

SERIE ORIENTALE ROMA

n.s. 37

ROOTS OF PERISTAN  
THE PRE-ISLAMIC CULTURES  
OF THE HINDUKUSH/KARAKORUM

Proceedings of the International  
Interdisciplinary Conference  
ISMEO, Rome, Palazzo Baleani, 5-7 October, 2022

Part I

edited by Alberto M. Cacopardo & Augusto S. Cacopardo



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# **Lineages, Rituals, and Gods among the Kalasha of Birir Textual Evidence**

PIERPAOLO DI CARLO

**SUMMARY.** The Kalasha—“the last Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush”—are mostly known through research focused on one of the three valleys where they are settled, i.e. Rumbur. Data collected in Birir, the southernmost and least known of the three valleys, is suggestive that what we refer to as “Kalasha culture” is in fact much less internally uniform than one might infer. One aspect where such differences emerge quite clearly concerns discourses and practices connecting patrilineages to local gods and ritual festivals. The texts illustrated in this article suggest that, in Birir, patterns of “ownership” of a deity or a festival constitute important yet thus far overlooked attributes of individual patrilineages. This observation finds some parallels in the pre-Islamic cultures of Nuristan and raises questions surrounding, for instance, the processes of creation of what are usually referred to as pre-Islamic pantheons across western Hindu-Kush and, relatedly, the extent to which the history of this area should be viewed first and foremost as the outcome of a multitude of micro-histories of lineages that are by and large self-sufficient, also in terms of cult.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This short article aims to contribute to answering some open questions that, while not often discussed in recent literature, are nonetheless commonly evoked by scholars of pre-Islamic Hindu-Kush societies in more or less informal occasions, and which concern the relationships existing between religious institutions (such as, e.g., deities, rituals, and sacred buildings), on the one hand, and descent groups, on the other. The main question I deal with in this article is as follows: to what extent are the religious institutions of the Kalasha of Birir the expression of individual descent groups (i.e. patrilineages) rather than of the multi-lineage, valley-wide collectivity?

I became interested in this problem when, while analyzing the verbal art performances of Kalasha singers I recorded during the Prun festival of 2006 in the valley of Birir, I realized that, surprisingly, several singers associated a specific patrilineage to the festival, as if it was an attribute of that patrilineage rather than of the Birir community as a whole (e.g. Di Carlo 2007: 84 ff.). Intrigued by this

finding, I later focused on the possible associations between lineages and local deities and identified data suggesting that at this level, too, there seemed to be traces of exclusive, direct relationships in both texts and observed practices. Texts from the Chaumos festival of Birir that Augusto Cacopardo kindly put at my disposal seemed to confirm these early insights (Cacopardo 2016: 84, 99, *et passim*). They seemed to clash not just with what I knew about Kalasha patrilineages—which was fundamentally based on ethnographic works about the Kalasha of Rumbur (e.g. Parkes 1983; Loude, Lièvre 1984)—but with the very view of the Kalasha society as a whole that I had derived from the whole of the existing literature on them. The evidence emerging from these texts seemed to question assumptions that, quite unconsciously, had brought me to adhere to an approach to the Kalasha as a sociocultural unit stemming from what Amselle (1998) calls “ethnological reasoning.” If, at least historically, deities are expressions of individual lineages, what kind of pantheon is that of Birir? What kind of *longue durée* processes would lineage- rather than collectivity-based relationships with religious institutions require us to postulate? In this paper, I do not aim to answer these questions but, rather, to provide data and some initial, falsifiable hypotheses, so as to allow other scholars to further this line of studies. After a short introduction to Birir and its lineages (section 2), I illustrate text excerpts focusing on the relationships between lineages and festivals (section 3) and between lineages and deities (section 4), and add a short digression on some possible parallels found in the pre-Islamic culture of the Parun valley in Nuristan (section 5).<sup>1</sup>

## 2. THE LINEAGES OF BIRIR

Birir (Kal. *bir'iu*) is the name of the Southernmost and least studied of the three valleys of Northwest Pakistan where the Kalasha, the “last Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush,” are settled – the other two valleys being Bumburet (Kal. *mu-mur'et*) and Rumbur (Kal. *rukmu'u*). The local population amounts to roughly 2,500 people (Baras Khan, pers. comm. 2 April 2023), about one third of which still identify as traditional Kalasha while the others are Muslim. Population is distributed across *c.* 20 minimal patrilineages, i.e. exogamous kin groups reckoning descent from an eponymous ancestor and acting corporately in terms of residence (virilocality) and, partly, of economy (e.g. rights of use of high-mountain pastures and goat-sheds). Each lineage is associated with a given village, where most of its male members and their families reside. About half of the lineages are unrelated to any other whereas the remaining ones join to form three macro-lineages (see Tab. 1 and Fig. 1).

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Alberto and Augusto Cacopardo for inviting me to contribute to this volume even if I was unable to attend the conference—and for insisting that I contribute. I owe Augusto a special thank for his availability to share his data, recordings, and field notes, and for comments on an earlier version of this paper. I am the sole responsible for the content of this article.

TABLE 1

Names of macro-lineages (Kal. *d'arak*) and lineages (Kal. *kam*) in Birir and names of the locales that are associated with the latter. In the right-hand column, lineages are not affiliated with macro-lineages

Macro-lineage	(Minimal) lineage	Main associated village	(Minimal) lineage	Main associated village
Shurasinawau	Alikshernawau	Aspar	Chumbuknawau	Gri
	Baburanawau	Guru	Dramanawau	Grom
	Gilasurnawau	Ururi	Sandukanawau	Majarik Dam
	Latharuknawau	Guru	Jalongnawau	?
Razhuknawau	Razhuknawau	Gasguru / Noshbyu	Changanchinawau	Grabet Kui
	Danishtanawau	Gri (?)	Dumunawau	Bishala
	GAAnawau	Weneriweshi	Panenawau	Waridon
Bangulenawau	Punjapaonawau	Biyou	Sharutanawau	?
	Jangunawau	?	Mirbaasenawau	Jauguru
	Manjabeknawau	?		
	Astambirnawau	?		

I spent twelve weeks in Birir between August and November 2006, during which time I documented the Prun festival and transcribed and analyzed the about dozen hours of verbal art performances I recorded thanks to the help of a number of consultants, mainly from the Latharuknawau lineage (Di Carlo 2007; 2010a; 2010b; 2011). To this initial corpus, I added several hours of recordings and extensive field notes about the 2006-2007 Chaumos of Birir that Augusto Cacopardo kindly shared with me. It is from this extensive *corpus*—perhaps the largest collection of texts of Kalasha discourse, both poetic and ordinary, available today—that I took the thirteen excerpts I illustrate in the next sections. For reasons of space, I cannot provide each excerpt with exhaustive information about the speaker(s) and the situational contexts where the performances took place: the interested reader can find useful information in this regard in Di Carlo (2007) and Cacopardo (2016: 81-160).

