

**Anāhitā:**

Transformations of an Iranian Goddess

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## A Note on Transcriptions

The transcription of Avestan is based on the system of Karl Hoffman (Hoffmann 1975). For Pahlavi I have used the system of D.N. Mackenzie (Mackenzie 1986). I have based my transcriptions from New Persian on those of the *Encyclopædia Iranica* (Yarshater 1982-).



## Abbreviations

AM	<i>Andarz ī Ādurbād ī Mahraspandān</i>
AS	<i>Abdīh ud Sahīgīh ī Sagistān</i>
Av	Avestan
AW	<i>Ayādgār ī Wuzurgmihr</i>
AWN	<i>Ardā Wīrāz-Nāmag</i>
Bd	<i>Bundahišn</i>
ČAP	<i>Čīdag Andarz ī Pōryōtkēšān</i>
Dk	<i>Dēnkard</i>
GBd	<i>Greater Bundahišn</i>
HN	<i>Hādōxt Nask</i>
HR	<i>Husraw ī Kawādān ud Rēdag-ē</i>
KAP	<i>Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pāpagān</i>
MP	<i>Middle Persian</i>
MX	<i>Mēnōg ī xrad</i>
N	<i>Nērangestān</i>
NM	<i>Nāmagīhā ī Manuščihr</i>
Phl	Pahlavi
PIE	Proto-Indo-European
RV	<i>Ṛg Veda</i>
ŠĒ	<i>Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr</i>
Skt	Sanskrit
ŠN	<i>Šāh-nāmeḥ</i>
Vd	<i>Vīdēvdād</i>
WZ	<i>Wizīdagīhā ī Zādsprām</i>
Y	<i>Yasna</i>
Yt	<i>Yašt</i>
ZWY	<i>Zand ī Wahman Yašt</i>

## Introduction

This is a study of how the most important goddess of pre-Islamic Iran, Anāhitā, was transformed over time. Possibly having roots in the prehistoric river goddess(es) of the ancient proto-Indo-European peoples of the fifth millennium BCE or earlier, she emerges by the late the Achaemenid period as one of the three principle deities of the Iranian pantheon, alongside Ahura Mazdā and Miθra; an important Avestan hymn, the *Ābān Yašt*, is composed in honour of Anāhitā, establishing her role within the Zoroastrian religion. During the course of this process she acquires additional functions, presumably from pre-existing goddesses in the regions where Iranians came to live. Variations on the Iranian Anāhitā are found in the religious cultures of neighbouring lands such as Armenia, Bactria and Sogdiana. With the coming of Islam her cult disappears, yet numerous aspects of it survive in female figures from Persian literature and through folk tales and rituals, usually Islamicized, which are often connected with water. This dissertation aims to schematize these variations over time and space, in order to trace Anāhitā's development as a major figure in Iranian religion and the constantly evolving mix of her roles and attributes within culturally diverse communities throughout Greater Iran.

According to both the Avesta and the royal inscriptions of three successive Iranian empires, Anāhitā (along with Miθra) was the most powerful deity created by the supreme being Ahura Mazdā.<sup>1</sup> Being originally a water-river goddess, Anāhitā likely incorporated aspects of pre-existing water deities in the areas where her cult flourished. She was specifically goddess of the rivers and the lakes. Temples devoted to her have been identified at Sardis, Babylon, Damascus, Persepolis, Bishapur, and Hamadan, as well as in Afghanistan and Armenia, usually alongside

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<sup>1</sup> Yt 5.6.

rivers.<sup>2</sup> More such sites are being identified all the time, and numerous place-names throughout Iran (such as Pol-e doxtar, Qale-ye doxtar, etc.) may reflect her memory. Many holy sites across the Middle East are thought to have originally been temples devoted to Anāhitā.<sup>3</sup> The Ār Stēn temple on a hillside near Duhok in Iraqi Kurdistan, excavated only as recently as 2006, is a particularly illustrative example: a square chamber containing the main fire pit is circumscribed by a knee-high water channel, fed by run-off, carved into the rock walls and running from there into an open-air sacrificial area which Kurdish archaeologists have attributed to Anāhitā.<sup>4</sup>

In the context of ancient Iranian religion Anāhitā is noteworthy in a number of respects. First, she is the most prominent female deity among the Iranian goddesses, “being worthy of worship”<sup>5</sup> within a largely male pantheon of Iranian deities. Second, her visual aspect is more fully developed than for any other Iranian deity: she is a shape-shifter, alternately a goddess and a river, and has been described fully in both forms. Physical descriptions of her in the Avesta are very extensive and detailed. Some of the other deities mentioned in the Yašts do occasionally take on various shapes (animals and human beings). However, since in the Iranian belief system deities are not usually perceived in human terms, they are not generally anthropomorphized to the extent one sees in Greek and Mesopotamian mythology.

In her original form as a water goddess Anāhitā is more involved in fertility, support and healing. Over time, however, and perhaps partly through influence from non-Indo-European goddesses, she acquired additional functions and characteristics which tied her to the warrior and priestly functions as well. In contrast to the norm according to which a deity was connected to a particular social groups, Anāhitā came to be associated with all of the three major social categories

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<sup>2</sup> For a survey of temples attributed to Anāhitā in the Greek literature see De Jong 1997, pp. 277-284; also see Chaumont 1989.

<sup>3</sup> See Treve 1967, pp. 121-32.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Barwari 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Yt 5.1.

of ancient Iranian society: priests/rulers, warriors, and “producers”.<sup>6</sup> By the historical period—specifically her appearance in the Avestan hymn devoted to her, the *Ābān Yašt*—Anāhitā as the female *yazata* of the waters<sup>7</sup> comes to possess three very different aspects: she is simultaneously 1) a spiritual ruler, 2) a mighty deity who supports warriors, and 3) a fertility goddess.<sup>8</sup> Thus, through the acquisition of new characteristics, which were likely taken over from pre-existing local, non-Iranian goddesses, Anāhitā assumed functions associated with the full range of her devotees’ needs and concerns at all social levels, giving her a uniquely important role in the emerging Iranian society.

There is much evidence of Anāhitā’s popularity in ancient times, when she was an object of devotion amongst the Iranian peoples, but the details of this are less clear than one might wish. Specifically, Anāhitā’s features, functions, and place in the pantheon varied considerably from one historical period to the next, and also among the various regions of Iranian cultural influence—in Asia Minor including Armenia, Anatolia, and possibly even Arabia<sup>9</sup>—where her cult was active. This dissertation aims to schematize these variations over time and space, in order to trace Anāhitā’s development as a major figure in Iranian religion and the constantly evolving mix of her roles and attributes within culturally diverse communities throughout Greater Iran.

We may never know the exact details concerning Anāhitā’s historical transformation and development. Nor can we assess with any certainty the extent to which her importance was due to her taking over the position of a pre-existing local goddess or goddesses—although her original identity as a river goddess did not disappear—when the Iranians moved into southwestern Asia.

A comparative study of the mythologies of the various Indo-European peoples suggests that in the common period (ca. 5,000 years BP) there existed a river goddess who was the object

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<sup>6</sup> Mallory and Adams 2006, p. 433.

<sup>7</sup> Y.5. and Rose 2015, p. 275.

<sup>8</sup> Yt 5.85-87.

<sup>9</sup> De Jong 1997, pp. 268-73.

of religious devotion. (It is not possible given our data to reconstruct with certainty what her name may have been, although at least one of her epithets appears to be very ancient as will be shown in Chapter Five.) As the Iranian version of this hypothetical deity, Anāhitā had one important mythological and ritual role among many. Through a series of historical encounters with devotees of different (i.e., non-Iranian) cultural backgrounds, Anāhitā's client base of devotees was dramatically expanded, her expanding transfunctionality giving her the potential to encompass all levels of society.<sup>10</sup> As a result, her status was unrivalled by any other Iranian goddess throughout the course of three successive Iranian empires over a period of a thousand years. (Her later subordination in the Pahlavi texts is most likely due to the socio-political agenda of their authors, reflecting struggles for spiritual authority during the Sasanian period and after, as will be discussed in Chapter Nine.)

In charting out Anāhitā's historical transformations a number of questions emerge. What exactly does Anāhitā represent, in religio-mythological terms, at the various stages of her transformation? Can her original identity as an Indo-European water goddess be convincingly established? And if so, what, if anything, do Anāhitā and these goddesses have in common, and to what extent? How and when were these similarities transmitted? And how is her essential nature as a water goddess connected to her assimilation of other functions over time?

Other questions arise when looking at the evolving roles and representations of Anāhitā during her periods of greatest popularity under the (late?) Achaemenids. What can we conclude from her presence in the Iranian pantheon? A similar question arises when looking at the role of Anāhitā, especially during the Parthian and Sasanian periods. Did she remain important during the last two Iranian monarchies? What was her role in the Avesta, and in the Middle Persian texts? What differences exist between the two in terms of how they portray her?

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<sup>10</sup> Mallory and Adams 2006, p. 433.

More broadly, what can we conclude by the prominence of female deities in the Iranian pantheon? Can this be taken as a reflection of gender relations in ancient Iranian societies, or is the presence of goddesses merely a projection of male ideas about femininity? How does one account for Anāhitā's altered portrayal in the Pahlavi texts, which is markedly different from how she appears in the Avesta? Are any socio-political forces behind this transformation? Should Anāhitā's importance in the religious life of Iranians be seen as reflecting an improved position of women in Iranian society, or does her apparent demotion in the priestly Pahlavi texts actually reflect the opposite? Finally, with the Islamization of the Iranian peoples, what aspects of Anāhitā's legacy survive, whether in literature, or in popular religious rituals and legends, and how can they be detected?

Chapter One provides an overview of scholarly studies on *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* by numerous of scholars from the West and in Iran. To build a coherent framework and better understand our research, we have divided the chapter based on the three major questions about the goddess: (1) What were the roots of the goddess, (2) Does she possess a proper name in addition to her various epithets, and what are their etymological meanings and symbolic significance, and finally, (3) What, if anything, is unique about Anāhitā's description in comparison with other Iranian deities? This chapter also provides a brief discussion on the efforts of scholars to establish critical editions of the *Ābān Yašt* and to translate it into Western languages.

Chapter Two surveys and provides an overview of the primary sources that have been observed, examined and evaluated for this study. These sources include the Avestan and the Middle Persian texts, along with the Greco-Roman, Vedic and Mesopotamian texts which contain material relevant to our discussion. This chapter also notes several valuable sources from Islamic period such as the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*, the *Dārāb-nāma*, and the *History* of Ṭabarī.

Chapter Three surveys the methodological framework used in this dissertation through the use of comparative mythology. Since this study looks at many different aspects, cultures, and

academic methodologies in order to attempt to answer the questions posed about Anāhitā's role and transformations over time, the theoretical framework for this research will focus on comparative study in mythology using relevant disciplines, so that its overall approach can best be described as interdisciplinary.

Chapter Four provides a background for the role played by goddesses in the ancient world generally, and in the lands that came to be occupied by Iranians in the historical period and its neighbouring regions. So-called Venus figurines are found across a wide area and have often been taken as an indication of goddess worship. Texts and archaeological remains, including temples, offer further evidence of the role of goddesses in the religions of ancient Sumer, Elam, and Babylonia. The goal of this chapter is to discuss the various goddesses and their roles in their respective societies. This perspective is necessary in order to compare these goddesses with Anāhitā, to discover their common features and the possible cultural exchanges between them.

Chapter Five surveys the evidence for water goddesses across a range of Indo-European societies, including the Celts, the Slavs, the Armenians, and the Indo-Iranians. This chapter presents an important and central issue, since it establishes the origin of Anāhitā going back to the common Proto-Indo-European period. The chapter examines the possibility of Anāhitā having originated as an Indo-European water goddess. The many similarities among the water goddesses of these various groups suggests a common Proto-Indo-European origin, echoes of which survive in historical expressions of the Iranian water goddess, Anāhitā. Among these one may cite similar offerings and worship rituals, some of them as essential as the "cult of the head", and the parallel transformation of some of these goddesses such as Coventina (the Celtic water goddess), Brigantia (the Celtic wisdom /fire water-origin goddess) and Anāhitā, all of which suggest that these goddesses share a common origin.

Chapter Six analyses in detail the description and functions attributed to Anāhitā or *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā*, as she appears in the principal Zoroastrian sacred text the Avesta, in the

section known as the *Ābān Yašt* which is a liturgy specifically devoted to her cult. The name “Anāhitā” is seen to have originated as one of the goddess’s three epithets, the etymologies of which are discussed in this chapter. Here we shall also analyze Anāhitā’s descriptions in the *Ābān Yašt*, in order to discover her importance, origin, her multifarious functions, and her possible connection to the *daēuuas*. Finally, this chapter provides the details of Anāhitā’s visualizations and discusses whether they have any symbolic meaning and uniqueness in relation to other goddesses.

Chapter Seven places Anāhitā within the context of other ancient Iranian female deities, a context which changed over time, as the functions and rituals assigned to each shifted and were redistributed. In order to fully understand the evolving role of Anāhitā in ancient Iranian religion, a comparison between some of the most important female deities and Anāhitā is called for. These goddesses are Spəntā Ārmaiti—the abstract concept of “right-mindedness” and the spirit of the earth—Daēnā, the Avestan term for an anthropomorphized moral concept but also a hypostasized goddess; the ancient pre-Zoroastrian divinity Aši, goddess of “Reward, Fortune”; and finally, the Gathic deities of health and immortality, Hauruatāt and Amərətāt. Particular note is taken of Anāhitā’s symbolizing of feminine characteristics as having evolved in complementarity with those of the goddess Aši.

Chapter Eight deals with the issue that Anāhitā is far more than just a water goddess; she has warrior and fertility functions as well. This problem is explained by her assimilation of additional functions from other goddesses that had existed among the various cultures Iranians came to dominate and absorb, from the BMAC culture in Central Asia to the Elamites, Babylonians, and others in Mesopotamia. An attempt is made to distinguish between those characteristics Anāhitā retained from the Indo-European water goddess and those she acquired from non-Iranian sources such as the Elamite and Mesopotamian Features. The chapter concludes



with an investigation of Anāhitā's possible connection with the widespread Indo-European dragon-slaying myth and its associations with water.

Chapter Nine discusses the cult of Anāhitā under three successive Iranian empires, the Achaemenid, the Parthian (Arsacid), and the Sasanian, as well as evidence for her cult among the Sogdians in Central Asia. Her importance as the Patron Deity of the Sasanian Royal House will be examined. Throughout this chapter, the religious sites and sanctuaries in different parts of Iran which are the sacred places and could be connected to Anāhitā, also the Sogdian-era temples at Panjikent, Tajikistan and its possible connection to Anāhitā will be examined. Mention will be made of a discovery in two copper mines at Vešnave in the western central Iranian plateau where thousands of offerings to water were found, presumably to Anāhitā, which suggests a connection to the offerings found in some European rivers (or other sources of sacred water, discussed in Chapter Four) in a religious or a ritual context.

