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HAOMA

-an religious intoxicating beverage

“At the hour of Havani, Haoma came to Zarathushtra, as he served the (sacred) Fire, and sanctified (its flame), while he sang aloud the Gathas. And Zarathushtra asked him: Who art thou, O honorable one! who art of all the incarnate world the most beautiful in Thine own body of those whom I have, seen, (thou) glorious [immortal]?”

Thereupon gave Haoma answer, the holy one who driveth death afar: I am, O Zarathushtra Haoma, the holy and driving death afar; pray to me, O Spitama, prepare me for the taste. Praise me so that also the other Saoshyants [benefactors] may praise me.

Thereupon spake Zarathushtra: Unto Haoma be the praise. What man, O Haoma! first prepared thee for the corporeal world? What award was offered him? what gain did he acquire? Thereupon did Haoma answer me, he the holy one, and driving death afar: Vivanghvant was the first of men who prepared me for the incarnate world. This award was offered him; this gain did he acquire, that to him was born a son who was Yima, called the brilliant, (he of the many flocks, the most glorious of those yet born, the sunlike-one of men), that he made from his authority both herds and people free from dying, both plants and waters free from drought, and men could eat inexhaustible food. In the reign of brave Yima was there neither cold nor heat, there was neither age nor death, nor envy demon-made. Like teenagers walked the two forth, son and father, in their stature and their form, so long as Yima, son of Vivanghvant ruled, he of the many herds!”¹

The quotation above are from the Haoma anthem that can be found in the Avesta. The Avesta is still used today by the followers and worshipers of Zarathustra. The anthem is a dialog with questions and answers. Zarathustra asks the questions and the God Ahura Mazda answers. Before the Avesta was written down it was transmitted orally from one generation to the other among the tribes in the Persian Empire. Before Zarathustras reformation towards a more monotheistic religion (Zoroanism) a pantheon of different Gods existed among the tribes where the god Haoma was very

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¹<http://www.avesta.org/yasna/y9t011s.htm>. Translated into english by L. H. Mills (From *Sacred Books of the East*, American Edition, 1898.)

important. The God Haoma came to Zarathustra an early morning when he was preparing the Holy fire and chanting the hymns he had been taught by oral tradition.

This article is about Haoma as an intoxicating religious beverage and its use by the followers and worshippers of Zarathustra and its predecessors. The sacred beverage of Haoma has been in the focus of several researchers' interest due to its intoxicating effects and it has been very difficult to establish the ingredients in the beverage. Before I turn to the beverage itself and its rituals I will give a short introduction to the early Persian religious believes and its cult since Zarathustra own teaching has its roots from those believes.

Haoma and the Persian believes before Zarathustra

The believes and culture of the Persian Empire reflected the attitudes and confrontations between the good and bad that existed. It also reflected the Gods activities among heroes and fabulous beasts.

The Gods in the pantheon was mainly described by their natural side as the prominent side of their being, seldom with human features. The high God was also the God of destiny that send happiness and unhappiness to the humans. Later on this was going to be divided into one good spirit and one spirit that carried bad and dark characteristics and the fight between the two spirits. This God of destiny was Ahura Mazda and his being was divided into the god spirit Spenta Mainyu and the dark spirit Angra (Ahra) Mainyu [Jensen et al, 1996:116; Söderblom, 1908: 689-765; Seltzer, 1987:122-128].

Mithra

The God Mithra was Ahura Mazdas greatest competitor, he was a God of the heaven and seems to be connected to the night sky. The stars was his all seeing eyes and further on he came also came to be associated with the sky of the day and the sun. His name means "covenant" or "interpretation" and he represents the regularity by the law or the legal aspects of the rein function. He was the one who held together all the different social classes in society and was the God of social order. Apart from that Mithra was also the god of war and victory, which also makes him God of destiny. The humans imagined that Mithra travelled in a chariot shafts by white horses. The drinking of the Haoma and the sacrifice of a bull was very important in his cult. The Haoma sacrifice in the Mithras

cult seems to the largest extent has taken place in the Persian Empire, even if it also is known from other places. The cult of Mithra became of great importance to the Greeks under the Hellenistic period and his cult became very big in the Roman Empire, then known as Mithras. Mithras, himself is very often depicted sacrificing a white bull [Seltzer, 1987: 122-128].

