre *Indrak'un*, the 'garden' of the deity Indr (the Kafir version of the Vedic deity Indra), located at 1,850 near the large village of Wama in the Pech Valley (figs. 7-8). That is possibly the centre of Babur's region 'Pich-i-kafiristani', known for its wealth of wild growing vines enjoying favourable climatic conditions and an abundance of 'best-suited' climbable trees, especially holly-oaks. Then, in 1953, in the Waigal village of Zhönchigal, Edelberg was the first re-

¹⁴ Unfortunately, Edelberg was not a social or cultural anthropologist, but a botanist by profession, who developed sympathies for the oppressed, formerly enslaved craftsmen *bari* and servant-like *šuwala*, rather than for their often very self-conscious but better informative former masters, the heirs to the upholders of the Kafir civilisation.



Figure 9. Wine press in the Indrak'un garden (see also fig. 10) (photo: M. Klimburg, 1974)

searcher to see, to his great amazement, two of the 'ominous' silver cups, known before only from hearsay (fig. 13). They turned out to be surprisingly large and stemmed chalice-like vessels.¹⁵ Numerous such cups then appeared soon afterwards, mostly in the Waigal Valley (figs. 14-16, 18).¹⁶ Obviously, nothing could document better the great importance wine once had in particular in southern Kafiristan.

The location of the Indrak'un 'garden', a small forest of large holly oak, walnut and other fruit trees literally embraced by wild vines, on an inclined terrace with a rock facade high above the Pech River, is an extraordinary scenic feature in the otherwise very narrow valley. From that rock wall people could be thrown to their death when found guilty

15 See Edelberg 1965 (in Danish, with an English summary). Much afraid of causing a rush of antique dealers to Nuristan, Edelberg kept the great news of the discovery secret for twelve years.

16 A dozen or more silver cups are known to have survived in museum collections, but the three cups formerly in the author's collection in Kabul and then donated to the National Museum of Afghanistan in 1978 (see Klimburg 1981) were stolen during the recent civil war. One or the other cup may be left in Nuristan.



Figure 10. Man in wine press in the Indrak'un garden (photo: M. Klimburg, 1974)

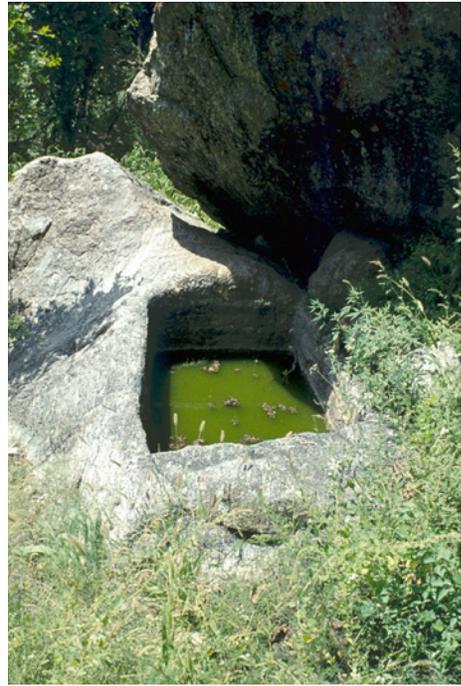


Figure 11. Stone vat in the Indrak'un garden (photo: M. Klimburg, 1973)

of a serious misdemeanour such as grape-picking before the time of its announcement.¹⁷

The garden is also most noteworthy for its mythical origin owing to the god Indr, the most popular deity of Wama and Ashkungal (the region of the Ashkun speakers inhabiting the south-west of Nuristan), who was thought to visit Indrak'un each summer. Indr was credited for having founded the garden after he had tricked his brother Giwish/Gish into choosing a piece of land in the Kantiwo Valley at some distance to the north of Wama. When Giwish found out about the great beauty of orchard created by Indr, he tried in vain to destroy it by rolling large boulders down from the mountain behind the garden. Indr made the best of it, as the story goes, by carving vats into several of these boulders to be used for wine making, as he was thought to be a great wine lover. There are four such vats, with one of them made to

