

## 2 Apprenticeship and the Cult of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ

The cult of the music god Nāsaḥḍyaḥ and rituals connected with apprenticeship of music are outlined in earlier publications<sup>1</sup>. The Lord of Music and Dance is called with musical offerings *ḍyaḥlhāygu*<sup>2</sup>, as his blessings are needed for any music performance to succeed. The cult of the music god must be one of the oldest in the Kathmandu Valley. Every Newar settlement has at its centre a shrine of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ. If a village is too small to have a Nāsaḥḍyaḥ shrine, the oldest drum serves as a portable shrine. The god is believed to reside in drums. Each of the Bhaktapur's twenty-four shrines of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ is paired with a smaller shrine of his destructive aspect, Haimāḍyaḥ. (Figs. 3–9)

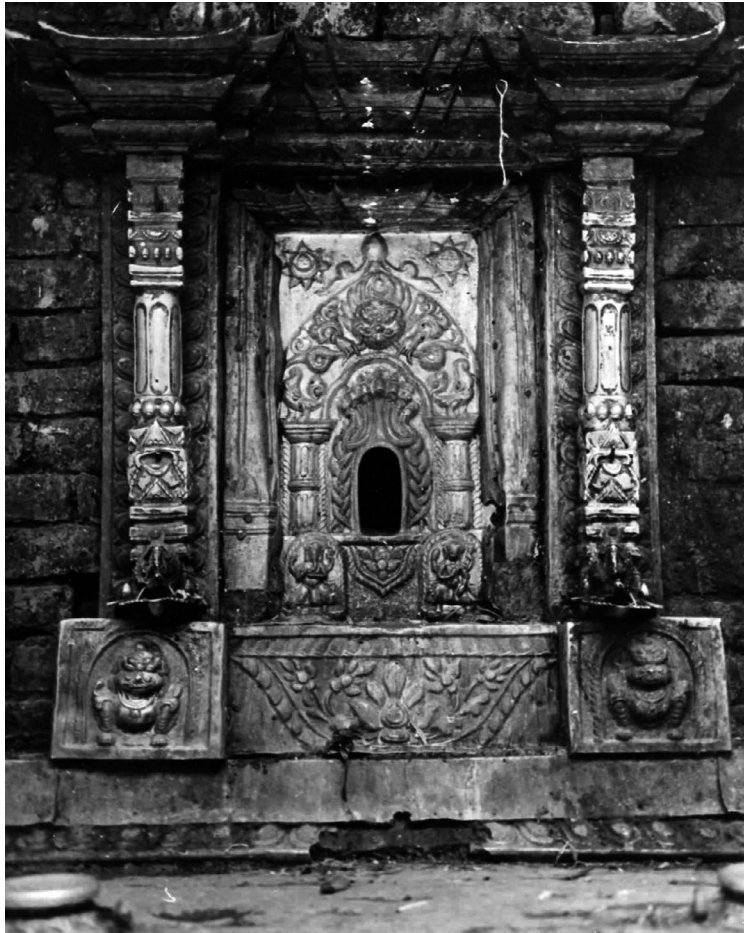


*Fig. 3:* Shrine of Thāthu Nāsaḥḍyaḥ with Nāsaḥ *pvaḥ* hole in the central brass plate, signifying the flight lane of the Lord of Music and Dance, that passes in a linear progression of divine energy (cf. Wegner 1992b) through the shrine and adjacent buildings. During rituals, offerings are given to Nāsaḥḍyaḥ, Haimāḍyaḥ (at his shrine around the corner and his flight lane crossing that of the Nāsaḥ shrine at an angle of 90°), Gaṇeś, Kumār (both depicted on the brass plate), Betāḥ (central stone figure between two guardian lions), two Khicā dogs holding human limbs and to the invisible divine attendants Nandi and Bhṛṅgi (located left and right on the brick wall). This is where most music students of the upper town are initiated into the cult of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ that includes blood sacrifices at the shrine. Years after I took this photo in 1984, a crude woodcarving was added above, depicting Śiva as Nṛṭyanāth. Of South Indian origin, Nṛṭyanāth is now popularly identified with Nāsaḥḍyaḥ.

1 Ellingson 1990, Wegner 1986 and 1992b

2 lit. 'calling the god'

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*Fig. 4: Thāthu Nāsaḥḍyah with Nāsaḥ pvaḥ hole in the central brass plate (detail), depicting Gaṇeś (left), and Kumār (right) in dancing postures below the Nāsaḥ pvaḥ hole, 1984*

Some of these shrines are more important than others. They attract music groups from larger areas. For example, most music apprentices from the entire lower town visit the shrines of Nāsaḥmanā Nāsaḥ (also called Mū Nāsaḥ) and Haimā. The realms of influence of the main Nāsaḥ shrines point to Bhaktapur's early history when the town grew from a cluster of ancient villages, each with their own Nāsaḥ shrine.<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 5, Map 5)

Every shrine has empty holes signifying a flight lane of the music god. Such flight lanes pass through a series of characteristic holes in brick walls of several adjacent buildings. The flow of divine energy must not be blocked. This concept of a linear progression of divine energy is not known in India. It appears to be an ancient concept in Nepal and Tibet. Almost all flight lanes proceed horizontally. The only exception is Kabilās Nāsaḥ located in the pavement of the palace