Even if the Haomacult was strongly connected to Mithra it also occurred on other occasions. Haoma was a holy intoxicated beverage that was believed to keep death on its distance and was also believed to grant health, force and life. At the sacrifice of the Haoma holy twigs was held (so called Baresman) in the hands. Regular sacrifices of animals existed, especially of bulls and horses. The fire rites was very important since the fire was worshipped as a divine, settled and lifegiving force in existence. Young men, especially warriors were combined to each other through special societies or associations. They had their own cults where slaughtering of a dragon had a central place both in the rite and in the myth. Most likely had the priests their own guilds and societies, several classes of priests are mentioned in the Avesta. However there was no temples or cult images and the holy traditions were orally passed on from one generation to the other [Seltzer, 1987: 122-128].

Zarathustra and his reformation

Zarathustra turned against the animal sacrifice since he did not like blood sacrifices, also he did not like the use of the beverage that gave strong hallucinogenic illusions. He meant that those rites did not belong in a place where humans tried to live a pure life. Zarathustras own big religious conversion was caused by a very specific situation. In the tribe Zarathustra belonged to it was common practice to carry out the blood offering and the Haoma drunkenness. Zarathustra received a revelation that said that the humans should care for the cattle with good pasturage so that the cattle in return could give humans good and healthy milk. It is the God Ahura Mazda that reveals himself to Zarathustra in the vision. Where and when Zarathustra lived is not clear but he can be places in the time period 1000-600 B.C.

He seems to have been a priest and he knew the liturgy very well. Among the researchers there is a debate if Zarathustra was a member of an ecstatic group or not. The researchers that believes that he was a member of one of this ecstatic groups means that he was in rapture and in a mind of ecstasy when he experienced how his soul left him and made a heavenly voyage and saw divine secrets [Seltzer, 1987: 128-150].

Zarathustra rearranged the former gods in the pantheon and made Ahura Mazda the only God. The other gods became personalities that became parts of Ahura Mazda himself and his helpers. Zarathustras religion has its base on dualism, there is a constant battle between the good and the evil. Ahura Mazda stands for the good that will be victories in the end. Ahura Mazda created the fire and stepped into it and was consumed by the flames and still he lives on. This is the reason why the fire is holy [Seltzer, 1987: 128-150].

The Avesta

The Avesta is the holy script that is in use by the followers of Zarathustras today. Today the followers are spread all over the world, the largest group can be found in India, England and Canada. It also exist minority groups in the Caucasus and in the western world, like Sweden. Within the religion Haoma has three meanings; the Haomaritual and its beverage, the Haomaplant as the base for the beverage and Haoma as a God or a legendary priest (personified by the plant and the beverage) [Jensen et al, 1996:116-124].

The Avesta consists of the Yasna and the Ghatas. Ghatas means songs and this part are ascribed to Zarathustra. The Yasna are considered to be of an earlier date. The Avesta has links and connections to the ancient Indian hymns; The Rigveda. The Avesta is problematic since it consists of parts from different time periods. As mentioned earlier in the text the priests in the Persian Empire transmitted their knowledge orally for a very long time [Jensen et al, 1996:116-124].

From the original texts that was collected and put together as a written canon during the time of the Sassanid's only a fourth still remains to this day. The oldest handwritten texts are dated to 1323 A.D. However important parts of the Avesta dates back to the first millennia B.C. The original Avesta was written in an east-iranian language that dates to approximately 1400-1200 B.C, only a few understands that language today. The preserved texts consists of the following parts; 1, *Yasna* ('adoration', 'worship', 'sacrifice') is the most important part of the liturgy. The 72 chapters are recited by the priest during a ceremony called Yasna, when the liquid from the Haoma plant (in the myths the immortality beverage in old Iran) is prepared and drunk by the priest. Among the yasna texts the most important chapters can be found, the 17 songs (gathas) that is most likely written by Zarathustra. They consists of the chapters 28-34, 43-51 and 53. They are in a subtle poetic form carrier of the visions by Ahura Mazda, the divine

world and the forthcoming life. The Gatha songs are written in a dialect that in a linguistic way are older than the rest of the Avesta. When “the new Avesta” is spoken of all the text in the liturgy is meant besides the gathas. 2) *Visprat* (‘all protective powers’, e. g. the calling upon them) consists of ritual texts that are recited in closeness to the yasna, particularly at the feast for the different seasons of the year. 3) *Vendidad* is by origin no liturgical text and consists of incantations against demons and regulations for purity.

