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RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Iconographic Study of the Goddess Anāhitā in Bas-Reliefs and Stuccos of the Sassanian Period

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Abstract: Anahita, a prominent Zoroastrian goddess, has always had importance status and widely revered during the Sassanian period. In the present research, relying on the studies of Sassanian bas-reliefs and stuccos, an attempt has been made to study the role of this goddess in Sassanian art. The results of this research clearly indicate that Anahita, among the other Zoroastrian deities, has always had a valuable place in those eras because she was thought to offer wisdom to those who revered her. Personification and depiction of the goddess Anahita in human icons in Sassanian bas-reliefs and stuccos were an attempt by the Sassanian emperors to legitimize their rule.

Keywords: Goddess Anahita; Sassanian; Bas-Relief; Stucco.

Introduction

The Sasanian era is one of the most important and influential parts of Iran's history, with many authors and researchers focusing on the artistic, cultural and social characteristics of this period in their books and articles (see Rahbar, 2023; Nourallahi, 2022; Panjehbashi & Mohazzab Torabi, 2022; Benmaran, 2022; Roustae Farsi, *et al*, 2022; Maksymiuk, 2021; Matloubkari, & Shaikh Baikloo Islam, 2022; Skupniewicz, 2022; Khanmoradi, *et al*, 2023, Rostami & Aryamanesh, 2020; Mowlaiey Kordsholi & Jafarizand, 2023; Sedaghati, & Ahamadzai, 2023; Rostami, & Ghasemian, 2023).

One of the ethnic and indigenous indicators of every nation is relying on the achievements resulting from its beliefs and attitudes towards the surrounding world. With a profound look at the history of ancient people, it is found that deities and myths of that era constitute a large part of the beliefs of nations. The reflection of these can palpably be perceived in the art works created by them. These creations and innovations, in fact, do represent the spirit of artists who arose from among the people, which later saw continuity and expansion. One of the most important ways of learning the common culture, art and beliefs in a society, in which, the artworks are studied is to pay attention to symbolic motifs and signs used that can reveal many hidden concepts.

As a kind of court art, Sasanian art attempted to reflect the thoughts and opinions of the kings and the ruling class. The meanings and concepts behind each of these motifs have been the reflection of administrative, religious and social policies of the ruling class. The depiction of Anahita in the Sasanian art, particularly in bas-reliefs and stuccos of that period, is not an exception to this rule, and the appearance of this goddess is a manifestation of administrative and religious policies of the kings and elites. The current research intends to investigate the role and place of this goddess in the Sassanian era relying on the study of Sasanian petroglyphs and stuccos as well as religious and Pahlavi texts of that period.

Research Question

What is the purpose of personification and depiction of human icons of the goddess Anahita in Sassanian bas-reliefs and stuccos? These have been borrowed from which culture from an iconographic perspective?

Research Approach

Iconographic approach: This is used to analyze and interpret ancient icons. In other words, iconography is applied to identify, describe and interpret the content of icons.

Cognitive archaeology: To American scholars, Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus, cognitive archeology is the study of all aspects of ancient cultures that are the products of human minds; and

this type of archaeology examines the issues such as mythology, religion, ideology, iconography and other forms, in which, religious and symbolic norms are reminders of archaeological evidence (Flannery and Marcus, 2000: 98). Colin Renfrew also took some steps in England by organizing cognitive archeology and establishing a new strategy called ancient thought and engaged in investigating and analyzing symbols (Renfrew, 2011a and b). Therefore, in this research, cognitive archeology is also used to interpret and explain the acquired data.

Research Methodology

This is a foundational research in terms of purpose and with regard to nature and the method applied; it is a kind of art history and archaeological study. In the first step, the authors examine archaeological findings such as figurines, statues, sculptured heads, bas-reliefs, and etc. found in Sassanian sites. These data are obtained through observation, taking notes, and obtaining photos and sketch of the findings. Next, the data are studied and analyzed by comparing iconography of the works found in the cultural-artistic-religious context of the Sassanian period.