¹⁷ The harvest of all the fruits and crops was strictly regulated in every Kafir community, as is mostly still the case in Nuristan.

press the grapes (figs. 9-11).¹⁸ The other three, holding 840, 1,330 and 3,780 litres respectively (Edelberg 1965, p. 171), served to produce wine called *čūkūra* by simply letting the juice ferment under a protective against twigs and leaves (W 9). According to Edelberg's fieldnotes, several days after the pressing and filling of the stone vats with the juice, men sat on the stone near the vats and drank some of the fermenting juice out of wooden cups.

The Indrak'un wine, being community property, had to be distributed among the eligible adult men, numbering some 300 in 1948 (Edelberg 1965, p. 171), according to social criteria, thus most probably not, as Edelberg was told, in equal shares of 10 litres. Naturally, families headed by men with high social merits through feast giving and acts of heroism had the right to larger quantities of wine than the average households of 'free', eligible men. Socially dependent families and, even more so, those occupying a slave-like and untouchable-like status such as the craftsmen known as *bari* and the even lower classified servant-like *šūwala*, groups classified as ethnic outsiders, had no access to wine – such as women.

In the garden there was also a large cult place in Indr's honour known as *Indr-tā* (fig. 12). Its centre consisted foremost of a small boulder which served as basis of Indr's effigy, and a large juniper tree next to it, already dead in 1948. «On the trunk of this tree (or perhaps on a post nearby – or possibly on three posts, one for each of the main clans of Wama) the Kafirs used to hang [...] rings of almond withes on wooden plugs hammered into the trunk or post(s) – presumably one ring (*dāl*) for every Muslim killed» (Edelberg 1965, p. 165).¹⁹ Normally the effigy of Indr, most probably represented standing, was kept in his temple, the *Indr-amā*, inside the village, but on the occasion of a large feast in his honour soon after the grape harvest the figure was carried to the *Indr-tā* and placed on the said stone block. There it then served as the central cult image honoured by the sacrifice of numerous he-goats and one or two oxen, whose blood was thrown on the sacrificial fire,²⁰ while men acting as priests and worshippers said thanksgiving prayers and sang hymns. Specific to Wama and possibly also

18 K. Wutt photographed similar stone vats in Darra-ye Nur, also an important wine producing valley in the past. It is inhabited by Pashai whose Indo-Aryan language is only distantly related to the idioms of the Kafirs/Nuristani, but who were certainly classified as Kafirs as well before they were gradually Islamized some time before 'our' Kafirs. See Wutt 1981, pls. 152, 153, 159.

19 The rings were called *shagere*, while *dāl* (or *dal*) denotes large poles mostly standing at pathways near the villages and signalling the number of homicides by the number of wooden plugs hammered into the trunk.

20 After the pouring of blood on the fire, the severed heads of the goats were placed briefly at the fire and their carcasses were held above it so that some of their hair would burn. All the deities were thought to cherish the smell of burned blood and hair.

to Zhönchigal, new wine was thrown on the statue, as reported to Edelberg (p. 165).²¹ Silver cups filled with wine were probably used in this context and when feasting Indr in his temple in the winter month of Zintsei-mās. The assumption that silver cups were used at these rituals is supported by a report of such a use by the Parun Kafirs, inhabitants of the Parun Valley further to the north,²² when sprinkling the statue of Wushum, one of their main deities, with the blood of sacrificed goats.