Chapter Ten is about traces of Anāhitā in the selected Middle Persian texts. Here, references to Anāhitā are analyzed in terms of how they differ from her portrayal in the Avesta, since the Pahlavi texts of the Sasanian and early Islamic periods speak rather little of her. Might this be due to the invisibility and inequality of women in the society of the time? Is it appropriate to employ Anāhitā's gender (as a goddess) as a basic analytic category, or are other issues involved? Another question addressed in this chapter is whether she referred to as two distinct goddesses in the Pahlavi texts. Her apparent division is explained in light of attitudes towards women and women's roles and the different types of "wisdom" that are seen to have prevailed amongst the Zoroastrian priesthood of the time.

Chapter Eleven discusses the many survivals of the goddess that can be detected in the literature and folk rituals of Islamic Iran, from the attributes of female figures in literary works such as the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*, the *Dārāb-nāmeḥ*, and other sources. The female characters in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* who show extraordinary independence and self-assertion and their possible origins and

roots will be discussed. Also, traces for supernatural creatures such as the Avestan *pairikās* remained in the popular tales and beliefs as *parīs* (nymphs) and ongoing rituals that use or refer to water.

In the Conclusion it is observed that Anāhitā, who this dissertation demonstrates to have evolved from the ancient Iranian goddess of the waters, underwent numerous transformations from prehistoric times through her gradual absorption into Mazdaeism and ultimately, in numerous sublimated forms, up to the present day in Islamic Iran.

## Chapter One

### Scholarly Studies on Anāhitā

As the most important Iranian goddess, Anāhitā, or *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* as she is referred to in the Avesta, has been the focus of numerous scholarly studies both in Iran and in the West, mostly in the form of brief articles focusing on specific issues regarding her identity and functions in terms of their various possible influences. To date, however, no study has sought to treat questions regarding her origins or her transformation and development over time in a unified way that attempts to construct a full picture of the goddess throughout her evolving contexts over time. Such, therefore, is the aim of the present dissertation.

In order to build a coherent framework within which questions about the Iranian water goddess may be better understood, we provide in this chapter a brief survey of what scholars have said about Anāhitā up to now. A critical evaluation of these views, highlighting the particular strengths and weaknesses of each, will serve as the starting point for this study. Specifically, three major questions will be addressed: (1) what were the root(s) of the goddess, (2) Does she possess a proper name in addition to her various epithets, and what are their etymological meanings and symbolic significance, and finally, (3) what, if anything, is unique about Anāhitā's description in comparison with other Iranian deities?

Since the most extensive primary textual source on Anāhitā is the Avestan hymn known as the *Ābān Yašt*, we will begin briefly by discussing scholarly attempts to establish critical editions of the text and to translate it into Western languages. The first complete edition of the Avesta (*Zendavesta*) was published by the Danish scholar N.L. Westergaard in 1852-54.<sup>1</sup> His work

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<sup>1</sup> Westergaard 1852-54. Kellens (2006) provides a critical, stage-by-stage overview of the history of Avesta scholarship in the West, tracing the diverse approaches which various scholars brought to the text. In doing this, Kellens highlights the weaknesses and errors of perspective that characterized each; these ranged from theological biases and obsolete methodological approaches

contains the complete corpus of the Avestan texts and manuscripts, including the the *Ābān Yašt*. A subsequent edition of the *Ābān Yašt* was included in K.F. Geldner's 1881-96 edition of the Avesta.<sup>2</sup> Geldner had access to 135 manuscripts in preparing this edition. Although Westergaard's edition was more complete than Geldner's, it was based on fewer manuscripts. Geldner had previously shown in an 1877 paper that most of the Younger Avestan texts were composed in metre.<sup>3</sup> Geldner's *Prolegomena*<sup>4</sup> provided an exact description of all the manuscripts and their genealogical relationship. It provided a firm foundation for all further study of the text of the Avesta.<sup>5</sup> Aspects of his work have been criticized, however, especially in recent years by Cantera and Andres-Toledo.<sup>6</sup>

The first English translation of the *Ābān Yašt* was completed by the French scholar James Darmesteter in 1883.<sup>7</sup> Darmesteter went on to publish a comprehensive French translation of the text in 1892-3 accompanied by a historical commentary.<sup>8</sup> In 1910 Fritz Wolff published a new German translation of the *Ābān Yašt* as part of his *Avesta: Die heiligen Bücher der Parsen*.<sup>9</sup> Lommel's 1927 German translation of the *Yašts*<sup>10</sup> is considered to be the most important of his creative work.<sup>11</sup> A later English translation by T.R. Sethna<sup>12</sup> in 1967 was included in his complete transcription and translation of the *Yašts*. Malandra (1983) and Skjærvø (2007) each provide a

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to wilful manipulation of the meanings of the text to suit particular interpretive agendas, as well as in some cases simply poor philological knowledge. Cantera has referred to the shortcomings of previous scholarship as well, in making his case for a new edition of the Avesta (Cantera 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Geldner 1881.

<sup>3</sup> Recently Oettinger has reaffirmed Geldner's theory combined with solid text criticism, which provides reciprocal support and facts (Oettinger 1983). See Schlerath 2000, pp. 394-396.

<sup>4</sup> Geldner 1896.

<sup>5</sup> Schlerath 2000.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Andrés-Toledo 2012, pp. 433-438. See reference to Kellens in footnote 1.

<sup>7</sup> *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol 23. pp. 52-84.

<sup>8</sup> Darmesteter had first established his credentials as an Iranologist with an article entitled "Notes de philologie iranienne" in 1874 (Boyce and MacKenzie 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Wolff 1910.

<sup>10</sup> *Die Yašt's des Awesta, übersetzt und eingeleitet*, Göttingen and Leipzig, 1927.

<sup>11</sup> Schmitt 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Sethna 1976, *Yashts in Roman Script with Translation*.

valuable contribution translated excerpts of the *Ābān Yašt* in their respective anthologies of Zoroastrian texts.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from these various translations of the original texts, to date the *Ābān Yašt* has been the subject of only one extended scholarly treatment, in the form of Oettinger's 1983 doctoral dissertation entitled "Untersuchungen zur Avestischen Sprache am Beispiel des *Ardwīsūr-Yašt*".<sup>14</sup> Hermann Weller's work on Indo-Iranian metre, *Anahita, Grundlegendes zur Arischen Metrik*, includes a translation of the *Ābān Yašt*.<sup>15</sup> In reviewing this translation Zaehner comments that "the traditional transcription is used with certain modifications which serve to illustrate the author's metrical theories."<sup>16</sup>

A contemporary monograph in Persian, *Anāhitā dar ostūre-ye Īrānī* by Susan Gaviri, offers a largely stereotyped portrayal of the goddess based on received interpretations, and has little scholarly value.<sup>17</sup> A recent collection of articles in English edited by Payam Nabarz, entitled *Anāhitā: Ancient Persian Goddess and Zoroastrian Yazata*,<sup>18</sup> is similarly driven by popular notions and has little to offer the scholar. Nabarz's book does contain several articles that could be considered scholarly, notably one by Méndez who places Anāhitā within the line of mother-goddesses and traces her origin to Armenia and Western Iran.<sup>19</sup> The untenability of this interpretation will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, where it will be shown that the Armenian goddess Anahit derives from Anāhitā and not the other way around. Moreover, there is no verse in the *Ābān Yašt* which links Anāhitā to the motherhood function. Nabarz's collection also includes an essay by Compareti which will be discussed below.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Malandra 1983, pp. 117-130; Skjærvø 2007, pp. 71-82.

<sup>14</sup> Öttinger 1983.

<sup>15</sup> Weller 1938.

<sup>16</sup> R. C. Zaehner 1940. p. 89.

<sup>17</sup> Gaviri 1385 [2005].

<sup>18</sup> Nabraz 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Méndez 2013, p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> Compareti 2013.

## 1.1 The *Yas̥ts* and “monotheism”

Following Martin Haug in the mid-nineteenth century, most Western scholars of Zoroastrianism have characterized Zaratuštra as intentionally ignoring the *Yas̥t*-deities in the *Gāthās*, in an attempt to elevate Ahura Mazdā to the status of supreme creator god (of whom the *Aməša Spəntas* were merely aspects, as opposed to being deities in and of themselves). According to this interpretation, the other Iranian deities remained popular among the masses, re-appearing in the Younger Avesta “by popular demand”; “orthodox” Zoroastrianism (i.e., that of the Magi) is understood to have eventually accepted these deities as subordinate figures in the service of the supreme deity, Ahura Mazdā. More recent scholars have challenged this narrative, however, with Jean Kellens going so far as to suggest that the *Gāthās* themselves, far from tending towards monotheism, even reflect a process of *creating* new deities, Sraoša and Aši being two particularly striking examples.<sup>21</sup>

A more perplexing question concerns the alleged emergence of “monotheism” within the innovating Mazdaean religion. Modern Zoroastrians, beginning with their nineteenth-century encounters with European Christian missionaries, have tended to assert that Zaratuštra was “the world’s first monotheist,” but this claim is complicated by the fact that we do not know for sure when (or even whether) Zaratuštra lived or to what extent monotheistic ideas have been read into the *Gāthās* by modern-day interpreters.<sup>22</sup> Faced with the power and status of the evil deity Ahriman and the notion of the world as a cosmic battlefield between the forces of good and evil contemporary scholars have struggled with how to categorize Mazdaism; whether as a “monotheistic dualism (Schwartz), a “dualistic monotheism” (Gnoli), “genuinely monotheistic” (Panaino), or “dualistic/polytheistic” (Skjærvø). Taking note of these scholars’ various characterizations, Hintze has suggested a compromise view positing that “Zoroastrianism has its

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<sup>21</sup> Kellens 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Kellens 2006.

own particular form of monotheism”, which should be measured on its own terms rather than compared to other religions.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from the range of labels and interpretations that have been applied to the Mazdaean tradition throughout history, it is important to keep in mind that like all religions Mazdaism is not static but has constantly transformed itself over time. One may perhaps bracket the question of monotheism as being anachronistic in the Avestan context, bearing in mind that throughout the ancient world polytheism was typically the norm, with Mazdā-worship falling more appropriately into the category of henotheism.<sup>24</sup> At a minimum, the fact that so many Avestan deities apart from Mazda have their own *Yašts* casts doubt on the appropriateness of characterizing the Avesta (even the *Gaṇas*, as Kellens has shown) as a monotheistic text.

### 1.1.1 The *Ābān Yašt*

The *Ābān Yašt* is generally considered to belong to the “legendary” group of *Yašts* (Yt. 5, 9, 15, 16, 17 and 19) while also having some “hymnic” features. Hintze notes that the structure of the *Ābān Yašt* is a combination of “hymnic” and “legendary” sections, which alternate with each other.<sup>25</sup> She explains “The classification of these hymns as ‘legendary’ is based on the distinctive feature that they predominantly, though not exclusively, relate the names and stories of previous worshippers of the deity.”<sup>26</sup> Éric Pirart argues that unlike the other *Yašts* in which the liturgical element is emphasized, the *Ābān Yašt* rather highlights the sacrifice’s legal aspect.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hintze 2014, p. 227.

<sup>24</sup> Foltz 2013, pp. xviii-xiv.

<sup>25</sup> Hintze notes that the first four *kardes* (Yt 5.1-15), *karde* 23 and the last three *kardes* have hymnic features while Yt 5.16-83, 97-99, and 103-18 have an alternating legendary character (Hintze 2009, pp. 58-59).

<sup>26</sup> Hintze 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Pirart 2003.

Nyberg has suggested that some parts of the *Ābān Yašt*, the section of the so-called Young Avesta dedicated to Anāhitā, may be almost as old as the *Gāθās*,<sup>28</sup> and subsequent scholars from Widengren to Boyce have agreed with this assessment.<sup>29</sup> It bears repeating that in the *Yašts*, of all the Zoroastrian divinities only Anāhitā and Vāiiu are said to receive sacrifices from evildoers like Fraṇrasiian and Aži-Dahāka.

The original text of the *Ābān Yašt* is now available as part of the Avestan Digital Archive.<sup>30</sup>

## 1.2 Anāhitā's Roots

Western scholarly views about the nature and character of Anāhitā took shape during the early twentieth century. Christensen, like most later scholars, associated her with Western Iran,<sup>31</sup> while Nyberg considered her to be a “Tūranian,” that is, East-Iranian goddess. According to Nyberg’s analysis, the Avestan goddess Aši corresponded to the “Aphrodite of the Arians” mentioned in Greek sources who was connected to the oasis of Merv and the Oxus valley (around the Amū-Darya), while Anāhitā was the “Tūranian Aphrodite” of the Jaxartes River (Syr-Darya) region further north. He thus considers Anāhitā as the goddess associated with the Jaxartes River (Av. Raṇhā- River).<sup>32</sup> Others, meanwhile, including Geiger, Gray, and Widengren, have considered Anāhitā as the goddess of Oxus River.<sup>33</sup>

Benveniste, following Meyer, considered Anāhitā to have been an originally non-Iranian

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<sup>28</sup> Nyberg 1938, p. 260. Several *Yašts* are devoted to natural phenomena. Some parts of the *Yašts* may be pre-Zoroastrian in origin.

<sup>29</sup> Oettinger 1983; Hintze 2012, p. 423.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.avesta-archive.com>, and <http://www.ada.usal.es>. For the Munich collection see [www.bsb-muenchen.de](http://www.bsb-muenchen.de) and for the Copenhagen collection see [www.kb.dk/manus/ortsam/2009/okt/orientalia/subject640/en](http://www.kb.dk/manus/ortsam/2009/okt/orientalia/subject640/en).

<sup>31</sup> Christensen 1928, pp. 10, 34.

<sup>32</sup> Nyberg 1938, pp. 260-262.

<sup>33</sup> Geiger 1882, pp. 46-52; Gray 1929, pp. 60-61; Widengren 1965, p. 19.



goddess, borrowed from the pantheon of neighbouring peoples.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Benveniste held Anāhitā to have been a late addition into the Avesta, introduced from Asia Minor via Babylonia.<sup>35</sup> He believed the *Ābān Yašt* to date only to the fourth century BCE.<sup>36</sup> Lommel, on the other hand, proposed that the *Ābān Yašt* was originally composed by a devotee or devotees who worshipped her as a non-Zoroastrian goddess, the hymn being incorporated into the Avesta at a later time.<sup>37</sup> Lommel saw Anāhitā as a hybrid goddess derived originally from the Indo-Iranian Sárasvatī, Iranian \*Harahvatī and represents the primal river.<sup>38</sup> He noted that both goddesses ride chariots, and are both a woman and a celestial river.<sup>39</sup> Hence, Lommel concludes that Anāhitā and Sárasvatī are two versions of one goddess.

