

The Role of Goddess Anahita in the Representation of Women's Status During the Sassanid Era

Salam Fathi

Department of History, Islamic Azad University of Tehran, Central Branch, Iran

Received: September 2, 2022

Accepted: November 10, 2022

ABSTRACT

Anahita is derived from two words: "Anna" and "Hita." Anna is a negative prefix, and Hita signifies pollution, therefore the phrase "away from pollution" comes to mind. Water is the goddess (woman-god) in Avestan, and Anahita is also known as the "clean river" in Avestan. The Sassanid goddess' dominance during this time is quite surprising, especially when compared with Mithras in Rome, the only god who eclipses all others. Anahita achieves its climax in Sassanid Iran and gains political significance. It is discussed in this article how the goddess Anahita's influence on societal reactions through ancient cultural layers was one of the primary causes influencing society's traditional and cultural views regarding the manifestation of Iranian women's positions, from the name of Azar Anahid Pars to her appearance in the coronation ceremony of the emperors. This study focuses primarily on the role of Anahita in expressing Iranian women's status. There is no doubt that the Sassanid era's attitude towards women, no matter what it was, was more compassionate, equitable, and fairer than the bordering cultures of Zoroastrian civilization at the time, and many of these cultures were influenced by it.

KEYWORDS: Anahita, Woman, Goddess, Mithras, Sassanid

INTRODUCTION

The term "Venus" is derived from the word "Anahita" (Anahit). In Avesta, the term "Anahita" is made up of two parts: "an" (against, anti), "Ahita" (infected), and "Cham," "uninfected/pure." After the development of Zoroaster's religion in Avesta, this god's name was changed to "Aredvī-Sūrā-Ānāhitā", which means "powerful clean river" (20). In spite of her influence lasting until subsequent periods, especially the Sassanid period, Anahita is a remnant of the pre-Zoroastrian period. Zoroastrian literature relates that Ahura Mazda created him with the power preserve both and destroy the home, land, and court. He is the wellspring of material development and expansion, increasing herds and prosperity.

The ancient Iranians believed that Anahita was the goddess of water, the protector angel of springs and rain, as well as the source of all cosmic oceans and a symbol of the blessing of love and friendship. During the Sassanid period, Anahita was helpful in improving the status of women. In what way has the goddess been influential even in later periods, especially in the Sassanid era, and how has it influenced the works of poets like Ferdowsi? Sassanid reliefs demonstrate the importance and influence of the goddess Anahita in this period. That the role and picture of women have been inscribed on fewer inscriptions and reliefs during the extended period of ancient Iran's empires. There is no depiction of a woman in the shape of a goddess or goddesses, either on Earth or in myth.

According to ancient societies, the mother was the one who defined a person's ancestry and identity, rather than a father or a husband. An individual's relationship with his group or tribe was established through a relative's passing from mother to husband. Control of the country was also passed to his wife. Symbols of fertility and fertilization have also been associated with women in ancient myths, which have been incorporated into Islamic mythology. There have been many analyses of the goddesses and goddesses of ancient Iran. In turn, each is remarkable, the authors have extensively discussed the deity of women in ancient Iran and from a historical perspective, so they have included more periods, but they haven't addressed the role of women outside of the family or their identity or given them independence. The role of women's deity has been less explored in regards to the position of women. For this reason, the purpose of this text is to remove these limitations by looking at the topic from the historical period.

Anahita, the Iranian water protector goddess

Anahita, whose full name is "Aredvī-Sūrā-Ānāhitā", is considered by Iranians to be the guardian goddess of water and rain, as well as the source of all cosmic seas, as well as the deity of cleanliness, fertility, blessing, and as a sign of love and friendship. She is seated on a chariot pulled by four horses and surrounded by wind, rain, clouds, and hail. Anahita is a powerful, brilliant, tall, and beautiful celestial with an eight thousand star gold crown and a golden robe and necklace to match (20).

However, Anahita, like Mehr, was later recognized as one of Zoroastrianism's primary gods, and in the chapters following the Avestan Gathas, she is largely taught with Mehr, and the fifth Avesta starts with her name and praise. Ahura Mazda told our white Zarathustra, "She white Zarathustra." Praise be to the Ordovician Anahita, who is a spreading and healing healer, an opponent of the court and an adherent of the Ahura faith, to multiply the herds, herds, prosperity, nation, and the universe, and, if necessary, deliver milk to pregnant women's breasts. A thousand rivers and lakes, each measuring forty days (3).