4) *Yashterna* is a collection of hymns to different kinds of Iranian divinities such as Amesha Spentas, Mithra, Anahita and Haoma. Some of these texts contain parts from the religion in Iran before Zarathustra. 5) *Khorda Avesta* ‘the small Avesta.’ consists of excerpts from the Avesta such as prayers for laymen [Jensen et al, 1996:116-124].

The Haoma anthem can be found in the most important part of the liturgy (Yasna 9-11). Since the anthem is not to be found within the chapters 28-34, 43-51 or 53 of the Yasna means that Zarathustra are not the author of the anthem. That indicates that Zarathustra has learned the anthem by heart, orally. Even if Zarathustra is not the originator of the anthem, the anthem is an conversation between Zarathustra and the God Haoma about life and immortality in 18 phrases. If one reads the anthem closely and deeply it indicates that the one who worships the Haoma God will do very well in life, Zarathustra himself are a very good example of that [Jensen et al, 1996:116-124; Söderblom, 1908:689-765].

Even if Zarathustra himself turned against the widespread sacrificing surrounding the Haoma cult in his own tribe, he himself experiences a form of intoxication when he prepared and sacrificed the Haoma.

What was Haoma that putted the worshipers in such an intoxicated state of mind?

Haomas contents and effects

In the research field of Haoma there is a variation of suggestions what was used to prepare the Haoma, fungus and different plants has been suggested. Some researchers believe that the beverage never existed since the intoxication that is described in connection with the drinking of the beverage seems to be too good to be true [Flattery David, Schwartz Martin, 1989:13-33]. That theory are not the predominant one in the research field.

If the main ingredient in the Haoma beverage was a fungus it most likely belonged to the Amanita family and would have been some kind of

fly agaric. The fungus in this family consists of different kind of intoxication even if the chemical compositions in the funguses are not clear there is indicators that points to the fact that they vary a lot between the different funguses in the family. The intoxication effect among the funguses in the family is not the same. Some of the funguses has an antibiotic effect, others has been highly regarded funguses for food in Europe during long period of time. The most likely candidate in the family is *Amanita Muscaria* which has its largest spreading in the north temperate zones in Eurasia. The psychological and mental effect from the fungus is different from one person to another. Eating one to four funguses would be enough to start an intoxicating effect and process. The effect will show anywhere between 15 minutes to one hour after the eating of the fungus [Heim, 1963: 90-99].

The feet's gets numb, the body experience spasms and convulsions. This will be followed by an euphoric feeling of happiness and a wish to dance. These feelings are accompanied by colourful visions. During the intoxication one very often also experience religious overtones. In some cases the intoxicated person runs around and around in circles. When the effect wares off a feeling of great tiredness and deep sleep comes over the person. It is very likely that this is the fungus that was used in the Indian rites in the Indus valley 3500 years ago [Heim, 1963: 90-99].

Those rites was called Soma where a hallocinogenic beverage was drunk to the divinities honour. Over 1000 hymns were composed and 120 of them were devoted to Soma. Today those hymns are kept intact in the Rigveda. Eventually the cult died out and the fungus was forgotten and was replaced in modern times with a less hallucinogenic substitute. Over time more then 100 suggestions has been on the table of what kind of main ingredient the Soma constituted of. It appears that the strongest candidate is the fly agaric [Heim, 1963: 90-99].

Haoma was and are not only the plant or fungus that is used; it is also the divinity that is being worshipped. This divinity possesses the same characteristics as the plant.

Some researchers think that the base in the Haoma could have been hops since Mithra are depicted drinking haoma surrounded by hop plants. That depiction can be found on a drinking vessel found in Georgia [Gachechiladze, Levan, Kandelaki, Tamaz, 2004: 67].

Other researchers' means that it never has been a fungus or hops that have been the main ingredient in the Haoma beverage. The original haoma plant would have been a small bush that secreted a strong smell and had bitter leaves (the plant was often used in medicine). The original plant has been forgotten after Zarathustras reformation of the religion and the

ceremony. It is not in use in today's ritual and has been replaced by a plant that does not have as strong intoxicating effects [Kotwal, Firoze, 1991: 6].

