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Defining the Defiling: The Term khandia (PG ‘poll-bearer’) as a Reflection of Ritual Change in the Parsi Community

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**Defining the Defiling:
The Term *k^handia* (PG ‘poll-bearer’) as a Reflection of
Ritual Change in the Parsi Community**

Anton Zykov

Widēwdād (circa 7th c.)

8.11 (A) ēdōn awēšān **nasā-keš** ē nišīnēnd ān ī and az rist čand se gām [ay ka nazd nišīnēnd ā-š xwad bīm ka dūr ē nišīnēnd ā šāyēd]

(B) ēg ē gōwēd rad-ē ahlaw [**sālār** ī murdag-kešān] ō mazdēsna kū mazdēsna hēd

(C) ā-m ō [awēšān] gōmēz ē barē kū pad ān ī awēšān nasā-kēš frāz ē šōyēnd wars ud tan.

8.11 (A) Thus these **corpse-bearers** shall sit as far from the dead as three steps [if they sit near, they fear themselves; it is proper if they sit farther].

(B) Then the righteous master [**master** of the corpse-bearers] will say this to the Mazdayasnians:

(C) bring for [them] bull's urine so that these corpse-bearers may wash their hair and body.²

Moazami 2014, 80-1

nasā (MP 'corpses of humans and animals', Av *nasu* 'a demon of dead matter')

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sālār (MP 'master', 'controller')

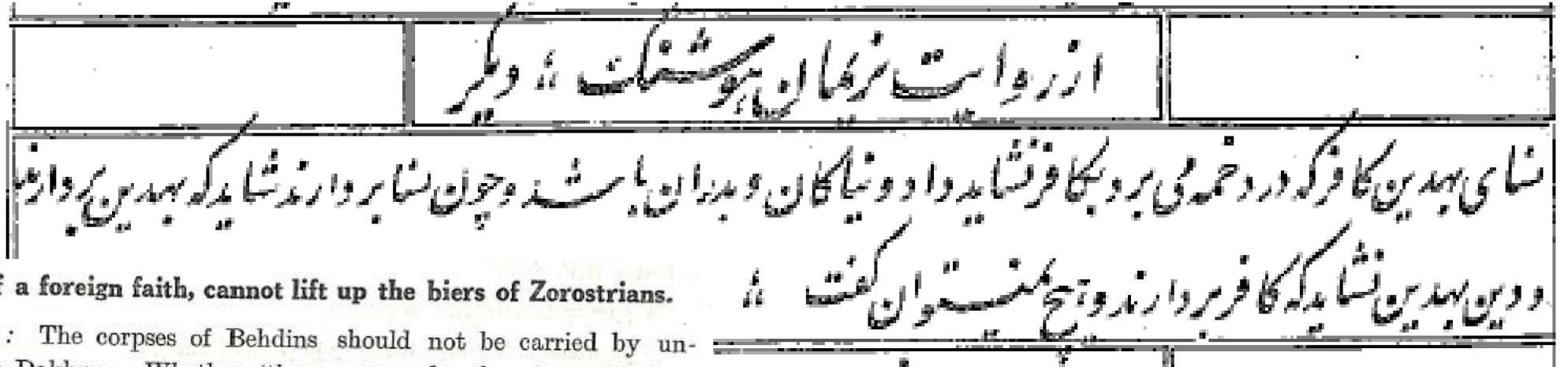
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nasāsālār – 'the one that masters a demon [that possesses a dead body]' or, following Boyce (1989, 304), 'master of the corpse', 'a corpse-bearer'.

“There are two classes of bearers: (a) *Nasā-sālārs* [sic], who alone can enter into the Tower of Silence, (b) the *Khāndyas* [sic] who are in charge of carrying the body from the house to the Tower, where it is taken over by the *Nasā-sālārs*. The *Nasā-sālārs* who are in contact with the bodies, do not belong to the priestly class; they are just Behdins. They are usually housed in separate buildings; they are not permitted to go to *Atash Behrams* (principal Fire Temples) unless they are purified with *Barashnum*, which obliges them to retreat for nine days and nine nights. At public festivals (*Jasans* or *Gāhānbārs*) they have their meals separately”.

Menant 1898, 185, fn. 2

Rivāyat of Narimān Hošang (1478)



Juddins, *i.e.*, men of a foreign faith, cannot lift up the biers of Zorostrians.

Nariman Hoshang: The corpses of Behdins should not be carried by unbelievers (*kafr*) to the Dakhma. Whether (these corpses be of our) grandfathers or fathers, these, if uplifted, should be uplifted by Behdins, but it is not proper

Unvala 1922, 107

1 نساها *lit.*, dead matter; corpses; here, the bones denuded of the flesh.

2 سواد ۸ or سواد چم = inner apartment; closet. Cf. Ar. سوادق—It is the central well of the Tower of Silence called *bhandâr* in Gujarâti.

3 The place where the Bareshnum purification is administered. The bath of the *si-shui* (*lit.*, 30 washings) should be undergone by them as they have become *riman* (polluted).