The date of the Indr festival in Indrak'un could not be ascertained, but it must have taken place soon after of the picking of the grapes, lasting four days (followed by that of walnuts, pomegranates and jujubes), starting on the first of the September/October month of Drashletr-mās. The most likely date is the end or the last day of this month, when all the flocks, mainly of goats, and their goatherds had returned to the village. The feast must have been particularly merry, with singing and dancing exceeding that of all other feasts, and with some excessive wine-related behaviour with regard to the sexual relations, in particular between the unmarried young. A similar, but probably smaller feast, recorded by both Edelberg and the present author, took place about the same time in Zhönchigal in honour of the local guardian deity Traskan (1965, p. 175). His name also appears in that of the local grape- and fruit-picking month called Traskando-mās, which is mostly known in Waigal Valley under the name of Atau-mās. In default of stone vats, in Zhönchigal, as in all other wine-producing villages, except in Wama, the vinification took place in large wooden pots or stone vessels. The wine was then stored in wooden pots or stone vessels or skin-bags.²³ Until it was drunk out of wooden vessels or the rare silver cups owned by a small minority of important and/or wealthy men.

On the occasion of feasts, in particular the often very elaborate feasts of honourification, better known as 'feasts of merit', which could include invitations not only to the eligible population of the host's community, but also to that of neighbouring villages, the respective host had to care especially for the wealthy and established guests by serving them food and wine

21 The author could not verify that statement.

22 The Parun River is the eastern of the two main feeders of the Pech River. The culture of the local Kafirs, living surrounded by the Kati Kafirs to the east and west, as well as the Wama and Waigal Kafirs to the south, forms the topic of the forthcoming study by the present author, complementing that on the Waigal and Ashkun Kafirs published in 1999.

23 A story recorded by G. Buddruss in Nisheigram and published by A. Degener deals with the grape picking from privately owned vines and the vinification in stone vessels which were then sealed off with clay for three months. The wine, *čükura*, was often left to age for three to four years. Old wine, *přã*, mixed with honey, *maçi*, was the highly cherished drink *maçi-přã*. See Degener 1998, pp. 307 ff. Vines can only be privately owned when growing and climbing on trees standing on private land.



Figure 12. The *Indr-tā* cultplace in the Indrak'un garden with stone blocks as seats (photo: M. Klimburg, 1974)

inside the privacy of his house.²⁴ These celebrations may frequently have been nothing less than drinking bouts with mainly whitebeards present, each of them sitting on his proper chair-of-honour known as 'horn chair' (*ṣiṅ-neṣā* in Waigal, *ṣiṅ-asta* in Wama/Ashkungal) featuring two backrests set at a right angle (figs. 18-19). At least some of them must have owned a silver cup which they could have placed on a special stand next to their chairs – if such a stand called *urei-taò* was in their possession (figs. 17-18).

An additional, specifically honorific role of these large, stemmed, chalice-like silver cups or goblets, known as *urei* and *ro* (silver) in Waigal, in Wama and Ashkungal respectively (figs. 13-16, 18), was reported in the context of funeral feasts in honour of important men. Then a wooden cruciform structure dressed with a woman's shirt and capped by a reversed *urei* or *ro* (in so far as the deceased had owned a silver cup) was carried in dance (see Klimburg 1999, p. 98). Such an object, known in Waigal as

24 Robertson mentioned wine drinking at a public feast only once, stating that there was much dancing also with a heavy wooden ancestor figure, *mute* (1896, pp. 219 ff.). It was a large, expensive feast in the context of the ancestor cult, as such a figure then served for some time, placed near the cemetery and next to those of other ancestors, to remind everybody of the respective important person who had died in the year before that feast.



Figure 13. The two silver cups *urei* shown to Edelberg, 1955 (Edelberg 1965, fig. 4)

dal-sanka, represented the dead, and it recalls the dancing with wooden ancestor figures in Kamdesh observed by Robertson. All this expressed great respect for the dead person's social merits, especially those honoured for the killing of genuine or imagined enemies, strongly indicated by the use of an *urei* as a shining 'helmet', which served otherwise as a wine-drinking vessel and, probably, also as a blood-filled sacrificial vessel. Ancestor figures did not exist among the Waigal and Ashkungal Kafirs, and hence such dressed and helmeted cruciform structures might be understood as a local and specifically also blood cult- and achievement-related status object reflecting somewhat the highly developed ancestor cult with its figures of the Kati Kafirs, demonstrating the preservation of higher social standing more than particular deeds and achievements.