Women who desired to conceive committed to this goddess and, after accomplishing their desires or before, placed a picture of that goddess giving birth on a bar leading to a circular plate. The devotees put in and thereby fulfilled their pledges.

Anahita worship

The worship of Anahita as a girl and not a Zoroastrian god was common in western Iran for a long time, but during the time of Ardashir II of the Achaemenid dynasty, it penetrated to other parts of Iran (7). This goddess was so important in Achaemenid Iran that Darius II Achaemenid (358–404 BC), along with Ahuramaz and Mehr, mentioned her in his cornerstone. The translation of one part of these inscriptions found in Susa to be as follows: "Darius, one of my ancestors, erected this palace. My grandpa extinguished the fire during Ardashir's reign. I constructed it at the request of Ahura Mazda, Anahita, and Mitra; may Ahura Mazda, Anahita, and Mitra keeps me and protect what I have created" (20).

Brutus, a Chaldean historian of the third century BC, also mentions the fact that, by the order of Ardashir II of the Achaemenids, the statue of Anaetis (Anahita) was erected in Babylon, Susa, Hamedan, Damascus, and Sardis. These small statues made of pottery, silver, and gold, of which a large number have been obtained so far, are more traditional and mythical in shape and are made with indigenous clothing and make-up, as well as the perfect face of every woman that has been desired and desired by every man (3). There are reports from Belnitsky that a large number of female statues such as Anahita, the goddess of water and the plant world, have been found during excavations in Central Asia (8).

These monuments and artworks, to varying degrees, reveal depictions of her from the Yashts. Nahid "Venus" in Yasht is a youthful, attractive, powerful, and well-built lady with white arms and muscular horse shoulders, bulging breasts, a narrow belt at the waist, and decked with jewels and creased garments, among other things. To God's glory, Anahita worship, unlike Mehr worship, has spread beyond the borders of Iran. Anahita went a long way, passing through Mesopotamia and Syria before arriving in Asia Minor and, eventually, Rome through the Mediterranean Sea. (24).

Anahita was associated with the names Aphrodite and Venus. In the West, Anahita's devotion was combined with awe of the mother of all gods. The gods' faces merged with Anahita's, yet Anahita retained her unusual oriental look; however, after passing via Iran and arriving in the Semitic and Asia Minor nations, Venus took on the hue and aspect of some foreign tribe gods. It does not seem appropriate because Aphrodite is the goddess of love and passion, and Venus, despite her beauty, is far from lustful (24). In addition, she is considered by some to be rooted in the Babylonian goddess "Ishtar," which again should be viewed with suspicion. The goddess Ishtar is described in a poem this way: "She is full of magic and beauty and lust. She is dressed in love; her lips are sweet honey, and her mouth is like animal water. She is lovable and forgiving... but the Avesta Venus's glory and chastity far outweigh those of the Babylonian Ishtar (23).

We know that the Sassanid dynasty's forebears were the protectors and helpers of the shrine of Nahid Istakhr, and they came from there to the Persian Empire. Azerbaijan's famed Shiz Fire Temple has long been dedicated to Venus, and outstanding ladies have been transported there for nursing and devout life. Khatoon, the wife of the Turkish Khaqan (during the Sassanid dynasty), as well as a branch of Parthian women, reigned there. After establishing themselves and their position, the Parthians at Naqsh-e Rostam presented themselves as the leaders of the Anahita temple (12).

The crowning of kings was another benefit of the goddess Nahid. Nahid bestows the regal ring on Narsieh and Pirooz, the Sassanid rulers, in Naqsh-e Rostam and Taq-e Bostan. The Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid rulers

were generally crowned in the temple of Anāhīd at Estakhr and, later, Shiz, according to an ancient religion (21). Many sites have their own names, such as castles, bridges, tombs, gates, valleys, springs, etc., where terms like daughter, mother, sister, lady, Bibi, old woman, grandmother, and Turkish and Kurdish counterparts like Lori and Gilaki are combined. They are most likely linked to the goddess Nahid (11). Ardashir II's cuneiform remains show that the king propagated Nahid and Mehr's worship. Anahita was known as the Nahid "Venus" star and was recognized as the goddess of face, beauty, music, and lastly, love, since water was regarded as the source of life and the highest phenomenon of life was termed love. They understood that without any of them, life would be meaningless (5). In an inscription at Susa, Ardashir wrote that he rebuilt Susa's porch and palace on the orders of Ahura Mazda, Anahita, and Mithra (2).