Sassanian Bas-Reliefs

1- The Investiture of Peroz I by Ahura Mazda in the presence of Anahita in Taq-e Bostan

Taq-e Bostan consists of two big and small arches (*Taqs*), the opening of the big one is 7.30 meters, its height is more than 9 meters, and it is 6.70 meters deep. At the end of the arch and on its back, two reliefs have been carved out in two layers, with three figures being seen in the upper layer (Mousavi Haji and Sarfraz, 2017: 34-35). Researchers have expressed several views about who the people in these reliefs are. According to the similarity of the crown in the middle figure to that of Khosrow Parviz's coins, Herzfeld believes that the aforementioned relief belongs to Khosrow Parviz (Herzfeld, 1988) and following him, other researchers take the same stance (Meshkouti, 1970: 168; Wilson, 1938: 107- 110; Serato, 2004: 74-75; Shepherd, 2008: 598, Sami, 2010: 117; Shahbazi, 2010: 70; Schmidt, 1970: 138-139; Girshman, 1975: 122; Hermman, 1977: 133-134; Mackintosh, 1978:

149-177; Vanden Berghe, 1984: 95-98; Haerinck, 1999: 58; Azarpay, 2000: 69-70; Overlaet, 2011: 235; Canepa, 2013: 871). But Tanabe thinks that the middle figure probably represents Artaxerxes III based on his crown (Tanabe, 2003: 7). However, the authors of this paper agree with Mousavi Haji and Sarfraz, who attribute the middle figure to Peroz I, considering his crown and historical events (Mousavi Haji and Sarfraz, 2017: 36).

On the left side of the king, there is a carved figure of Ahura Mazda, who is giving the kingship ring with his right hand, with wavy bands hanging from it (Mousavi Haji and Sarfraz, 2017: 39). On the right, there is a figure of a lady who is raising the kingship ring with her right hand and is offering it to the king, and in her left hand she is holding a jar from which water is flowing. Herzfeld believes that the person holding the jar is Anahita (Herzfeld, 1988)

Mousavi Haji and Sarfraz argue that Sassanian artists carved this relief to show a historical event and it is reminiscent of the rain that began to fall after several years of drought during the reign of Peroz I, and so he wanted to show his devotion to the goddess of water, Anahita, by this relief (Mousavi Haji and Sarfraz, 2017: 40-41).



Fig. 1. Investiture of Peroz I by Ahura Mazda in the presence of Anahita in Taq-e Bostan (Flandin & Coste, 1858: 9)

2. Investiture of Narseh by Anahita in Naqsh-e Rostam

Narseh's relief is carved on the right side of the tomb of Darius the Great in Rostam, Fars, with 5.70 meters in length and 3.70 meters in width (Shahbazi, 1983: 256). In this relief, a man is standing in the middle with a crown, which is thought to be Sassanian emperor, Narseh, according to the very same crown. The emperor's head is turned towards a lady and he has extended his right hand towards her and he is receiving a ring from the crowned lady (Mousavi Haji and Sarfraz, 2017: 48). The mentioned lady is tall and is wearing an open crown, with curly hair hanging from its top to down on her neck and shoulders, and she is wearing necklace and earrings (Mousavi Haji and Sarfraz, 2017: 48). Most researchers believe that she is actually Aredvi Sura Anahita (Meshkoti, 2013: 30; Serato, 2013: 72; Lukonin, 2014: 321; Shepherd, 2014: 597; Sami, 2014: 140-141; Ghirshman, 2013: 176 Mousavi Haji and Sarfaraz, 2017: 50-54; Sarre, 1921: 37; Schmidt, 1970: 134; Vanden Berghe, 1987: 83; Levit-Tawil, 1993: 44; Haerink, 1995: 55; Hermman, 1977).

Apart from historical discussions about this figure, it has also been discussed from an iconographic point of view. Ghirshman holds that the garment of this lady is in the form of a boiling substance that has been spilled on the ground and is reminiscent of the fermentation of waves, reminding us the function of the goddess of waters (Ghirshman, 2011: 176). Mousavi Haji and Sarfraz, in addition to this view, have discussed the crenate crown of this lady, and considering the fact that this is the only motif among the female figures of the Sassanian era with such crown, they called her to be the goddess of water (Mousavi Haji and Sarfraz, 2017: 53).



Fig. 2. Naqsh-e Rostam, Investiture of Narseh by Anahita (Flandin and Coste, 1858: 184)

Sassanian Stuccos

1. Bandian, Darghaz

Darghaz County is located north of Razavi Khorasan province, about 130 km northeast of Mashhad, and Bandian tepe is 2 km northwest of Darghaz and about 20 km away from the border of Turkmenistan. The distance between this border city and Nesa, Ashgabat is less than 100 kilometers. Darghaz is located on the slopes of Allahuekber and Hezarmasjed mountains, and it is a relatively fertile plain. Darungar River, which is flowing from the west to east of this plain, irrigates agricultural lands before it sinks into the Turkmen sandy plains (Rahbar, 1999: 315).