### 3. LINEAGES AND FESTIVALS: KALASHA TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

In this section, I collect all the relevant excerpts from verbal art performances (be they songs or panegyrics) and ordinary discourse found in my *corpus* which are more or less explicitly dealing with possible relationships between

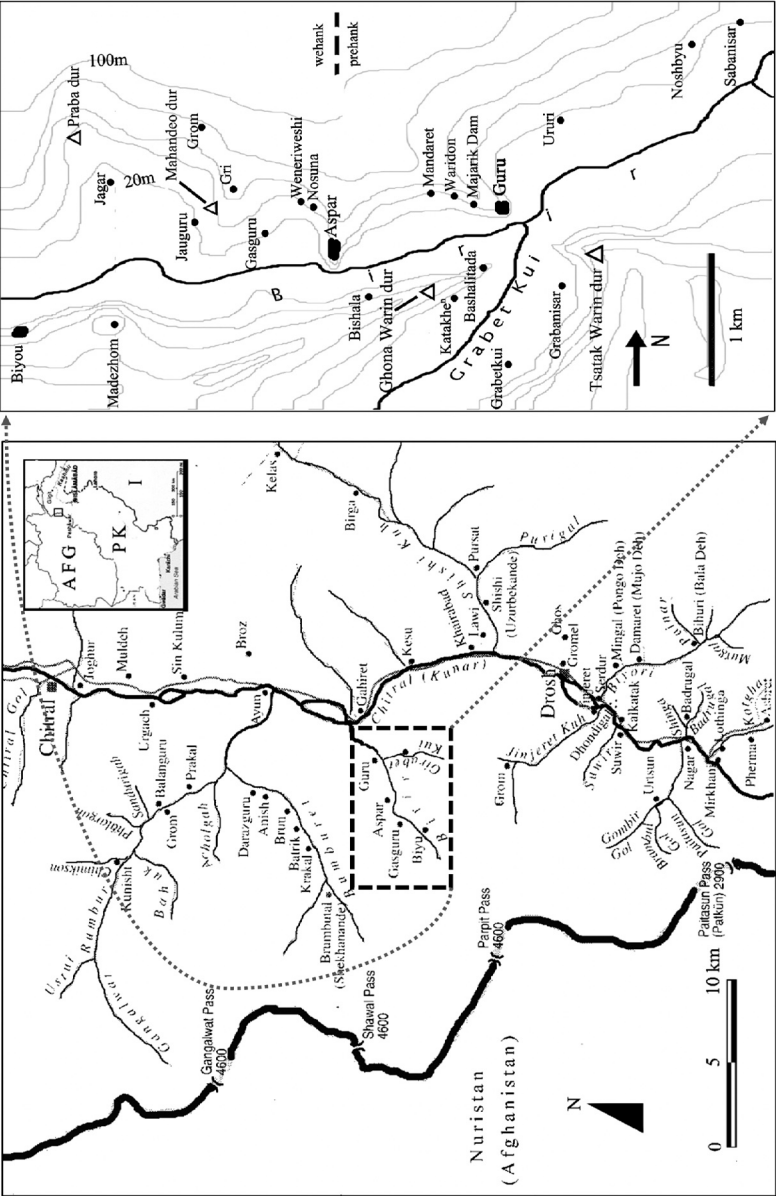


Fig. 1 - Sketch map of the three Kalasha valleys in their immediate geographical context (left) and sketch topographic map of the Birir valley (right). In the latter, triangles indicate deva dur “god’s house(s),” i.e. open-air altars dedicated to individual male deities, and black-filled shapes indicate the main residential areas. (From Di Carlo 2010a: 269-270).

individual lineages and ritual festivals, i.e. the Prun (section 3.1) and the Chau-mos (section 3.2).<sup>2</sup>

### 3.1 *The Prun Festival and the Alikshernawau Lineage*

The first association emerging quite clearly from my corpus is that between the Prun festival and the Alikshernawau lineage. Excerpts 1-4 are taken from panegyrics performed during the Prun of 2006 and dedicated to Mir Bad Shah, the senior elder of the Alikshernawau lineage. Excerpts 2 and 3 have been published in Di Carlo (2007: 85-86).

Excerpt 1—From a panegyric dedicated by Shahara (Gilasurnawau) to Mir Bad Shah (Alikshernawau) (Reference file: shaharaE3-31.052 / .053).<sup>3</sup>

<i>shun'eli</i>	<i>pU~</i>	<i>t'ai</i>	<i>gaRiL'o</i>	<i>sh'i-aw-o</i>
Prun.epithet	Prun	2SG.GEN	tradition	be.INAN-P/F.3SG-RTM
<i>wa~ts</i>	<i>k'ai</i>	<i>kar-'a</i>	<i>sh'awak</i>	<i>tamash'a</i>
easily	do.CP	do-IMPV.2PL	pleasure	entertainment

“The shuneli Prun is your tradition; you have done well (so far), continue creating pleasure and entertainment (i.e. continue celebrating the Prun according to tradition)”

In these two lines we see a classical closing formula of a panegyric—*wa~ts k'ai k'ara sh'awak tamash'a*—preceded by a verse whose meaning looks quite straightforward and even reinforced by its position right before the closing formula: Shahara, an elder of the Gilasurnawau lineage, clearly asserts that the Prun festival is an Alikshernawau lineage's tradition (Kal. *gaRiL'o*). The same content is found in a number of other texts, like in excerpt 2, which is taken from a panegyric sung by Goarnment, an elder of the Razhuknawau lineage.

Excerpt 2—From a panegyric dedicated by Goarnment (Razhuknawau) to Mir Bad Shah (Alikshernawau) (Reference file: government E12-31.007).

<i>manj'ar</i>	<i>manj'ar-una</i>	<i>sh-'ia</i>	<i>rushp'unc</i>	<i>zhe</i>	<i>koshan'i</i>
generation	Generation-LOC	INTNS-this.SG.NOM	ritual	and	feast

<sup>2</sup> Transcriptions are in italic: capital letters represent retroflex articulation and a single stroke “'” immediately precedes the accented vowel. Glossing conventions follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules: 1 “first person,” 2 “second person,” 3 “third person,” A “actual,” ABL “ablative case,” ACC “accusative case,” ADJ “adjectivizer,” AGENT “agentivizer,” AN “animate,” CP “conjunctive participle,” DIST “distant,” EMPH “emphatic,” FOC “focus,” GEN “genitive case,” HUM “human,” I “inferential,” IMPV “imperative,” INAN “inanimate,” INTNS “intensifier,” LOC “locative case,” NEG “negative marker,” NNOM “non-nominative case,” NOM “nominative case,” OBL “oblique case,” PL “plural,” P/F “present/future,” POSS “possessive,” PROX “proximal,” PST “past tense,” PTCP “participle,” REM “remote,” RTM “rhythmic element,” SG “singular,” SEQ “sequencer,” TOP “topic.”

<sup>3</sup> File names including a capital E followed by a number and then by “31” refer to the Prun corpus published in Di Carlo 2010a.