Today the original plant has been replaced by a plant that belongs to the family *Efediner* and its Latin name is *Peganum Harmala*. The plant belongs to a family that consists of a half a dozen plants. This particular plant grows in the northern areas of the east Mediterranean to the northern part of India, Mongolia and Manchuria. The herb is of narcotic type and causes illusions. Seeds from the plant contain the alkaloids *harmin* and *harmaline* and some other alkaloids bases that can be related to eight different kinds of families. The fruits on the bush consist of a red colour and oil. The plant is held in high regards in today's natural medicine because it contains aphrodisiac and it also cures different kind of eye diseases. When one consume the plant the person gets a feeling of leaving ones own body and flies over it. Since the plant has these characteristics and since it is held in high regards by native tribes around the world today it is very likely it also was used as such in the pre-historic time as a hallucinogenic drug in religious ceremonies [Hinnells, 1975: 38].

Today Haoma worshippers pick the twigs from the plant and let them dry before the ritual. If the worshippers originally used a fungus as the main ingredient, it has been replaced with a plant both in the teaching of Zarathustra and today's version of Soma. *Ephedra* is a plant with a bracing effect for the one who consumes it. *Ephedra* only grows in the mountain areas of what today is Iran and the bush does not have any leaves. Since it only grows in that area that means that the worshippers in all the other part of the world needs to import the dry twigs in order to be able to use them in their rituals [Hinnells, 1975:127-128].

The practice of the Haoma ritual

Since the knowledge about the pratice of the Haomaritual before Zarathustra was passed down orally from one generation to another it is very difficult to trace the origin of the ritual. However, during the last decades archaeologists has found remains of a ritual of Haoma type before Zarathustra. The geographical location of these remains is in todays area of northern Afghanistan (Bactria) and eastern Turkmenistan (Margiana). The area is dated to the Bronze Age.²

²Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies, vol. 9 (2003), <http://www.ejvs.laurasianacademy.com/issues.html>

The temples that have been excavated on the sites are very large and the complexity of them makes the researches draw parallels with the temples in Mesopotamia. All of the temples has the same architectonic designs and the central part of the temples consists of the so called “white rooms”.³

Along the walls in this white rooms low benches with special vessels was found. The vessels shows traces of ephedra, cannabis and poppy. All of them have for a very long time been used to manufacture narcotic substances. Most of the identifiable traces in the vessels comes from cannabis.⁴

Around the temples in Margiana archaeologists has excavated and examined 25 living houses and all of them had the same kind of “white rooms” as in the temples in a smaller scale, the vessels from this rooms also shows traces of cannabis. This findings in the houses indicates that the houses have belonged to people that have been involved in the daily activities surrounding the temples but also carried out the rituals in the privacy of their own homes. Three of the four monumental temples in Margiana were dedicated to the cult of libation sacrifices of Haoma type.⁵

Since the ephedra, cannabis and poppy do not have a nice smell the plants was first washed in water before they were prepared. In the temples special vessels of clay or woven baskets with a plaster like substance on the inside was kept for this purpose. After the washing the plant was grinded in mortars and pressed, in all of the temples all of this equipment has been found in direct connection to the “white rooms”. The grinded and pressed substance was then mixed with milk, water and grain and was left to ferment in special vessels in the “white rooms”. When the fermentation was finished the liquid/beverage was strained off from seeds and stems that still remained. The vessel for this had a whole in the bottom that was covered with wool so the liquid could pass and the seeds and stems stayed on top of the wool. The filtered beverage was then poured into special cult vessels that were used at ritual ceremonies; first and foremost it was used for libation offerings. These vessels are decorated with figurines of animals and humans along the edge of the vessel. The idols made it very hard, almost impossible to drink from the vessels itself during the ceremony. Due to this fact the worshippers most likely has used straws to drink from during the ceremony. The straws were putted into the sacred bowls and

³Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies, vol. 9 (2003), <http://www.ejvs.laurasianacademy.com/issues.html>

⁴Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies, vol. 9 (2003), <http://www.ejvs.laurasianacademy.com/issues.html>

⁵Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies, vol. 9 (2003), <http://www.ejvs.laurasianacademy.com/issues.html>

the liquid was sucked up through the straws. The straws were made from bones and are highly decorated with large expanded eyes. Traces of the same kind of plants that has been in the cult vessels have been found on the inside of these straws. It is believed among today's researchers that the large, widely expanded eyes are depictions of the worshippers eyes as a result of using the narcotic beverage of Haoma type in the religious ceremonies.⁶

Today's Haoma ritual are practiced and carried out in the "fire temples", in some parts of the world the temple are closed for non believers. In an early stage of the ritual such as Zarathustra reformed it seven (7) priest carried out the ceremony, today it is one priest and his assistant that performs the ceremony [Kotwal, Firoze, 1991: 97-111].