Harahvati (Av. Haraxvaitī), was applied to a region, probably to the Achaemenid Arachosia (in Southern Afghanistan), having various rivers; at the same time, \*Harahvatī seems to have been the personification of a great mythical river. Lommel's statement is based on the similarities between the two goddesses Anāhitā and Sárasvatī and their connection to rivers. These features are more or less similar to many other Indo-European river goddesses and possibly go back even further in time. The goddess, therefore, cannot be another version of another goddess or have originated in a specific region, due to her similarities to the Vedic Sárasvatī, although she was probably worshipped in Arachosia as well as in many other regions (with various banks of rivers and lakes). According to the Mazdean Creation tradition, any source of water represents Anāhitā. Thus, any river, spring or well is sacred since it potentially represents the "whole creation of water" concept and the goddess as well.

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<sup>34</sup> Benveniste 1929, pp. 27-8, 38-9, and 61-3; Meyer 1877.

<sup>35</sup> Benveniste 1929, p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> Benveniste 1929, p. 63.

<sup>37</sup> Lommel 1927, pp. 26-32.

<sup>38</sup> Lommel 1954, pp. 405-13.

<sup>39</sup> Lommel 1954, pp. 405-13.

Malandra rejects the association of Anāhitā with \*Harahvatī/ Sārasvatī, primarily on linguistic grounds. He sees the form Anāhitā as a back-construction imposed on an earlier \*Anāhitiš which gave Old Persian Anāhīd (thus explaining the Greek form, Ἀναΐτις). Noting that the Pahlavi tradition distinguishes *anāhīd* from *ardwīsūr* (*arəduuī sūrā*), he proposes that the two were originally separate goddesses and that “the Avestan goddess of Yašt 5 is a late combination of the two (at least originally) distinct goddesses Anāhitiš and Ardwī Sūrā.”<sup>40</sup>

Scholars such as Boyce,<sup>41</sup> Gnoli,<sup>42</sup> Malandra,<sup>43</sup> Panaino,<sup>44</sup> and De Jong<sup>45</sup> have characterized the historical Anāhitā as a product of syncretism between an earlier Iranian goddess by that name and several important Mesopotamian goddesses, such as the Sumerian Inanna (Nana) and the Babylonian Ištar. Grenet considers Anāhitā as counterpart of the goddess Nana and some of the deities who have been identified in Sogdian art.<sup>46</sup> He states:

Nana, depicted as Artemis, appears to fulfill the double function of guardian of the earth and of the water, as shown by her two attributes (wand with lion proteome and vase). In addition, her occasional title *šao* ‘ruler’ and the very wording of the Rabatak inscription show her as chief bestower and protector of royalty, a function which was already fulfilled by the Mesopotamian Nana-Ishtar. In her capacity as provider of water, she was probably considered by Zoroastrians as identical with the Avestan goddess Anāhitā, sometimes called “Nana” in Iran.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Malandra 2013, pp. 104-111.

<sup>41</sup> Boyce 1982, pp. 29-31, 201-4.

<sup>42</sup> Gnoli 1974, pp. 126-31 and 137-9.

<sup>43</sup> Malandra 1983, pp. 117-20.

<sup>44</sup> Panaino 2000, pp. 36-9.

<sup>45</sup> De Jong 1997, pp. 103-110.

<sup>46</sup> Grenet 2015, pp. 129-146.

<sup>47</sup> Grenet 2015, p. 132.

De Jong has traced and analyzed in detail information and references about Anāhitā and her cult in the Greco-Latin sources.<sup>48</sup> He considers Anāhitā to be an original Western Iranian goddess.<sup>49</sup>

De Jong is among those contemporary scholars who downplay Anāhitā's Iranian character. Although confirming her origin as a river-goddess, he prefers to consider her cult to be under strong Semitic influence. He states that the origin of Anāhitā and her cult is unclear,<sup>50</sup> and argues that seeing Anāhitā as a river goddess is "illogical" since the characteristics of warrior, queen, love goddess, and healer are not, in his view, connected to rivers. He argues:

If Avestan Aredvī was a river-goddess, there might be a logical connection between her aquatic personality and her functioning as a fertility goddess, but her overpowering role as a warrior queen and as a goddess of love and healing, as she appears in her hymn and in the Classical texts, cannot be logically connected with her Avestan namesake. Therefore, a connection with Babylonian Ištar or with Elamite Nanaia is generally assumed.<sup>51</sup>

Our interpretation will depart from De Jong's in a number of respects. As will be shown in Chapter Four, some of the Celtic water/lake/river goddesses acquired increased strength, power and warlike features in their transformation over the time. In particular, two Celtic goddesses, Coventina and Brigantia, are examples of deities who, like Anāhitā, were originally water goddesses whose overpowering role influenced their other functions. Moreover, healing is one of the common functions of the river/water goddesses in Indo-European mythology, and Anāhitā is

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<sup>48</sup> De Jong 1997.

<sup>49</sup> De Jong 1997, pp. 105 and 273.

<sup>50</sup> De Jong 1997, p.104

<sup>51</sup> De Jong 1997, p. 106.

no exception (her healing function is mentioned in the *Yašt.* 5.1). Finally, there are no verses in the *Ābān Yašt* which depict Anāhitā as the “goddess of love”.

Kellens likewise disagrees with De Jong’s analysis. He counters that the first three characteristics attributed to Anāhitā are not in fact present in the Avesta, while the fourth, that of healing, does in fact correspond well with a river goddess. Kellens explains that Anāhitā’s connections with war are incidental, not essential; like any benevolent deity, Anāhitā simply gives her devotees what they ask for, and in the case of warriors, that would be success in battle. Kellens also argues that one should not conflate Anāhitā’s patronage of fertility with that of love or sex, which, as he points out, the Iranian system relegates to the goddesses Aši and Daēnā.<sup>52</sup> Kellens has emphasized Anāhitā’s purely Iranian aspects, calling her “a typically Iranian goddess.”<sup>53</sup> Hintze too considers that Anāhitā is specifically an Iranian deity.<sup>54</sup>

De Jong maintains that Anāhitā is not a prominent divinity in the Avesta,<sup>55</sup> yet the *Ābān Yašt*, which is devoted to her, is the third longest *Yašt* after the *Farwardīn Yašt* and the *Mihr Yašt*. Moreover, Anāhitā is portrayed in this *Yašt* with great strength and power. De Jong seems to question the *Ābān Yašt*’s originality, claiming it is mostly derived from Yt 17 which is devoted to the goddess Aši. Kellens, however, rejects this assessment as well, noting that the former text’s version of the parallel sections is longer and more detailed than the latter, and that its formulation is unique.<sup>56</sup> Kellens does not find particularly troubling the fact that Anāhitā does not occur in the *Gāθās*, the oldest section of the Avesta, since these hymns do not concern themselves with water (although the waters are central to the other Old Avestan text, the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*- “Seven-Part Sacrifice”). Most Avestan deities are found in the *Yašts* rather than in the *Gāθās*, and Anāhitā is no different.

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<sup>52</sup> Kellens 2002-03, p. 319.

<sup>53</sup> Kellens 2002-03, p. 317.

<sup>54</sup> Hintze 2009, p. 46.

<sup>55</sup> Hintze 2009, p. 105.

<sup>56</sup> Kellens 2002-03, p. 320.

Riel describes Anāhitā as a composite goddess born from the assimilation of the Indo-Iranian divinity Sārasvatī and an Elamite fertility goddess identified with the planet Venus.<sup>57</sup> Although there exists some evidence regarding ceremonies connected to water and flowing streams in Elamite religion, connected with the important Elamite goddess Kiririša (as will be discussed in Chapter Three), Riel’s statement lacks unequivocal support, although one may concede that some level of cultural exchange between these three goddesses is not excluded.

Clearly, many questions pertaining to Anāhitā’s composition, functions, and development remain subject to discussion and debate. The present study will take the goddess’s origin as a water/river deity as its starting point, analyzing her prominent and uniquely visual description in the *Ābān Yašt* against the background of other Indo-European expressions of the river goddess. As Skjærvø correctly notes, Anāhitā in the *Ābān Yašt* “is partly described as a river and partly as a richly dressed woman.”<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the vivid way that Anāhitā is described, partly as a river/waterfall and partly as a super-sized goddess, is one of the most distinctive and noteworthy features of her portrayal in the *Ābān Yašt*. Once her original identity as an expression of the Indo-European water/river goddess is established (as will be done in Chapter Four), all of her other functions and characteristics, whether original or acquired over time, can be better understood.

### 1.3 Anāhitā’s Name and Epithets

Anāhitā appears in the Avesta as *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā*, which is a series of three adjectives or epithets. Lommel was the first to propose that since the three terms are adjectives, then an implied noun—the goddess’s real name—must logically follow.<sup>59</sup> He guessed that if we accept that *Arəduuī* and *Anāhitā* are the goddess’s epithets, then possibly there existed a goddess

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<sup>57</sup> Riel 2002, pp. 197-210.

<sup>58</sup> Skjærvø 2005, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> Lommel 1954, pp. 405-413.

named Harahvati who was the Iranian version of the Vedic goddess Sárasvatī, whose name was forgotten in Iranian sources and replaced by her triple epithet: *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā*.<sup>60</sup>

More recent scholars have generally not accepted Lommel's conclusion, however, and speculation on what the goddess's proper name might be continues to this day. De Jong translates the three epithets as "moist, strong, undefiled".<sup>61</sup> Shenkar, in a similar way, translates them as "moist, mighty, undefiled",<sup>62</sup> while Riel proposes "The Humid Strong Immaculate One".<sup>63</sup> Rose sees the epithets *sūrā*, "strong" and *Anāhitā*, "undefiled" as assertions of her identity.<sup>64</sup>

Hjerrild follows the same translation of Riel, "the humid, the strong, the immaculate". She is among the scholars who identify *Anāhitā* not only with the Vedic Sárasvatī but also with the Greek goddess Artemis (and Aphrodite, Athena).<sup>65</sup> She cautiously states that *Anāhitā*'s name "probably" was \*Harahvatī which was gradually forgotten and replaced by the three epithets, as Lommel had earlier claimed.<sup>66</sup> This raises the question, however, of how and why this "forgetting" occurred.

Applying Dumézil's tripartite caste division theory to *Anāhitā*'s functions, Hjerrild ultimately leaves the question "undecided but in this case, it makes sense". According to this framework, the *Anāhitā*'s "humid" quality relates to the producer class, her "strength" to the warriors, and her "immaculate" nature to the priesthood.<sup>67</sup> However, as will be seen in Chapter Five, the actual meanings of *Anāhitā*'s three epithets are still subject to discussion and debate; moreover, she has other functions which appear to connect her to different groups of deities.

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<sup>60</sup> Lommel 1954, pp. 405-413.

<sup>61</sup> De Jong 1997, p. 104.

<sup>62</sup> Shenkar 2014, p. 66.

<sup>63</sup> Riel 2002. Riel also states that *Anāhitā* comes down to the Earth as a star. Since the goddess never was described as a star in the *Ābān Yašt*, this might be misunderstanding the paragraph 85 in the *Ābān Yašt*.

<sup>64</sup> Rose 2015, pp. 273-87.

<sup>65</sup> Hjerrild 2009, pp. 46-7.

<sup>66</sup> Hjerrild 2009, p. 45.

<sup>67</sup> Hjerrild 2009, p. 47.

Skjærvø conceives Anāhitā as ultimately the “heavenly river”, rendering her epithets as “the unattached lofty one, rich in life-giving strength”. Meanwhile Oettinger’s translation, “the lofty, beneficial *Anāhitā*,”<sup>68</sup> suggests that he considers Anāhitā to be her proper name and the two other terms as her adjectives.

Éric Pirart, based on a recurring strophe in the *Ābān Yašt*, initially proposed that Anāhitā’s proper name is Hī,<sup>69</sup> but he later retracted this.<sup>70</sup> Malandra follows Boyce in contending that her name is taken from a parallel, unattested West Iranian goddess, \*Anāhiti (based on the Greek form *Avαῖτις*),<sup>71</sup> but this suggestion is neither supported by clear evidence nor particularly enlightening. Malandra also states:

As for the goddess, originally the name meant “Unboundedness,” i.e., “innocence, Guiltlessness,” but once it had become hyper-corrected in Old Persian and Avestan to Anāhitā it was understood to mean “Faultless.”<sup>72</sup>

Kellens, more convincingly, suggests that based on Yasna 65.1 which reads, *yazāi āpəm arəduuīm sūrqm anāhitqm*, “I sacrifice to the Water, arəduuī sūrā anāhitā”<sup>73</sup> the word *āp-* in the singular was used in connection to Anāhitā.

And Hintze points out:

This attitude of respect and care for the material world is also incorporated in prayers of the Khordeh Avesta which are to be recited at the sight of a mountain (*namāz kūh*, Y 6.13),

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<sup>68</sup> “Die förderliche, starke *Anāhitā*”; “the lofty beneficial *Anāhitā*” (Oettinger 1983, p. 37).

<sup>69</sup> Pirart 1997, pp. 156-59.

<sup>70</sup> Pirart 2003, p. 200.

<sup>71</sup> Boyce 1986.

<sup>72</sup> Malandra 2013, p. 108.

<sup>73</sup> Kellens 2002-03, p. 324.

cattle (*namāz gōspandān*, Vd 21.1–2) and running water (*namāz āb*, in praise of *Arədvīsūr Anāhitā*).<sup>74</sup> Seeing the sun, the moon, rivers and mountains, having food and drink to sustain the body and medicine against illness, all these are perceived as religious actions in praise of Ahura Mazdā’s presence in the material world.<sup>75</sup>

Skjaervø more convincingly states:

For instance, the name of *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā*, the deity of the heavenly waters consists of three epithets, the gapped noun conceivably being the word for “water” itself. The deity may therefore well be intended also in the *Gā9ās* where water is mentioned.<sup>76</sup>

As we see, a clear agreement about the goddess’s name has so far eluded us. A more detailed analysis of the meaning of *Anāhitā*’s three epithets will be provided in Chapter Three.

