

In my earlier essay, "Greece in Central Asia", I have dealt in details on the Greek mythology in Pashto language. Those who have read the article, may have found it interesting to know that, besides the Greek mythology, a large number of ancient Greek words and phonetics transferred to Pashto language, are still existing in this eastern Iranian tongue, which is one of the two main languages of Afghanistan and widely spoken in the western and northern parts of Pakistan. At this stage of my research work on the topic, I have traced at least seven more Greek Gods and Goddesses of various ranks in Pashto. Besides this, a list of superstitious beliefs or folklore of the modern Greeks and Pashtuns, with striking similarities, have also been included in this article. This peculiar folklore of the modern Greeks and Pashtuns, is something, both of these people, seem to have inherited from the ancient Greeks.

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Greek Mythology in Pashto

Apollo

Firstly, the Greek mythology in Pashto, a language several thousands of miles away in west Asia, is something, which was completely unknown in the past. In my earlier article, I have mentioned eight Greek Gods and Goddesses. In this article about seven Greek Gods and Goddesses, still present in Pashto language, would be discussed. Greek God Apollo would be one of the most important of the Gods and Goddesses in the article as was Athena in the earlier article. As Apollo was one of the Greek Gods with several definitions, is still present in Pashto language with many of his facets. Apollo was the God of the sun, light, medicine, music and all wisdom and fortune telling. Apollo was considered to bring life-giving heat and light to earth. The existence of God Apollo among the ancient Pashtuns needs a more comprehensive study. What I have come to know at this stage is the name of this God, linked to all wisdom, fortune telling and his life-giving quality.

This shows that Apollo was one of the important Gods of the ancient Pashtuns as was of the ancient Greeks in the mainland Greece. The very word for wisdom in Pashto, "Poha" or "Poya", comes from Apollo. This word doesn't exist in any other Iranian languages and seems to have come to Pashto language from the name of the Greek God Apollo. As Apollo, was the God of all wisdom and knowledge, the word "Poha" or "Poya" is translated as all wisdom and knowledge in Pashto. Another important work of the God Apollo was fortune telling. The word for fortune telling in Pashto is "Pall". The word for fortune telling in some other languages in close proximity of Pashto is "Fal". The word "Pall", in Pashto, very clearly seems to have come from Apollo. As for as the life-giving quality of Apollo is concerned, I found the word, "Pai-dall" in Pashto, which means life-giving in Pashto. All these three words or phrases have no substitutes in Pashto.

Cytherea (Aphrodite)

As Cytherea or Aphrodite was an important Goddess of Beauty, Love and female fertility and desire, worshipped by the ancient Greeks, there are signs that this Goddess like many other Gods and Goddesses, was revered or worshipped by the ancient Pashtuns as well. So far, I couldn't find the word Aphrodite in Pashto but Cytherea is existing in modern Pashto. When a Pashtun girl reaches the age of fertility, she is made "Cythera", which means she must cover herself from the gaze of stranger males, to avoid any feelings of desire by them. Girls reached puberty at ages, twelve or thirteen in the ancient Greece, at which point they were considered adults and could marry. And there was a ceremony in which girls would take their childhood toys and left them at the temple of Artemis. This signalled that their childhood was over and that they were adults. There could be a similar ceremony or ceremonies attached to "Cytherea" (age of female fertility) among the ancient Pashtuns which during the course of more comprehensive research might be known.

Hestia

The Goddess of Home has left her traces by the word Estoga for a place to live, in Pashto. The sound

“H” is normally silent in modern Pashto. If we put “H” before “E” in “Estoga”, it would become “Hestoga”. Moving to a new house is generally marked by some rituals and a ceremony of sheep sacrifice by many Pashtuns. The sacrificial ceremony of sheep still bears hall marks of the ancient Greeks, despite the conversion of the Pashtun people to Islamic faith for more than a thousand years. After the slaughter of sheep, the meat is divided into three portions with the biggest, dedicated to the God. This in Pashto would be called, “Da Khudai Barxa or Barkha”, which means the portion of the God. Word “Barxa” in Pashto comes from the ancient Greek “Aparxia”. Dedicating “aparxia” to Gods was one of the most important rituals of the ancient Greeks. This practise seems to have disappeared in the modern Greece, but is still existing among many Pashtuns.

Cynthia

(Artemis), the Goddess of Hunting, Moon and virginity, is still present in Pashto by the word “Spoghmai” for moon and Sathai for a woman who never marries and remains virgin for the whole of her life. The words Spogmai and “Sathai”, both have very clearly originated from the Goddess Cynthia. Spogmai, moon, in Pashto has been mentioned in folkloric songs from the past many centuries.

Eos

The Goddess of Dawn, has left her name alive in Pashto by the word “Gaes”, meaning early morning or dawn.

Hephaestus

The God of fire and metal or iron works can be traced in Pashto to “Hospana”, which in Pashto means, iron.

Aglaia

A junior Goddess of beauty has been mentioned in the medieval Pashto poetry. One of the Pashto poets, in the famous Pashto poetry book, called “Pata Khazana”, has attributed, the word “Aglaia” to beautiful girls of the medieval homeland of the Pashtuns. This poem is said to be about one thousand years old. The word “Aglaia”, is almost non-existent in modern Pashto.

The Greek mythology is not only about Gods and Goddesses but there are large number of other creatures, heroes, monsters and places. In my earlier article, I have traced several creatures, characters, monsters and places relating to the faith of the ancient Greeks, still present in the Pashto language. In this second article, I have found “Scylla” to be also present in Pashto along with “Euryale” of the Greek mythology.