Anahita reliefs

In Kermanshah, the Taq-e Bostan and Naqsh-e Rostam in Pars, both of which are major Anahita reliefs, are noteworthy Anahita reliefs. In the relief of Taq-e Bostan, Khorsrow Parviz stands between Ahura Mazda and Anahita. The relief shows Anahita to the right of the monarch, holding a crown-like Ahura in one hand, the holy oven ring in the other, and a jug filled with water in the other (Fig.1). In this relief, Anahita is depicted as a muscular woman wearing a lengthy robe. This relief in the Bostan arch, which is carved inside the area's biggest arch, or porch, contains additional fascinating elements. This includes its placement in front of a spring and a lake, which links it to Anahita, the goddess of water. A tree of life is represented at the entrance of the arch or huge porch, and winged angels are engraved on it (9).

Except in historical circumstances, the significance of this alleviation; as a result, the function and image of women have been etched on fewer inscriptions and reliefs throughout the lengthy era of ancient Iran's empires, and the example of Taq-e Bostan is one of the few and hence highly important instances. It is necessary to note that the myriad of Persepolis images does not include any representations of women in the form of goddesses, either on earth or in myth (17). Anahita is shown in the Naqsh-e Rostam in a setting comparable to Taq-e Bostan, next to Nasser, the Sassanid monarch. The Sassanid dynasty was founded by Ardeshir Babakan, according to these accounts, before his reign, Ardeshir Babakan was the guardian of the Anahita temple in the city of Istakhr near Persepolis; thus, perhaps the importance of this goddess to the Sassanid kings had grown so great that they had depicted Anahita in scenes of the king's hostage-taking or taking a divine throne from Ahura Mazda's hands (15)

In spite of the fact that the Anahita Temple in Kangavar, near Kermanshah and Hamedan, is recognized as Iran's name, the ceremonial of conferring authority and offering ransom to queens was unknown in Sassanid art (22). It should be noted that this occurrence has never occurred in Iran's history.

Mythology of Anahita

Anahita is the head of the Iranian deities and one of the ancient Persian goddesses. Throughout history, she has been seen as important by the powerful. Ashkan Tirdad I was crowned at a Venusian temple. The guardians of the temple of Nahid, where Atoranahit was lighted, were in the pool of the Sassanid forefathers and family, and according to certain fire-worshipping scientists, it was specifically tied to this type of usury (13). It is said that she was so powerful that she was able to weaken the water god Napāt and take her place in Iranian mythology (2). The Avesta (Yashts) contains a detailed account of his appearance and attributes. She is characterized as a tall, lovely young lady with a flowing white arm, a girdle, and jewelry with a golden collar (2). The goddesses' link with water as a sign of fertility and birth and the plant as a symbol of rising from the soil and being revitalized, has been examined in this portion of mythology; however, other Iranian goddesses also perform these functions.

The situation of women during the Sassanid period

Sassanid culture, like other civilized cultures before it, was divided into classes. However, it appears that class in ancient society was horizontal and parallel, rather than vertical and upward, which is obviously distinct from the imperial family, the Sassanid dynasty (11). Masculinity is a privilege under such institutions, and males are superior to women. Various aspects of this system are reflected in procedures such as inheritance, succession, guardianship, and family custody, registration of documents and even fossils, marriage (whether remarriage or polygamy), and, in other words, social participation and the possibility of achieving opportunities for advancement or political power (7).

As an example, during the reign of Shapur I, the second Sassanid emperor, the monarch, for the first time in Iranian history, acknowledges his queen by name in his official inscription (Fig.2). Shortly later, during the reign of Bahram II, the queen appears beside the monarch in an official lithograph for the first time in Iranian history (Fig. 3). Soon after, the "Narseh" dynasty takes over the kingdom from a woman, and a few years later, during Shapur II's childhood, she becomes Iran's first woman viceroy (3).