#### 1.4 *Anāhitā*’s description

In the Avestan context *Anāhitā*’s description in the *Ābān Yašt* is uniquely rich and detailed. In some parts of the *Ābān Yašt*, it is as if the composer(s) had a clear physical image of her in his mind as he wrote. In fact, a number of scholars have speculated that this was precisely the case, suggesting that the composer(s) of the *Ābān Yašt* may have based these descriptions on an actual statue or statues which are known to have existed by the mid-Achaemenid period at the latest.<sup>77</sup> A recent study on the iconography of *Anāhitā* has even considered that her description in the *Ābān Yašt* was derived from observing her figure in the rock relief in Tāq-e Bostān.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Kotwal and Hintze 2008, pp. 32–34. Furthermore, prayers are to be recited when seeing a site for exposing the dead (*namāz dādgāh*, Y 26.7) and also when entering a village, city or country (*namāz šahrhā* Y 1.16).

<sup>75</sup> Hintze 2014 a.

<sup>76</sup> Skjaervø 2011b, p. 85; also, Skjaervø 2002.

<sup>77</sup> Malandra 1983, pp. 118-19; also Olmstead 1948, pp. 471-72.

<sup>78</sup> Compareti 2014, p. 143



Antonio Panaino is among those scholars who believe that the *Ābān Yašt* “Presents a description of the goddess (in particular of her dress), which seems to be based on a statue or something similar.”<sup>79</sup> However, it is not quite clear how Anāhitā’s beaver-skin clothing as described in the *Ābān Yašt* (Yt 5.129) could have been discerned merely by looking at her statues.

De Jong observes that Anāhitā’s portrayal in the *Ābān Yašt* “in many ways resembles descriptions of desirable young girls elsewhere in the Avesta.”<sup>80</sup> This statement should be taken with caution, however, since the concept of Anāhitā in the Avesta does not have any direct connection to “desirability” as such. In any case, De Jong opines that “it is unlikely that the description of the goddess is based on a genuine statue.”<sup>81</sup>

Nevertheless, it does appear that Anāhitā was the first Iranian deity to be depicted (and worshipped) in the form of a statue, as attested by Berossus in the fourth century BCE and quoted by Clement of Alexandria:

And yet, after many years, they [i.e., the Persians] began to worship statues in human form, as Berossus reports in the third book of his *Chaldean History*; this has been introduced by Artaxerxes, the son of Darius Ochus. He was the first to erect a statue of Aphrodite Anaitis in Babylon, and to suggest such worship to those in Susa, Ecbatana, Persepolis, Bactra, Damascus and Sardis.<sup>82</sup>

Kellens dismisses the theory that Anāhitā’s description in the *Ābān Yašt* is based on an existing statue, arguing that it could just as well have been based on an apparition. Moreover, he points out that her actual physical description, which he characterizes as “brief and concise,”

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<sup>79</sup> Panaino 2000, p. 37.

<sup>80</sup> De Jong 1997, p. 272.

<sup>81</sup> De Jong 1997, p. 272.

<sup>82</sup> Clement of Alexandria (Titus Flavius Clemens. 150-215 CE). Translation: Butterworth 1958, 5.65.3.

resembles that of Daēnā, in contrast to the far more detailed description of her clothing which is without parallel in the Avesta and may be a literary trope, like the description of Miθra’s armor.<sup>83</sup>

Even if we accept Kellens’ assessment of Anāhitā’s physical description as “concise”, it is nevertheless a composite which contains a number of important elements and symbolic indications about her origin. In this sense the significance of the goddess’s visual description goes well beyond that of mere “poetic imagination” (this will be discussed further in Chapter Five). It is also unwarranted to dismiss Anāhitā’s clothing as merely a “literary trope” like the description of Miθra’s armour. For example, one may observe that her diadem, described as “having eight crenulations,” could be connected to the Mesopotamian solar system and shows her assimilation with that system, while her beaver-skin clothing—which is ascribed uniquely to her—emphasizes her water-goddess origin and connects her with an earlier, more northern environment.

De Jong compares Anāhitā’s description to that of the goddess Aši and argues that the main part of that *Ābān Yašt* is (merely) a compilation of texts from the hymn to Aši.<sup>84</sup> We agree that the similarities in some parts of Anāhitā’s description with the other goddesses in their *Yašts* seems noticeable. For example, there is a whole list of characters who sacrifice to both goddesses (Anāhitā and Aši), which is also identical in both *Yašts*, except that in the *Ābān Yašt* the list is longer and contains some additional negative figures among the sacrificers. This is a key point, and will be discussed further in Chapters Three and Four.

In contrast to De Jong, Malandra finds Anāhitā’s visual description a “wholly unusual feature,” noting that nowhere in the Avesta and the Vedic literature can one find such detailed descriptions of a deity’s garment.<sup>85</sup> Shenkar likewise finds her anthropomorphic description “detailed and expressive”.<sup>86</sup> Compareti similarly emphasizes the uniqueness of Anāhitā’s

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<sup>83</sup> Kellens 2002-03, p. 320.

<sup>84</sup> De Jong 1997, p. 104.

<sup>85</sup> Malandra 1983, p. 118.

<sup>86</sup> Shenkar 2014. P. 66.

description, stating that she “is the only *yazata* to be described in detail in the Avesta.”<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, he discusses that she is also the only *yazata* whose rock relief figure can be identified precisely in Tāq-e Bostān based on Mazdaean written sources.<sup>88</sup> Although we agree with Compareti that the female deity in the relief at Tāq-e Bostān represents Anāhitā, to state that the figure is “precisely” based on Mazdaean written sources is an exaggeration. The super-sized human description of Anāhitā in the Avesta, as well as the shape-shifting feature of her from waterfall/river to a goddess, is not what we see in the Tāq-e Bostān’s rock-relief figure; nor do we detect her description as a goddess clothed in beaver skins.

Another debate connected with Anāhitā surrounds the extent to which she may or may not be the figure depicted in artistic representations of the Sasanian period, whether in the context of rock reliefs, coins, plates and vessels or even Sogdian painting in Central Asia. Farridnejad has addressed these issues of identification in a recent article.<sup>89</sup> Pointing out the many discrepancies between many of these representations with the details specified in the *Ābān Yašt*, Farridnejad suggests that certain practical aspects of the Sasanian Anāhitā cult may have become assimilated to that of Dionysos. This would seem particularly relevant to depictions of a semi-nude female dancer which appear on many handicrafts of the period. To Farridnejad’s analysis, however, one might reply that there is nothing on any of these objects that specifically identifies the dancing figure as Anāhitā.

Apart from the rock reliefs of Naqš-e Rostam and Tāq-e Bostān, many artistic figures have been considered as possibly representing Anāhitā, but in no case is this identification absolute. As Bier notes, “neither the images in art nor the architectural monuments correspond precisely to

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<sup>87</sup> Compareti 2014, pp. 139-174.

<sup>88</sup> Compareti 2014, pp. 139-174.

<sup>89</sup> Farridnejad 2015.

descriptions in literature, and none of the numerous (contested) attributions to her of images and sanctuaries rests upon firm ground.”<sup>90</sup>

There are some female figures on numerous decorative vessels and silverwares which often are identified by Anāhitā. These figures mostly are nudes and have moving features, in a pose suggested dancing, and are associated with many different elements such as fruits, animals and flowers etc. Among them, there are two vessels<sup>91</sup> showing four dancing figures, which Shepherd has identified as representing Anāhitā.<sup>92</sup> Following this idea, he interprets the different objects in the sceneries in terms of Anāhitā’s functions: water, vegetation, agriculture, and fertility. Farridnejad supports Shepherd’s analysis,<sup>93</sup> but qualifies that the description of the goddess in her hymn and her representations should be seen as “allegorical and metaphorical.”

The *Ābān Yašt* is our most complete source for constructing Anāhitā’s visual representation. However, the symbolic descriptions of the goddess in her hymn should be interpreted within a larger framework. This means not focusing on her description merely in one or two stanzas, but rather looking at the whole picture of her. Anāhitā’s description in the *Ābān Yašt* is rich and distinctive in number of ways, enabling one to visualize the goddess in ways that could even be displayed through contemporary visual art.

The issue is complicated by the fact that the goddess is a shape-shifter, perceived alternately as a woman and as a waterfall/river. The complete concept of the composite goddess comprises her various functions, which just part of it is her feminine body: and despite her femininity, her arms are said to be “as thick as a horse’s shoulder”. In this sense it is difficult to perceive any connection between her strength aspect and these dancing figures, which more than anything provide joyful, hedonic scenes. The figures might represent some fertility ritualistic

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<sup>90</sup> Bier 1989.

<sup>91</sup> These are in the Musée du Louvre, Paris.

<sup>92</sup> Shepherd 1980, pp. 47-86.

<sup>93</sup> Farridnejad 2015, pp. 19-4.

figures and/or goddesses, but identifying them is beyond the scope of this study. In fact, apart from the rock reliefs of Naqš-e Rostam and ʾTāq-e Bostān—and even for these certain confirmation is lacking<sup>94</sup>—any other representations of the goddess should be considered with caution. In short, we cannot identify any figure as beyond doubt representing Anāhitā; perhaps due at least in part to the complex description of the goddess in the texts. In light of these considerations we must agree with Bier that “Anāhitā’s representation and identification pose one of the most complex iconographic problems in the study of architecture and the visual arts of Iran.”<sup>95</sup>

It may be further added that as for the iconography elements in Iranian culture, it would seem that for the most part they did not conceptualize their deities in human terms (as will be discussed in Chapter Eight). The deities in the Avesta are sometimes described in visual terms. In cases where the Avesta does provide visual descriptions, they tend more to reflect the conceptual meaning of the deity’s characteristic, function and duty and not the realistic form. Such visualizations are rather symbolic and this statement includes Anāhitā as well.

In contrast to De Jong, Kellens rejects the notion that the Avestan Anāhitā was a goddess of love or that she had any connection to war.<sup>96</sup> Arguments regarding her martial character often cite the fact that visual images evoked in the *Ābān Yašt* describe Anāhitā as a mighty chariot rider. One may clarify the situation by pointing out that in the *Ābān Yašt* the majority of Anāhitā’s supplicants, whether they are positive or negative figures, and whether they are warriors or other types, appear in the context of asking for her assistance in overcoming their enemies; this does not make her a “warrior deity” as such, but simply a deity who may (or, in the case of negative figures, may not) help the supplicant achieve their aims, whatever these may be.

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<sup>94</sup> Bier 1989.

<sup>95</sup> Bier 1989.

<sup>96</sup> Kellens 2002-3.

Plutarch mentions that in the Achaemenid period Artaxerxes II was crowned in the temple of a “warrior goddess,” which many have assumed to have been Anāhitā.<sup>97</sup> Centuries later the Sāsānian king Ardešīr I sent the severed heads of defeated enemies to Anāhitā’s temple at Eṣṭaxr of which the Sasanian family were the hereditary custodians. (The significance of this gesture will be discussed in Chapters Five and Eight.)

Chaumont has cautioned that the sources provide very little upon which we can reconstruct the cult of Anāhitā as practiced at this temple in pre-Sasanian times.<sup>98</sup> She wonders whether the reference in Plutarch may be an anachronism, but in the case of Ardešīr she concludes from Tabarī, Eṣṭaxrī and other sources that it was to indeed to Anāhitā, both at the Eṣṭaxr temple as well as at another he established for Anāhitā at Firuzabad, that the Sasanian “paid homage for his victories and did not hesitate to satisfy her most bloody and inhuman appetites, so opposite to the ethics of this Zoroastrian religion he was preparing to make the official religion of his empire.”

Observing that “Of all the gods only Anāhitā was honored with these monstrous trophies,” Chaumont further notes that even a century later Ardešīr’s descendant Šāpūr II exposed the severed heads of Christians at Anāhitā’s temple.<sup>99</sup> She suggests that in Arsacid times Anāhitā was “A warrior goddess, served by warriors such as Sāsān and Pāpak, and not by the Magi.” One must not, she cautions, “confound the rite of Anāhitā as presented under the last Arsacids with the Zoroastrian rite under the Sasanians: the first was confined to the members of the nobility, and the second reserved exclusively for the members of the priestly class.”<sup>100</sup>

In any case, it would seem that by the Parthian and into the Sasanian period Anāhitā was a powerful and feared deity in the context of Iranian Pars. Even given the intimidating “warrior aspect” this originally water deity had by that time acquired, Rose cautions that “such Zoroastrian

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<sup>97</sup> Plutarch (AD 46 – AD 120) 2016, 3.1-2.

<sup>98</sup> Chaumont 1958, p. 154.

<sup>99</sup> Chaumont 1958, pp. 158-9.

<sup>100</sup> Chaumont 1958, p. 161.

mythology of powerful female divinities was not necessarily mirrored in the social standing of mortal women.”<sup>101</sup> This issue will be discussed in Chapter Nine in the context of the Pahlavi texts.

To conclude, it can be seen from a survey of the existing literature on Anāhitā that a number of questions regarding the nature of the goddess and her role in ancient Iranian societies remain unresolved. Moreover, to date no single work has attempted to weave together the array of evidence related to Anāhitā so as to account for her evolution and transformations throughout history. It is the aim of this dissertation to provide, for the first time, an encompassing and coherent narrative on the changing roles, meanings and representations of Anāhitā in Iranian myth and religion.

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<sup>101</sup> Rose 2015, pp. 273-87.

## Chapter Two

### The Primary Sources

This chapter provides an overview of the primary literary sources that have been examined, evaluated and utilized in preparing this dissertation. These sources have been collected and discussed in detail by many scholars in Zoroastrian Studies,<sup>102</sup> although it should be noted that this dissertation is not limited to that field alone and therefore takes its own approach to these sources. For example, although Herodotus has been used extensively by historians of Zoroastrianism, they have typically focused on attempting to discern the beliefs and practices of the various Iranian tribes, while giving less attention to assessing this information in terms of the geography of the Scythian lands. Yet this latter question, particularly in terms of water sources, is highly relevant to our argument that Anāhitā has her roots as a pre-Zoroastrian river goddess. The same may be said about some Vedic, Mesopotamian and Islamic sources, which we have employed in broader and sometimes different contexts than is usually done by scholars of Zoroastrianism. Here again, we are concerned with what the Vedic sources tell us about female deities related to water. Thus, our approach in using the primary sources is tailored to the particular needs of our inquiry, which is broader than that of Zoroastrian Studies per se but also draws on the frameworks of comparative mythology, anthropology, and gender studies.

The present chapter will first evaluate the Avestan and the Pahlavi texts and the old Persian materials which are directly or indirectly connected to *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā*. Since we have already discussed the most important scholarly editions, translations and studies of the *Ābān Yašt* and the goddess in Chapter One, these will not be repeated in this chapter. Greco-Roman texts containing any material connected to our discussion about Anāhitā and her transformation will also be treated here, as will other sources pertinent to our study. These include Vedic and

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<sup>102</sup> For example, the valuable contribution of De Jong 1997.