4 *lit.*, the proper place *i.e.*, the Dakhma. This term is used both for the Dakhma and for the place where the fire is kept.

“again, it has been represented (to us) that the nasa of men, dogs and other nasas are ordered to be taken by infidels (*kāfir*) and non-Zoroastrians (*juddīns*) and they take them to the dad-gah. This is bad, odious and not good. There is greater crime thereof, because it is said in the religion of Ormazd and Zaratosht that is they knowingly order *juddins* to take these *nasas*, then if the *juddins* go near water of fire, that person who has issued orders is responsible for the sin”

Dhabar 1932, 162-3

Guj *kand^h* (variations: *sk^hand^h*, *kānd^h*, *k^hand^h*, *k^hānd^h*)

Hin *kand^hā*

Mar *k^hāndā*

Raj *kand^h* (variations: *kand^hau*, *kānd^h*, *k^hand^h*, *k^hand^hau*)

< Sk *skand^ha*

Khândiās (or *Shiv-gāhān*).

Johan von Mandelslo (1638)

“When one is so sick, as that there is little hope of recovery, he is taken out of his bed, to be laid on a little bit of green Turfs upon the ground, where he lies till he give up the ghost, and immediately after, five or six Men, whose employment is to dig the graves, take him from the said Pallat of Turfs put a Shroud about him and lay him upon the Iron-grate, made after the form of a Biere, upon which they carry the body to the place of burial...”

“...sort of people called Theers, who are neither Pagans nor Mahumetans, for they have no Religion at all... [who] are altogether employed about the scouring of Wells, Sinks, Common-Shores, and Privies, as also cleaning of dead Beasts, whose flesh they eat... Whence it comes that they are in abomination to all the other Indians, who are obliged to purify themselves from head to foot, if any of these people, whom upon that occasion, they call *Alchores* [sic.], should touch them.”

Peter Mundy (1667)

“Parsees are only found about Suratt [sic], who neither bury nor burn their dead...”

“*Hallalcores* [sic]... are a kind of base, object and contemned people or caste most commonly put to empty houses of office, which go not with vault as ours, only in some place are certain high steps one by another, on which they set their feet and ease themselves. [The waste] is carried away by the *Hallalcores*, so that there is seldome any ill savor in their houses of office. They are also put to bring up, carry about and keep great mens dogs (as unclean beasts). They also keep swine and eat of their flesh...”

William Symson (1701)

“Their way of disposing their dead is to expose their carcasses to the fowls of the air, carrying them into an open field, near the place where they are to be placed for the ravenous birds to feed on. The corpse being laid on the ground one of the company goes to look out a dog and having found one invited him along with the piece of bread provided for that purpose till he draws him as near the corpse as he can; for the nearer the dog is brought to the body, the nearer the soul is to felicity... When this ceremony is over two of the Daroos standing at small distance, repeat a tedious form of prayer, which lasts about half an hour, and then the **Halalkhors** convey the corpse to the intended repository, all the company following by two and two with their hands joined.”

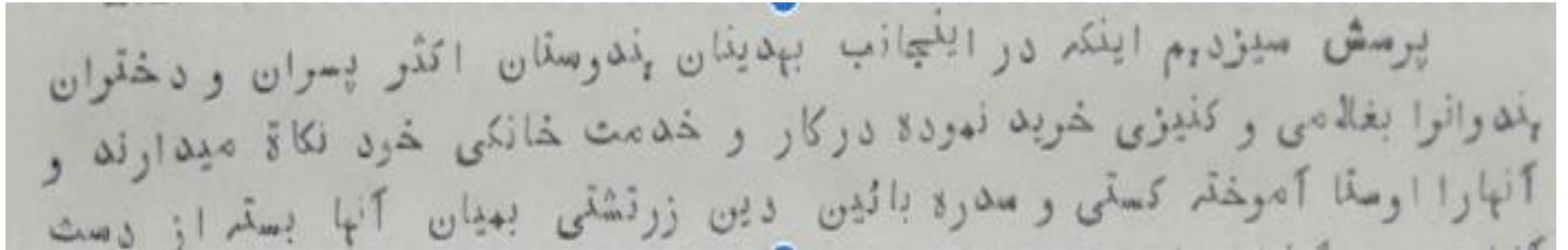
(Symson, 64-5)

halālxor

“halal-khor [sic.] – one who eats what is lawful..., applied euphemistically to a person of a very low caste, a sweeper of scavenger, implying ‘to whom is all lawful food’”

Hobson-Jobson 1903, 409

Rivāyat Iṭhōter / Haftād-o Hasht (1773)



“The Behdins of Hindustan having purchased mostly sons and daughters of Hindus (Indians) as slaves and female slaves possess them for... their own work and home service, having taught Avesta to them, and having invested them with Kushti and Sudre according to the faith of Zaratushtra, employ them to prepare Daruns for Gahambar and other holy festival to consecrate those things; and also all Mobeds and Behdins drinks from their hands...”