In 1966, Ezzatullah Negahban along with a number of archeology students conducted a brief survey of this plain, as a result of which, a number of ancient mounds and sites in the north of Khorasan were investigated and identified (Rahbar, 1997: 9-10). Rahbar excavated this historical site for 11 seasons from 1994 to 2006 (Rahbar, 1999: 317).

The complex of architectural spaces of Bandian includes a sanctuary with a large columned hall and various stuccos in the offering room, the fire temple, the porch and the dead tower (Rahbar, 2004: 8 and Rahbar, 2004: 317).

This site yielded 12 stuccos depicting various ritual, hunting, battle, victory over the enemy, coronation, and feast motifs, of which five scenes were inscriptions (Rahbar, 1999: 323). Next to the private door of the hall, in the west, there are three lily bushes, each with five leaves. These bushes are carved behind the head of a lady with a pleated dress whose sleeves cover her wrists. She is performing some rituals in a hall with a valuable pleated curtain which is drawn and tied with a ribbon in the middle, allowing enough light to shine into the hall. The lady is holding a jug in her hand and is pouring water on the ground (Rahbar, 1999: 14).



Fig. 3. Bandian, Darghaz, the relief of a lady with a water jug (Rahbar, 2004: planche.VII)

Rahbar believes that the first relief of Bandian, Darghaz represents Anahita, and considers the lilies behind her head to be the symbol of this goddess. On the right and left sides, there are two figures standing symmetrically, with the left one wearing a shirt, skirt and baggy pants. The lower part of

the pleated skirt and the pattern of flowers on the fabric of the skirt and pants are made up of pomegranate flowers. There is a long ribbon hanging behind her head that reaches near her feet. In her left hand, she is holding a Barsam and a hearth is in her right hand. The person on the right is also wearing a pleated shirt and long skirt. This figure has a Barsam in his left hand and a hearth in his right hand. The hearths in the hands of the two figures in the altar have three steps, which definitely have a meaning when it is considered along with the three-step sub-column and the sanctuary that is situated on three steps (Rahbar, 1997: 14 and Rahbar, 1999: 64) (Fig. 3). Ghirshman argues that the crock is one of the signs of Anahita (Ghirshman, 1999: 160), however, Gignoux believes that not only is the crock not always full of water, but it is also not the only symbol of the goddess Anahita, and thus should not be attributed to Anahita (Gignoux, 2008: 168). Koulabadi holds that the crock has been depicted in the hands of women in the art works of the Sassanian period, therefore it is not a special sign of Anahita, but it could be considered as a possibility in these scenes (Koulabadi, 2015: 531). According to different views of the researchers, the authors agree with Rahbar's point of view in this case and consider this figure to be Anahita.

Ritual scene: In the northwest corner of the altar, there is damaged stucco depicting four standing figures. The first one on the left has a long ribbon hanging behind his (her) head. The second person wears a skirt extending to the knees and its fabric contains stylized details. He (She) is wearing high boots. In the central part, there is a sanctuary built on a three-step platform. There are two carved columns on both sides, the lower part is cube-shaped and decorated with four-leaf flowers, and the upper part is made of several tangential spheres. Between these two columns, a curtain can be seen drawn and tied with a ribbon. In this scene, two characters are depicted who are wearing brocade garments. Each of these people is holding a stick or a Barsam in their right hand and a hearth in their left hand. The person on the left is wearing a loose shirt, skirt and pants and the lower part of the skirt is pleated and the pattern of both skirt and pant includes pomegranate flowers, and a long ribbon is hanging from the back of his (her) head reaching near the feet. The person on the right has a pleated blouse and long skirt with relatively different

decorations. He (She) is wearing boots and a short ribbon is hanging on the left side of his (her) body. Between these two persons, there is a large three-step hearth. The hearths that are held in the hands of two figures have three steps, which definitely have a religious meaning when considered along with the three-step column and the sanctuary situated on three steps (Rahbar, 1997: 14).

Like the previous relief, with reference to the crock motif, Rahbar believes that one of the depicted women is the goddess Anahita (Rahbar, 1997: 14; Rahbar, 2010-1390: 175-176 and Rahbar, 2004: 16). However, as mentioned earlier, Gignoux does not agree with this view and does not consider the crock to be a symbol of Anahita (Gignoux, 2008: 168). As mentioned above, Koulabadi also argues that the crock has also been shown in the hands of other women in the works of the Sasanian period, therefore it should not be regarded as a special sign of Anahita, but it could be considered as a possibility in these scenes (Koulabadi, 2015: 531).