Mesopotamian texts, as well as later sources from the Islamic period such as the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*, the *Dārāb-nāma*, and the *History* of Ṭabarī.

Translations of relevant original Mesopotamian texts have been consulted and are cited where connected to our discussion.<sup>103</sup> Transliterations of the Vedic texts have also been used where necessary.<sup>104</sup> The most important source from the Islamic period for our discussion is the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* which we have used wherever traces of Anāhitā and/or any goddess influence have been observed.<sup>105</sup>

Many popular Iranian folkloric tales and stories contain traces of goddesses (for example the *Pairikās/Parīs*, with their connection to water) and are recorded in people's memories from their childhood, in books, or even in newspapers—these are listed in the Bibliography.<sup>106</sup> Very likely a memory of the cult of the water-goddess (Anāhitā) was so strong that it remained in the collective conscious of Iranians, absorbing elements derived from other ancient societies. Also, many archeological sites whose names contain *doxtar* (“girl”) or *bānū* (“lady”), may signal reflexions of Anāhitā in Iranian historical memory. Some popular ancient rituals connected to Anāhitā continued to be practiced throughout Greater Iran into Islamic times and even up until the present, their meanings forgotten by most Iranians except to some extent by Zoroastrians. These are all valuable sources for detecting possible traces or/and memories of Anāhitā up to present-day Iran.

In sum, to better understand Anāhitā's origins, roots, functions, development, and the process of her transformation, it is central to our discussion to trace her and/or any goddess-related signs in all of these sources. Anāhitā's transformation will be better understood by combing through the full range of these materials.

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<sup>103</sup> The electronic text corpus of Sumerian literature, Oxford University: <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>

<sup>104</sup> <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/indexe.htm>

<sup>105</sup> Ferdowsi, ed. Djalāl Khāleghī-Motlagh, 1990, 8 vols.

<sup>106</sup> For example, <http://www.dana.ir/news/1036039.html> چرا آب-مهریه-حضرت-زهره-است

## 2.1 The Avestan Texts

The Avesta, the sacred scripture of the Zoroastrians, is a collection of mostly ritual texts, the oldest parts of which date back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE.<sup>107</sup> The Avesta was transmitted through the oral tradition of the Zoroastrian priests until it was eventually written down, presumably around 600 CE. Since then the oral tradition has continued alongside the written one up to the present day. These texts are preserved in an ancient Iranian language not attested by any other sources. According to linguistic analysis, the Avestan texts were composed in an East-Iranian language in three variants: Old, Middle and Young Avestan. The term ‘Avestan’, referring both to the texts themselves and the language in which they are composed, is taken from the Middle Persian term *abestāg*<sup>108</sup> (or *avastāk* in Pāzand<sup>109</sup>), which—since Bartholomae—most scholars derived from *\*upa-stāyaka-* meaning “praise”.<sup>110</sup> These texts presumably survived over the centuries because they were performed during the religious rituals.<sup>111</sup> Transmitted orally from one generation to the next by the priestly class, they were most probably put into written form as late as the Sasanian period (224-651 CE). This writing down cannot have occurred earlier than the fourth century CE, since it was done using an alphabet derived from the Pahlavi script specifically for this purpose.<sup>112</sup>

In the Sasanian period the Avesta was divided into twenty-one books, or *nasks* (“divisions”). These are described very briefly in Book Eight and more extensively in Book Nine of the Dēnkard, a 9<sup>th</sup> century work containing a summary of religious texts based on Pahlavi versions of the Avestan texts. Of the Sasanian Avesta it seems that only a small portion, about one

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<sup>107</sup> Skjærvø 2017, p. 475. In fact, the oral transmission lives on to the present day, so there are 3,500 years of oral transmission alongside which a written tradition started in ca. 600CE.

<sup>108</sup> Macuch 2009, p.124.

<sup>109</sup> Hintze 2009, p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> From  $\sqrt{stu}$ - “to praise.” See Bartholomae 1906, p. 108 and Hintze 2014, p. 2 for this and alternative explanations.

<sup>111</sup> Skjærvø 2012, p. 5.

<sup>112</sup> See Hoffmann/Narten 1989, p. 34; Macuch 2009, p. 124.

quarter of the Avestan canon, has survived.

The Avesta remains the most important primary source for our topic. Two parts of the Avestan corpus in particular, the *Yasna* (“sacrifice”) and the *Yašt*s (liturgical hymns) have been utilised in terms of the direct or indirect material they contain about Anāhitā. The *Ābān Yašt*, an Avestan hymn devoted specifically to Anāhitā, is rich in details about her, establishing the goddess’s role within the Mazdayasnian religion.

2.1.1 The *Yasna*, including hymns and prayers, is gathered into 72 chapters (*hā* or *hāiti*). The *Yasna* is a liturgical text and includes “all the Old Avestan texts which represents the most ancient part of Zoroastrian literature”.<sup>113</sup> The *Gāθās* are part of the *Yasna*, made up of seventeen hymns, archaic and poetic, and are linguistically the oldest material included in the Avesta. In our discussion about *daēuuas*, their demonization, and those who sacrifice to *daēuuas* or *daēuuas*-worshippers in Chapter Six, the *Yasna* and the *Gāθās* are major sources and will be utilized extensively. Their importance to our discussion centers on our being able to clarify the role of the *daēuuas* and how were they described in the oldest part of Avesta, and how the process of their demonization began.

*Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* is not mentioned in the *Gāθās*. However, *Yasna* 65-68 and the *Yasna Haptañhāiti* (“The Seven-Part Sacrifice”, a liturgical text linguistically as archaic as the *Gāθās*<sup>114</sup>) contain several passages connected with water rituals. *Yasna* 38 in the *Yasna Haptañhāiti* provides the Avesta’s earliest mention of “waters,” (*Yasna* 38 and 42) though the connection to Anāhitā is not yet clear. In any case, worship of the waters (and fire as well<sup>115</sup>) is the main focus of the *Yasna Haptañhāiti*.

The *Niyāyišns* (prayers) in the Khordeh Avesta also contain some hymns about rituals of

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<sup>113</sup> Hintze 2009, p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> Hintze 2007, p. 2. and Narten 1986, p. 20f.

<sup>115</sup> *Yasna* 36. See also Narten 1986, p. 155-156.

the waters (*Arđvīsūr*)—*Āb Zōhr* (Av. *ape zaoθra*), *Y* 63-69 (i.e., “the waters”)—as well as to the sun, the moon, fire, and the god Miθra. In the *Niyāyišns* (prayers) in the Khordeh Avesta devoted to the sun, Anāhitā is also mentioned alongside the plants and the sun. The fact that the Young Avestan part of the *Yasna* includes the libation to the waters, demonstrates the high importance of water in Zoroastrianism as well as the continued old tradition of “offering to the water(s)” which is central to our discussion of Anāhitā as a water goddess. *Yasna* 65 clearly enjoins Mazdayasnians to make their supplications to “the water(s)” and to ask its support by performing the offering ceremony to it.

2.1.2 The *Yašt*s, twenty-one in number, are hymns addressed to various deities of the Mazdaean pantheon, some of them with pre-Zoroastrian roots. More specifically, these include Indo-Iranian deities such as Miθra and Haoma as well as others connected to natural phenomena (*Anāhitā*, *Vāiiu*, *Tištiriia*, *Hauruuatāt* and *Xwaršēd*). Hintze argues that Haoma, Mithra, and *Vərəθayna* belong to the pre-Zoroastrian category of deities, since they have Vedic counterparts, whereas she considers Anāhitā alongside *Druuāspā* and *xvarənah* to be specifically Iranian because their names have no etymological equivalent in Vedic.<sup>116</sup> While it is true that the name *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* is clearly Iranian, this study will argue that Anāhitā’s roots go back further, to Indo-European river/water goddesses. (This will be discussed in Chapter 5.)

The *Yašt*s, including the *Ābān Yašt*, are full of ancient Iranian deities who were mostly ignored in the *Gāθās* and are almost never mentioned in the older Avesta. However, as the *Yašt*s attest, belief in these deities and rituals associated with their worship remained strong in ancient Iranian society. Like the other parts of the Avesta, the *Yašt*s originated from oral culture. They

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<sup>116</sup> Hintze 2009, p. 46.

also are divided into sections (*karde*), which can be long or short.<sup>117</sup> Each *Yašt* is normally devoted to one particular deity (a god or goddess). In this way the *Yašts* differ from the *Yasna*, which praises the entire Zoroastrian pantheon and is recited only by priests; the *Yašts* could be recited by any member of the community. The *Yašts*, like most of the Avesta, usually consist of a dialogue between the creator god Ahura Mazdā and Zaratuštra.<sup>118</sup> They differ from each other in order of their length and structure and are grouped according to their types. All *Yašts* have introductory and concluding verses. The *Yašts* are grouped by scholars based on their types into “legendary”, “hymnic”, and “minor”.<sup>119</sup> Hintze notes that “the principle structuring device of the ‘legendary and ‘hymnic’ *Yašts* is a series of recurrent verses which demarcate the beginning and end of a section.”<sup>120</sup>

Since the most important source for Anāhitā is the fifth *Yašt*, an entire hymn devoted to her, this part of the Avesta is central to the present study; we will therefore provide a full discussion of it in Chapter Six. The most extensive treatment and detailed descriptions of Anāhitā in all the Zoroastrian literature are found in the *Ābān Yašt*. This text details the functions attributed to Anāhitā as well as how she is visualized physically. Indeed, many of the central questions raised in this dissertation are based on the data found in this *Yašt*, as is much of our analysis. Although it is our premise that Anāhitā has her roots in a pre-Zoroastrian water deity, the *Ābān Yašt* represents one of the major stages of her many historical transformations, an intermediary stage in her development where one can detect a synthesis of divine aspects likely coming from different sources. One of our tasks will be to determine the provenance of Anāhitā’s different aspects seen in the *Ābān Yašt*, whether from earlier Iranian or non-Iranian influences. Thus, our

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<sup>117</sup> The actual writing down of the entire corpus of the Avestan oral tradition (which had previously been transmitted orally) was probably not begun until the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE (Skjærvø 2005-06, pp. 1-29).

<sup>118</sup> Hintze 2009, pp. 39-40.

<sup>119</sup> Hintze 2014, Kellens 1978, Skjærvø 1994, p. 212.

<sup>120</sup> Hintze 2014.

approach will go beyond simply treating the *Ābān Yašt* in its own terms, but seek to place its portrayal of Anāhitā within a historical continuum of her portrayals in different sources.

Water is also mentioned in the *Rām Yašt* (Yt.15.1.), which is devoted to the deity Vāiiu.

2.1.3 The *Hāδōxt Nask* (The Book of What is Recited Together [with other texts]) is also part of the Avesta. Daēnā, a person’s anthropomorphized ‘vision’ conscience and morality appears in the *Hāδōxt Nask* along with her description, which is thus connected to this study in terms of her comparison with Anāhitā.

Surviving in two fragments, the *Hāδōxt Nask* is an Avestan text accompanied by Pahlavi translation.<sup>121</sup> It is a collection of some fragments of the Avestan texts, specifically the sixth Nask of the Sasanian Avesta according to Book Nine of the *Dēnkard*, or the sixth of the seven Gāθic *nasks* (*gāsānīg*) of the Sasanian Avesta according to *Dēnkard* 8 (45.1).<sup>122</sup> The *Hāδōxt Nask* is comprised of three *fargards* (divisions). The first *fargard* is about the importance of the *Ašəm-Vohū*, which is the second of the four most important prayers of Zoroastrians. The other two divisions of the text discuss the fate of the soul after death. It talks about the *uruuan* of each human, who encounters his or her own Daēnā before crossing the *Činuuat* bridge. In the case of the deceitful person, Daēnā appears as a smelly, disgusting hag (*fargard* three), while in the case of the righteous person, she manifests herself as a beautiful young girl who has just reached the age of fifteen (*fargard* two).<sup>123</sup> This part of the *Hāδōxt Nask* is particularly important for our section on Daēnā and her appearance (in comparison with Anāhitā), as discussed in Chapter 7.

## 2.2 Middle Persian Sources

The bulk of Zoroastrian texts are composed in the Middle Persian language, also known as

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<sup>121</sup> The latest edition is Piras 2000.

<sup>122</sup> Kellens 2002.

<sup>123</sup> *Kainīn*, the age of nubility (Kellens 2002).

Pahlavi. Although most of these texts were written down or redacted subsequent the Arab invasion of Iran in the mid-seventh century, we can assume that many of their religious themes are based on texts from the Sasanian period and most likely contain material that is even older than that. Most of the Pahlavi texts are not original compositions by individual authors; but rather compilations, based on Sasanian oral traditions and the religious tradition (*dēn*) in its multiple varieties.<sup>124</sup> For purposes of the present study many of the Middle Persian primary sources have been consulted, but only those texts containing material directly connected to our research will be mentioned here. The major Pahlavi texts relevant to our research are the following:

2.2.1 The *Bundahišn*, (Primal Creation: *bun*: “base, beginning” + *dahišn*: “creation”) or more recently known as *Zand-āgāhīh* (knowledge from the Zand) is an important encyclopedic and cosmological text which provides a detailed mythical account of history from the beginning of the world up to the Arab conquests in the seventh century CE based on knowledge of the *Zand* and other Zoroastrian scriptures. The book was probably redacted in the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, and it has been suggested (based on the book’s Introduction) that neither *Bundahišn* nor *Zand-āgāhīh* was the original title given to the work.<sup>125</sup> The Pahlavi text exists in two versions, the shorter (and more corrupt) “Indian” *Bundahišn*, and the “Iranian”, or Greater *Bundahišn*.

The *Bundahišn* is used most extensively in Chapter Nine of this study, but in the other chapters as well since it is our main source for comparing the portrayal of *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd* in the Pahlavi period with the Avestan depiction of *Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā*. Bailey presented a complete transliteration and translation of the Iranian *Bundahišn* as his unpublished doctoral thesis at Oxford in 1933.<sup>126</sup> For the present study I have relied mainly on Pākzād’s more recent 2005

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<sup>124</sup> Skjærvø 2012, p. 4.

<sup>125</sup> Mackenzie 1989.

<sup>126</sup> Bailey 1933; also see Mackenzie 1989.

edition, in conjunction with Bahār's 1999 Persian translation; I have also consulted the transcription provided on the Titus Avestan Corpus website.