3 cf. map 5

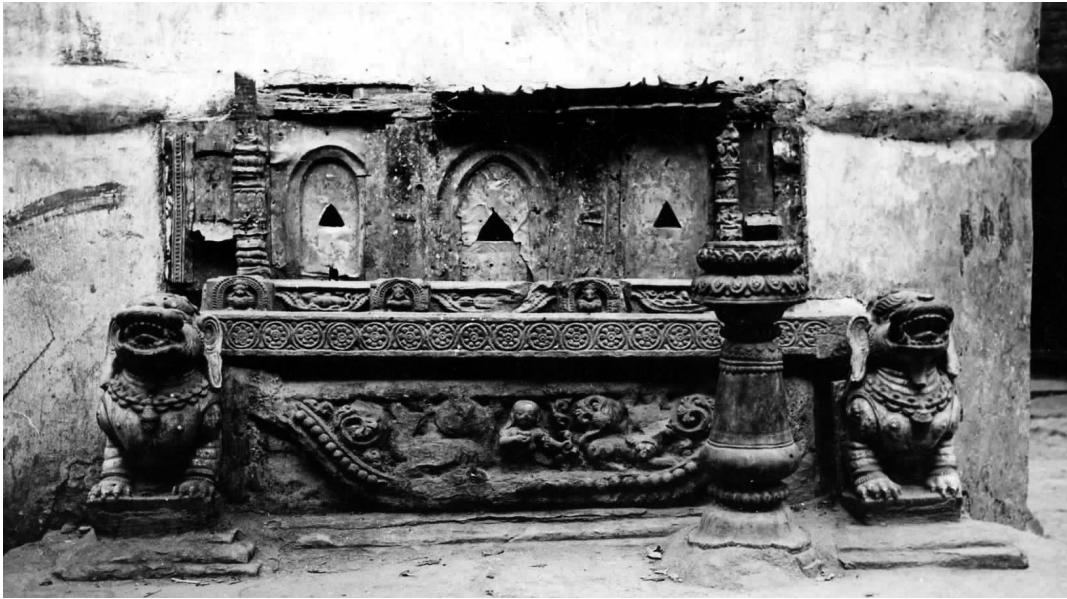
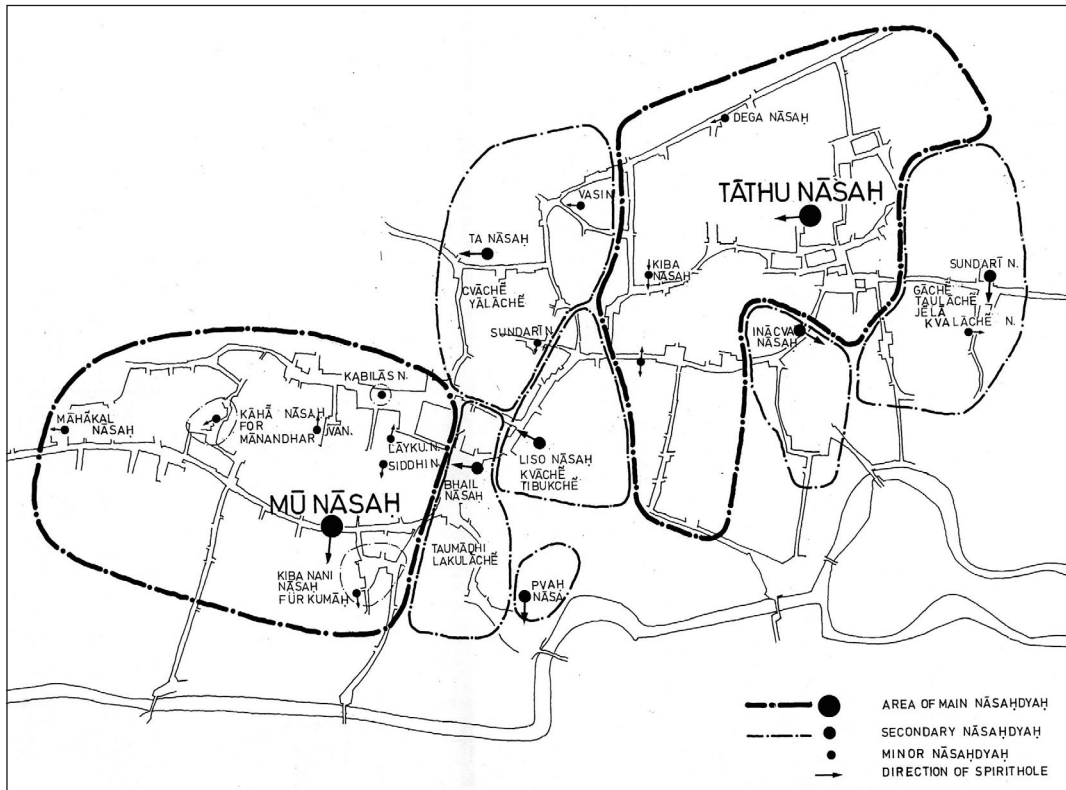
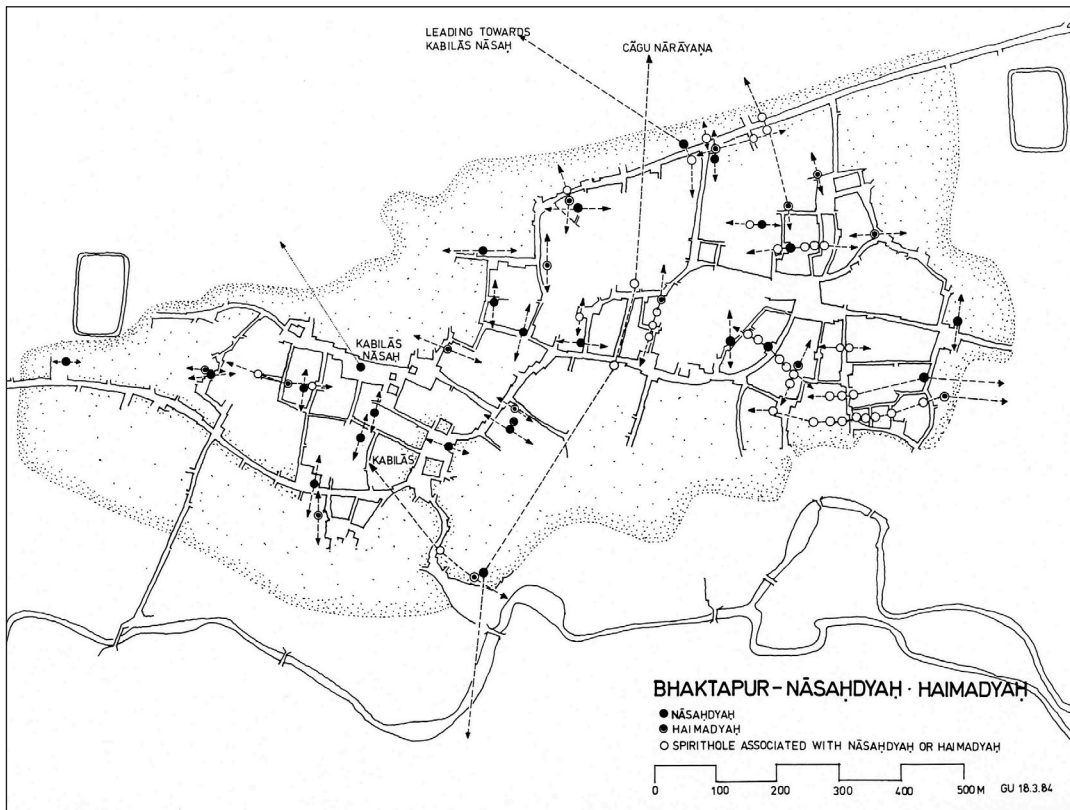