*t'ai m'uCa sh-ay'a m'ai aw'eri k'ui*  
 2SG.GEN possession INTNS-here 1SG.NNOM beloved valley  
 “Generation after generation these very ritual and festival (have been) your possessions,  
 here in my beloved valley”

Excerpt 3—From a panegyric dedicated by Goarnment (Razhuknawau) to Mir Bad Shah (Alikshernawau) (Reference file: government E7-31.017).

*oh shurasi'-O jag'-ai de shun'eli p'U~ t'ai baS'ara g'Uak gho~-n*  
 oh Shurasi-ADJ look-IMPV.2SG RTM shuneli Prun 2SG.GEN old.HUM child say-P/F.3PL  
 “Oh descendant of Shurasi, look, people say ‘the shuneli Prun is a son of your old age’”

While analyzing excerpt 3 with my consultants in Birir, they agreed on an interpretation of its closing metaphor “the Prun is a son of your old age” as “the Prun has become your tradition relatively recently.” None of my consultants was an experienced singer at the time, and this perhaps accounts for the fact that they were unable to identify which lineage the Alikshernawau “succeeded” to in having this strong association with the Prun festival. What they agreed upon, however, was that the lineage Goarnment evoked here ceased having a direct relationship with the Prun because it either died out or just became too “weak” to be able to keep that responsibility.<sup>4</sup> I will return to this issue in section 3.1.1 below.

In excerpt 4, Danok stresses once more such Alikshernawau “ownership” of the Prun, as do several other singers in more or less the same terms, i.e. by defining the Prun as “your tradition” while addressing their panegyrics to Mir Bad Shah.

Excerpt 4—From a panegyric dedicated by Danok (Latharuknawau) to Mir Bad Shah (Alikshernawau) (Reference file: danokE13-31.006 / .007).

*c'una kalash'um sar'i na t'ai bir'il aw'eri k'ui n'a-e*  
 all kalash.people gather.CP RTM 2SG.NNOM Birir narrow valley RTM-RTM  
 “All of the Kalasha people gathered in your Birir narrow valley...”

*a-kh'oj-aw 'ia t'ai shun'eli pU~*  
 PST.A-call-PST.A.3SG PROX.S.NOM 2SG.NNOM Prun.festival.epithet Prun.festival  
 “... this shuneli Prun of yours called (them)”

It is interesting to add that Mir Bad Shah is among the only three singers who used a first-person possessive related to the Prun, the other two being Saidan Shah and Goarnment. The former, one of the most respected men of the valley belonging to the Latharuknawau lineage, said *m'ai shun'eli pU~*

<sup>4</sup> The reference to Mir Badsha as a ‘descendant of Shurasi’ is justified by the fact that Aliksher was one of the seven (or eight) sons of Shurasi: Shurasinawau is a hyperonym indicating a cluster of present-day lineages (see Table 1).

while performing a panegyric dedicated to Sado, an aged and highly regarded guest from the Bumburet Valley. Hence, it is highly likely that here Saidan Shah displayed his ownership of the Prun as a Kalasha from Birir opposed to one from Bumburet rather than as a member of the Latharuknawau lineage specifically. Mir Bad Shah, by contrast, used a first-person possessive in front of other Birir men (Kal. *b'irila moc*), i.e. in whose eyes he is a descendant of Aliksher.

The second singer who used a possessive is Goarnment, as I discuss below.

### 3.1.1 Some Possible Counter Examples

The following two excerpts seem to go against the linear association between the Prun and the Alikshernawau lineage I outlined in the previous section. In excerpt 5, Goarnment (Razhuknawau) refers to the Prun as *m'ai*, i.e. “my,” in the closing strophe of a panegyric.

Excerpt 5—From a panegyric dedicated by Goarnment (Razhuknawau) to Mir Bad Shah (Alikshernawau) (Reference file: government E17-31.018).

<i>loT</i>	<i>mondr-o</i>	<i>k'ya</i>	<i>d-em-e</i>	
great	word-SEQ	what	give-P/F:1SG-RTM	
<i>pruST</i>	<i>k'ay</i>	<i>kar-'a</i>	<i>mai</i>	<i>shun'eli pU~</i>
good	do.CP	do-IMPV:2PL	1SG:NNOM	epithet Prun

“What (other) great words (can) I say. Having done well, keep on celebrating my shuneli Prun”

It is possible that use of first-person possessives with reference to the Prun may be an affective stereotype of the “stock phrases” type in terms of Vansina (1972: 72 ff.), i.e. phrases that express commonly accepted ideals in the society rather than factual reality. In other words, for one to say to possess the Prun might reflect one’s “affective” stance towards the festival and, as such, it might hardly be interpreted historically as I am trying to do here. If so, we should ignore not just this excerpt but also all the instances of first-person possessives modifying the word *pU~* as potentially diagnostic of anything beyond style. I do not think this is the case, however, also in consideration of the content of excerpt 6 below.

Excerpt 6—From a panegyric dedicated by Shahara (Gilasurnawau) to Goarnment (Razhuknawau) (Reference file: shaharaE27-31.002 / .003).

<i>o Razhuk-naw'au</i>	<i>w'awa-u</i>	<i>mish'ari</i>	<i>'asta</i>
oh Razhuk-grandchild	grandfather-POSS.2.SG	mixed	be.AN:PST.I

<i>baSinda-g'ar</i>	<i>o Razhuk-naw'au</i>
bequeathed.property-AGENT	oh Razhuk grandchild

“Oh grandchild of Razhuk, your ancestor mixed up (with deities/fairies) and then established himself (here in Birir)”

*shun'eli pU~ shi-'ada d'esh-ta ay'a pre~h'e~k rah'i k'ada-e*  
 epithet Prun be.INAN-PST.I region-TOP here downstream departure do.PST.I-RTM

*ne pat'ak-i gh'ona razhuk-naw'au*  
 NEG move-CP great Razhuk-grandchild

“It was the time of the *shuneli* Prun and the inhabitants of the low valley moved (to come) here after the great Razhuknawau gave the order without a move”

In excerpt 6, Shahara (Gilasurnawau) recalls a fact that might account for the representation of Prun’s ownership by the Razhuknawau without conflicting with the idea that it is *currently* “owned” by the Alikshernawau—thus indirectly indicating that these expressions may provide some insights into Birir social organization and history. In the first verse of the last strophe, Shahara uses verb forms inflected in the hearsay (or inferential) past (i.e. *shi'ada* and *k'ada*) to locate the event he is recalling, i.e. the beginning of the Prun festival, in a fairly remote past. In the final verse, he uses the expression *ne pat'aki* to refer to the typical action of an elder: giving orders while remaining sit, without making efforts. We might paraphrase him by saying that, in a distant past, the Razhuknawau used to declare the beginning of the Prun—where being the one giving the order to start a celebration is a clear sign of “ownership,” as we shall see in the next section for the Chaumos. If we recall that, in excerpt 3, Goarnment said to Mir Bad Shah that the Prun is “a son of your old age,” then it becomes possible to see the Razhuknawau lineage as the previous “owner” of the Prun festival and the Alikshernawau as their “successors” in having this responsibility. I realize that this may look like an *ad hoc* interpretation and I will return to this issue in section 4.2 below with additional data that would seem to provide corroborating evidence that, in fact, this can be viewed as a viable hypothesis.