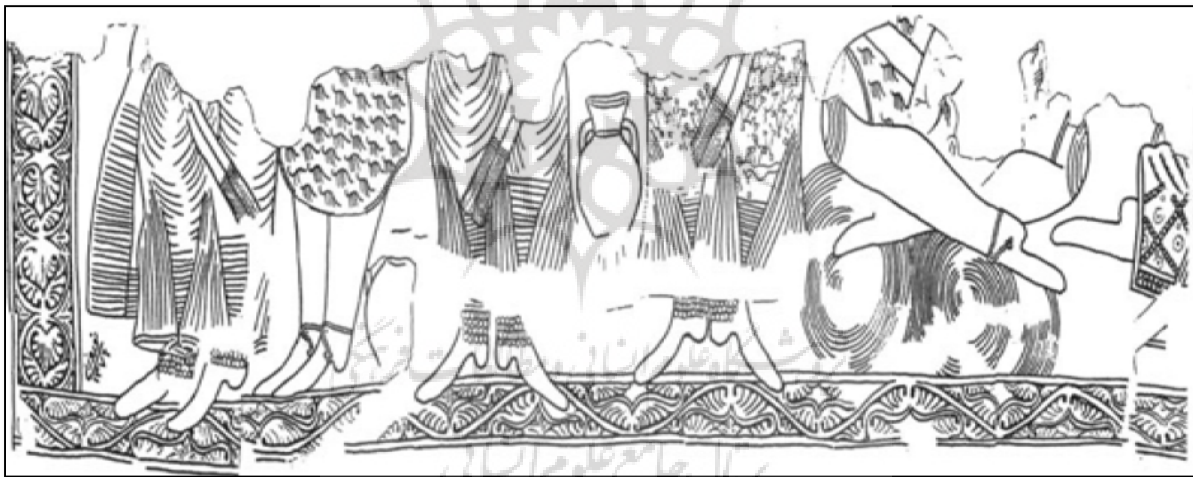


Fig. 4. Bandian, Darghaz, the scene of religious ceremony (Rahbar, 2010-2011: Fig. 13)

2. Tepe Hissar

Tepe Hissar (or Tappeh Hesar) is located about three kilometers southeast of Damghan and on the southern edge of the Alborz Mountain. Today, due to the expansion and development of the city of Damghan, Tepe Hissar is almost located on the outskirts of the city (Negahban, 1997: 393).

This mound was surveyed by Ronald de McNom in 1928. After that, Ernest Herzfeld surveyed and excavated it in 193 (Massoumi, 2013:539). Subsequently, Eric Schmidt continued to excavate this mound in 1931 and 1932 and he first published the report of his excavations in *Pennsylvania Museum Journal* (Scmidt, 1933) and then in a book entitled *Excavation Records from Tepe Hissar, Damghan* (Scmidt, 1937)

Tepe Hissar includes a site called the Sassanian Palace. This is located southwest of the main ridge of Hissar Tepe. This building has a columned porch or hall leading to another hall in the back, which may have probably had a domed roof. The columns of the hall and possibly parts of its walls had stuccos. Various plaster plaques with figures of humans, deer and boars and other symbolic motifs have been among the decoration of the walls of this structure (Scmidt, 1937: 327, 330-331, 333-336).

The Lady's Plaque: This square plaque is 43x43 cm in size, obtained from the palace and includes a decorative border with four curved floral motifs extending from the corners of the inner square to the four outer corners of the plaque. The main character is a full-face bust of a lady, which is separated from the border by two square strips inside the plaque. This maiden is wearing a robe that is fastened in front of the chest with a pin and from which a double row of beads is hanging in a long form with ornaments in between, and her hands are under her robe. Two raised ribbons can be seen behind her head. She is wearing a necklace, which is a double necklace, with the upper one having a row of pearl beads and the lower having a row of twisted bands from which a rhombus-shaped pendant is hung with a circular bead in the center (Fig. 5). The lady has a simple braid on her hair. A part of her hair is placed on the forehead and on both sides of the face, two small bunches of hair are falling on her shoulders behind each ear. The lady has a long face and short eyebrows, a long and wide nose, almond-shaped eyes, and narrow and elongated lips.

Different views have been expressed about who this lady is. Schmidt believes that according to the ornaments, the bust belongs to a prince (Scmidt, 1937: 334). Jens Kröger has associated it with the motif of Aphrodite before the Sassanian period and attributed the lady to Anahita (Kröger,

1982: 73). Koulabadi also believes that Sassanian artists may have been inspired by the motif of "Lady behind the window" which had roots in Mesopotamia and used it as an ornament without knowing its real meaning (Koulabadi, 2015: 536). Considering the lack of features of Anahita in this motif, the authors do not consider it as the motif of the goddess Anahita.