The ritual that are in use today have its roots from Zarathustra. The ritual is very complex and complicated. It consists of eight (8) different part that are very important for the performance of the ceremony. The different parts are 1; the properties for the liturgy, 2; the rite to make the liturgical instrument pure and holy, 3; the rite for taking milk from a goat, 4; the rite to gather and collect date palm leaves and twigs from pomegranate trees, 5; the rite for taking libation offering, 6; the rite to wash and bind the twigs together, 7; the rite to make the twigs holy and 8; the rite to drink the white haoma. The Haoma ritual in it self is part of a larger ceremony that takes around two (2) hours [Kotwal, Firoze, 1991: 62-85].

The Haoma is prepared three (3) times during the ritual and the twigs from the Ephedera plant that are in use must be at least 13 months old and without any flaws. The first time the Haoma is prepared is before the ritual starts and it is prepared by the assistant. The assistant sits alone in the sacred and holy area and are pounding three twigs together with water in a mortar along with a piece of a twig from the pomegranate tree. From the crushed twigs he is squishing the juice and press it through a filter with nine (9) wholes before the juices passes through a ring made of bulls hair [Kotwal, Firoze, 1991: 62-85].

The beverage is immediately strain into the haoma cup, the same cup the priest later drinks from. What is left of the twigs are thrown on the floor and will later be burned. The ritual burning of the haoma plant along with incense are believed to be a remnant from the time when meat was burned along with incense. After this is done by the assistant the priest

⁶Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies vol 9 (2003), <http://www.ejvs.laurasianacademy.com/issues.html>

enters the sacred and holy area and start to recite the 72 chapters of the Yasna [Kotwal, Firoze, 1991: 62-85].

During the recitation the priest makes a pause and eats a holy bread and after that he continues with the recitation and drinks the first cup of Haoma. When the recitations starts again after the break the priest starts to prepare the second Haoma. This Haoma is poured into a well after that the ceremony is over. After pressing the twigs that has been blessed with holy water the beverage is strained through a filter which consists of a metal ring with a grating made by hair from a holy, healthy and not castrated white flawless bull. The Haoma beverage is then drunk by the priest and his assistant. The ritual also consists of a third preparing of the Haoma [Kotwal, Firoze, 1991: 62-85].

The first time the Haoma is drunk by the assistant it does not contain milk from a goat which it does the two (2) last times and therefore are regarded to give a more hallucinogenic refreshing effect. The hymn is read over the beverage and the immortal God Haoma. This part of the ritual are dedicated to all the immortal souls, the dead and the living and to those that have not been born yet. In the believes the dualism is consistently and there is a very strong symbolism in crushing the twigs for the Haoma. By doing so the God is killed just for the sole purpose that he once again can resurrect with renewed power and strength. The prehistoric believes was build upon the idea that the world should be saved on Doomsday. The final cleansing would come in a torrent of metal and fire and all who had lived a pure life would be allowed to enter in the immortal Gods paradise, the white Haoma paradise [Hinnells, John, 1975:127-128].

Since the God Haoma still is believed to be an immortal God, the Haoma beverage also is given to newborn babies (then it is called white Haoma) and to dyeing people in order to give their souls eternal life. A part from this groups it is only the priest and his assistant that are allowed to drink the Haoma [Kotwal,, Firoze, 1991: 110].

Closing discussion

Today it is very difficult to establish where and when the pre-historic preparation and use of beverage of Haoma typ took place and how many transformations it underwent before it received the form that was written down in the Avesta.

The difficulties to derive the origin of the Haoma beverage are due to several factors. One is that the societies and cultures during the Bronze Age did not have a written language so no written records are left behind

for us. However, archaeologists have been able to prove preparing and cult practise from the younger Bronze Age in the areas, that are today northern Afghanistan and east Turkmenistan from temple complex. Today's political situation in the area has contributed to the difficulties for archaeologists to receive working and excavation permits over a longer time period, this in its own turn are contributing to the great knowledge gap that exists today regarding the early use and practice of the Haoma cult.