### 3.2 The Chaumos Festival and the Latharuknawau Lineage

In this section, I collect a number of excerpts taken from both verbal art performances and interviews recorded by Augusto Cacopardo in 2006-2007 during his documentation of the Chaumos festival in Birir. In excerpt 7, we can see how, in the words of Major Khan (Changanchainawau, a *kam* considered to be indigenous to the valley, Kal. *bhumk'i*) dedicated to Saidan Shah (Latharuknawau), the Chaumos was brought to Birir by the latter’s ancestor. The Latharuknawau, for this reason, are deemed to be in charge of the festival as it is the responsibility of a member of this lineage to announce its beginning (Cacopardo 2016: 84).

Excerpt 7—From a panegyric dedicated by Major Khan (Changanchainawau) to Saidan Shah (Latharuknawau) (reference file: 0081-Majorkhan nom.001 / .004)

*S'abaS t'ai h'atya m'ai ishp'ashur o lathar'uk naw'au*  
 bravo 2SG.NNOM to 1SG.NNOM father.in.law oh Latharuk-grandson  
 “hail to thee oh my father-in-law, offspring of Latharuk”

*caum'os ay'a bir'iu ne shi-'ala*

Chaumos here Birir NEG be.INAN-PST.I

*t'ai w'awa-u on-ila o lathar'uk-naw'au*

2SG.NNOM grandfather-POSS.2.SG bring-PST.I oh Latharuk-grandson

“here in Birir there was no Chaumos, your ancestor brought it here, oh descendant of Lataruk”

*sha-taL'ey p'iSTaw bin'a k'ada*

INTNS-from.there after never.done.before do.PST.I

“from then on this innovation was introduced”

*to caum'os dewasam'E~a sha-tar'a waxt-una xub'i zhe zawal'i*  
that.SG.REM.ACC Chaumos epithet INTNS-there.REM time-LOC rejoicing and joy

*a-shi-is o lathar'uk-naw'au*

that.SG.REM.ACC oh Latharuk-grandson

“in those times this Chaumos celebration brought happiness and joy, oh descendant of Lataruk”

Excerpt 8—From a panegyric dedicated by Goarnment (Razhuknawau) to Saidan Shah (Latharuknawau) (Reference file: 0081 Goarn nom per Saidanca.001 / .008).

*o shuras'i-O jag-ai de tu sh-aL'-ey maj'am-ai sh'ili bi*  
oh Shurasi-ADJ look-IMPV.2SG RTM 2SG.NOM INTNS-there-from Majam-ADJ millet seed  
“Oh offspring of Shurasi, look! (Your) Majam’s millet seeds (i.e. women) right from there (came here)”

*ay'a caum'os dewasam'E~a-ta ne shi-'ala*

here Chaumos epithet-TOP NEG be.INAN-PST.I

“the Chaumos festival did not exist here”

*w'awa-u sU~aS'ai on-ila jag-ai dur'ik zhe saraw'at biy'ot-ai*  
grandfather-POSS.2.SG Suanshai bring-PST.I look-IMPV.2SG Durik and Sarawat cross-CP  
“your ancestor Suanshai brought it crossing over Durik and Sarawat”

*o kaLaSa Sa jag-ai nuh'unj -ai tu sh-'ama c'una kaLaS'um*  
oh Kalasha king look-IMPV.2SG control-RTM 2SG.NOM INTNS-this.SG.ACC all Kalasha  
“oh Kalasha king, look! this whole Kalasha country is under your control”

In excerpts 7 and 8, members of lineages unrelated to the Latharuknawau (i.e. a Changanchainawau in excerpt 7 and a Razhuknawau in excerpt 8) clearly say that the Chaumos was brought to Birir by ancestors of the Latharuknawau lineage, and that the Chaumos is their own tradition.

Another interesting fact emerging from the texts is that only members of Shurasinawau lineages singers referred to Chaumos using a first-person possessive, like e.g. Saidan Shah (Latharuknawau) who said *'ia m'ai caum'os dewasam'E~* literally “this my Chaumos festival.” Other singers who did the same are the Latharuknawau men Kanok and Danok, and the Gilasurnawau elder Shahara—i.e. all Shurasinawau. Conversely, several non-Shurasinawau singers referred to the Chaumos as a property of the Latharuknawau (like Goarnment

in excerpt 8 above) and, in one case, of the Gilasurnawau, i.e. another minimal lineage of the Shurasinawau macrolineage (see Table 1). When non-Shurasinawau singers refer directly to the Chaumos, like in some of the formulas of panegyrics, they seem to never use the first-person possessive: for example, Der Alam, member of the Changanchainawau lineage, said *'ia caum'os dewasam'E~* “this Chaumos festival” and not *\*m'ai caum'os dewasam'E~*, like Saidan Shah. Interestingly, in the data available, the Alikshernawau elder Mir Bad Shah, one of the most prolific and powerful singers of the whole valley who, as we have seen in the previous section, often referred to the Prun as his own festival, in fact never uses first-person possessives for the Chaumos but only utters formulas like those of non-Shurasinawau singers.

### 3.3 *Lineages and Festivals: Provisional Conclusions*

The textual evidence summarized in this section is suggestive of a complementary distribution of responsibilities among lineages within the Shurasinawau macrolineage with regards to the celebration of the Prun (Alikshernawau) and Chaumos festivals (Latharuknawau and, perhaps, Gilasurnawau). Extra-linguistic evidence seems to corroborate this view. As for Prun, it is worth recalling that members of the Alikshernawau lineage play a central role in several phases of the festival: Alikshernawau women are the only ones who know the text of the *yac* “secret song” (Di Carlo 2007: 82 ff.), and the women who form the procession of the *m'aRik k'Uek* “picking red berries” belong to this same *kam* or are wives of its members (see Di Carlo 2007: 56 ff.). Furthermore, although it has been impossible for me to verify this in the field, other ethnographic accounts (Palwal 1974: 93; Loude, Lièvre 1987: 212-213) combined with information quoted by Danok in his panegyric (danokE13-31.018-.028), report that the preparatory phases of the Prun take place in locales that are closely related to the Alikshernawau lineage, i.e. the Mahandeo altar (see below) and the village of Aspar, which is the main village associated with the lineage (see Table 1). As for Chaumos, the Latharuknawau “have the duty to announce the beginning of the festival” (Cacopardo 2016: 111), which implies that this *kam* has a unique and irreplaceable responsibility for its celebration.

## 4. LINEAGES AND GODS

### 4.1 *Kalasha Pantheon and Differentiation Among Gods*

Besides Dizila Dizau, the creator God, the other gods of the Kalasha pantheon of Birir form a small pantheon of six main divinities, namely Warin, Praba, Mahandeo, Grimun, Jeshtak, and Deزالik—the latter two being fe-

male.<sup>5</sup> Collectively, they are referred to as Kal. *d'ewa* or *dewal'ok* and are by and large conceptualized in anthropomorphic terms—and, in the past, also often represented anthropomorphically (Cacopardo 2006). Each deity has a specific place of worship: female deities have indoor shrines—Dezalik in the *baSali* “house of menstruations” and Jeshtak in each house (see also 4.3 below)—whereas male gods reside in *d'ewa dur* “god’s houses,” i.e. relatively small stone structures built in a holy place lying at a higher altitude as compared to villages, surmounted by wooden symbols of two or four horse heads and having a small opening in the front where offerings are thrown in so as to reach the deity who is believed to live inside the *dur*. In this section, I will focus only on the cult of male gods and some remarks on the goddess Jeshtak will be found in section 4.3.