Fig. 5. The plaster plaque in Tepe Hissar (Scmitdh, 1933: Pl. CLXV)

3. Hajiabad

Hajiabad village is located about 60 km south-southwest of Darab and 280 km east of Shiraz. In the summer of 1976, during an extensive digging operation with a bulldozer (for agricultural or construction purposes), some stuccos were revealed on a mound in the northern part of Hajiabad. This mound was called Tal-e Sefidak. At that time, Hajiabad Gendarmerie intervened to save this place. Masoud Azarnoush excavated this site in 1978, although this site was severely damaged and almost 60% of the mound was lost (Azarnoush, 1983: 164-168).

The result of the excavation was a building complex called *Khane Arbabi*. The collection of buildings discovered from Hajiabad includes an administrative and ceremonial part, a ritual part, a residential part and an irrigation network. The ritual part is a complex with large spaces with stucco decorations. This complex includes various rooms and relatively smaller open areas that are connected by different corridors. On the walls of this space, there are some indentations, in which,

a life-size statue of a goddess has been placed. Most of Hajiabad's stucco fragments were obtained from this section, and rooms 114 and 104 are the most important ones. Azarnoush has considered room number 114 as a ritual place due to the presence of figures. He suggests that the statues of Hajiabad, whether naked or else, represent the goddess Anahita (Azarnoush, 1983: 168-174).

Figure 1: This small plaster figure of a lady which is three-dimensional and is 31 cm long, 17.9 cm wide and 12.7 cm thick. Only a small part of the woman's neck above the beaded edge of the collar remains. She is wearing a long-pleated shirt with long pleated sleeves. Numerous folds can be seen on the entire clothes, especially around her waist, sleeves and the lower part of the skirt. This folding is slightly puffed around and under the bust and tied tightly under the belt. The skirt has fewer folds in the front of the leg and right thigh. Despite the folds, the shape of the lady's body is visible under it. The end of the belt is in the form of a knot in the area of the navel, before it hangs in a gable pattern. These two belt strips are hanging from one point and gradually become larger with an oblique movement downwards. There are two large round buttons on each side of the belt knot, which may belong to its hook. Even though the lady has covered her left breast with her left hand, its prominence can be seen from under the hand. The right hand with the thumb being missed is placed on the right knee. The shoulders are too wide and the right knee is slightly bent and moved inwards. She is wearing a necklace in the form of a row of simple round beads with a holed pendant in the middle of the chest (Azarnoush, 1994: 123-124) (Fig. 6).

This plaster figure is similar to Anahita's motif in the Investiture of Narseh bas-relief in Naqsh-e Rostam. The way of standing, with one leg being bent inward, the hand being placed on the thigh, the pleated shirt being gathered under the leg and the folds of the garment, broad shoulders, belt with two hanging bands and beaded necklace are the common points in this plaster sculpture and the bas-relief of Naqsh-e Rostam (Chehri, 2007: 142).



Fig. 6. The plaster figure, Hajiabad (Azarnoush, 1994: Pl. XXI)

Figure 2. This plaster work is part of a female body, of which only a part of the lower chest, abdomen, and pelvis remains. In this piece, one can see the frequent and intensive folding of the garment around the waist and upper part and the belt. The belt is in the form of a flat strip and the details of its buckle and hook are clear in the area of the navel. A round button can be seen on the right side of the knot. Two strips are hanging down from the oval knot in the center of the belt, and at the end of it, it shows the belt coming out of the knot (Azarnoush, 1994: 121) (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Plaster figure of Anahita (Archive of the National Museum)

Anahita's Naked Figurines: Only six examples of these figurines have been obtained. These figurines have lots of protuberances and may have probably been in a round shape and were not used in the walls. One of these pieces, which is more complete than the others, is 61 cm long and 12 cm wide and was obtained from room number 114. The makeup of a woman's head is complicated. Her hair is gathered on the top of the head and passed through a ring and then turned into a round forelock. Five regular rows of beads show the curls of hair in this forelock and these ring-like projections lead to the tip of the ball. The forelock comes straight from the head with a ring that is like a strong rod which has a smooth surface. The surface above the head, on which this bar is placed, has no traces of curls. The convex body of this part and the headdress (crown) is regularly covered with three rows of semi-circular shapes. The headdress (crown) is a simple convex headband with an oval bead in the center. The end of the headband on each side of the head leads to a leaf-like and diamond-shaped decorative element. A tuft of hair is hanging from under the headdress (crown) on the top of the cheeks near the earlobe and covers the temples on each side. This hairstyle has four curls. On each side of the head, in the area below these curled rings, three other rings are hanging on the shoulders and a part of the chest, in the shape of an incomplete cone. The smooth surface of these hanging rings does not have any traces of carved lines to show the curling rings. This lady has arched eyebrows, a proportionate nose, a small mouth, fleshy