2.2.2 The *Dēnkard* (Acts of the Religion), the most exhaustive Pahlavi text, is an apology of Mazdaeism and the main source of information on the Avestan *nasks*. It is a diverse encyclopedic work in nine volumes, of which the first, second and part of the third have not survived. It is summary of the knowledge of Mazdaean religion such as it existed in the ninth and tenth centuries, or, as Rezania puts it, a “theological apologetic within an inter-religious context”.<sup>127</sup> Books III-V are devoted to rational apologetics, Book VI to moral wisdom, and Books VII-IX to exegetical theology.<sup>128</sup>

The *Dēnkard* also includes material related to the Zoroastrian cosmogony. The description of the creation of the four elements (Air, Fire, Water and Earth) as the origin of the essence of material objects is relevant to our study, specifically in terms of discussing water.<sup>129</sup>

The information provided in the books about Zoroastrian eschatology, the Renovation of the world and its attendant events (along with many subjects relevant to other aspects of our study), have been carefully analyzed in terms of their direct or indirect connection to Anāhitā. Book III of the *Dēnkard*, a miscellaneous text mainly treating theological and philosophical matters, tries to make a rational apologetic framework for Zoroastrianism; it also contains material about two different kinds of “wisdom” (*xrad*) which we have used to discuss the gendered aspect of inner insight and its possible connection to water.

Marijan Molé's French translation of Book VII and part of Book V was published posthumously in 1967, and Jean de Menasce's French translation of Book III was published

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<sup>127</sup> Rezania 2017, pp. 336-362.

<sup>128</sup> Gignoux 1994.

<sup>129</sup> *Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, I, pp. 120-21.



posthumously in 1973. Shaul Shaked produced an English translation of Book VI in 1979. Aḥmad Tafazzolī and Žāleh Āmūzgār’s French translation of Book V appeared in 2000.<sup>130</sup>

Book 7 of the *Dēnkard* describes the history of the world from Vištasp to the coming of Sošans, but is mostly about the life of Zaratuštra, his birth and death story, and information about three future maidens who will bear sons having Zaratuštra’s lineage, has been examined and combed for details which can shed light on the connection of the water goddess to Zoroastrian eschatology. We will also consider a mythologically ambiguous mention of Spandārmad found in Book 7, as well as two different kinds of sacrifice to water. The book made a distinction between two kinds of sacrifice to water: one used by Zarduxšt (*āb ī homīgān*) and the other by people who are “*dēw*-worshippers”.<sup>131</sup> Here again, the implication is that the latter form may have preserved a pre-Zoroastrian tradition associated with Anāhitā, which seems that was practiced by people in Zaratuštra’s time according to the book. These materials and many other details, all pertinent information for different parts of our discussion.

2.2.3 *Wizīdagīhā-ī Zādspram* (The Selections of Zādspram), or *Anthology*, from the ninth century, deals with many of the same themes found in the *Dēnkard* and the *Bundahišn*; these include the life of Zaratuštra, the Renovation and the end of the world. A complete edition, with transliteration, transcription, translation, and commentary, was prepared by Gignoux and Tafazzolī in 1993.<sup>132</sup> For our research, apart from some noteworthy information about eschatology and the Renovation, the book provides a visualization of the goddess Spandārmad which is useful for our comparison between the female deities.

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<sup>130</sup> A Persian translation by Tafazzolī and Āmūzgār was published in 2007.

<sup>131</sup> *Dēnkard* 7.4.35.

<sup>132</sup> In Iran, Mehrdād Bahār published a glossary of the *Anthology* in 1972, and M. T. Rāšed-Moḥaṣṣel provided a Persian translation of the text in 1987.

2.2.4 The *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*,<sup>133</sup> (Exegesis of the *Wahman Yasn/Yašt*) is a late compilation of myths and apocalyptic speculations, and as Cereti emphasizes, the most complete representative of the apocalyptic genre among the Zoroastrian texts of late antiquity although it does not seem to be related to any “lost” *Wahman Yašt* despite the title, as Cereti convincingly argues.<sup>134</sup> In fact, Bahman (Vohu Manah, the first Aməša Spənta) does not enter into the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* at all.

Gignoux has argued that an Avestan *Wahman Yašt* original never existed; rather, he believes that the first version of the book cannot be dated earlier than the late Sasanian period, after the time of Xosrow ī Anušīrvān (ca. 530 CE).<sup>135</sup> Cereti proposes that the compiler of the final version of the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* most probably lived in Islamic times.<sup>136</sup>

Despite the late date of its final redaction, the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* is the most important apocalyptic work in Zoroastrian literature, primarily because its vision of the tree (in chapter 3, and in an older form in chapter 1) is obviously comparable with Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of the image of the world empires in the book of Daniel.<sup>137</sup> Josephson states that the book is the written version of a story that must have been told orally or performed by a storyteller, and that each chapter seems like an act in a theatre play and is told in a series of scenes.<sup>138</sup> She emphasizes that the book is a good example of an oral apocalyptic.

The *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* consists of a dialogue between Zaratuštra and Ohrmazd. Zaratuštra drinks down the wisdom of all knowledge in the form of water, and goes into a visionary trance enabling him to see the future until the end of the world. Chapter Nine of the book is about Hōšēdar and Hōšēdar-māh, the first and the second saviors, who battle with the awakened demon Aži Dahāk and the great harm done to the world by this monster before his death

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<sup>133</sup> Sundermann 1988.

<sup>134</sup> Cereti 1995, p. 1. The practice of referring to the text as the *Bahman Yašt* was invented by modern scholars (Hultgård 1983, pp. 388-411).

<sup>135</sup> Gignoux 1986, pp. 53-64.

<sup>136</sup> Cereti 1995, p. 2, and 26.

<sup>137</sup> Sundermann 1988. Macuch 2009, pp. 154-155.

<sup>138</sup> Josephson 2012, p. 243.

at the hands of Karšāsp, and finally a portrayal of the final deliverance by Sōšiiāns.<sup>139</sup>

For purposes of the present study the book was utilized for its information about Zaratuštra's three sons, the Lake of Three Seeds, and more importantly, Zaratuštra's receiving the "*xrad ī harwisp-āgāhīh*/ the all-in-encompassing wisdom" in the form of water, which is useful for our discussion about wisdom and its connection to water.

2.2.5 The *Dādestān ī Mēnog ī Xrad* (Judgments of the Spirit of Wisdom), a compendium of wisdom in sixty-two questions and answers. In question-answer form, the book compares different religions to prove that Zoroastrianism is the only true belief. The book contains some information about Afrāsīāb (MX 26.44) and his connection with water and drought which is useful for this study as will be discussed in Chapters 8 and 11. The text also mentions Daēnā as a beautiful young maiden, who will be discussed in Chapter 7 in comparison with Anāhitā.

2.2.6 The *Ardā Wīrāz nāmag* (Book of the Righteous Wīrāz), probably redacted in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> centuries CE,<sup>140</sup> is the journey of the priest Wīrāz through precisely described heaven and hell including the punishments in hell, in order to prove the truth of Zoroastrian beliefs. According to the text, Wīrāz was chosen for this task because he was a righteous and just man and because of his virtue. He initiates his journey by drinking the narcotic beverage *mang*. He remains unconscious for seven days and nights, after which his soul returns to his body and he is able to tell of his experiences. He describes in great detail the journey of human souls after death, heaven, hell and the various punishments there. Dēn (Av. Daēnā, a person's anthropomorphized 'vision' or conscience and morality) is described with detail in Chapter Four of the text.

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<sup>139</sup> Rashīd-Mohāsel 2010; also see Sundermann 1988.

<sup>140</sup> Andrés-Toledo 2015, pp. 519-528.

2.2.7 The text known as *Abadīh ud sahīgīh ī Sag(k)istān* (The Wonder and Remarkability of Sagastān/Sīstān), which is a description of Sīstān, contains further information that has been useful for our research. According to the text, Sīstān is the land where Zaratūstra's seed resides and kept by *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd*. Three future Zoroastrian saviours will be born from the waters of Lake Kayānsē. The authorship and period of composition of the text are unknown.<sup>141</sup>

2.2.8 The *Ayādgār ī Wuzurg-mihr* (Memorial of Wuzurg-mihr) also contains information about the two different kinds of wisdom, *āsn-xrad* and *gōšōsrūd-xrad*, which are declared to be *mainyos* having the duty to protect people. This subject will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

In addition to editions of ancient Iranian texts by Western scholars from the nineteenth century up to the present, numerous Iranian scholars, known or unknown to Western academics, have done important recent work on them as well. Among these one may mention Āmūzgar, Bahār, Bāstānī-Pārīzī, Dūstxāh, Khaleghi-Motlagh, Kia, Pākzād, Rashīd-Mohāsel, Tafāzzolī, and many others. I have evaluated, compared and used their editions and commentaries on the primary source texts throughout my study: Dūstxāh's *Avestā*, (1991), Rashīd-Mohāsel's *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* (1991), *Dēnkard-e Haftom* (The Seventh Dēnkard 2009), *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* (2010), Bahār's *Bundahišn* (1999), Pākzād's *Bundahišn* (2005) and Āmūzgar and Tafāzzolī's *Le cinquième livre du Denkard* (2000) in French and *Ketāb-e panjom-e Dēnkard* (2008) in Persian.

Despite all this attention to the Pahlavi sources by Iranian and non-Iranian scholars, Anāhitā has generally not been their main focus, perhaps in large part due to her seemingly reduced importance within that corpus as compared to her status in the Avesta as well as to the fact that her portrayal in the Pahlavi texts is far more ambiguous and problematic. One of our aims in the present work is to focus precisely on these problems, placing Anāhitā at the centre of our analysis of the Pahlavi texts.

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<sup>141</sup> Tafāzzolī 1982.

### 2.3 Old and Middle Persian Royal Inscriptions and Iconography<sup>142</sup>

Since unambiguous documented traces of Anāhitā are very limited, having her name in the royal inscriptions of the Achaemenid and Sasanian Empires are highly significant pieces of evidence demonstrating her importance over a long period of at least a millennium. During the Achaemenid period, the Ahura Mazdā - Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā - Miθra triangulate is first documented in the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II (r. 404-358 BCE). These inscriptions, from the time of Artaxerxes II (A<sup>2</sup>Ha and A<sup>2</sup>Sa at Hamedan and on four columns of the Apadāna palace at Persepolis) demonstrate that Miθra and Anāhitā were the most important deities in the Iranian pantheon alongside Ahura Mazdā.

Anāhitā is mentioned in the royal inscriptions as “Anah<sup>ata</sup>”<sup>143</sup>/ Anahita”<sup>144</sup> (inscriptions: A<sup>2</sup> Ha in Hamadan and A<sup>2</sup> Sa and A<sup>2</sup>Sd in Susa). The fact that these inscriptions refer to the goddess by her third epithet, i.e., Anāhitā, provides the earliest absolute date for fixing her name in the Iranian pantheon<sup>145</sup>.

In several Sasanian royal inscriptions, Anāhitā appears alongside Ahura Mazdā in stone reliefs. At Naqš-e Rostam in Fārs, Anāhitā appears in a rock relief where she is depicted crowning (i.e., bestowing kingship on) the Sasanian monarch Narseh I (r. 293-302 CE). She appears alongside Ahura Mazdā in stone reliefs commemorating Šapur I (242-272 CE). She appears as well alongside Ahura Mazdā in stone reliefs commemorating Šapur I (242-272 CE). In the inscription at Paikuli (in modern Iraqī Kurdistan) carved for Narseh in 283, the King of Kings invokes Ōhrmazd, “Anāhīd, the lady,” and “all the gods (NPi. 9.19?)”.<sup>146</sup> Anāhitā also figures in

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<sup>142</sup> English translations of the Old Persian inscriptions have been made available in a collection published by Amélie Kuhrt in 2007; a German edition of the texts was published by Rüdiger Schmitt in 2009 along with a dictionary in 2014.

<sup>143</sup> Kent 1953, Artaxerxes II: A<sup>2</sup> Sa, p. 154 and A<sup>2</sup> Ha, p. 155.

<sup>144</sup> Kent 1953, p. 155.

<sup>145</sup> She is referred to as *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* in the Avesta with both her three epithets. Relative chronology suggests that Yt 5 is older than the OP inscriptions.

<sup>146</sup> Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, p. 14.

an engraving commemorating the investiture of Xosrow II (r. 590-628 CE) at Țāq-e Bostān near Kermānšāh, one of the most important rock reliefs from the Sasanian period, also rare because it is located outside of Fārs, while being close to the Sasanian capital at Ctesiphon.

All of these rock reliefs are of particular importance for our discussion since they provide the only certain documented evidence of Anāhitā's appearance. A recent study on the iconography of Anāhitā has even considered that her description in the *Ābān Yašt* was derived from observing her figure in the rock relief in Țāq-e Bostān (See Chapter 1).<sup>147</sup> Anāhitā's appearance in these inscriptions will be discussed in Chapter 9.

## 2.4 The Greco-Roman Texts

The Greek and Latin texts were used for centuries as the main sources for numerous studies on ancient Iran and religion of Iranian by Western scholars.<sup>148</sup> The *Histories* of Herodotus (c. 484 – 425/413 BCE), the celebrated Greek writer and historian, includes much valuable information on the various Iranian peoples, but also some inaccuracies, so we have used it with caution. Examples are his list of the Saka deities (especially the importance of their goddesses), the Persian temples and their habits in order of praying, and references to the Iranian reverence for water. We also consider his reports on Scythian society, the land and rivers of Scythia, and his mention of a celestial goddess of the Iranian pantheon whom he wrongly calls “Mitra”.

Xenophon (c. 430–354 BC) gives some relevant information about goddess worship and royal ceremonies in the time of Cyrus the Great.<sup>149</sup> Strabo (64 BC – c. AD 24), the Greek historian and geographer, relates a number of useful details about the religion of the Persians, the Medes and the Armenians, including some interesting evidence about the pairing of fire and water cults in

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<sup>147</sup> Compareti 2014, p. 143

<sup>148</sup> For information about scholarly attempts from the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards to reconstruct the history and religion of ancient Iran see De Jong 1997, p. 6.