Since cult practices devoted to the various male gods are noticeably uniform and “Kalasha mythology is poor” (Cacopardo 2016: 60), the only remaining aspect on which one can focus in order to understand whether these deities are differentiated from one another is looking at their epithets.

In general, deities who receive a regular cult are commonly addressed as Kal. *baS zhu'au* “share eater.” In my *corpus*, both male deities and Jeshtak, the main goddess, are given this epithet, evidently referring to the fact that, during sacrifices, they take their share of whatever is sacrificed in their honor. Cacopardo (2016: 59) recalls that there are some epithets differentiating Warin from Mahandeo: Warin is often called Kal. *sh'ura*, i.e. “hero, valiant,” whereas Mahandeo is Kal. *k'ushala* i.e. wise, cunning. The following excerpt from a prayer to Warin recorded by Augusto Cacopardo on the roof of a goat-shed in Grabanisar is telling that this differentiation is, *de facto*, inconsistent in actual use.

Excerpt 9—A prayer to the god Warin living in the Kal. *gh'ona war'in dur* (see Fig. 1) (Reference file: 0082-preg Warin).

This prayer was uttered just before a he-goat was slaughtered in a goat-shed in Grabanisar for the initiation ritual of a boy from one of the families (Changanchainawau) who owned the premises. A free translation of this text is found in Cacopardo (2016: 121).

*band kar-i o k'ushaLa sh'ura war'in bat-o piST-ay sh'ura war'in*  
 closed make-IMPV.2SG oh wise valiant Warin stone-RTM crest-LOC valiant Warin  
 “... (initial words lost) prevent oh wise and valiant Warin; you, valiant Warin, who dwell among the rocks of the crest”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> In Biyou, there is also a sacred place dedicated to a god called Kal. *'indr*, whose form clearly recalls Vedic Indra—like the names for Warin from \*a-parendra “unrivalled Indra” (T-444) and Praba from pravabhra (T-8782)—(Augusto Cacopardo, pers. comm.).

<sup>6</sup> The shrine of the god *ghona Warin* is located on a rocky crest dominating the lower part of the valley.

*sh-'ia se dewasam'E~a*  
 INTNS-this.SG.NOM REM.SG.NOM Chaumos.epithet  
 “this is the dewasamE (Chaumos)”

*suw'ash kay aw'ic-as tu k'ushala sh'ura war'in*  
 promptly (?) do.CP accept-P/F.2SG 2SG.NOM wise valiant Warin  
 “promptly accept (this offering) you wise and valiant Warin”

*khayr-i kar-i bat-o piST-ay sh'ura war'in*  
 peace-ADJV make-IMPV.2SG stone-RTM crest-LOC valiant Warin  
 “bring peace oh valiant Warin of the rocky crest”

*khayr zhal-'ai kim'on 'isa tazag'i k'ar-i abh'at k'ar-i*  
 peace arrive-CP how.much PROX.SG.OBL health make-IMPV.2SG offspring make-IMPV.2SG  
 “once the peace has come, give to this one (a boy) good health and many children”

*sh-ala-m'i roS dy'-ai tu gh'ona sh'ura war'in*  
 INTNS-DIST.SG.ACC-INTNS blessing put-IMPV.2SG 2S.NOM great valiant Warin  
 “give your blessings to this very one, you great valiant Warin”

*pak Parwadig'ar k'ushaLa sh'ura war'in khod'ai-as dust 'as-as*  
 holy god wise valiant Warin supreme.god-GEN friend be.AN-P/F.2SG  
 “you holy god wise and valiant Warin, you who are Khodai’s friend”

This text further stresses that, until texts are found that demonstrate the contrary, the gods populating the pantheon of Birir can hardly be considered to have any trace of functional specialization.

## 4.2 Oral Traditions of Exclusive Relationships Between Lineages and Gods

### 4.2.1 Comprehensive Tradition

In Birir, oral traditions connect individual deities with lineages rather than with specific functions. Consider excerpt 9 below, from an interview with Danok (Latharuknawau) by Augusto Cacopardo.

Excerpt 9—From an interview with Danok (Latharuknawau), January 6, 2007 (Reference file: 06.01 file0133).

*war'in matuz'al h'al-ya ChanganCh'ai-a w'aw-as*  
 Warin Matuzal bring.AN-PST.I Changanchai-GEN grandfather-POSS.SG.3SG  
 “Matuzal, Changanchai’s grandfather, brought Warin”

*matuz'al war'in hal-i 'as-au*  
 Matuzal Warin bring.AN-CP be.AN-P/F.3S

*mahand'eo punjapao-d'ari zhe razhuk-d'ari al-i 'as-an*  
 Mahandeo Punjapao-descendant and Razhuk-descendants be.ANIM-P/F.3PL

“Matuzal brought Warin. As for Mahandeo, it was the descendants of Punjapao and of Razhuk who brought it”

*te du ti hal-'i 'as-an mahand'eo*  
 3PL.SUBJ two become.CP bring.AN-CP be.AN-P/F:3PL Mahandeo  
 “They brought Mahandeo together”

*praba m'ai w'awa hal-'i 'as-au, suanS'ai*  
 Praba 1SG.NNOM grandfather bring.AN-CP be.AN-P/F:3SG Suanshai  
 “Praba, my grandfather Suanshai brought it”

*Aliksher-d'ari-an w'aw-asi Latharuk-naw'aw-an*  
 Aliksher-descendant-OBL.PL grandfather-POSS.SG.3PL Latharuk-descendant-OBL.PL

*w'aw-asi ek w'awa*  
 grandfather-POSS.SG.3PL one grandfather  
 “Ancestor of the Aliksherdari and the Latharukdari, one ancestor”

*gilasur-d'ari 'asta aaw*  
 Gilasur-descendant also yes  
 “(Ancestor) also (of) the Gilasurdari, yes.”

#### 4.2.2 The God Warin and the Changanchainawau Lineage

The myth of Warin being brought by the Changanchainawau ancestor named Matuzal is found in multiple places in the *corpus*, especially in the panegyrics recorded during the Chaumos, like in excerpt 10 below.

Excerpt 10—From a panegyric dedicated by Goarnment (Razhuknawau) to a member of the Changanchainawau lineage.<sup>7</sup> (Reference file: Augusto Caco-pardo's 30/12/2006 field notes).