During the Sassanid era, women's political prominence rose, and this tendency continued in the fifth century AD. The triumphant empire and his fight with his rebellious brother were fought in Ctesiphon by his mother, Queen Ding. Meanwhile, the name "Homy" is mentioned in the Goddess Letter of the Sassanid forebears of Kian (Kiani), which was the official history of the country, and its image is represented in Shahnamehs of the Islamic period. The more Parviz demonstrates himself, the stronger his wives are in politics, and after Khosrow Parviz, since he had no son, his daughter Pourandokht ascended to the throne, and after his death, his sister Azarmidokht. Iranian history has never seen a woman ascend to the throne legitimately and permanently (6).

In Pahlavi Arda Viraf's book is a letter that describes the travels to another realm of Viraf (Virāz) Parsa, a Sassanid priest (possibly during the reign of Khosrow Anoushirvan). The first women mentioned in the Qur'an are the ladies of Arda Viraf, a group of seven Evin sisters who had accepted the sacred ceremony of marriage with their kin. In other words, the scripture says, in the instance of the first seven women, they "admitted religion." In other words, these seven ladies were able to learn the Avesta and recite Yasht at religious events. We know that, while Bartolome sees the condition of women in the Sassanid era as "progressing and growing from the bottom up," he argues that girls' education was primarily focused on housekeeping. On the other hand, she does not fully dismiss the existence of scientific knowledge among Sassanid Empire women. They walk away. The presence of these seven women in the Arda Viraf Name, who read the Avesta well and to the liking of men, and sometimes sang, demonstrates that, while "women did not have rights" in ancient times, the "increasing prevalence of perfect education in the world of Sassanid women" gradually prepared them for independence. I take not so much the independence that women of the twenty-first century inspire, but the independence that is founded on respect for the marriage tie and stems from the ancient Iranians' desire to have many children (14).

When studying women during the Sassanid period, we focus on the official culture and literature of Iran, particularly Mazdisani "Zoroastrian" culture. However, at least three other civilizations—Manichaean, Mazdaki, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhism—were fully alive and active in western and eastern Iran, influencing official and state culture while ruling over millions of Iranians (10).

According to the late Massoud Azarnoush's field findings in Hajiabad, Pars, which were published in 1994, statues from the Sassanid period were discovered in which women were clothed and sometimes naked, demonstrating a clear interpretation of the necessity of the status of women in society, and they testified to portraying a woman (4). The elites are regarded as ladies or unattractive people in Manichaean-Mazdakian society, and they are obliged to share everything. The higher echelons of the Manichaean faith were rigorously banned from associating with women, and Mani himself refrained from women in the manner of Christ. We read about Mazdak in Khawaja Nasir al-Din al-travelogue: Ferdowsi's Shahnameh relates the same opinion to Mazdak (18). With the fall of the Sassanid administration, this tendency was fully reversed, and the women's movement in Iran, as in other civilizations, waned.

Anahita in Persian Poems

The goddess Anahita's influence as a female figure in Iranian lyric poetry has the most human color and smell. In poems regarding love that deal with the image of a woman, her face can be discovered in Vargheh and Golshah, Leila and Majnoon, as well as Wameq and Azra, Khosrow and Shirin. As the image of a woman in Khosrow and Shirin's poems is accompanied by historical, legendary, and epic descriptions and other features, the poet desires to describe Shirin's face here. Romantic poetry expresses the heart's desire and expresses its complex feelings. There has not been such a rare feature of women in ancient Persian literature for such a long period of time. Ethical principles and social norms should be considered the main causes of this deficiency. By the fifth century AH, women's appearance and beauty were more important than God's perfection, which is manifested in this or in an absolute way. Based on Abu Rihan al-Biruni's description of Venus (the second planet of the solar system) in *Al-Tafhim*, it appears that Venus is associated with water, whiteness, growth, reproduction, fertility, beauty, love, and similar issues. Thus, Venus is the same as Nahid, the goddess of water. According to ancient astronomical sources, the next day is also dedicated to Venus, according to ancient astronomical sources (1).

Female images have two earthly and celestial effects, that is, they appear as human symbols and as superhuman figures. As both the subject and the excuse and mediator of planetary love, and as belonging to the essence of truth, it is the subject of earthly love as well. The appearance and beauty of a woman are created with the water and flowers of Persian literature (19).