If the Haoma cult in the Persian Empire was the same as in the temples from the Bronze Age is very difficult to say or establish. However the lack of altars in the Bronze Age temples for sacrificing animals can be an indicator that the animal sacrifices in Mithras honour is something that was added to the Haoma cult during the Persian Empire. This in itself does not mean that the libation sacrifice of Haoma does not have its roots in the Bronze Age. Another important difference is that there were no temples in the Persian Empire (before Zarathustra) dedicated to the Haoma ritual.

The oral tradition to pass on the knowledge of the cult practise from one generation to the other continued during the Persian Empire and was not written down until the Sassanids was in power (ca 226-651 B.C) but the oldest today known version of the Avesta is dated to 1323 A.D. Therefore it is very difficult to establish what kind of transformations the text underwent from the first time it was written down to the version that is known to us today.

During Zarathustra's upbringing he had heard the cult tradition by oral transmission until he knew them by heart, this we know since the Avesta tells us that the God Haoma came to Zarathustra an early morning when he was preparing the holy fire. Zarathustra brought a reformation and transformation of the earlier beliefs and he made Ahura Mazda the most important God but the God Haoma was allowed to keep his place in the new religion. It is very clear that the God Haoma was very important to Zarathustra since the rites of preparing the Haoma beverage was given such an important part of the two (2) hour long ceremony which is still in use today by the followers of Zarathustra.

It is going to be very interesting to follow and to see if the researchers in the future with the help of archaeology and history are going to be able to establish the origin of today's Haoma use and its pre-historic spreading. I for one would not be the least surprised if the origin is going to be found in the Caucasus area since early evidence exists for fire worshippers that are earlier than the followers of Zarathustra in the region.

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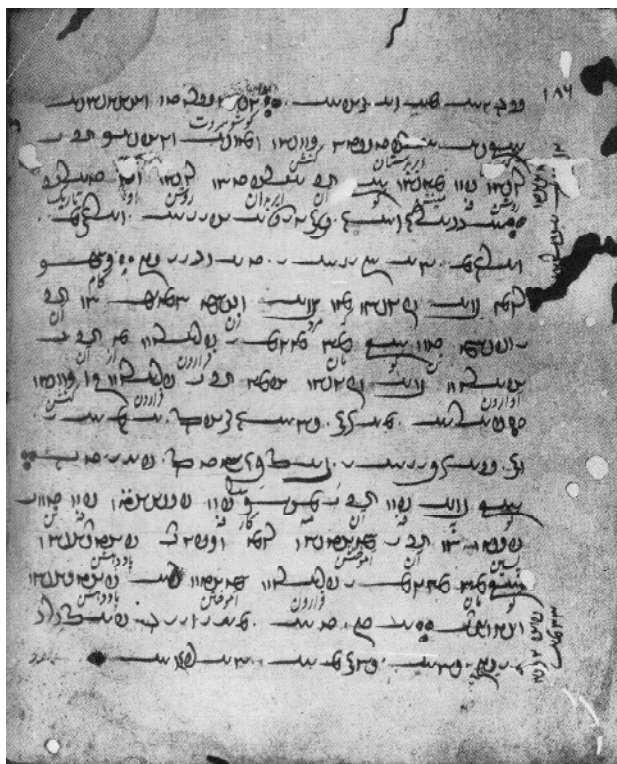
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A very early depiction of the winged Ahura Mazda. The seal is dated to 200-300 B.C and is found in Atskuri, Georgia.

Photo: Professor V. Licheli, Tbilisi State University.



A page from the oldest handwritten manuscript that exists to day of the Avesta. The text is rendering some of the verses from the Gatha songs, first in avestan script, then in middle Persian translation and in new Persian version.

From Jensen et al, *Religionshistoria: rituel, mytologi, ikonografi*, Nora 1996:116).