*w'awa-u matuz'al-a th'on-una n'is-i 'as-as nogag'a gr'abet k'ui*  
 Grandfather-POSS.2.SG Matuzal-GEN place-LOC sit.CP be.AN-P/F:2SG epithet Grabet valley  
 “You sit in the place of your ancestor Matuzal, in *nogaga* Grabet Kui”

*w'awa-u matuz'al sh-'ala war'in hal'i-o sh-atr'a*  
 Grandfather- Matuzal EMPH-DIST.SG.ACC Warin bring.ANIM.CP-SEQ EMPH-there.DIST  
 POSS.2.SG

*p'ishta nis'ai-o d'esh-as h'atya mad'at h'ula o ChanganChai-nawau*  
 behind seat.CP-RTM country-OBL to help become:PST.I oh Changanchai-  
 grandchild

“Your grandfather Matuzal was sitting in (his) place, *nogaga* Grabet Kui. After bringing that Warin and after making it reside over there behind, your ancestor Matuzal did provide help to the whole country, oh Changanchainawau”

<sup>7</sup> This is one of a series of panegyrics that followed a *d'ushak* sung by Shahara, a Gilasurnawau, which was in itself a panegyric to a relative of his, named Unat Bek, who is from the Changanchainawau lineage. The following panegyrics are all offered to the latter.

#### 4.2.3 The God Praba and the Shurasinawau Macro-Lineage

The myth of Praba being brought by Suanshai, apical ancestor of the Shurasinawau, is consistent and recalled by a number of singers, among whom Adina in excerpt 11.

Excerpt 11—From a panegyric dedicated by Adina (Latharuknawau) to Mir Bad Shah (Alikshernawau) (Reference file: AdinaE7-31.004 / .006).

*sh'ili bi sh'eta th'om-an j'ai nish'an d'ita*  
millet seed ? bow-OBL.PL put-CP sign give.PST.I

*zhe sh-'asa gh'ona pr'aba n'ae baTh'ula dewal'ok*  
and EMPH-DIST.SG.NOM great Praba RTM strong god

“(Once arrived?) the seeds of millet (i.e. the women from Majam), the great god Praba took his bow and gave the sign (i.e. launched arrows)”

*nish-'an d'ita w'awa-u n'ae sapr'alya sh-atr'a*  
sign-DIR.PL give.PST.I grandfather-POSS.SG.2SG RTM find.PST.I INTNS-there.DIST

*t'ai at'aly-una 'ita to nish'an*  
2SG.NNOM plain-LOC come.CP that.SG.REM.ACC sign

“After that, your grandfather found the sign (the arrow) there in your narrow plain”

Being a Latharuknawau, Adina is also member of the Shurasinawau macrolineage, like Mir Bad Shah who is Alikshernawau. Since Praba was brought by Suanshai, Shurasi's father, they are both connected to the deity in some sense. Here Adina dedicates this divine reference to Mir Bad Shah focusing on one specific aspect, i.e. the fact that his village (Aspar) is where their apical ancestor established the first village of the Shurasinawau. Adina calls Shurasi “your ancestor” rather than “our ancestor” as a likely way to refer to this spatial specificity.

#### 4.2.4 The God Grimun and the Punjapaonawau and Razhuknawau Lineages

One final direct association between a deity and a lineage is that between the mythical Bhangabhangi, who later transformed into the deity called *grim'un* and the Punjapaonawau lineage. In the existing corpus, I found only one reference to this myth in verbal art performances—where the myth is alluded to rather than retold. It must also be recalled that Grimun has his shrine towards the low end of the Birir valley, in an area where members of the Razhuknawau lineage have built their houses relatively recently (see Cacopardo 2016: 99 and below).

#### 4.2.5 The God Mahandeo

Mahandeo is the only deity who is present in all the three Kalasha valleys. As for Birir, known oral traditions report that he used to reside in Bashgal and, like Danok said in excerpt 9, was brought to Birir by members of the Razhuk-

nawau and the Punjapaonawau lineages. It comes as a surprise to see Mahandeo consistently associated with a different lineage, i.e. the Alikshernawau, in a number of texts from the Prun festival. This is what emerges, for example, from the panegyric that Danok, a relatively young singer from the Latharuknawau lineage, devotes to members of the Alikshernawau lineage.

Excerpt 12—From a panegyric dedicated by Danok (Latharuknawau) to Mayani (Alikshernawau woman) (Reference file: danokE21-31).

*w'awa-u*                      *matawal'i taL-'ai*                      *driSN'-i-o*  
grandfather-POSS.2.SG Matawali there.DIST-LOC come.out-CP-SEQ  
*'alya Mahand'eo 'asta ujh-'em gh'o--ta-e /*  
up.there Mahandeo also repair-P/F.1SG say-PST.I-RTM  
*to bira-m'ou 'asta l'U-i k'arim gh'o--ta-e*  
then biramor also look.at-IMPV.2SG do-P/F.1SG say-PST.I-RTM  
*gra k'ada tu aliksh'er-naw'au //*  
stack.of.branches do.PST.I 2SG.NOM Aliksher-grandchild  
“Your grandfather Matawali, born in that distant past, said ‘I’ll fix the altar of Mahandeo uphill /  
And, look, I’ll also celebrate a biramor”<sup>8</sup> and he really did that, oh you descendant of Aliksher //”

*w'awa-u*                      *matawal'i jag-'ai*                      *de*  
grandfather-POSS.2.SG Matawali look-IMPV.2SG RTM  
*b'ira TRaTR-'ai mahand'eo d'ur-a g'ala*  
he.goat release.animals-CP Mahandeo house-LOC go.PST.I  
*ujh-'alya to baS-zh'ula mahand'eo //*  
repair-PST.I REM.SG.ACC part-eat.PTCP.PST Mahandeo  
“Your grandfather Matawali look! After releasing the he-goats went to the altar of Mahandeo and repaired it, Mahandeo who eats his share”

The same story is retold by a number of singers and some of them, like Goarnment, refer to Mahandeo’s altar as Alikshernawau’s “own” altar, as in excerpt 13 below.

Excerpt 13—From a panegyric dedicated by Goarnment (Razhuknawau) to Mir Bad Shah (Alikshernawau) (Reference file: governmentE7-31.012).

*t'ai w'awa-u se matawal'i n'ade muti-w'ai*  
2SG.NNOM grandfather-POSS.2.SG that.SG.REM.NOM Matawali RTM kid-goat  
*b'ira gri-ta k'ada biram'or jag-'ai de*  
he.goat catch.CP-TOP do.PST.I biramor look.at-IMPV.2SG RTM

<sup>8</sup> Kal. *biram'or* (lit. “killing male goats”) is the name of the greatest feast of merit a Kalasha man can celebrate. Restoring a god’s altar is an integral part of a biram’or.

*ujh-'aw sh-'ala t'ai mahand'eo dur*  
 repair-PST.A.3SG EMPH-DIST.S.ACC 2S.NNOM Mahandeo house  
 “Your ancestor, that Matawali, he did *biramor* with he-goats born from one-year old  
 she-goats, look! He repaired that Mahandeo altar of yours!