<sup>149</sup> Xenophon (c. 430–354 BC) 1968, Book VII, C.5.57 and C.6.1.

ancient Iran.<sup>150</sup> Plutarch (c. AD 46 – AD 120) reports that Artaxerxes II was crowned in the temple of a “warrior goddess,” information that is highly pertinent to our discussion regarding the possible warrior function of Anāhitā.<sup>151</sup>

Berosus (ca. 345-270 BCE), a Hellenistic-era Babylonian priest, mentions the erection of many statues of Anāhitā (whom he calls Aphrodite Anaïtis) by a Persian king in many different cities throughout the Achaemenid empire. His is the only account of the goddess’s statues, which is indeed very significant since Iranians had previously been noted precisely for *not* creating physical representations of their gods—this likely shows Greek influence.<sup>152</sup>

Isidore of Charax, the Greek geographer, reported the existence of two Anāhitā temples,<sup>153</sup> and the Greek Historian Polybius (c. 200 – c. 118 BC) mentions her temple in 209 under the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III.<sup>154</sup> The geographer Pausanias (ca. 100-180 CE) uncomprehendingly describes Anāhitā’s cult rituals.<sup>155</sup> Pliny (AD 23-79), a Roman author, mentions an Anāhitā temple at the Armenian town of Erez (modern Erzincan in eastern Turkey) in 36 BCE.<sup>156</sup>

## 2.5 Vedic sources

Given that linguistically the Avestan language is closest to that of the Rig Veda, the latter is an indispensable source for any comparative studies about ancient Iranian religion. The Rig Veda has therefore been consulted for the purpose of drawing comparisons between its deities, their functions, transformations, and their rituals and those found in the Avesta, particularly in terms of goddesses and their connections to water. For example, Rig Veda’s description of Sārasvatī shows that just like Anāhitā (and many Celtic river goddesses as well), she was

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<sup>150</sup> Strabo (64 BC – c. AD 24) 2014, 11.14.16.

<sup>151</sup> Plutarch (c. AD 46 – AD 120) 2016, 27.

<sup>152</sup> Berosus.

<sup>153</sup> Isidore of Charax 1976.

<sup>154</sup> Polybius (c. 200 – c. 118 BC) 2010, 10.27.

<sup>155</sup> Pausanias (ca. 100-180 CE) 1965, 7.27.5.

<sup>156</sup> Pliny (AD 23-79) 1944, 6.35.

associated with both wisdom and war (will be discussed in Chapter Five). Similarly, one may connect the Vedic god Indra<sup>157</sup> (whose functions were divided between Miθra and Vərəθraγna<sup>158</sup>), and the Vedic dragon (*ahi-Vṛtra*),<sup>159</sup> (the Iranian deity Vərəθraγna's name literally means "slayer of [the dragon] Vṛtra), to the dragon-slaying myth in Iran which, as will be shown, may have important connections to Anāhitā. Our approach to the Vedic texts will thus focus specifically on these and other issues against the backdrop of comparison with related themes in the Avesta. We have used Jamison and Brereton's 2014 English translation of the Rig Veda.<sup>160</sup>

## 2.6 Mesopotamian Sources

Located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, Mesopotamia had a broad influence on the developing culture, religion and rituals of the western Iranian peoples, especially the Persians. The Iranian pantheon was affected and transformed by the Mesopotamian worldview, with its own local gods, goddesses and their associated rituals, either by adding deities or by adapting and developing the Iranian deities' functions.

Mesopotamian sources are invaluable for any study of ancient Iran due to their significant influence on Iranians, especially via the Elamites. The successive migrations of Aryan tribes throughout the second millennium BCE led to cultural exchanges and mutual influences between the newcomers and the existing inhabitants of the various regions they came to dominate. The first major settled civilization encountered by the nomadic proto-Iranians was that attested by the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex occupying the Oxus basin in Central Asia, a culture that had already been shaped by contacts with Mesopotamia. Michael Witzel has highlighted the

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<sup>157</sup> After the separation of the Indo-Aryans from the Iranians, Indra was demoted to the status of a demon, and in subsequent Iranian mythology he becomes the opponent of the deity Aša Vahišta, upholder of the cosmic order. See Āmūzgar 1380 [2001], p. 81.

<sup>158</sup> Āmūzgar 1380 [2001], pp. 72-3.

<sup>159</sup> RV II 11.2. 5. 9.

<sup>160</sup> Jamison and Brereton 2014.



relationship between the Mesopotamian and Indo-Iranian elements in BMAC culture as depicted in seals and other art forms.<sup>161</sup> Panaino even suggests that the descriptions of Anāhitā's jewelry and other ornaments in the *Ābān Yašt* is an example of the influence of the Babylonian Ištar on Anāhitā,<sup>162</sup> as will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

This study has accordingly used Mesopotamian sources in connection with a number of questions and issues. For example, the Sumerian mythological poem of Enlil and Sud (a divine couple) has been analyzed because the myth connects the goddess Sud whose another name is Ninlil (who was syncretized with several goddesses, including Ištar) to water, specifically the sacred river.<sup>163</sup> The myth is interesting for our discussion in that it connects Sud/Ninlil (who also was identified by Ištar) to water, specifically the sacred river—this, as we shall see, could provide a natural link to the river goddess of the Indo-Europeans which may have resonated with early Iranian migrants into Mesopotamia. (This will be discussed in Chapter Eleven.)

Another Mesopotamian source relevant to our inquiry is the Akkadian story of “The Descent of Ištar to the Underworld” and its older Sumerian version, the martyr/regeneration myth “Inanna's descent to the nether-world”.<sup>164</sup> This myth tells of the deity Dumuzi and his connection with the goddess Inanna/ Ištar, his death and rise, causing seasonal fertility, all of which are connected to our discussion.<sup>165</sup> Dumuzi was the vegetation god,<sup>166</sup> whose story and associated mourning rituals are closely connected to that of the Iranian Siāvaš. (This will be discussed in Chapter Eleven.)

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<sup>161</sup> Witzel 2004.

<sup>162</sup> Panaino 2000, p. 38.

<sup>163</sup> *Enlil and Sud*, 2006. Version A, Segment A, 13-21.

<sup>164</sup> The Electronic text corpus of Sumerian literature, Oxford University:  
[http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=c.1.4\\*#](http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=c.1.4*#)

<sup>165</sup> The story is first attested in Late Bronze Age texts, in both Babylonia and Assyria, and then from the palace library at Nineveh. It appears to end with and have been connected to an annual ritual called *taklimtu*. (See Dalley 2008, p. 154.)

<sup>166</sup> Skjærvø 2013c.

## 2.7 Archaeological Sources

Archaeological Sources are important for this study, (starting from the very early traces of goddess worshipping) as listed below. The first archaeological traces of goddess worship date far back into pre-history, specifically to so-called “Venus” figurines. These figurines are usually nude, featuring prominent breasts, large buttocks, and thick thighs. These features have led many archaeologists to assume that they possibly are connected to fertility.<sup>167</sup> The presence of Venus figurines throughout the Iranian plateau, including Tappeh Sarāb east of Kermanshah in north-west Iran, Giyān Tappeh near Nahāvand in the west, Tappeh Alī-kosh near Dēzfūl in Khuzestan to the southwest, Tappeh Sīalk near Kāshān in central Iran, the archaeological site of Kalūraz near Tappeh Jalāliyah in Gilan in north,<sup>168</sup> and Turang Tappeh near Gorgan in the northeast,<sup>169</sup> possibly show the existence of a goddess worship in the society across the region. (This will be discussed in Chapter Four.)

### 2.7.1 Indo-European Archeological Sites

Many Celtic sites throughout Europe are considered to have been religious places; La Tène on the edge of Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland is but one among many examples.<sup>170</sup> Investigations at La Tène uncovered thousands of weapons, tools, jewelry and coins at the bottom of the lake, suggesting that it was used as a locus for sacrificial offerings.<sup>171</sup> Similarly, in western Iran in a cave containing a small lake archaeologists have found thousands of objects which had all been deposited into the water, ritual activities covering the period from 800 BCE until the 8<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>167</sup> The identification of Venus figures with goddesses was first made by Johann Bachofen in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Bachofen 1861).

<sup>168</sup> Ohtsu 2010.

<sup>169</sup> Shahmirzadi 1995, p. 136.

<sup>170</sup> Cunliffe 1997, p. 194.

<sup>171</sup> Bradley 2012, p. 41.

CE.<sup>172</sup> These offerings were almost certainly made to a water deity, presumably Anāhitā. Here one can detect marked similarities to the offering rituals to the Celtic water goddesses, which suggests the likely share a common origin. (This will be discussed in Chapters Nine and Eleven.)

An archaeological site at Luxeuil in France has produced the remains of an ancient Celtic temple associated with healing, combining hot springs and sanctuaries. Sulis or Sul, a native Celtic deity with her sacred hot spring in Bath (*Aquae Sulis*) in England, appears to have served as the principal connection with the goddess, where her devotees requested her support. This ritual has an interesting parallel in Tajikistan up until present (discussed in Chapter Eleven).

The shrine of Sequana, goddess of the river Seine in France, was located at the river's source in Burgundy near Dijon.<sup>173</sup> Several votive items were dedicated to the goddess, some of them showing the healing function of her,<sup>174</sup> and many others representing human heads. The discovery of severed heads among the other offerings made to some Celtic goddesses points us to a similar phenomenon found in ancient Iran, where the severed heads of defeated enemies were sent to Anāhitā's temple at Eṣṭaxr. (This will be discussed in Chapter 5.)<sup>175</sup> This in turn suggests broader connections between the Iranian Anāhitā and the various Indo-European water goddesses.

### 2.7.2 Archaeological Sites in Iran

As discussed above, evidence for the cult of Anāhitā exists across three successive Iranian empires: the Achaemenids, the Parthians, and the Sasanians. Since clearly documented traces of Anāhitā are very limited, appearances of her name in the royal inscriptions of the Achaemenid and Sasanian Empires are highly significant pieces of evidence.

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<sup>172</sup> Bagherpour and Stöllner 2011, p.1.

<sup>173</sup> Cunliffe 1997, p. 199.

<sup>174</sup> Including a pot filled of silver and bronze models of organs possibly to be healed by Sequana. (See Green 1992, p. 40.)

<sup>175</sup> Al-Ṭabarī (224–310 AH; 839–923 AD) 1999, p. 15; also Nöldeke 1973, p. 17.

### 2.7.2.1 Anāhitā's Temples

The two best-known temples of Anāhitā indeed are those located at Bīšāpūr in Fars and at Kangavar near Hamedan. The Bīšāpūr site, discovered by the archeologist Ali-Akbar Sarfaraz, is an open-air temple with channels where running water from the nearby river used in ceremonies was brought via *qanāts* and could be controlled through the opening or blocking of water conduits. The archaeological complex at Taxt-e Soleimān in the northwest of Iran also includes both a fire-temple and one dedicated to Anāhitā.<sup>176</sup> She has been argued to appear on an Achaemenid cylinder seal,<sup>177</sup> which is possibly intended to represent her physical appearance,<sup>178</sup> on some reliefs from the Parthian period,<sup>179</sup> on two ossuaries, one found near Bīšāpūr and the other Sogdian,<sup>180</sup> and in some Sasanian silver utensils.

Certain frescos among the wall paintings adorning the Sogdian-era temples at Panjikent, Tajikistan are related to very old rituals. Azarpay describes a female figure in one painting, haloed, with a lotus-shaped crown, as clearly being a river goddess (Anāhitā) but concedes that “her exact identity remains tentative”.<sup>181</sup>

Many popular religious sites in different parts of Iran have *doxtar*, *Bībī*, or *Bānū* as part of their name, suggesting a possible connection to Anāhitā. These include the sanctuaries of Bībī Šāhrbānū near Ray, Pīr-ē sabz (the most important Zoroastrian holy site, known as Pīr-ē ček-ček among non-Zoroastrians) and Pīr-ē-harišt near Yazd, and many other places.

Many artistic works have been considered as possibly representing Anāhitā, but in no case is this identification absolute. (This will be discussed in Chapter Nine.)

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<sup>176</sup> Von der Osten and Naumann 1961, pp. 85-92.

<sup>177</sup> Duchesne-Guillemin 1971, p. 378 and pl. III, fig. 3

<sup>178</sup> From the De Clercq collection. See Shenkar 2014, pp. 67-68.

<sup>179</sup> Idem. 1962, p. 333.

<sup>180</sup> Ghirshman 1962, p. 106 and fig. 120, p. 313 and fig. 255.

<sup>181</sup> Azarpay 1981, p. 134 and p. 140, n. 61.

Considering all of these archaeological sources in terms of their possible connections to Anāhitā can help us to observe and analyze her importance over time, and to better understand whether her ritual (via offerings to the waters) continued over a long period until Islamic era and beyond.

## 2.8 Sources from the Islamic Period

The well-known Iranian historian Ṭabarī in his book *Tarīkh al-Rusūl wa al-Mulūk* (History of the Prophets and Kings) reports that the Sāsānian king Ardešīr sent the severed heads of defeated enemies to Anāhitā’s temple at Eṣṭaxr, demonstrating his devotion to Anāhitā.<sup>182</sup> This information is central to our discussion because of its similarities to some Celtic river goddesses, and is thus important for our consideration about the roots of Anāhitā.

### 2.8.1 The *Šāh-nāmeḥ* (“Book of Kings”)

One of the most important sources for studying representations of ancient Iran in the early Islamic period is the 10<sup>th</sup>-century national epic, the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* (“Book of Kings”). Illustrations in manuscripts of the stories of the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* include the most fabulous and valuable masterpieces of the royal Persian painting tradition; in the Iranian cultural tradition, no work brings together art and literature more richly than the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* has done over the centuries. The *Book of Kings*, like other popular works of classical Persian literature, contain themes and symbols from not only Zoroastrianism and ancient Iranian mythology, but also Mesopotamian, Mediterranean, Chinese and other sources as well.<sup>183</sup>

Ferdowsī’s epic poem celebrates the glories of Iran’s pre-Islamic past, and many of the characters in the book also appear in the Avesta and in the Rig-Veda as deities. Most of these gods

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<sup>182</sup> Al-Ṭabarī (224–310 AH; 839–923 AD) 1999, p. 15.

<sup>183</sup> Saadi-nejad 2009.

lost their prior mythological status, but their influence remained, with many being re-conceived as heroes.<sup>184</sup>

As will be argued in this study, it is possible to trace the roots of many female characters in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* back to a goddess-centered society in the past as will be discussed in Chapter 11. Many female characters in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* are striking for their extraordinary independence and self-assertion, and their Old Iranian models may have been as goddesses or witches (*pairikās*<sup>185</sup>). Siāvaš and Sūdābeh's story in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* bears so many similarities to that of Ištar and Dumuzi as to appear a likely historical borrowing. Siāvaš, the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*'s innocent hero (who is mentioned in the Avesta as *Siiāuuaršan* in Yt 13.132), and who is identified with the Mesopotamian god Dumuzi, will also be discussed in detail in Chapter 10.

A significant aspect of Iranian ritual culture is *azā-dārī*, mourning ceremonies, which has elements from ancient Mesopotamia. In the present study, the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*'s poetry will be used to illustrate the direct similarities between Siāvaš's story and that of Ištar and Dumuzi and their possible connection to the goddesses' influence as will be discussed in Chapter Eleven.