cheeks, and a pointed chin. Among the ornaments, two strings of necklaces can be mentioned, with the upper necklace being a simple beaded one with hemispherical beads hanging from the bottom of the neck. The second necklace, which has a longer string and hangs lower than the first necklace, is like two simple convex strips hanging on the chest in a V shape. The tip of this necklace has a round pendant that fills the hollow of the chest. This pendant has a ring and an oval bead. Her earring consists of two beads and an oval pendant at the end. Only the right breast of the lady is visible and the other breast is covered by her right hand. She has also covered his pubic bone with her left hand. The thighs are fleshy and the legs are fat. The right knee is slightly bent and the woman's weight rests more on her left leg. Both her legs are placed on a rectangular base. The other piece is similar to this one, with the only difference being the ball above the head and the right hand from the elbow along with the left breast are broken and lost (Azarnoush, 1994: 124-126) (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Hajiabad 3, the naked figurines (Azarnoush, 1994: Pl. XXII)

The Sculptured Head of Anahita, Hajiabad: This piece, which seems to have been the head of one of the statues inside the ledges, is 22.5 cm long and 12.5 cm wide. Her hair is decorated with vertical wavy grooves in front of her head. At the back of the head, the hair is straight in the beginning and its end is slightly wavy on the neck. The hair has passed through a loop and comes

out in the form of a ball with an oval cross-section with a diameter of 4-8 cm. On both sides of the face, two strands of wavy hair are hanging on the cheeks. The eyes are large and almond-shaped, and the cheeks are fleshy and fat (Azarnoush, 1994: 120, 121) (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. Hajiabad, the lady's figure (Azarnoush, 1994: Pl. XIX-XX)

A Review of the Goddess Anahita in Iran by Examining Pahlavi Texts

In the cultural arena of Western Asia, the mother goddess with her powerful personality not only provided a wide range of myths, but was also the main subject of customs and rituals of matriarchal societies of this cultural region; the same customs and rituals that continued even to the next patriarchal era in the region. This goddess was known by various names throughout the region, such as Pi-Nikir, Kiririsha, and Perti, which were the names of the same goddess in different parts of Elam. She was exactly called "the great mother of the deities" and was considered superior to all other deities. In Mesopotamia, Ishtar was the great goddess, which is equivalent to Ashrut in Syria, Shām and Torah literature. The high status of this goddess of water and fertility is slightly lowered in the later patriarchal ages and other manifestations of her holy existence turn into the wife of the Great God. So, as Pi Nikir is the wife of Homban, the great god of Elam, Elahgani also becomes the wife of Marduk, the great god of Babylon and Assyria, in the land of Assyria.

However, in the lands that suffered the arrival of Aryan tribes in the second millennium B.C, the same goddess appeared in a new form and with Indo-European names. Sarasvatī in India, Anahita in Iran and Aphrodite in Greece represent this transformation of names. Although in the

eras when patriarchy was established in West Asia, this great goddess is no longer at the top of the deities and received a lower and secondary status, her function still remained. Saraswati in the Indus Valley and Anahita in Iran, were very powerful goddess. Belligerence, marriage, and fertility are their great functions. Anahita fertilizes the wombs. She is the victorious enemy of demons, immortals and fairies. She is the helper of mankind; she gives splendor. She helps Ahura Mazda to lead the holy Zoroaster to the path of religion. She is the protector of believers and the enemy of demon worshippers. In the inscriptions of the second Achaemenid period, her name appears together with Ahura Mazda and Mithras, who form a powerful trinity and are the protectors of the monarchy and royal works (Bahar, 2001: 394 and 395).

Sami, quoting from Avesta in Sasanian Civilization, has described Anahita as follows: "Aredvi Sura Anahita (Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā) has the body of a beautiful maiden, she is very strong, well-built, high-waisted, straight, magnificent, and free; her arms are beautiful and white and with the strength of a horse. She wears brassiere to make her breasts look fit so that she also looks desirable. She is wearing a precious folded golden dress, holding a Barsam in her hand, wears four-sided gold earrings, and a beautiful necklace. She wears a crown on her head with hundred stars, which is golden, with eight cracks, wheel-like, beautiful bands that have an annulus, she wears a garment of skin (of white tiger), extended to her ankle and she wears golden and shiny boots (shoes). (Sami, 2010: 95)

In the examination of Pahlavi texts, some names such as Ardisur, Anahid and Apām Napāt are found that Christiansen mistakenly argues that each of these deities are independent of each other (Christiansen, 288: 1998).