The cups were no particular status objects such as the chairs-of-honour (figs. 18-19), carved decorations on the facades and posts of the houses, insignia and the like, all based on meritorious deeds. They represented rather the status of wealth, being valued in the 1970s as the equivalent of



Figure 14. Two informants with an *urei* in Nisheigram, Waigal Valley (photo: M. Klimburg, 1976)



Figure 15. *Urei* from Nisheigram (Waigal), h. 18 cm, Ø 21 cm, donated to the Kabul Museum (see Klimburg 1981, fig. 48), lost (photo: M. Klimburg, 1978)



Figure 16. Stemless *urei* in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Carter 1992, fig. 11)



Figure 17. Cup-stand *urei-taò* from Zhönchigal (Waigal Valley) donated to the National Museum of Afghanistan (see Klimburg 1981, fig. 45) (photo: M. Klimburg, 1978)

30-60 goats,²⁵ and that of connections to the world of spirits, *peri*, or even deities credited with help in raising fertility and gaining wealth. Stories tell of silver or even golden cups in treasures hidden in small lakes high up in the mountains, whose water would have retreated on certain occasions and then exposed the glittering objects.²⁶ Certain *urei* were said to have had the capacity of ringing when touched by lower class, ritually impure people like the *bari* and *shüwala*, and to heal infertile women when touched by them. Spirits are believed to have produced them according to information given in the 1960s and 1970s mainly in Waigal. There was the tale of a secret smith named Gauwarkawana living somewhere on the southern border of Kafiristan towards the Pech Valley who would produce and magically deliver *urei* as well as the special Kafir daggers known as *katara* (fig. 20, recalling the ancient Greeks' *akinakes*). If someone wished to order such an object, he had to request the local shaman (in Waigali:

25 A female goat aged 2-3 years was/is the basic unit of value at any transaction in southern Kafiristan/Nuristan.

26 See Jones 1973-1974 and Klimburg 1999, pp. 214 ff. Jones' statement that some of the *urei* could be worth «as much as 240 goats» or «the price of a man» (p. 170) cannot be taken seriously.



Figure 18. Three-legged iron stand with added-
on *urei*-stand next to a chair of honour in the
Moesgård Museum in Denmark
(photo: M. Klimburg)



Figure 19. Chair-of-honour *şiq-neşä*
in Nisheigram (Waigal Valley), donated
to the National Museum of Afghanistan
(see Klimburg 1981, fig. 19)
(photo: M. Klimburg 1972)



Figure 20. Kafir dagger *katara*

dyäl) to contact the smith, bring 30-60 goats or 4-8 cows for an *urei* and 6-7 goats or one cow for a *katara* to a certain location and then leave. The animals, after having been checked and approved as payment, then disappeared, and several days afterwards the *dyäl* would have informed the purchaser that the paid-for *urei* or *katara* would be seen placed at the same spot or even suspended in the air waiting to be fetched. Such tales may have been created some time ago for socio-political purposes.

More trustworthy sounding information given in Parun, once the religious centre of Kafiristan,²⁷ claim that the cups were made in Badakhshan and then exported to Kafiristan, together with much coveted, gaudy looking *ikat* clothes and coats from Middle Asia as well as much needed salt. Such an origin appears possible, but the question remains as to their relations to the very similar looking drinking vessels depicted in ancient wall-paintings of the sixth to eight century CE in Sogdian Middle Asia such as in Balalyk Tepe (Albaum 1960, fig. 109). Jettmar hypothesized that they were popular in «the ruling class of the nomadic warriors in the steppes» of Tokharistan (Middle Asia) and were «exported to the ceremonial use of a nobility of Hephthalite descent ruling in Gandhara. They were copied by the common people and were finally brought to the mountains» of Kafiristan (1973b, p. 42), where, of course, the remarkably capable *bari* craftsmen of the Kafirs could have copied them.²⁸