Scylla

A woman monster with six heads and twelve feet in Greek mythology is usually mentioned together with Raevi (Euryale in Greek mythology) in Pashto. The name of “Scylla”, seems to have changed to “Scyrilli” in Pashto. A detailed information about “Euryale” or “Raevi” has already been given in my earlier article, published few months back at the same website.

Striking similarity between Greek and Pashtun folklore

Matiasma

Besides sharing some similar looks, words, sentences, customs, modern Greeks and ethnic Afghans or Pashtuns share a lot of their superstitious beliefs or folklore as well, which they have inherited from the ancient Greeks. I was surprised to know that most of the folklore of the modern Greeks, who are Orthodox Christians, are so similar to those of the ethnic Pashtuns who are Muslims. Greece, being a modern country is fast moving away from some of these beliefs, but many ethnic Pashtuns, even, living in cities, still, believe that they can be afflicted by evil spirits, “Matisama” or “Tavisona”, in Pashto. Like the Greeks, many Pashtuns believe that “Tavisona”, can affect any body

at any time and anywhere. "Tavisona," are stronger evil spirits in the traditional Pashtun society. Interestingly, to cure "Tavisona", a Pashtun would go to an especially qualified person to cure himself of the evil affects. But for the lesser evil spirits like evil eye, "Bada Starga", an older woman of the family has the cure, as in the case of a traditional Greek family in a remote village in Greece. Many Pashtuns, for centuries have resisted Islamic teachings, which strongly oppose these superstitions as un-Islamic.

A Pashtun mother having a cute and very healthy baby would be very much worried about an evil eye on her sibling. It's quite probable that she would avoid visiting functions along with her baby where she thinks that evil eyes can cast on her baby. And when the baby shows signs of an evil eye, the grandmother or another older woman would cure the evil eye in ways similar to the ones in traditional Greek villages.

Three times spitting to ward off evil spirits

If members of a Pashtun family are having very good time, laughing readily and rejoicing, some body, most probably, an older woman, possibly, a mother or a grandmother would ask everyone to spit three times on themselves to ward off an evil spirit, which means if they don't spit three times on themselves, it is possible that they might have miss-fortune after that happy occasion. Many Greeks, still believe that evil spirits can be warded off by spitting three times in a way very similar to those of the ethnic Pashtuns.

The sanctity of bread

A loaf of bread is considered a gift of the God by both the Greeks and Pashtuns. Pashtuns, no matter how modern they are, would never throw away bread in the rubbish bin. To throw leftover bread in in the rubbish, is considered a big sin among the Pashtuns. Many Greeks, have similar traditions and in many villages in the country, the leftover bread is fed to animals and birds and generally not thrown away.

Never keep your bread container empty

Like some Greeks many Pashtuns believe that to keep some bread even a very small piece, inside the bread container, is very important. The word for a small piece of bread in Pashto language is atom, taken from the ancient Greek word atom, meaning a small piece. Similarly, wallets and pockets are generally not kept empty as they believe that by doing so they may lose thier "barakat", sustainability.

Cawing of Crow

I remembered from my own family that whenever a crow cawed, at least one woman from the family will answer, by saying, "Crow, give us the good news". In most cases I remembered that she would shout three times, repeating the whole sentence again and again. Many traditional Greeks would say exactly the same thing when they hear a crow cawing as they believe that crows can bring a bed news. In some Greek villages when you see a crow cawing you say "Sto Kalo... Sto Kalo.... Kala Nea na me Feris" which can be translated, go well into the day and bring me good news.

Healing swellings through onions

After finding so many similarities about the common folklore of the Greeks and ethnic Pashtuns, I was not surprised to hear stories about the importance of onion as an element of healing ailments both in the Pashtun and Greek villages. My own grandmother who was born and grown up near the city of Ghazni in Afghanistan, founded by the ancient Greeks more than two thousands of years ago, believed in the healing powers of onions. This is something, she had learnt from her parents and grandparents. I remembered, when I was a teenager, I hurt one of my feet and had some swelling on one of the knees. My grandmother, half roasted an onion, cut it into two equal pieces, took out the further most two layers and quickly put it on the swollen part of the knee and bandaged it. In the

morning the swelling was gone. Pashtuns are generally known to use much more onions in their food, compared with other ethnic groups in their surroundings. Greeks from the ancient times, believe in their village folklore about the healing powers of onions. In many remote villages of Greece, to ease the swelling caused by many reasons, a paste of grate onions mix with a bit of Ouzo, a Greek drink, is applied to the swollen area and bandaged to sooth swelling. In some Greek villages onions are still used to cure swellings.

Never leave shoes overturned (soles up)

As in Greece, overturned shoes (soles up), are considered a sign of bad luck or Miss-fortune, many Pashtuns believe exactly in the same way. Go to any Pashtun house in a village or a city, both in Afghanistan and Pashtun parts of Pakistan, you will never see people accepting shoes, lying overturned with soles up. If by any chance a shoe or shoes get overturned, any body who sees them first, would immediately turned them over. I still remembered a radio programme from Kabul many years ago, educating people not to believe in superstitions and very particularly mentioning overturned shoes.

Talismans or 'Filahta' are regularly used in Greece to ward off evil spirits or evil eye. Many Pashtuns Carry a similar thing called "Badbaraka", for the same purpose. "Badbaraka", is pinned to children's clothing to guard them from evil spirits and "Bada Starga", evil eyes.

There are so many traditions and stories in the Greek as well as in the Pashtun Folklore with striking similarities that I would need a book, to write them down.

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