Conclusion

There is, however, an exception to the downward trend of women's status in world civilizations during the Sassanid period. The status of women in Greece and Rome in the middle of the 1st millennium AD was far worse than that in Greece in classical (Achaemenes) times, but in Sassanid Iran, women were progressing during the

430-year Sassanid period. The status of women in Iranian society has declined due to their weak roles in political developments, although it is not assumed that they are irrational. It is evident that the position of women in the Sasanian period is different from previous periods when Anahita, along with Ahura-Mazda, played a crucial role in political developments.



Fig. 1: Anahita and Ahura-Mazda granting crown to Khosrow Parviz in Taq-e Bostan. (16).



Fig. 2. The figure of Bahram II in the family and elders - Naqsh-e- Rustam. (16)



Fig. 3. The figure of Anahita while blessing the Medal of Shapur I – Tang-e- Qandil. (16).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Al-Biruni, Abu'l-R. (1973). *Kitab al-Tafhim l'ail Sanat al-Tanjim*, by the Effort of Jalal al-Din Homayi, (E. II). Tehran: Babak Pub.
2. Amouzgar, J. (2001). *Mythological History of Iran*. Tehran: Samt Pub.
3. Afifi, R. (2004). *Iran's myths and culture*. Tehran: Toos Pub.
4. Azarnoush, M. (1997). *The Sasanian Manor House at Haji Abad of Iran*, -American Journal of Archaeology. Vol. 101. No. 3. Jul.
5. Bahar. M. (2002). *Research on Iran's myths*. Vol. 4. Tehran: Agah Pub.
6. Bartholomew, Ch. (1965). *Woman in Sassanid Law*. (E. II). Translated by Sahib al-Zamani. Tehran: Atai Pub.
7. Bayani, Sh. (2000). *The Role of Women in Ancient Iran*. Tehran: Association of Women Researchers in History Pub.
8. Belnitsky, A. (1985). *Khorasan, and Transcendental. (Central Asia)*. Translated by Verjavand, P., Tehran: Nashr Gofar Pub.
9. Christensen, Arthur E. (1998). *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (E. II). Translated by Rashid Yasemi, Tehran: Negah Institute Pub.
10. Daryaeae, T. (2004) *Sasanian Empire*, translated by Morteza Saghebfar. Tehran: Qoqnoos Pub.
11. Dadeqi, F. (2001). *Bandesh. Mehrdad Bahar Report*. Vol. II. Tehran: Toos Pub.
12. Fikouhi, N. (1979). *Pieces of Anthropology*. Tehran: Ney Pub.
13. Gershman, R. (1995). *Iran from the beginning to Islam*. Translated by Mohammad Moin. Tehran: scientific and cultural Pub.
14. Gignoux, Ph. (1993). *Ardavirafname: (Le livre d'Ardaviraz)*. Translated by Jaleh Amouzgar, French Iranian Studies Association. Tehran: Moin Pub.
15. Hinnells John R. (1991). *Understanding Iranian Mythology*. Translated by Jaleh Amouzgar and Ahmad Tafazoli, Tehran: Cheshmeh Pub.
16. Javadi, Sh. & Avarzmani, F. (2009). *Sangnegare-ha-y-e-Sasani: (Sassanid rock art)*. Tehran: Balkh Pub.
17. Lecoq, P. (2003). *Achaemenid inscriptions*. Translated by Nazila Khalkhali, Tehran: Forouzan Pub.
18. Mazda Pour, K. (1990). *Shayest-Nashayest: (A text in the Sasanian Pahlavi language)*. Tehran: Institute of Cultural Studies and Research Pub.
19. Madadpour, M. (1998). *Spiritual wisdom and the field of art*. Tehran: Hoze Honari Pub.
20. Pourdavud, E. (1960). *Yashtha*. Vols I & II, Tehran: Farahvar Pub.
21. _____, E. (1964). *Anahita*, Tehran: Amir Kabir Pub.
22. Shapour Shahbazi, A. (1998). Studies in Sasanian prospography, in V. Sarkhosh Curtis & R. Hillenbrand (eds.) *the art and archaeology of ancient Persia: 58-66*. London: Tauris Pub.
23. Sajjadpour, F. (2000). *Fasun Fasaneh*, Tehran: Sepideh Sahar Pub.
24. Tafazzoli, A. (1997, *History of Pre-Islamic Iranian Literature*. By the Effort of Jaleh Amouzgar. Tehran: Sokhan Pub.