Evidently, both the wine and the silver cups had important social and probably also religious functions which, unfortunately, are hard to envision with any degree of reliability. The cups may well have played the role also of sacrificial chalices used in religious cults to promote fertility.²⁹ In addition, the red wine, which was/is the general kind of wine produced in Kafiristan, may have been seen as reflecting the blood of sacrificial animals. As already reported with reference to the cult of Indr in Wama, wine was drunk there also or mainly in honour of Indr, who was believed to be a great wine drinker himself, whose effigy was allegedly splattered with wine and whose temple reportedly served also as a community wine storage. Likewise, wine was drunk during feasts honouring local tutelary deities such as Traskan, the protector of both Waigal Village and Zhönchi-

27 The Parun Valley constitutes the heart of Kafiristan/Nuristan, where (by far) the largest Kafir temple once stood. Since some twelve years it houses the capital of the province of Nuristan. Through the valley leads an important path connecting central Nuristan with Badakhshan, the province and historical landscape to the north of the Hindu Kush.

28 Proving their craftsmanship, the Kafirs' blacksmiths among the *bari* craftsmen produced very antique-looking three-legged stands of wrought iron, often decorated artistically, which served to hold flat wooden bowls or, designed differently, silver cups (figs. 17-18).

29 There was not much of a role left for them after Islamization, and therefore they were then used to help paying the (always somewhat negotiable) bride price once set at 200 goats and often even more, e.g. in the Waigal Valley.

gal, or Gröshter-panao, the guardian deity of Nisheigram, or, above all, Indr, the tutelary 'wine god' of Wama and also of Nakara (Titin Valley in Ashkungal). Accordingly, wine must have had a (regionally varied) cultic value in all of 'greater Kafiristan', recently proposed as 'Peristan' (see Caccopardo, Caccopardo 2001), as also indicated in the information gathered in the 1960s by K. Jettmar among Ismaelis in Punyal (North-Pakistan), where during the pressing of the grapes, preferably by boys or young men, one had to observe strict purifying traditions meant to preserve the wine's cultic purity.³⁰

One may surmise that the worship of village tutelary deities in comparatively wine-rich southern and southwestern Kafiristan had particular wine-related features including the use of silver cups as sacrificial vessels to express special reverence to the deities. Accordingly, there was probably more emphasis on the cultic role of wine in southern Kafiristan than in the Bashgal Valley, not so speak of the wine-less Parun Valley, where wine was available only in smaller quantities and therefore drunk primarily in the context of private and public feasting. However, during invocations of deities not only sacrificial blood but also some wine could be thrown on their shrines or effigies, as was the case at a rite attended by Robertson in honour of the war deity Gish/Giwish. Before the sacrifice of 15 male goats the door of the deity's shrine was sprinkled with wine, water, ghee and millet flour scooped out of four wooden bowls - in essence an offer of *hors d'œuvre* before the main dish consisting of 15 sacrificed male goats (1896, p. 429).³¹

The basic differences assumed here in the viticulture of the Kati/Kam Kafirs versus the Waigal/Ashkun Kafirs indicate more emphasis on more private and public enjoyment in the east versus accretional cultic values in the south and south-west of Kafiristan and would complement the numerous other socio-cultural features which allow to discern between two distinct Kafir cultures. Differences in the achievement orientation may be credited for many of these variations, and thus it is plausible that the wine culture in the highly competitive Waigal/Wama/Ashkungal culture had pre-

30 Jettmar 1973a, pp. 192-3 and 198-9: A young man had to wash his feet and then, before the treading of the grapes, he and the others present were purified with the smoke of burning juniper. At another place the treading of the grapes was done by boys (of untold age) after they had taken a bath, put on new clothes and had been purified by the smoke of burning juniper, as were the attendants and the press, and after finally a certain dish was ritually eaten to please the wine-loving *peri* (fairies), who were believed to be present at the pressing. Women of child-bearing age were not allowed to attend. An animal (goat?) was sacrificed after the pressing.