Fig. 5: Mū Nāsaḥ of the lower town at Nāsaḥmanā



Map 5: Areas of the main Nāsaḥ shrines of Bhaktapur (map courtesy of Niels Gutschow)

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Map 6: Shrinēs of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ and Haimāḍyaḥ with their flight lanes extending through *Nāsaḥ pvaḥ* and *Haimā pvaḥ* holes in brick walls (map courtesy of Niels Gutschow)

square. Its flight lane points vertically into the sky and is known to connect with the cave of Kabilās Nāsaḥ near Nuvakot, two days walk northwest of the Kathmandu Valley (Map 6). Newar music groups from Bhaktapur and Kathmandu organise pilgrimages to carry out blood sacrifices at the cave and have a picnic on the plateau above. In March 1984 I was invited by farmers of Yātā to join such a pilgrimage of their *dāphā* group and play *dhimay* during the Nāsaḥ *pūjā*. Whilst the men were busy with their Nāsaḥ ritual at the cave, the women went a little further down to another cave that was the seat of the goddess Sasudyāḥ, the local name for Sarasvatī. Having arranged their weaving shuttles and offerings, they performed a *pūjā* for the goddess, asking their work at the loom to be blessed. According to local belief, Kathmandu’s oldest Nāsaḥḍyaḥ at Golkupakha (ward no. 29) came from Kabilās.

The local folk story of Kabilās Nāsaḥ’s flight from Bhaktapur to Nuvakot refers to the Mahābhārata epic. Prince Bhīmsen was known for his exceptional physical strength and fitness that came along with a certain lack of intellectual refinement. It occurred to him that he wanted to learn singing. So he approached Nāsaḥḍyaḥ and asked him to be taught. The music god invested much time and effort in training this powerful student, but to marginal effect. In learning music, a modicum of intelligence is essential. When this is absent, discipline alone cannot replace it.



*Fig. 6: Kabilās Nāsaḥ in the pavement of the Bhaktapur palace square*

Bhīmsen used to practise singing during lonely walks in the fields. He met a farmer who told him that he had been attracted by Bhīmsen's voice as he had mistaken it for the bleating of his missing sheep. Bhīmsen did not like this. He thought highly of his voice and blamed his teacher. His warrior blood boiled and he wanted to kill Nāsaḥḍyaḥ. The god knew what was coming and preferred to withdraw to a mountain cave at Kabilās where only his devotees can reach him.



*Fig. 7: Haimāpvaḥ in Gvaḥmādhī 1995. After demolition of the old brick house the flight lane of Haimāḍyaḥ had to be preserved in its original position in front of the new medical store and received a cement finial.*

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*Fig. 8:* Haimādyah in Kvāthādaḥ, related to Thāthu Nāsaḥ around the corner in Tacapāḥ



*Fig. 9:* Nāsaḥpvaḥ (left) with embossed brass plate in the wall of the Navadurgā *dyahchē* in Gaḥchē and Haimāpvaḥ (right) in a garden wall in Yāchē

To start a drumming apprenticeship, would-be students of a neighbourhood approach the most prominent drummer of their choice. They address him as ‘Guruju’ and observe a respectful attitude towards him<sup>4</sup>. For example, during ritual feasts, he occupies a seat of honour and is offered the cooked head and tail portion of the sacrificial animal<sup>5</sup>. Apprentices are expected to ask him for permission before touching their food. The teacher instructs the students to prepare a clean room<sup>6</sup> with a *gvākhā* wall niche for keeping the music gods. In the case of *navadāphā* and a few other initially well-bestowed groups, a special *dāphāchē* building serves for keeping musical instruments and for instructing apprentices. In all other cases, a room in a private home is designated as a teaching and practice room for the duration of the apprenticeship. No outsider is allowed access to this room after the gods have occupied their wall niche. The niche is covered with a piece of cloth protecting the gods from the eyes of possible intruders. Students worship the gods twice a day and practise in their presence. The teacher arrives every evening to check their progress. New lessons are only taught during auspicious weekdays, Thursday (assigned to Nāsaḥḍyaḥ), Saturday (Nārāyaṇa), Sunday (Surya) and Tuesday (Gaṇeśa).

Music apprenticeships begin on a Thursday and are structured by the following rituals:

1. Nāsaḥ *sāle pūjā* (transferring and installing the music god in the practice room),
2. several *khīpvu pūjā* (starting a new drum and/or a new major composition),
3. *hane pūjā* (before practising with accompanying instruments),
4. *pirāne pūjā* (coming-out ritual with major blood sacrifice and procession presenting new drummers to the neighbourhood), and
5. *carthi pūjā* (sacrifice and picnic at Ināre<sup>7</sup>, asking the guardian Gaṇeśa for blessing)

If anything goes wrong, this should be amended with a *chemā pūjā* (asking for forgiveness). When displeased, Nāsaḥḍyaḥ does not hesitate to unleash his wrath, causing doom and disaster. Fortunately, in Newar culture there is a solution for everything. A *chemā pūjā* at the Nāsaḥ shrine with a modest offering of eggs and other items suffices to soothe the raging god and bring back his blissful aspect. To illustrate the reliability of this proven method, my teachers gave the following examples:

Five boys were in the middle of their flute apprenticeship when one of them lost his mother. That caused his ritual impurity for a year and prevented him from partaking in the *pirāne pūjā*. As a result, he fell ill. The astrologer recommended a *chemā pūjā* for Nāsaḥḍyaḥ. When this was done, the boy recovered.

4 This is in no way comparable to the quasi-religious adoration that a guru enjoys and promotes in the context of Indian classical music.