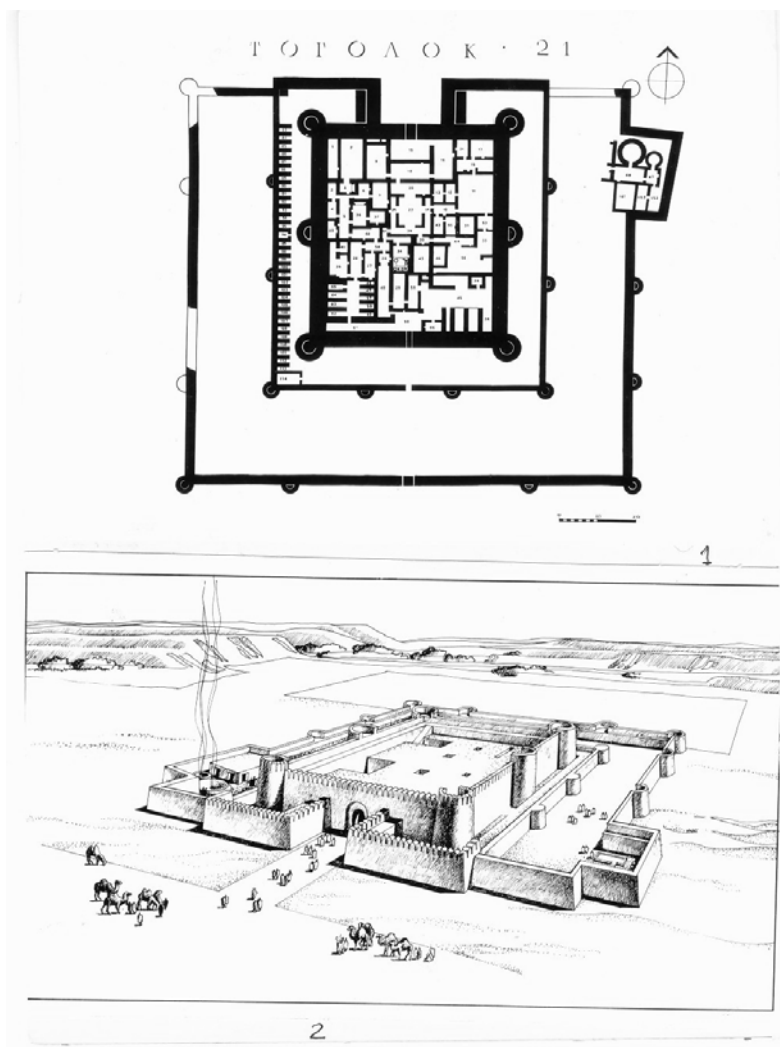
If the main ingredient of the Haoma beverage was a fungus the most likely candidate is *Amanita Muscaria*.

(after Heim, R, *Les Champignons Toxiques et Hallucinogènes*, Paris, 1963: 90).

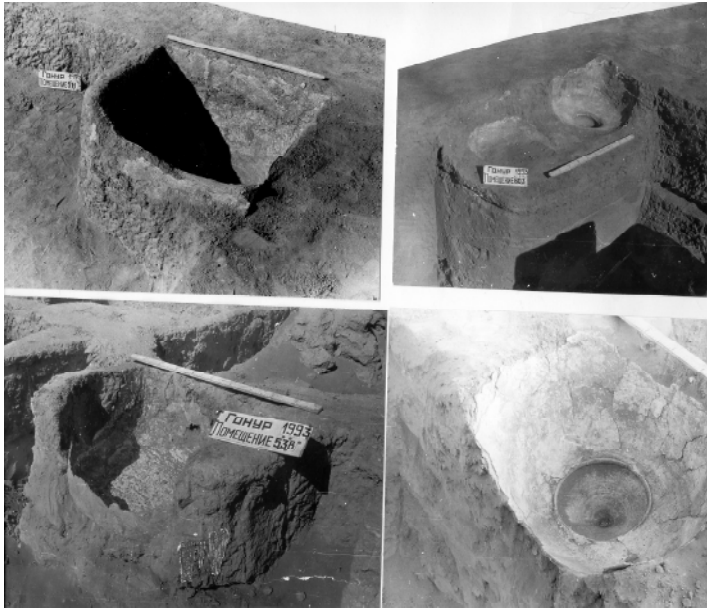


Some reserachers are of the opinion that the main ingrediens in the early Haoma beverage is hops since Mithra is depicted drinking Haoma surrounded by hopeplants.

(after <http://pharm1.pharmazie.uni-greifswald.de/allgemei/koebler/koeh-lat.htm>).