31 After having filled four wooden vessels with wine, water, millet flour and ghee, the priest Utah took «a small quantity of the contents of each vessel [and] threw it against the small closed door of the shrine, all the time repeating a certain invocation [...] The goats were then rapidly seized» and killed.

served at least some of its former cultic values, including that of the silver cups, shared by the whole (eligible) male population. In contrast, among the Kati speakers in the east, primarily in Kamdesh, a more firmly stratified society had made wine drinking a privilege of the wealthy, who appear to have contented themselves with the less ceremonious use of every-day wooden cups as drinking vessels. Thus also the two different types of wine-drinking vessels appear to reflect – among numerous other features – two diverging cultures with different socio-cultural backgrounds.

The millennia-old traditions of Indo-Iranian wine-related life-styles in isolated mountain societies in the Hindu Kush, nearly extinguished by the Islamization of the Kafirs of the Hindu Kush, have survived among the numerically much inferior Kalasha Kafirs in Chitral, Northwestern Pakistan. It is in Birir, the southernmost of the three valleys inhabited by those Kafirs in the southwest of the Chitral district, a valley particularly rich in wild growing vines, that the Kafir viticulture still enjoys its great traditional values attached to wine as a highly esteemed, nearly cultic beverage.³² It is praised for its «inherent purity revealed by the gods for prayer and rejoicing» (Loude, Lièvre 1988, p. 68), with ritual ‘pure’, called *onjesta*, versus ‘impure’, called *pragata* (the basic Kafir classification of everybody and everything).

The picking of grapes (and other fruits), strictly forbidden before,³³ starts in late September (on 20th in 2006) or in the beginning of October, after an evening sacrifice in honour of the deity Praba, a god closely associated to the Indian deity Indra/Indr and also seen as a protector of the vines and the health of the Kafirs. Two goat kids – one for each of the valley’s two moieties – are killed at each of the two adjoining cult places of Praba, with the moieties alternating in providing the sacrificial animals and using these places. The first sacrifice is at the smaller cult place consisting only of a «roundish whitish stone» (Di Carlo 2007, p. 54), the second at the god’s shrine, which features an altar topped by two wooden horse heads. In both cases an *onjesta* virgin boy kills the animals next to a sacrificial fire and sprinkles the kids’ blood on the fire – a standard sacrificial procedure. Then, at the first offer, he also throws blood on the faces of the participants, thereby initiating them to the second, more

32 Good descriptions are only by Loude and Lièvre (1987, based on a visit in 1985) and Di Carlo (2007, based on a visit in 2006), while Staley’s report is very short and the information given in the recent book by Fentz is partially doubtful.

I am very grateful to A.S. Cacopardo for informing me about that wine culture, which I had not noticed adequately before, and for commenting critically my respective discourse.

33 As already noted above, in the Kafir – and still in the Nuristani – social economy, all the starts of harvesting crops and collecting fruits are strictly regulated by each village, which therefore chooses annually a certain number of men empowered to control and fine trespassers.

important sacrifice (p. 54),³⁴ when the boy also sprinkles blood on the altar and – according to Loude and Lièvre (1988, p. 68) – on bunches of freshly picked grapes. Then the first animal's meat is cooked and eaten while the second kid's «meat is roasted and eaten by the *onjesta suda* 'pure boys', and its bones are then thrown into the fire» (Di Carlo 2007, p. 55). This last act cannot but mean that the whole animal is offered to the deity, as a similar observation was made 21 years earlier by Loude and Lièvre (1987, p. 209). The two French researchers observed a virgin boy killing the first of two goat kids at the Praba shrine (the smaller cult place is not mentioned), then grilling and eating pieces of the kid's meat and throwing the whole carcass into the fire as a special offer to Praba. This gift of the goat's whole body to the deity was explained as necessary «to re-establish the threatened purity» endangered by the conversion to Islam of members of the Kafir community some time before. The French researchers noticed further that the meat of the second sacrificed kid was then boiled and eaten at the shrine, and that the participants at the sacrifice were also offered, as the valley's privileged first persons, fruits (grapes, walnuts, pears) picked before the general fruit harvesting was allowed to start in the following morning.³⁵

After this sacrifice the general picking of the grapes starts, undertaken by men and boys climbing the trees and collecting the grapes in small baskets which are then emptied by women below the trees into large carrying baskets. Men carry these baskets to the (still empty) winter stables.