5 If you happen to be the teacher and don’t want to eat those grizzly bits, hand them over to the person next to you who will be absolutely delighted. This is how it is done: Accept head and tail with your LEFT hand, pretend to admire the smell with joyous approval, before getting rid of them in a charming manner.

6 ‘Clean’ means, the floor is washed with a mixture of cow dung and water, then dried before arranging straw mats to sit on. These *sukhū* straw mats provide a habitat for a jumping and biting gang of *kusi* (Pulex irritans), with their number increasing until the end of the apprenticeship.

7 Surya Vināyak Gaṇeśa south of Bhaktapur



Fig. 10: Hari Govinda Ranjitkar carrying a cock—not stolen, bought!—for my first Nāsaḥ *sāle pūjā* in 1983

Stealing sacrificial animals makes better drummers, for sure. That is what *gurujus* tell their students with a wink. Timid faint-hearts are advised to grab a cauliflower. (Fig. 10)

Obviously, a certain dose of playful mischievousness is a necessary ingredient in a growing musician, if it comes together with the ability to practise until the respective problem is solved. The time for stealing sacrificial animals is Wednesday evening, as the sacrifice has to happen on Nāsaḥḍyaḥ's day, Thursday. It does not take much courage to pinch a chicken. Stealing a male goat requires advanced skills, shrewdness, creativity, nimble legs, tolerance to the animal's rich body odour, and Nāsaḥḍyaḥ's divine assistance. Before approaching the animal of his choice<sup>9</sup>, the student picks up a few leftover rice grains from a recent ritual at the Nāsaḥ shrine. Charged with the god's magic, these grains have to touch the animal's head, ensuring that it remains calm during the procedure and does not give away Nāsaḥḍyaḥ's devotee to its keepers. They would certainly not be amused. From first-hand experience I can testify that the charm works beautifully with most animals kept in Bhaktapur. Only ducks are immune to the spell. They become agitated, making quacking alarm noises. Stay clear of ducks, is my advice. (Figs. 11–13)

The Sāymi oilpressers of Gvaḥmādhi started an apprenticeship of Buddhist processional *gūlābājā* music. Soon it became evident that the candidates were unable to learn the compositions. After a year of abysmal suffering, the teachers gave up, deciding to perform *pirāne pūjā* at midnight, so that nobody would witness the deficient performance. Nāsaḥḍyaḥ did witness the rotten music and took offence. The anxious oil pressers immediately arranged for an elaborate *chemā pūjā* and managed to reconcile the god before disaster struck.

As a rare feat, Hari Govinda Ranjitkar succeeded in stealing four cocks in one go for his *pirāne pūjā*. A jealous neighbour<sup>8</sup> watched him and proceeded to blackmail him. Soon after this incident, the nasty neighbour fell seriously ill. For two years he wasted away until his bones were shining through his skin. An astrologer revealed the cause and advised to pacify Nāsaḥḍyaḥ, protector of drummers and chicken thieves, with a *chemā pūjā*. The patient recovered.

Nāsaḥḍyaḥ is known to favour students who commit petty theft as a test of courage.

8 In Bhaktapur everybody appears to have jealous neighbours who can get absolutely vicious at times.

9 Sacrificial goats should be completely white or completely black. No cheating with shoe polish, please!



*Fig. 11:* Sujaman Banmala demonstrates the method of stealing a chicken for Nāsaḥḍyah in four steps. Step 1: Collect sacrificial grains at the Nāsaḥḍyah shrine



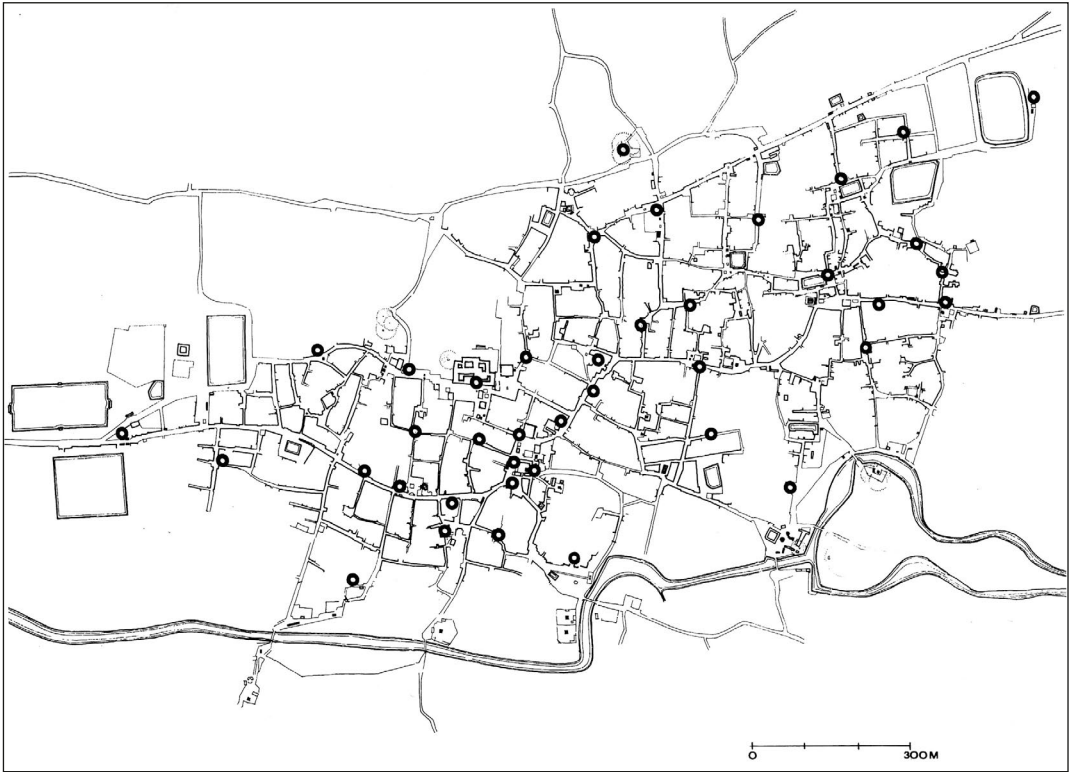
*Fig. 12:* Step 2: After sprinkling the grains on the chicken, grab it



*Fig. 13:* Steps 3 and 4: Stow away the chicken and go home, as if in deep and pleasant thought



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Map 7: Shrines of Gaṇeśa. The god receives offerings for good luck during music apprenticeships (map courtesy of Niels Gutschow, also publ. in Levy 1990, p. 221)

Apprenticeship rituals always address both qualities of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ, the creative, inspiring aspect and the destructive force that causes mistakes in music. These opposed qualities are represented not only by the pair of related shrines of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ and Haimāḍyaḥ but also by the two drum-heads, the higher sounding one (Nāsaḥ) and the lower sounding one (Haimā). Only in the case of the pair of the kettledrum *nagarā*, the lower sounding drum is called Mākaḥ<sup>10</sup>—in accordance with the terms used in Kathmandu and Patan. Consequently, the system for keeping Newar drums demands that drums standing on the floor or hanging from a wall hook must show the Nāsaḥ head and conceal the Haimā head. This is strictly observed and believed to create a beneficial aura for humans to live in.