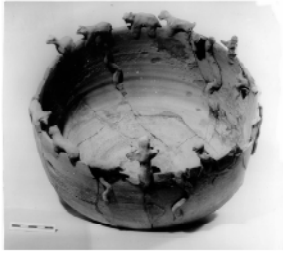
Plan and reconstruction of the excavated temples.
 (after Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies (2003),
<http://www.ejvs.laurasianacademy.com/issues.html>)



The benches with thier immersed vessels for preparing of beverage of Haoma type in the excavated temples (after Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies (2003), <http://www.ejvs.laurasianacademy.com/issues.html>).



Part of the bottom segment from the vessels under microscope. What is shown on the photograph is traces after cannabis. (after Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies (2003), <http://www.ejvs.laurasianacademy.com/issues.html>)



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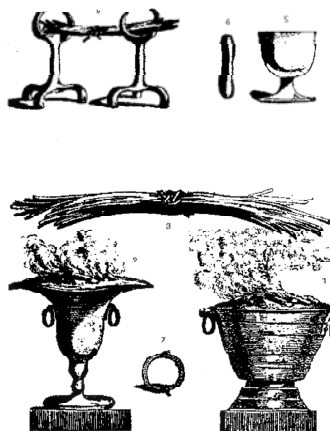


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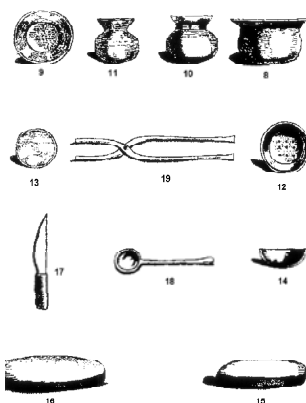
The special vessels that were used for the beverage of Haoma type with richly decorated edges. One interpretation of the depicted animal and humans around the edges is that they are representatives of the myths in the pre-historic religious dogmas. (after Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies (2003), <http://www.ejvs.laurasianacademy.com/issues.html>).



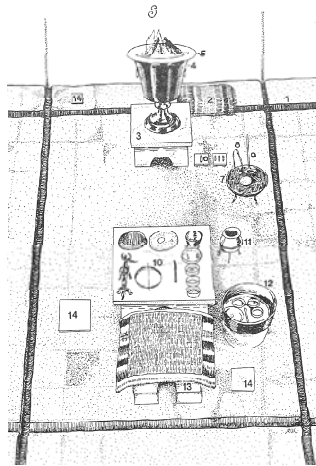
This straws are made of bones and are highly decorated and are belived to have been used in the intake of the beverage of Haoma type. The reason for this is that was not possible to drink from the vessels since they where decorated around the edges with animal and human idols. Traces of cannabis has been found inside the straws, the same as in the bottom segment from the vessels. It is belived that the depicted big eyes on the straws reflect the state of mind of the worshipers after drinking the beverage (after Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies (2003), <http://www.ejvs.laurasianacademy.com/issues.html>).



The utensils that are used in the Haoma ritual today are several. On this picture its shown as follows: 1 & 2, metal vases for holding the ritual fire, 3, Barsom (Av. Baresma), bundle of sticks. The numbers of sticks vary depending on ritual requirements, 4, Moon-shaped metal stands for holding the Barsom (Mah-Ruy), 5, Moon-shaped metal stands for holding the Barsom (Mah-Ruy), 6, Pestal for Haoma (dastag/abar-hawan/labao) and 7, Ring tied with bull's hair (waras fuliyan) (after <http://www.avesta.org/ritual/alat.htm>).



The seven utensils are not enough and are complemented by 8. Vase containing water for purifications, 9. Saucer, 10. & 11. Vases for washing the hands, 12. Nine-holed saucer (Surakhdar tashta), 13. Bowl to hold ritual preparation, parahom, 14. Cup of goat's milk, 15. & 16. Saucers containing Dron (ritual cakes) (dron tashta), 17. Knife for barsom (barsom-chin), 18. Ladle for tending ritual fire (chamach) and 19. Tongs for tending the ritual fire (chipyo), (after <http://www.avesta.org/ritual/alat.htm>).



The utensils that are need for the ritual are placed within the area where the priest and his assistant are performing the ritual. The area is holy and no one else but the priest and his assistant are allowed in the area (from Kotwal, Firoze, *A Persian offering*, Paris, 1991: 33).



Firetemple in Tbilisi, Georgia that has been the place for worshipers and followers of Zarathustra. Today the temple is a very important part of the cultural heritage in the city.

Photo: Ulrica Söderlind.