X.

PISACA = 'Ωμοφάγος.

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AS a contribution towards solving the question of the origin of the inhabitants of the North-Western Frontier of British India, i.e., of Gilgit, Chitral, and Kāfiristān, I would draw attention to the fact that several legends as to the early customs of these tribes point to cannibalism having once prevailed there. The interpretation of the word *Pisāca* as meaning 'an eater of raw flesh,' 'Ωμοφάγος, is well known. Some of the legends have been printed, and of these I do not propose to give more than a brief sketch, with references to the authorities. Others, hitherto unpublished, I shall give at greater length.

Amongst the Shīns of Gilgit the festival of the Winter solstice occupies an important place. On the second day the *Talēnī* or torch festival is celebrated.¹ It is in commemoration of the death of the tyrant Shiribadatt. The legend regarding him is given at length by Leitner,² and, for our present purposes, its outline is as follows:—

Shiribadatt was a descendant of the Yakṣas, and ruled over Gilgit. He was a powerful magician, and terribly oppressed his subjects. One day his cook brought him some mutton broth of superlative excellence. On enquiry it turned out that it was made from the flesh of a sheep that had been suckled in its lambhood by a woman, and was therefore to all intents and purposes the flesh of a human being. The taste for this unnatural food was awakened in Shiribadatt, and he ordered that his kitchen should be regularly provided with children of tender age, whose flesh,

¹ Biddulph, *Tribes of the Hindoo Koosh*, pp. 101 and 109.

² Leitner, *Dardistan in 1866-1886 and 1893*, pp. 9 ff.

when converted into broth, would now alone appease his appetite. At first he was provided with the children and orphans of neighbouring tribes, but when this supply failed he compelled the inhabitants of Gilgit itself to give up their own children for slaughter.

Relief came at the hand of a fairy who had become a human being by eating the kidneys and liver of a calf. He arrived at Gilgit, where the tyrant's daughter fell in love with him. He persuaded her to ask her father the secret of the abiding-place of his soul, and she finally wrested from the latter the information that his soul was in the snows, and that he could only perish by fire. The fairy prince called the inhabitants of the country to surround the castle with lighted torches (*talēn*). Overcome by the heat, the monster leaped over the wall of his fortress, only to fall into a pit which had been dug for him. The villagers ran up, threw their torches into the pit, and thus destroyed Shiribadatt. The fairy prince was then proclaimed king, celebrated his nuptials with the princess, and, as a sole tribute, exacted the offering of one sheep, instead of that of a human child, annually from each of his subjects. The torch festival is in celebration of this deliverance. According to Leitner¹ the Dards of Gilgit had a reputation amongst the Kāśmīris for cannibalism so late as the year 1866, and one Dard tribe will accuse another of the practice. They themselves confess to the custom of drinking the blood of a slain enemy.²

Biddulph³ gives an amusing story of a female demon who used to eat up the Gilgit people. A saint turned her into stone, and on going away warned the people to bury him when he died at the foot of the image, otherwise the statue

¹ L.c.

² The story of Shiribadatt has striking points of resemblance with the *Mahā-sutasōma Jātaka*, for a version of which I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. Francis. In this the hero Brahma Datta (the 'Datta' is a curious coincidence) had been a Yakṣa in a former birth. By an accident of the cook-room he also reacquired the taste for human flesh and became a cannibal. He first ate up the prisoners in the jail. When that supply was exhausted he ate his subjects. He was then expelled from his kingdom. I have to thank Professor Rhys Davids for first drawing my attention to this *Jātaka*.

³ p. 112.

would come to life again. The practically minded Gilgit people, to save themselves the trouble of looking for the corpse of the wandering ascetic, promptly chopped off his head, and buried him there and then. The statue (really an image of the Buddha) is still there to bear witness to the truth of the legend.

Turning to the west of the Pisāca country, we find similar traces of ancient cannibalism in Kāfiristān. In the country of the Bashgal Kāfirs¹ there was an enormous snake which used to eat travellers. The god Imra remonstrated with him, but in vain. Imra then decapitated the snake.

The Wai Kāfirs have an interesting legend of their origin and of why they worship their deity Trasken. Here it is, literally translated from the version as given to me in their own language :—

“Formerly the Wai people dwelt in Jalālābād. Thence they migrated to Narang. They fled from there and dwelt in Caqansarāi. Then they dwelt in Shakurik, which is near the Shigal country. Then they dwelt in Kumaritun and Samalam. Thence they came and dwelt in the Wai valley.

“In the Wai valley there was a devil. Each year he took tribute from the Wai people. They counted houses, and turn and turn about a man was given him (to eat). In one house there were a boy and a girl, orphans. Their turn arrived. First the boy went, then the girl went, but the devil said, ‘They are very small. I will not take them.’ On this account the Wai people rebelled against the devil, and went about searching for the god Trasken. They found Trasken on Bimberi hill. He went with the Wai people, and killed the devil. Since then the Wai people have made their offerings to (i.e. have worshipped) Trasken.”

In the south of the Kāfir country, round about Laghmān, are the Pashai Kāfirs.² They have a remarkable story about a cannibal princess which runs as follows. I translate literally :—

“There was a king. He had one son and one daughter. The daughter was a cannibal (*ādamkhōr*). The brother fled from the

¹ Robinson, *Kāfirs of the Hindu Kush*, p. 388.

² Dr. Hoernle has suggested to me a connexion between ‘Pashai’ and ‘Pisāca.’ The connexion is phonetically quite possible.

sister and lived with a woman in another country. He kept two dogs. Much time passed. He returned to his father's city. There was no one there except his sister. (Apparently the lady had exhausted the entire available supply of her favourite food.) The sister prepared to eat him. She ate up his horse. The brother began to fear for his life. Then the sister said, 'I will eat you.' The brother said, 'Good. Take a sieve. Bring it full of water from the river. Come back when you have made your teeth sharp.' The sister went (with a sieve) to the river, but put a drum by him. She said, 'Keep beating the drum.' He caught a rat, and put it on the top of the drum. The rat jumped about, and so beat the drum. Then the boy ran away. When his sister came back, her brother was not there. She ran after him. When she got near him, he dropped a needle. The needle became a mountain. With much trouble she climbed it. Then he threw down salt. The salt became a mountain. With much trouble she climbed it. Then the brother threw down soap (*sābūn*). The soap became a mountain. She climbed to the top of it also. Her brother climbed a tree. She arrived beneath the tree. Just as she was about to eat her brother, his dogs came. He said to the dogs, 'Eat her in such a way that not one drop of blood fall on the ground.'¹ In that instant the dogs tore her into little pieces."

From the above it appears that legends connected with cannibalism are very widely spread over the modern Piśāca country, and that in some instances they are intimately connected with basal traditions regarding national origin and national religion. This is thoroughly in agreement with the root-meaning of the word *Piśāca*, and supports other arguments based on linguistic considerations which have been elsewhere adduced to show that the Piśācas of Sanskrit literature belonged to this part of India.

¹ Cf. Frazer, *Golden Bough*, i, 355.