Usually, apprenticeship rituals at the shrine of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ are carried out by the teacher who purifies and decorates the shrine with prescribed offerings, before addressing the god with prayer, supervising the sacrifice and further proceedings.<sup>11</sup> Every Nāsaḥ *pūjā* is preceded by offerings

<sup>10</sup> This could refer to Mahākāla Bhairava.

<sup>11</sup> When I became a teacher of *dhimay*, it was expected that I learned all those tantric ritual skills to initiate my students in the proper manner.

at the local Gaṇeśa shrine and to Kumār residing in a carved stone inserted in the pavement in front of every Newar house entrance. (Map 7)

A Nāsaḥ *pūjā* always includes a smaller *pūjā* for Haimādyah whose shrine is found in the vicinity of the Nāsaḥ shrine. Nāsaḥdyah receives the blood of male sacrificial animals. Haimādyah prefers young female chickens.

Before the proceedings start, the lady of the house with the practice room is asked to prepare four large plates with offerings for the gods. She purifies the floor where the plates are arranged to receive the following offerings:

<i>nīnā</i>	ritually clean, untouched water,
<i>tulbālā</i>	scarlet cloth to be shredded into strips that are tied around participants' necks,
<i>svā</i>	flowers,
<i>svāmā</i>	flower garlands,
<i>abīr</i>	red powder,
<i>bhvisinhāḥ</i>	orange powder,
<i>gvaḥjā</i>	fried beaten rice mixed with water and shaped into six cones,
<i>janakvakhā</i>	cotton threads,
<i>kīga</i>	husked rice,
<i>tecvaḥ</i>	raw barley,
<i>baji</i>	toasted beaten rice,
<i>musyā</i>	fried soya beans,
<i>māri</i>	flat bread,
<i>lābhā</i>	garlic pods,
<i>pālu</i>	peeled pieces of ginger root,
<i>nā</i>	dried fish,
<i>nyā</i>	distilled liquor or rice beer,
<i>khē</i>	raw eggs,
<i>phalphul</i>	fruit,
<i>ita</i>	cotton wicks,
<i>dhupāy</i>	incense powder in curled paper rolls,
<i>dhū</i>	incense sticks,
<i>sukunda</i>	ritual brass oil lamp filled with
<i>tū cikā</i>	mustard oil, and
<i>salicā</i>	tiny clay cup for catching soot.

Only for a Nāsaḥ *sāle pūjā* the necessary items include two *kisalī*, small clay cups filled with husked rice with an areca nut on top and a coin sticking out of the grains. If available, there should also be white *dhvaphaḥsvā*<sup>12</sup> and incense. The Nāsaḥ *sāle pūjā* serves to entice both, Nāsaḥdyah and Haimādyah into the areca nuts where they reside for the duration of the apprenticeship. The gods are kept in the wall niche to encourage the students who direct their prayers at them.

12 *Jasminum officinale*, white jasmine blossoms with seven to eight petals

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During the final *pirāne pūjā* they are brought back to their shrines and released from the nuts. Showing respect for the music god, those carrying the offerings must walk barefoot, ignore the inescapable layer of muck and phlegm coating the brick pavement and keep their balance whilst walking and sliding along.<sup>13</sup>

When the small procession arrives at the Nāsaḥ shrine, teacher and students circumambulate it clockwise, showing respect to the god and at the same time absorb some of the spiritual energy emanating from the shrine. The teacher purifies the altar with water, decorates it with flowers and places the *tulbālā* cloth above the brass plate with the Nāsaḥ hole. Out of respect for Nāsaḥḍyaḥ and the god's flight lane that must not be blocked, he does not stand exactly in front of the flight hole but tries to keep his body a little aside. He proceeds by smearing red and orange powder on all the places where members of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ's entourage are depicted or known to be. They also receive one rice dough cone and one *janakvakhā* cotton thread each. The two *kisalī* clay cups with rice grains and betelnut, coins and all edible items including raw eggs are placed on the altar below the Nāsaḥ hole.

If there are funds for a more elaborate tantric ritual, a ritual specialist called Ācāju (Karmācārya) of the Pañcatharīya caste is called to carry out the ritual in a grand, professional manner. Having purified the shrine with water and after an initial prayer, the Ācāju proceeds to paint several magic diagrams on the altar with rice flour. Three among them (nos. 1, 4, 5) include overlapping triangles with a *bindu* seed in the centre, symbolising male and female energies in creative union. Several diagrams (nos. 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 13, 15) include one or several *kvayē* flames in different sizes that look like the number 6. In a special basket, the Ācāju brings twenty-two small figures shaped as *gvaḥjā* cones and mounds. Consisting of beaten rice and water, they are decorated with red *bhvisinhāḥ* powder and black fried soya beans *musyā* inserted as eyes. These and other objects are placed on top of the diagrams. The Ācāju decorates the shrine, offers flowers, incense, water, *thvā* rice beer, *aylā* liquor, edibles including raw eggs that are perforated with a match and all the other paraphernalia listed above. He applies series of magic *mudra* gestures, whilst reciting chains of magic *mantra* syllables. Thus he invokes Nāsaḥḍyaḥ, Gaṇeś, Kumār, Betāl and the Navadurgā. Finally he rings a bell suspended at the side of the shrine, to actualise the benevolent divine energies for success of this rite of passage. (Figs. 14, 15)