The pressing of the grapes not eaten fresh or separated for making raisins (described by Di Carlo 2007, pp. 55 f. and Fentz 2010, pp. 404 f.) then takes place next to sheds close to the stables. A deity by the name of Warin, also associated to the god Indra/Indr, is invoked to provide for a good wine quality, and virgin boys, occasionally also men, ritually purified for the occasion, squeeze with their feet the grapes heaped in large boxes (up to 3 m long, nearly 1 m wide and up to 1 m high), which are dismantled after use (figs. 21-22). The juice is led through a hole and a conduit into big plastic bins or – hardly seen any longer – stone vessels kept in the ground or pits

34 According to Fentz (2010, p. 393), the boy dips his head into the blood. This feature has been documented by others only in the context of the Chaumos feast.

35 In Fentz' description (2010, pp. 393 ff.) special wine made of grapes picked before in «a sacred protected area in the lower part of the valley» was drunk «during the sacrificing at the Praba shrine». Then, in a nearby winter stable, when the participants ate the (roasted or boiled?) meat of the sacrificed kid, clusters of grapes were brought in, «one for each man [...] Finally, each man receives a large cup of wine». However, no other researcher has reported anything like that, and thus the very interesting information of an early sacred wine and the wine drinking at the Praba shrine may be just a story told by Kafir informants with a bent to extemporize. Furthermore, no non-Kafir man, and even less so a woman, is allowed to witness that particularly *onjesta* ritual.

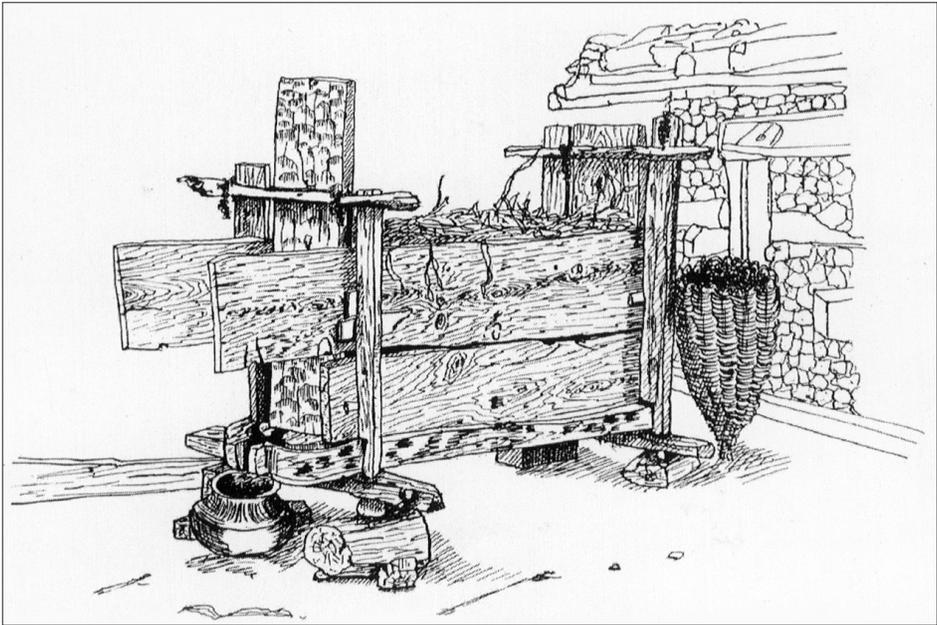


Figure 21. Wine press in Birir (Loude, Lièvre 1987, fig. 2)

in the ground carefully lined and tightened with stone slabs.³⁶ Protected by lids, the juice will become wine already after some ten days.³⁷

The grape-skins remaining of the wine-pressing «are hand pressed with a stone. This juice is drunk separately, and the dregs from the pressing are shaped into small balls that are kept aside and eaten as a great delicacy» (Fentz 2010, p. 408).³⁸

Drinking wine is 'authorized' only at the beginning of the winter feast Chaumos, when animals are sacrificed to honour a more martial deity by the name of Grimun. However, some of the new, still fermenting wine is drunk 'illegally' already during the Prun festival (Di Carlo 2007, p. 58), which starts - together with the harvesting of cereals - 10 to 14 days after the picking of the grapes and their pressing to juice.