Goarment is a member of the Razhuknawau lineage like Shobo and Tsi-pak, the two mythical Razhuknawau ancestors who are credited with bringing Mahandeo to Birir in collaboration with two Punjapao men, i.e. Rani and Gabaroti. It would be natural to assume that, if there is a lineage associated with Mahandeo, then that would be either the Razhuknawau or the Punjapaonawau. By contrast, Goarment recalls the great deed of an Alikshernawau ancestor—hardly mythical since *biramor* is the main merit feast in the Kalasha culture and those who manage to celebrate it are normally remembered for generations as the *gh'ona moc* “big men” of the valley—and attributes the altar of Mahandeo to the Alikshernawau. At the present stage of our knowledge of these texts and of their particular sociocultural contexts, it is impossible to judge whether these possessive phrases should be viewed as a form of “stock phrases” of stylistic value and no actual relation to factual reality. Something else can be attempted, i.e. look at this excerpt in synopsis with what we saw in section 3.1.1.

In section 3.1.1, I discussed the only two pieces of textual evidence I found in my *corpus* countering the proposed direct connection between the Alikshernawau lineage and the Prun festival: in excerpt 5, Goarment (Razhuknawau) said “my shuneli Prun” and, in excerpt 6, Shahara (Gilasurnawau) reported that, in a distant past, the Razhuknawau had prominence in the celebration of the Prun festival. In excerpt 9, we saw how oral traditions credit the Razhuknawau and the Punjapaonawau lineages with bringing Mahandeo to Birir, but excerpts 12 and 13 show a connection between the altar of Mahandeo and the Alikshernawau lineage. As one can see from Table 2, the literal meanings one can identify in these excerpts appear to draw a historical series where both lineage-festival and lineage-deity associations appear to change over time in a seemingly coordinated way.

TABLE 2

Associations between cultural items and lineages as they emerge from the analysis of the literal meanings of excerpts 5-6, 9, 12, and 13.

Cultural item	Association in a distant past	Association at present
Mahandeo	Razhuknawau and Punjapaonawau	(Alikshernawau)
Altar of Mahandeo	(Razhuknawau)	Alikshernawau
Prun	Razhuknawau	Alikshernawau
Grimun	?	Razhuknawau and Bangulenawau (currently, only Punjapaonawau)
Altar of Grimun	?	Razhuknawau

My field notes indicate that the Razhuknawau were earlier associated with the village of Gasguru, in the upper part of the valley, and moved to Noshbyu, at the opposite end of the valley, as a response to the mass conversions to Islam that took place after 1950 in the upper valley. It is interesting to see that, today, the Razhuknawau are the custodians of the altar of Grimun (Cacopardo 2016: 99), which is located very close to Noshbyu. This would appear to mirror the scenario emerging from Table 2 in terms of geographical distribution of lineages and gods' shrines. A possible reading of this piece of local history might be that the Razhuknawau remained associated with Mahandeo as long as they were concentrated in Gasguru, i.e. the closest village to Mahandeo's altar, and shifted to Grimun after moving to Noshbyu, i.e. the closest village to Grimun's altar.

This hypothesis leads us to other questions. First, are the Alikshernawau associated with the altar of Mahandeo as an effect of the fact that their village, Aspar, has at some point become the only sizable village inhabited mostly by traditional Kalasha that lies relatively close to it? Second: Barring "competition for worship" between the two lineages, could this shift and realignment of lineage-deity associations be seen as discursive crystallizations of real-world events at different time-depths in the past of the two lineages rather than the continuation of ancestral, timeless patterns? These are questions that only new field-work can help us answer.

#### 4.3 *Jeshtak in Birir vs. Rumbur*

Jeshtak is the main goddess of the Kalasha pantheon and, while her name is the same across the three valleys, her cult is revealing of quite significant differences between Birir, on the one hand, and Rumbur (and possibly Bum-buret), on the other. Existing literature generalizes to the whole of the Kalasha society the situation observed in the 1970s and 1980s in Rumbur. In Rumbur, Jeshtak is worshipped in both domestic and collective shrines. In houses, a sprig of holly-oak placed on the wall behind the fireplace—i.e. the holiest area of the house—marks the presence of the goddess. Collective shrines are constituted by wooden symbols of the goddess—miniatures of the wooden horse heads surmounting the open-air altars dedicated to male deities (see section 4.1)—that each exogamous lineage creates and places in the *j'eshtak han* "temple of Jeshtak," a monumental building that is owned by a macro-lineage (or "clan," as in Jones, Parkes 1984) and is located in a village. In Birir, by contrast, monumental buildings comparable to the *j'eshtak han* are called *rik-h'inni* and are not dedicated to her nor to any other deity. Here, Jeshtak appears to be worshipped only in domestic shrines. Even at this level, there are significant differences between the two Kalasha variants since, in Birir, in each house the presence of the goddess is marked by a wooden symbol like those found in Rumbur's *j'eshtak han* rather than a sprig of holly-oak.

All of this boils down to an overall different conception of the relationship existing between Jeshtak and descent groups in the two Kalasha valleys. In Rumbur, by the fact of housing all of the symbols owned by related lineages, the *j'eshtak han* “replicates the ordinary household on a macroscopic scale, reuniting dispersed lineages as one ‘family’ on ceremonial occasions” (Jones, Parkes 1984: 1166). In Birir, this trait is entirely missing as is also suggested by the fact that the distribution of *rikh'inni* structures appears unrelated to the distribution of lineages in the valley: in Rumbur there are two *j'eshtak han*, one for each of the two macrolineages of the valley, whereas in Birir there are only three *rikh'inni*—in Biyou, Aspar, and Guru—even though the number of local macrolineages is three plus no less than nine further unrelated lineages (see Table 1).<sup>9</sup> In other words: in Birir, Jeshtak appears to be entirely unrelated to matters of representation of lineages, be they maximal or minimal. I think this (overlooked) data justifies a provisional conclusion: in Rumbur, the key role in the symbolic representation of individual lineages is played by the goddess Jeshtak, whereas in Birir this function is performed by the male gods.<sup>10</sup>

## 5. COMPARISON WITH NURISTANI DATA

The limited data available about the religious institutions of pre-Islamic Nuristani societies include relatively clear indications that, at least in some regions, descent groups were directly linked to a group-specific tutelary deity, which was worshipped in a lineage-owned “temple” which was also the house of the lineage elder. This is what Motamedi, Edelberg (1968), Klimburg (1976; 2002), and Jones, Parkes (1984: 1159-1160) report for the Parun valley, where each *amal* “lineage house” housed the symbol of the tutelary deity. Data from Waigal are indicative of a very similar situation, although doubts remain as to the presence of deities’ effigies in the local *kantar kōt* “clan/lineage house.” Jones, Parkes (1984: 1160-1164) stress that this is not confirmed whereas Klimburg (1999: 170-173) reports that, at some point in the past, the *kantar kōt* of Nisheigram became known as the *demuta ama* (“the house of Demuta” a mythical ancestor) and “housed the cult statue of an unknown deity” (Klimburg 1999: 172).

<sup>9</sup> As a further indication of this misalignment between *rikh'inni* and macrolineages in Birir, it must be recalled that Schomberg (1938: 199) reports that in Guru—i.e. the “stronghold” of two lineages from the Shurasinawau macrolineage—existed two *rikh'inni*.