Nahid is the name of the water angel in Iran, which appears in the Avesta in the form of Anahita, with the adjective Aredvi Sura, which means high and strong as well as highly praised (Afifi, 1374: 634). This female deity with the attributes of strength, beauty and wisdom is also the goddess of love and fertility, since the fountain of life springs from her being and thus she also becomes the "Mother of God" (Amouzgar, 1997: 21).

Anahid or Anahita in Aban Yasht of the Avesta has been personified as a young, well-built, tall, beautiful-faced woman, with white arms and a graceful body, wearing a tight belt, adorned with jewels, with a golden collar, square earrings, wearing shining shoes, golden and highly folded mantle. The name of this goddess is first seen as Anahita in the Achaemenid inscriptions from the time of Ardashir II (Amouzgar, 1997: 21).

Aredvi Sura of water, Aredvi Sura Anahita is another name of the goddess of water. Aredvi Sura means powerful, enhancer, and Anahita means flawless and pure, and *Aredvi Sura Anahita* altogether means pure and powerful, unpolluted water. In Aban Yasht, Anahita has been praised (Afifi, 1995: 430).

In Aban Yasht, Ahura Mazda said to Septman of Zoroaster: O' Septman of Zoroaster, worship "Ardsur Anahita", who is widespread, healing, enemy of demons and an Ahura worshiper; by my will, she is the one who cleans all men's testis and purifies the wombs of all women for childbirth (Doostkhah, 297: 1991). She is the one who makes childbirth easy for all women and brings milk (in the breast) to pregnant women when they are required to breast feed their children; At that time, Aredvi Sura Anahita - the possessor of a thousand lakes and a thousand rivers, each as long as forty days route of a swift man's journey, flows toward the extensive sea, all the shores of that sea would boil and come to the middle of it (Ibid: 298).

In the ninth section of Bunda-hišn, which describes as how the seas were created, the name of *Aredvi Sura* has been mentioned that belongs to her (Spring, 2001: 73).

In Zādspram's excerpts, it is said about Anahita or Aredvi Sura: Aredvi Sura along with Sepandārmaz, sent Ferudmadeh down to the earth. Then, he (Zoroaster) was not harmed; his hand was dried (to prevent the harm of witches and demons) (*Zadsperm* excerpts 1987: 25). In the part that is about the seven meetings of religion, which equals the size of seven Amesha Spenta existing in seven places. In the sixth meeting, due to the small size of the seas and rivers, they came to meet Zoroaster in the Mount Snoone. He warned about the preservation and worship of water (ibid: 35).

In Yasns 65 of Yasna, it has been stated in praise of water and Aredvi Sura Anahita, the goddess of water: We praise the water of Aredvi Sura Nahid which is spread everywhere, is the healing one, the enemy of demons, the worshiper of Ahura, the befitting of praise in the earthly world, the befitting of prayer in the earthly world, the pure one who enhanced the world, the pure one who increases the flock and herd, the pure one that is enhancer of the country (Purdavoud, 1977: 89).

In *Khordeh Avestā*, which talks about the prayers and praises of the Mazd-Yasni religion, there are five great prayers, known as five prayers, which include: the Sun, Mehr and Moon, Water and Fire (Afifi, 1995: 278).

Ābān is derived from *Āp* in Avesta and *Epi* from ancient Persian and *Āp* from Pahlavi, which means water. In the Avesta many times "Ap", meaning the guardian deity of water, has been mentioned and all these words are in plural form. One of the five places of prayer: The Sun, Water, Moon, Mehr, Fire, is *Ābān Niayesh* (*niyāyišn*) or *Aredvi Sura Niayesh*, which is in the praise of the goddess Nahid Aredvi Sura Nāhīd and is the source of the world's waters, paragraph 1- *Aredvi Sura Niayesh*, which is called *Aban Niayesh*, from the first verses of *Aban Yasht* or from Yasna 65 (Oshidri, 199: 52). *Aban Yasht*, which belongs to the angel of water and Nahid, is one of the *Yashts* with a very long Avestian ode, consisting of 30 sections and a total of 133 paragraphs. Its contents can be divided into two parts: one praises and describes Nahid and the other talks about her admirers (Ibid: 53; Afifi, 1995: 403).