³⁶ Cacopardo was told that such a pit's size «is as deep as a man is tall and as wide as his outstretched arms» (personal communication).

³⁷ According to Fentz (2010, p. 385), Birir households «cultivate [i.e. have rights to?] an average of 20 to 30 vines producing several hundred litres of wine», and some families are «able to harvest more than 1,000 bottles per year» (!). Naturally, much of it is sold to mostly Muslim visitors.

³⁸ See above the description of a similar, more technical method of 'dreg-pressing' as seen by Robertson in a hamlet near Kamdesh.



Figure 22. Wine pressing of the Kalash in Birir (Fentz 2010, fig. 356)

Prun is a Birir feast which is variously called an autumn wine or harvesting or fertility festival celebrated with much singing and dancing – actually a feature common to all Kalasha feasts. It has no particular wine connotation except in a wider sense insofar that wine stimulates and reduces inhibitions with regard to sexuality. This used to play an important role until Muslims living nearby – virtually all of them Islamized Kalasha – made the Kafirs reduce markedly all sexually relevant behaviour.³⁹

During Chaumos, the long-lasting winter solstice festival of all the Kalasha with the focus on the ritual initiation of boys and girls, purification of men and women and the enhancement of communal solidarity, which

³⁹ Until recent times a goatherd or even several of them, just having descended from the pastures in the high mountains after a long isolation from women, appeared at the Prun festival dressed as he-goats with horns on their heads. Loaded with sexual energy, these *budalak*, as these men were called, were allowed to attack women and girl who were expected to take full advantage of the situation – for the good of progeny. See also Jettmar 1975, p. 392.

in Birir is in essence a wine festival,⁴⁰ much wine is consumed after its drinking has been 'authorised' by the deity Grimun. As told to A.S. Cacopardo in 2006 (2010b, pp. 150 ff.), who was not allowed to attend the rite, a sheep and a goat have to be sacrificed to that deity in the evening of the second day of the feast (on 15 December in 2006) at a goat's shed located at a distance from the deity's holy place and housing plastic bins or a pit filled with wine.

The wine consumption by both sexes and also children especially during the extensive singing and dancing can be so high that drunken behaviour, even that of women, is common, as noticed by Schomberg in the 1930s,⁴¹ by Topper in the 1960s and again by A.S. Cacopardo in 2006, while participating in the Chaumos (but not allowed to attend all the rituals). This wine drinking by women appears to be in sharp contrast to basic attitudes among the Kafirs in former Kafiristan, present Nuristan – a difference simply existing or partially explicable by culture change and by the fact that hardly anywhere there the conditions for the growing of wild vines are as favourable as in Birir, resulting in a much smaller production of wine.

Accordingly, in a small Hindu Kush valley in the northwest of Pakistan the Kafir viticulture with its ritually relevant features is still alive, but its survival is certainly in danger in view of the mounting Islamist threat. Its death would mean the end of the last pre-Islamic remains in a wide region once dominated by Kafir-like beliefs and an important Buddhist culture, both spirited by wine which may have originated locally many thousand years ago on the basis of wild growing vines of a special kind whose various descendants then may well have become our vines.

My research of the Kafir cultures in Nuristan and Chitral was generously supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and in 1995 also by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF).

40 Personal communication by Cacopardo, who states «che l'ebbrezza da vino è un tema che percorre tutta la festa» (drunkenness of wine is a theme which is present during the whole feast) (2010b, p. 151).

41 Schomberg observed that in spite of strict local regulations of gender dichotomy «the women will drink the wine as well as the men, and some of them are even famous toppers» (1938, p. 192).

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