<sup>10</sup> It is worth recalling here that all of the lineages of Rumbur are believed to descend from the same ancestor, Adobok, whereas the (macro)lineages of Birir are of diverse provenance. It is also important to recall that, in Rumbur, the creation of a new lineage is symbolically sanctioned by the creation of a new symbol of Jeshtak to be placed in the macrolineage’s Jeshtak han (Jones, Parkes 1984: 1169). This has no parallels with male gods in Birir.

Rather than providing an exhaustive literature review, which is clearly beyond the goals of this paper, in this section I would like to call attention to another text further confirming that, in the Parun valley, the connection between lineages and deities would appear to recall features of what I discussed for the Kalasha of Birir. The text in question is the transcript of an interview that Richard Strand made in 1973 with Zamân Xân, leader of the *Pazg'am* clan. Excerpt 14 below contains some of the most relevant exchanges in the much longer (and quite informative) interview (Strand 2015a).

Excerpt 14 - From an interview of Richard Strand (RS) with Zamân Xân (ZX). The language used in the interview is Kamviri (ISO 639 [xvi]) but I show only Strand's English translation (see Strand 2015b for the original transcription).

- ZX ... places of *Imro* exist around in a few areas. Here in our country *Imro*—*Imro*'s overseer is me. *Imro* is in my house. *Imro*'s idol is by me. If anyone would be coming to *Imro*'s house to make a prayer, they would bring a bull. They would bring a cow. [...] The idol of *Imro* would be in my house. What kind of house is mine, for him? They call it the *mün*<sup>11</sup> house, *Imro*'s house.
- ZX [...] Here<sup>12</sup> there are four men who have four *mün* houses. One is *p'eik tâdbâ*.<sup>13</sup> What god does he have? The god he has is *d'ivok*. *d'ivok*
- RS Wait. There are four agnatic groups, right? Each group of agnates has one *mün* ...
- ZX There's a *mün*. Each *mün* has a god. Each god has one idol. They're like that.
- RS Your god is *Imro*, isn't it? Right, what about those of the others? What other agnatic groups are there?
- ZX Others, the villagers': *ps'âk tâdbâ*. *ps'âk*. *ps'âk tâdbâ*. They have *disn'i*'s idol. *d'isni amal*. [...] Further then, *p'eci tâdbâ*. *p'eci tâdbâ*. Their god is *d'ivok*. The god's, *d'ivok*'s idol is with them. *d'ivok*'s idol is with them. They say *div'ok*. Another is the *puZ'ut* lineage. *puZ'ut*. That has *Imro*, too. Their *Imro* is a lesser *Imro*. It's not the big *Imro*.
- RS Are there two *Imros*?
- ZX No. *Imro* is one. That lesser *Imro* and -- *Imro*'s name, God, that *Imro*, he has been given a somewhat bigger name. That *Imro* who is lesser than the big *Imro* belongs to *puZ'ut*'s Boys.
- RS What's his name in your language?
- ZX In our language he's *p'ajGir m'ârâ*. *p'ajGir m'ârâ*. Our people say *m'ârâ* for *Imro*.

<sup>11</sup> Km. *mün* = Ash. *münt* "leader (lit. forehead)" (see also Klimburg 1976: 484).

<sup>12</sup> The village referred to is called *Şup'u*, the uppermost village in the Parun valley.

<sup>13</sup> Here, *tâdbâ* is an Ashkun word meaning "agnatic group."

By being the leader of the *Pazg'an* clan, *Zamân Xân* would be the keeper of the creator god *m'ârâ*, whereas the other lineages are connected with other deities: the *p'eik* or *p'eci tâdbâ* lineage with *d'ivok*, the *ps'âk tâdbâ* with *d'isni*, and the *puZ'ut* lineage with *p'ajGir m'ârâ*.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I collected thirteen excerpts from texts recorded in 2006-2007 in Birir, the Southernmost of the three Kalasha valleys, and focused my analyses on their explicit contents, or literal meanings, as an authoritative ethnographic and historiographical source. I realize this can be critiqued, especially because I tried to fill the gaps left by the data through more or less grounded hypotheses. It is worth recalling here that, as I said in the introduction, this paper aims to raise questions rather than propose answers.

Taken at face value, the texts I illustrated suggest that, in Birir, (i) some lineages have prominence in the celebration of specific festivals—the Latharuknawau for the Chaumos and the Alikshernawau for the Prun—and (ii) there are direct relationships between individual lineages, on the one hand, and individual deities and their places of worship, on the other. In section 5, I briefly presented textual data indicating that a similar correspondence between lineages, gods, and places of worship can be postulated also for the pre-Islamic societies of the Parun valley, in central Nuristan. There are still too many gaps in the documentation to allow one to draw any definitive conclusions: at the very least, though, one might say that the evidence presented here stresses that in Birir we observe cultural traits that are absent in the other two Kalasha valleys (see also Di Carlo 2007: 87-88). After all, the Kati people may have had good reasons to use two distinct ethnonyms to refer to the Kalasha of Birir (Kt. *weru*) and those of Rumbur and Bumburet (Kt. *kasvo*).

While I leave it to historians of religions to assess the relevance of the texts presented here for understanding the processes of creation of either the Kalasha and the pre-Islamic Nuristani pantheons, I would like to conclude this article with a general remark on what they contribute to our understanding of the past of these societies and, relatedly, to the methods for the study of oral traditions as key historiographical sources. People that both I and Augusto Cacopardo interviewed in Birir concerning the peopling history of the valley reported that the Chumbuknawau of Gri, the Razhuknawau of Gasguru/Noshbyu, the Paneinawau of Waridon, and the Gaanawau and the Danishtanawau are indigenous to Birir; that the Shurasinawau originally came from Majam, an area located in today's Nuristan; that the Dramanawau of Grom all descend from one man, Bangut, who was originally from Lutkho and became a *b'aira* “slave” at the service of the Alikshernawau of Aspar; that the Jalongnawau lineage originated from somewhere in today's Southern Chitral and were given land by the Punjapaonawau of Biyou. If we imagine these lineages as not just acting corpor-

ately in terms of exogamy, residence, and economy, but also in matters related to cult—as the texts I discussed seem to suggest—then it becomes crucial to know more about lineage-specific features and histories since, from an admittedly radical perspective, one might even say that “the history of the Kalasha of Birir” is nothing but an ethnological illusion, an epiphenomenon of the interrelated histories of the local lineages.

Methodologically, knowing more about the lineages would require that new textual data is collected in such a way as to guarantee that both its sources and the contexts of production are described adequately. I hope this article provides stimuli to understand why it is important to know as much as possible of both the biography of the sources of oral traditions—not generic definitions such as, e.g., “a Kalasha elder,” but metadata clarifying lineage membership of speakers and by-standers along with data about each lineage’s attributes, micro-myths and histories of relations—and the details of the situational context in which speakers interact—who they address, for what end, in what kind of event, etc. New field-based evidence is necessary, and hopefully it will be of a quality that will allow it to be used to answer the many questions I raised in this article.

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