Detailed meaning of the diagrams and of offerings arranged on them

- 1 Nāsaḥḍyaḥ in union with his Śaktī
- 2 Gaṇeśa: a *gvaḥjā* cone made of beaten rice and water placed on top
- 3 Kumār: a *gvaḥjā* cone in the shape of the diagram placed on top
- 4 Betāl
- 5 *baukuṇḍā*: a clay cup filled with a mound of beaten rice paste decorated with fried soya beans. This is Nāsaḥḍyaḥ *yā mhutu*, 'Nāsaḥḍyaḥ's mouth'.
- 6 *pātra*: rice beer or spirit
- 7 *kalas maṇḍap*: dry fish and water

13 Regular town cleaning started only in 1989

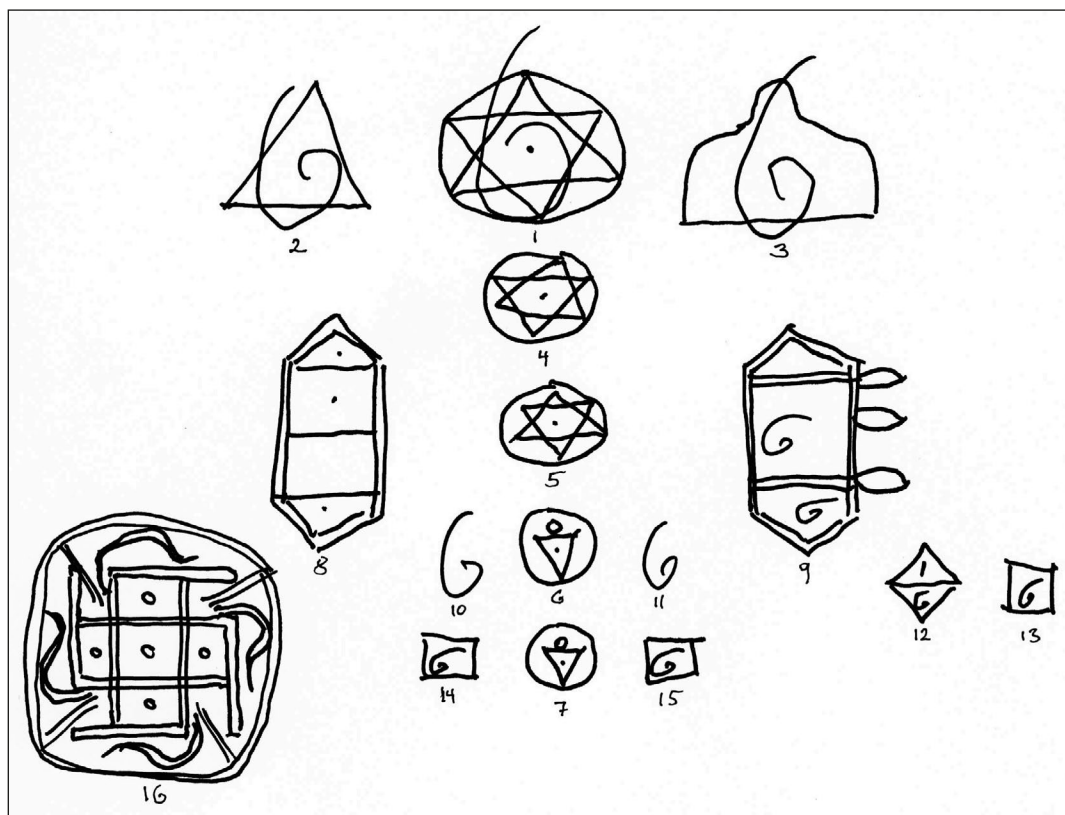


Fig. 14: Drawing of the Ācāju's diagrams sprinkled with rice flour on the altar before specific offerings are placed on top.

- 8 *pañcabali*: five *gvaḥjā* cones and five mounds with one soya bean each, representing five different sacrificial animals for the Navadurgā, buffalo, goat, ram, duck and cock
- 9 *tribali*: three *gvaḥjā* cones and three mounds representing buffalo, goat and sheep offerings for warding off ghosts
- 10, 11 *kvaye* flame
- 12 *mvahani saḥ*: arrangement of burning wick and clay cup for collecting soot
- 13 *sukūdā*: mustard oil container with wick lamp
- 14 *śaṅkha*: conch trumpet
- 15 *jal pātra*: water offering
- 16 *svastika*: two *dhaupatu* clay bowls with yoghurt

With its lavish preparation, intense observation of every minute detail, and only half-revealed procedures involving all senses, this elaborate ritual becomes a special focusing tool for approaching the gods in the proven manner. The aim is, to bring about a divine response that can be felt at a deeper level in our human existence. If performed correctly, the ritual opens a portal between the world of humans and the realm of the gods. It remains open for the initiated musician as a

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Fig. 15: Ācāju Krishna Karmacharya returning the music gods to the shrine of Thāthu Nāsaḥ during a *pirāne pūjā* for Yāchē *navadāphā*, 1984. The painted diagrams on the altar are covered with offerings.

potential means of addressing the gods with the help of musical invocations. In the context of Newar culture, music can be a powerful tool of communication and union, reaching out beyond the limited world of human affairs to access Nāsaḥdyah's magical bliss, the wondrous source of artistic inspiration.

During the *pirāne pūjā*, the Ācāju or in his absence, the Guruju blocks the central *Nāsaḥpvaḥ* flight hole in the metal plate with an edible *dhaubāji* paste<sup>14</sup>, to ensure that the god does not drift away. The face of Nāsaḥdyah is applied on the paste with red powder and three tiny silver eyes, indicating the divine presence<sup>15</sup> during the following blood sacrifice. (Fig. 16)

A blunt knife of impressive dimensions is also carried to the Nāsaḥ shrine, along with the sacrificial animals. The blade is purified and decorated with red and orange powder, flowers and rice grains. Sacrificial animals are asked for their consent to be sacrificed. Sudden shaking of the hair (goat) or the head (chicken) is said to signal agreement, as it matches the South Asian human gesture of letting one's head dance in eager approval. To make the omen work, water is sprinkled on the head or splashed against the belly of the goat. This helps to release the desired effect. Goats and chickens dislike being wet and shake the water off. If they only knew what fatal chain of events that movement triggers, their reaction would be more cautious. Nāsaḥdyah appears to tolerate cheating. Immediately after the head is cut off, the gushing blood is sprinkled over the

14 a sticky mixture of yoghurt and beaten rice

15 Ācāju's father identified this painted face as Bhairava's. Perhaps he was referring to the only Nāsaḥdyah that is part of a Bhairava temple, on the groundfloor front of the Taumādhi Bhairavnāth temple.