The guardian deities of water are mentioned with the following names: *Āb* or, *Aredvi Sura Āb* or *Aredvi Sura Anahita* (Venus), and *Apām Napāt* or *Burz Izad* or *Ābān Naf*, who is in charge of distributing water, is one of his (her) companions. *Amsha spand Khordad* is the lord of waters that according to *Bundahišn* existence the birth and development of the material world comes from water (Ibid.: 402). *Ābān Naf* means source or navel or being born of water, in the Avesta it is called *Apām Napāt* and in Pahlavi it is called *Burz* or the Tower of God and *Aban Naf* (Afifi, 1995: 419).

In *Dadtestan Dinak*, it has been stated: The water that flows from Aredvi Sura Anahita amounts to all the waters that flow in the world, the place of Aredvi Sura is *Sepehr*.

In two inscriptions belonging to Ardashir II from the Achaemenid dynasty, which is found in Hamedan and Susa, the name *Anahita* is mentioned along with the names of Ahura Mazds and Mehr (Afifi, 1995: 431).

The examined texts clearly prove the important and high-ranking position of Anahita among Zoroastrian Iranians of the Sassanian era. The presence of this female deity in the Zoroastrian religion, and high position in the Sassanian era, may have been be a kind of expediency adopted by the Sassanian kings and Zoroastrian priests who, according to their political wishes and needs, changed the Zoroastrian texts so that they could make the position of this goddess very high in the eyes of the people, for their own benefit. Since in the previous periods, especially the early Achaemenid period, apart from Ahura Mazda, there is no sign of Anahita and other deities. In the Sassanian period, according to the emphasis that religious texts put on the position and importance of Anahita, and just at the time when this importance was instilled in the people's minds, Sassanian kings and Zoroastrian priests engaged in personification in artworks and tried to depict the king next to the goddess Anahita, while she is giving the kingship ring to the Sassanian emperor. And this can only be a measure to legitimize the rule in order to convey this message to the people that: "Your king has the direct approval of the goddess Anahita, and anyone who opposes the king is combating the God and his religion."

Conclusion

Among the other Zoroastrian gods and goddesses, Anahita always had a significant role and position in the people's thought during the Sasanian period. At the time of the Darius I of the Achaemenid dynasty, no trace of the existence of other deities is seen and it is only Ahura Mazda who has been mentioned and praised by Darius. In other words, Ahura Mazda alone carries out the duties of other gods and goddesses. Over time, in the period of Ardeshir II of the Achaemenid dynasty, one sees the appearance of Anahita again in his inscriptions and the way is paved for the return of other gods and goddesses. In the Sassanian era, major changes took place in

Zoroastrianism, which were aligned with political goals and interests of priests and kings. In this period, the gods and goddesses were personified in order to legitimize the Sassanian kings, and in the doctrines of this period, the opposition and struggle with the pre-Zoroastrian deities were forgotten and replaced with the bold and prominent presence of these gods and goddesses as Ahura Mazda's assistants in religious texts and other works of art such as bas-reliefs and stuccos and others. In addition to the high position of Anahita in the Sasanian period, which is mentioned in the religious texts of that period, the status of this goddess reaches such a level even in the Narseh period that she is giving the Sassanian emperor the crown, which is usually given to the king by Ahura Mazda. Depicting this goddess in a naked state, which has no compatibility with the Iranian figure of Anahita, indicates the fact of being influenced and affected by her western counterparts.

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بررسی شمایل نگاشتی ایزدبانو آناهیتا در نقش برجسته‌ها و گچبری‌های دوره ساسانی



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چکیده

آناهیتا به‌عنوان یکی از ایزدبانوان زرتشتی، در دوره ساسانی جایگاهی ارزنده داشته است. در این پژوهش سعی بر آن است با تکیه بر مطالعات نقش برجسته‌ها و گچبری‌های ساسانی به بررسی نقش این ایزدبانو در هنرهای یادشده پرداخت. نتایج حاصل از این پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که آناهیتا در میان دیگر ایزدان و ایزدبانوان زرتشتی در دوره ساسانی همواره جایگاه ارزنده‌ای در اندیشه مردمان آن دوره داشته است. تجسم بخشی و آوردن شمایل انسانی ایزدبانو آناهیتا در نقش برجسته‌ها و گچبری‌های ساسانی تلاشی از سوی شاهنشاهان ساسانی برای مشروعیت بخشی به فرمانروایی شان است.

واژه‌های کلیدی: آناهیتا، ساسانی، نقش برجسته، گچبری.

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