*Fig. 16: Dhaubāji paste with the god's face (red powder mark and three silver eyes inserted), blocking the Nāsaḥpvaḥ passage during my first *pirāne pūjā*, 23/3/1984*

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Fig. 17: Severed goat head with tail in the mouth and cotton wicks and incense burning on top



Fig. 18: Dog awaiting his turn to bark during a *pirāne pūjā* of *Yāchē navadāphā* 1984

brass plate with the Nāsaḥ hole and over all members of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ's entourage. The severed head of the sacrificial animal is placed on the altar. Two lit oil wicks are placed on the head. Black soot is caught in an upturned *salicā* clay bowl. (Fig. 17)

If stray dogs are present and happen to bark during the proceedings, this is considered a very good omen for Nāsaḥḍyaḥ's acceptance and support. (Fig. 18)

The body is carried around the shrine, then gutted and the intestine cleaned and blown up to a snake-shaped balloon. This is draped around the brass plate as an adorning offering. Tiny strips of skin from the neck portion—in case of chicken, with feathers—are cut off and offered to Nāsaḥḍyaḥ and his entourage. A few of these skin strips are taken home to be stuck above the entrance of the house in a respectful gesture towards the house gods. (Figs. 19, 20)





*Fig. 19:* The goat intestine is blown up as an offering to Nāsaḥḍyaḥ. Strips of chicken skin are stuck like a crown to the head of the snake-eating demon Chepaḥ (Kīrtimukha), 23/3/1984

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Fig. 20: Nāsaḥḍyah in union with his Śaktī as cosmic creative energy (painting by Madhu Krishna Chitrakar)



Fig. 21: Bhaila Bahādur Banmala and Gaṇeś Kumār Banmala offering prayer before receiving the drums, 1988



Fig. 22: Dayārām Banmala and Nhuchhe Kumār Banmala having just received the drums from me, 1988

Before students play what they have learnt as an offering to Nāsaḥḍyaḥ, the teacher lifts the covered drums a few inches off the ground for each student to offer a coin, flower petals and husked rice to the music god residing in every drum and touch the drum with his forehead. The teacher then places the drum on the student's lap. (Figs. 21, 22)

In response, the students offer prayer and a small gift to the teacher, usually a Nepali cap and a coin. After this, all the students play their lessons together, starting with the musical offering *ḍyaḥllhāygu*. If a student feels blocked by stage fright, he may throw a raw egg at the brass plate. As its contents spill over the already messy shrine, the inhibition dissolves, enabling the student to play their repertoire with confidence. When the music is finished, the edible paste with Nāsaḥḍyaḥ's face is plucked off and distributed as edible divine blessing (*prasād*) among all participants who

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Fig. 23: Children awaiting the end of the *pūjā*, all set to get rich pickings

consume it with joy, as this is the first food they are allowed to eat on a *pūjā* day. At the end of the ritual every participant receives a red *bhvisinhāḥ* mark on the forehead and a vertical line of black soot drawn with a match above the *tikā*. The black *mvahani* line signifies participation in a blood sacrifice.

Students and teacher are honoured by students' relatives who offer new caps, tie white *betāli* turbans around their heads, sprinkle red powder over them, apply orange *tika* marks, a dab of yoghurt at the right temple<sup>16</sup> and rub red powder on the cheeks, rounding off the total effect with flowers. As a reward for his teaching efforts, the teacher receives a cap and a matching set of

<sup>16</sup> in case of females, on the left temple



Fig. 24: Dhimay students from Yāchē and their teacher Ganesh Bahadur Sijakhvā (with turban, next to central pillar) getting ready for their procession home after *pirāne pūjā* 1991

shirt and trousers, *nā* and *survāḥ*. A preliminary *samaybaji* meal<sup>17</sup> is served in front of the shrine and eaten after offering tiny bits of each food item and a drop of the accompanying drink spilled with the ring finger towards the gods and after asking the teacher for permission to start. (Fig. 23)

Eggs and some flowers are collected for taking home. Now children from the neighbourhood have their chance. From the beginning of the ritual they gathered right and left of the altar, eagerly waiting to pounce and grab remaining edibles and coins.

During the procession home, elated students present themselves to the public as fresh drummers, filled with a sense of accomplishment. The entire neighbourhood takes interest in the new drummers and people comment on their playing. (Fig. 24)

On arrival at the practice house, water is splashed on the lintel of the entrance, red powder smeared and a strip of feathery chicken skin stuck to it as an offering to the house gods. In the practice room, the teacher puts Nāsaḥḍyah's blessings in form of flower petals on everyone's head<sup>18</sup>. Students receive the blessing with the respectful expression "*Bagya ti, Guruju!*" A grand *bhvē* feast is prepared and consumed. At the end, the students escort the teacher home with a drum procession, honouring him by playing the sacred *dyahllhāygu* invocation in front of his house.

On the following Saturday, teacher, students and helpers carrying cooking vessels and food-stuff for a grand picnic proceed to Surya Vināyak Gaṇeśa to thank the god with a *carthi pūjā* that

17 consisting of beaten rice, a potato dish, raw garlic and ginger, toasted soy beans, fried buffalo meat, the half-done portion of goat's neck, washed down with several cups of rice beer

18 Flowers serve as a vehicle for divine blessing that is transmitted by touching the devotee's head

## 2 Apprenticeship and the Cult of Nāsaḥḍyaḥ

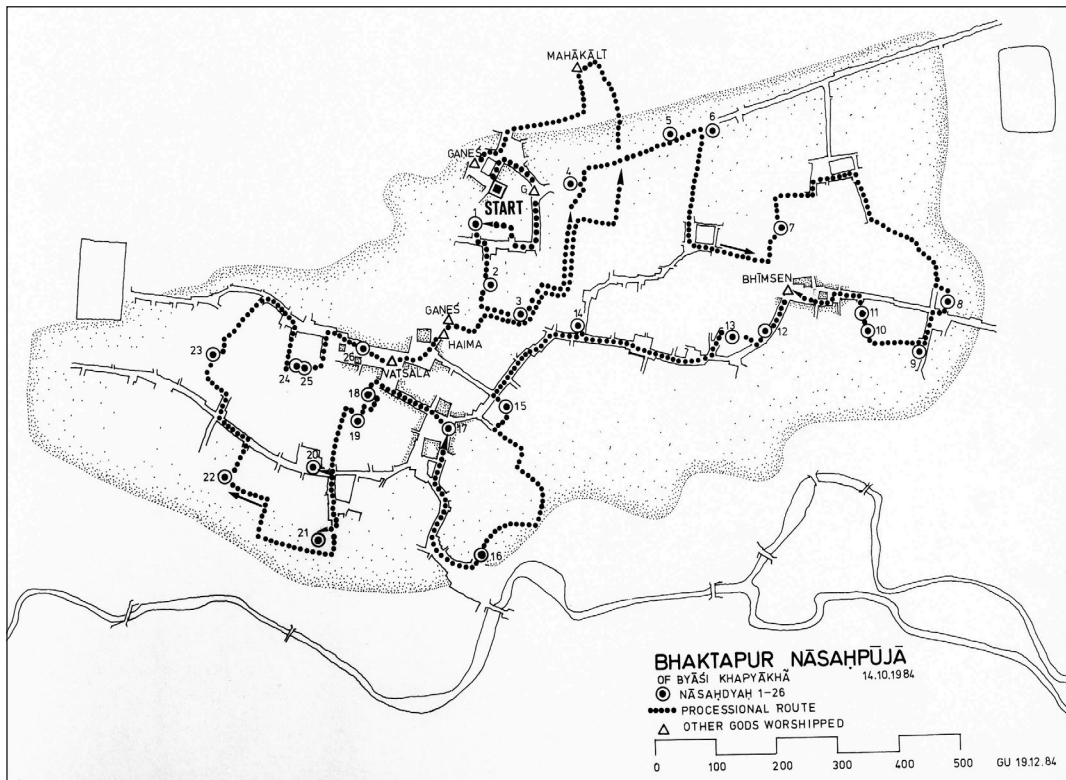
includes a blood sacrifice. The shrine lies at a forested ridge two kilometers south of Bhaktapur, a famous picnic spot. At the end of February rhododendron trees on top of the ridge begin to bloom. Youths collect these glowing red *taku svā* flowers to present them to their girlfriends who tie them to their hair knot. At the start of the procession, teacher and students play *dyahllhāygu* for Nāsaḥḍyaḥ, before proceeding with processional drum patterns. The next *dyahllhāygu* is played at the destination, as an offering to Gaṇeśa. Only on the way back home, other gods receive a short version of *dyahllhāygu*. This includes, among others, a sacred tree that is circumambulated and the local Hanumante river, as it is perceived as flowing from Lord Śiva's head. Bhaktapur's Hanumante is a minor tributary to the holy river Gaṅgā, the source of fertility to the plains of North India.

The teacher's involvement does not end here. In case of processional drumming apprenticeships, he continues to lead the new group for at least a year, playing either the lead drum or a pair of *bhuchyāḥ* cymbals. During processions he teaches the students how to read the townscape of old Bhaktapur as a musical score, selecting and adjusting the musical patterns according to the locality. Every drummer needs to identify all the gods on the way and play musical invocations, in order to open the portal to the spiritual power inherent in those shrines. Whilst passing the shrines in the prescribed manner, either a short version of *dyahllhāygu* is woven into the ongoing processional patterns, or the procession stops in front of the most important gods to salute them with the complete *dyahllhāygu*. Playing such musical invocations for the gods can be compared to dialing a complex telephone number. If you play/dial correctly, the connection with the source of inspiration is established and the music reaches another quality. It is THIS that musical processions aim at, both in tantric Hindu and tantric Buddhist contexts: Inspired music and dance can reveal that our true nature is cosmic creative energy.

*Navabājā*<sup>19</sup> drummers are initiated along similar lines, with blood sacrifices to be carried out with each of the nine drums that are taken up. Ideally, the student learns the complete set of compositions for the first drum, *dhā*, before proceeding to the next instrument, *kvatāḥ*, and so on, until at last the *naḡarā* repertoire is taught as a set. The final stage of the apprenticeship includes at least a week of practicing with all accompanying instruments, cymbals, natural trumpets, shawms and fipple flutes. Learning all seventy-five *navabājā* compositions by heart with the help of drumming syllables requires not only assiduous practice, a good memory and the blessings of the music god, but also the means to cover all expenses for rituals, feasts and making or repair of instruments. It takes more than a year to complete the *navabājā* apprenticeship. To minimise costs, *navadāphā* groups tend to teach students in a group, with each student learning only one or two drums. Nowadays there is a tendency to reduce the repertoire of each drum to one or two compositions, usually the easier and more popular ones. This practice causes other compositions to be forgotten. Students of *navabājā* learn during performances how to adjust the drum compositions to the shawm melodies. Students of *lālākhī* learn how to adjust the drum accompaniment to the different length of *dāphā* songs.

In October 1984 my *dhimay* drumming friends and I were invited to lead an extremely rare event, a Nāsaḥ *pūjā* procession with ritual offerings at every single Nāsaḥ shrine of Bhaktapur.

<sup>19</sup> *Navabājā* is an ensemble of nine different drums accompanied with cymbals, shawms, fipple flutes and natural trumpets, cf. chapters 5.3 and 6.



Map 8: Nāsaḥ pūjā processional route 1984 (map courtesy of Niels Gutschow)

A few other gods on the way (Byāśi Gaṇeś, Mahākālī, Bhīmsen, Vatsala) were included. This was organised by farmer families of Byāśi, with over five hundred participants. It took the whole day and ended with a grand feast. The old processional route for this comprehensive Nāsaḥ pūjā had been documented for a Naṭeśvar pūjā in 1894. Ninety years later this route had been blocked in places by urban growth. A sacred route cannot be changed. We had to climb ladders and planks leaning against those brick walls, sheds, and other obstacles. As far as I know, this was the only procession of its kind until today. (Map 8)