We also can find much information in *Šāh-nāmeḥ* about the dragon-king Žahhāk, a well-known negative character who sacrifices to Anāhitā in the Avesta as Aži-Dahāka. In this study, we identify some possible connections between Anāhitā and the *daēuuas*, as well as with the ancient Indo-European dragon-slaying myth; these will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

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<sup>184</sup> For example, Yama in the Vedas, Yima in the Avesta (who sacrifices to Anāhitā in the *Ābān Yašt*), and Jam or Jam-šīd in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* all derive from the same original character. In Iranian and Indian mythology both Yama and Jam-šīd are presented as having been rejected by the gods, as will be discussed in Chapter Eleven. We can also see traces of characters from Greek mythology in the *Book of Kings*, such as Esfandiār who shares a number of features with Achilles (Saadi nejad 2009).

<sup>185</sup> The Av. *Pairikās* (Phl. *Parīg*), as demonic creatures are said to be created by Aṅra-Mainyu, Ahura Mazdā's evil adversary (will be discussed in Chapter Eleven).

### 2.8.2 Other Sources from the Islamic Period

Another relevant New Persian source for our study is Ṭārsūsī's *Dārāb-nāma* from the Ghaznavid period.<sup>186</sup> This is a lengthy tale about Dārāb, a mythical Iranian king, abandoned at birth in a river, whose wife bears Anāhitā's name, Nāhīd; she is said to be the daughter of Philip of Macedonia. The book mentions three women whose names as well as some other characteristics directly or indirectly suggest some connection to Anāhitā, making this story significant to our study.

The persistence in Islamic Iran of rituals connected to water would seem to be an echo of ancient beliefs about the goddess. From the Safavid period, the powerful Twelver Shi'ite cleric Mohammad Bāqer Majlesī (1627–1699) provides an interesting *hadith* about Fatima, the prophet Muhammad's daughter whose dowry was said to have been water.<sup>187</sup> This would seem to be evidence that the historical memory of Islamicized Iran sustained a noticeable connection between an important Islamic female figure and Anāhitā.

In one particularly striking example, at a cave spring named for Bibi Fatima on the Tajikistan side of the Wakhan Valley bordering Afghanistan, women bathe nude while praying and touching the cave walls in order to ensure pregnancy,<sup>188</sup> clearly an Islamicized form of an older practice associated with a water goddess which we will elaborate in Chapter Eleven.

Also, one may detect some interesting evidence in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century travelogue of Adam Olearius about some water rituals he observed in Iran, as well as some ancient ruins (apparently, a temple) connected to the sacred water. Interestingly, the description of the *Čahār-šanbeh sūrī* ritual found in his work differs considerably from what one sees in Iran today.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Abū Tāher Muhammad Ṭārsūsī (12<sup>th</sup> century) 2011.

<sup>187</sup> Majlesī (1627–1699) 1998, vol. 43, Hadīth 34.

<sup>188</sup> Richard Foltz, personal communication from the field, 11 May 2018.

<sup>189</sup> Brancaforte 2004, p. 78.

### 2.8.3 Oral and Folk Traditions

This study notes a number of water rituals that have continued to be practiced in Iran during Islamic times up to present. In Chapter Eleven, “Traces of Anāhitā in Islamic Iran”, many such materials have been used, the references to which are primarily recent scholarly or news articles published in Persian (listed in the Bibliography) along with interviews and personal discussions with living Iranian practitioners.

For example, in the traditional belief of people in small towns and villages, the waters (such as *qanāts* - underground channels for irrigation) and rivers have gender. An Iranian historian of the Qajar period, E’temād al-Saltāneh (1843-1896), mentioned “*qanāt* weddings”. According to him, if a male *qanāt* does not have a wife it will go dry. People should therefore marry the *qanāt* to a woman, who should bathe naked in the water at least once per month.<sup>190</sup> Another interesting ritual connected to water, *Čak-o-dūleh*, believed to bring good fortune and well-being to those who perform it, and still exists among Zoroastrians in Iran.<sup>191</sup> Some folkloric tales of the islands of the Persian Gulf speak of “sea-*parīs*” (*parī-daryā ī*), who bring good luck and calm weather.<sup>192</sup>

Some passages in Chapter Eleven note links between various rituals practiced in Iran and our topic. This dissertation is not only based on literary sources but also on oral traditions, which are collected during fieldwork trips to Iran and Tajikistan. For example, there is a ritual connected to the Iranian Nowrūz in which planted sprouts should be symbolically tossed into running water on the thirteenth day after the New Year. This symbolic action seems to have a connection with the ancient water offering ritual. To cite another example, one Iranian Zoroastrian told us that taking some food and throwing it down to the well for the water spirit is common among Zoroastrians.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> E’temād al-Saltāneh (1843-1896) 1988.

<sup>191</sup> Rose 2011, p. 153.

<sup>192</sup> Cultural Heritage News Agency 2016.

<sup>193</sup> Bahman Moradian, personal communication, 18 July 2014.



We have already mentioned Sīāvaš, the Avestic figure and innocent hero in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*. One can find traces of Sīāvaš even in present-day as some mourning ceremonies which Simin Daneshvar describes in her novel *Sāvūšūn*.<sup>194</sup> The plot of the novel (first published in 1969 in Iran) takes place during the last years of World War II in Fārs province. It is about the life of a middle-class family during this period, centering on the tragic death of one of the novel's characters (linked with Sīāvaš, who was murdered by the Turānian king Afrāsīāb). The injustice of this murder constitutes a metaphoric bridge between this death and the ancient mourning ritual for Sīāvaš in Iran. In fact, this ritual has survived in the folklore of Fārs province under the name of “*sāvūšūn*”. Sīāvaš and Sūdābeh are relevant to our discussion due to their similarities with Ištar and Dumuzi. Moreover, Sūdābeh's description, which appears to reflect the survival of a number of goddess features, demonstrates her connection to Anāhitā and other goddesses, as will be discussed in Chapter Eleven.

## 2.9 Problems with the Sources

In reading through the primary Mazdaean texts that treat Anāhitā, one is immediately struck by the very different ways she is portrayed in the older Avestan texts as contrasted with the later texts of the Pahlavi period. In the Avesta she comes across as one of the most powerful deities and has no discernably negative features. She is described in fine detail, both in terms of her features and functions and in terms of her physical characteristics. By the Pahlavi period, however, her portrayal is much less clear and has become decidedly ambivalent, both morally and in terms of the deity's gender. We will seek to address these discrepancies in terms of changes within Iranian society and how the dominant Mazdaean priesthood dealt with newly arising influences and issues of their own authority as will be discussed in Chapter 10.

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<sup>194</sup> Daneshvar 1990.

In terms of using non-Iranian sources, the obvious concern is that non-Iranian writers may have poorly understood or misunderstood the material they were observing and discussing, as in the apparent misidentification of certain Iranian deities by Herodotus and other Greek writers. They may have in some cases misconstrued perceived similarities with their own deities and rituals or interpreted those of the Iranians using their own cultural filters. They may have been restricted in their access to Iranian language or prejudiced by the fact that they were writing about the culture of an enemy. We have taken these issues in consideration when weighing and interpreting the information gleaned from such sources.

A further observation may be made concerning written sources in general, which is that they typically represent an elite view that may stand at some distance from those of the broader population who have not left us a written legacy. The views and experiences of the latter must surely not be discounted, and popular beliefs and rituals connected with the water goddess may have been very different from what is represented in the written sources. To recover these is an admittedly problematic enterprise offering little hope of certitude. However, the importance of popular religion and its probable diversions from the “orthodoxy” promoted by religious elites may at least be acknowledged, and perhaps some light can be shed on it by reading between the lines of the elite sources especially when they appear to be condemning widely-held practices.

In sum, we can state that while all of these diverse sources have been used extensively by scholars of ancient Iran and other related fields, none has taken the specific interdisciplinary approach laid out in the present dissertation, which is to attempt to tie together all available information about the Iranian water goddess within the dual contexts of Iranian history and comparative mythology.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

In seeking to answer the questions about Anāhitā posed in the Introduction, we shall refer to written sources of the periods in question—including inscriptions, Zoroastrian texts, Greco-Roman and Mesopotamian references and Islamic period texts—as well as to the archaeological records. We will search these sources not only for information about Anāhitā, but also about various other related goddesses and myths through the use of comparative mythology archeology and folkroe studies. Through this combined methodology of textual analysis and comparative mythology, archaeology and folklore studies, it is hoped that a clearer picture of Anāhitā will emerge as a figure transformed by changing socio-political contexts over time.

Other questions arise, however, when we look at the many different aspects, cultures, and academic methodologies in order to identify, analyze, and shape Anāhitā’s role and transformation over the time. Are there any common origins for these different myths and cultures? Which theoretical framework(s) can be used for this study? Since all theories about our subject follow a comparative approach, does comparative mythology also include other disciplines such as history, anthropology, linguistics and religious studies? What role, if any, can gender studies play in this study? Are there any theories on women and gender studies that might be used?

In her book *Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture*, Doris Bachmann-Medick points out that the immense changes human societies have seen since the onset of modernity in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century have resulted in what she calles “cultural turns,” essential changes in the way human societies and individuals are being interpreted, performed, expressed artistically, contested, translated, spatially occupied, and affected by advances in science.<sup>195</sup> She

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<sup>195</sup> Bachmann-Medick 2016.

argues that the sheer breadth and intensity of these unprecedented changes in human history call for equally dramatic changes in the methodological approaches taken by scholars, a view with which we can only agree and which informs our approach in the present research.

Since comparative mythology comes from various fields, the present study attempts to shed light on the issue of the relationship between myth and history, and to identify the shared themes and characteristics between different myths from different cultures connected to Anāhitā. The similarities (and differences) between different goddesses that we will discuss in this study demand that one identify certain shared themes and characteristics between them through the use of comparative mythology. This involves exploring the relationship between the goddesses' various myths (from diverse cultural contexts) in order to identify any underlying similarities and trace their possible common origins. This is necessary to provide a starting point for the evolution and transformations of the goddess known as Anāhitā. Given the cross-cultural nature of these questions, the fields of religious studies, anthropology, linguistics, folklore and gender studies and material culture are also relevant to our inquiry. The methodological approaches of each, but in particular that of religious studies, will be examined and applied where appropriate.

The social scientific study of religion—as distinct from theology—has developed a wide range of methods since becoming established as an independent academic discipline.<sup>196</sup> As Young explains:

By the 1950s, this phenomenological tradition was taking root in North America, especially at the University of Chicago. There, Wach, Eliade, and Ricoeur contributed to a “school” called the Phenomenology and History of Religions. Their approach involved synchronic or cross-cultural comparisons and the search for essences, or types (in other

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<sup>196</sup> Schmidt 2014, pp. 211-220.

circles, this was called comparative religion), but also the historical study of religions with an emphasis on philology and texts.<sup>197</sup>

Approaches borrowed from the field of anthropology were significant in the development of this emerging field. As Gross notes:

Religion is still being studied by anthropologists, but usually not as an isolated phenomenon. Instead, it is collapsed into culture in general and studied quite widely in cultural and symbolic anthropology. Even more important, the field of religious studies is changing drastically, so that material that once would have been studied primarily by anthropologists is now considered integral to religious studies.<sup>198</sup>

More recently religious studies has come to acknowledge the androcentrism which dominated its earlier approaches, and has sought to rectify this imbalance by incorporating perspectives drawn from women's studies and gender studies. Thus, religious studies has become by its essence multidisciplinary, drawing on the methodologies of text analysis, historical studies, comparative mythology, phenomenology, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and area studies. The very notion of "religion" has been questioned and reconceptualized, or even subordinated to the broader field of cultural studies, which is more appropriate.<sup>199</sup> Within this wide definition thus, a very different history of religion and/or "study of the cultures" can possibly be imagined and produced.

In term of the cultural studies, also many new perspectives and focuses have been

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<sup>197</sup> Young 2002, pp. 17-40.

<sup>198</sup> Gross 2002, pp. 41-66.

<sup>199</sup> Fitzgerald 2000, p. 10.

appeared. Bachmann-Medick speaks about an “alternative turn-based view” of the study of culture and notes:

The master narrative of a comprehensive cultural turn has thus been undermined by the trend toward differentiation among those very different “cultural turns.” With their striking changes in perspectives, they have even challenged the validity claim of the linguistic turn itself. After all, they have taken us away from the emphasis on language and text in cultural analysis, from the dominance of representation and constructivism. But what have they actually led to? It is precisely these diverse perspectives that are opening up new horizons for the development of the humanities and the study of culture in the wake of the linguistic turn.<sup>200</sup>

Within the history of the humanities, myths, in a very broad sense, can perhaps be seen as an early reaction by humans to what they felt towards the world around them and their connection with the universe. Thus they envisioned gods, goddesses and cults, which developed and transformed themselves over time. Goddesses featured prominently in the religions of the various early agricultural societies, in certain cases gradually replaced by male gods. Feminist readings of religion in the ancient world have argued that a “key series of events in the transformation of culture from matrifocal to patriarchal must have been the shift from worship of powerful goddesses to dominant male gods.”<sup>201</sup>

Women’s studies theoretical frameworks provide a system of ideas or conceptual structures that help to understand and explain any issues connected to women during the history. For purposes of the present research, the approaches of women’s studies (including gender studies

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<sup>200</sup> Bachmann-Medick 2016, pp. 1-2.

<sup>201</sup> Nadelhaft 1997, pp. 967-9.

and feminist studies) are important for understanding the transformation of rituals as one of the essential components of religions, being the performative counterpart to the documented written religious texts. Women's studies has helped open up scholars to an increased consideration of oral history as a source for attaining a more complete understanding of religious rituals and their social roots, for example by analyzing and interpreting material objects. These frameworks each represent an alternative way of looking at our subject.

The importance of fertility—that of both the tribe members and their domesticated animals—was paramount amongst all of the ancient peoples and reflected in their religious traditions (although importance of the goddesses does not necessarily mean women had social power). Accordingly, the female life-giving principle was central to their ritual life. The best-known visual representations of fertility and women from the ancient period are nude figurines, generically referred to as “Venuses” featuring prominent breasts, large buttocks, and thick thighs, probably symbolizing fertility. These will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

Modern feminist scholarship has often sought to reconstruct a “matriarchal”, goddess-centered world prior to the fourth millennium BCE, which is said to have been superseded by patriarchy.<sup>202</sup> However, as archaeologist V. Gordon Childe remarked in 1951, the prevalence of Venus figures from the ancient world is no more an indicator of matriarchal culture than are images of the Virgin Mary in the Christian West.<sup>203</sup> Walter Burkert poses the question thus: “Are they representations of the Great Goddess, the mother of life and death, or are they goddesses, or nymphs, or gifts to the dead man intended to serve him in another world?... all attempts at interpretation must remain conjecture.”<sup>204</sup> Obviously, any kind of reified matriarchal interpretations of ancient female figures are as extreme as patriarchal ones and should be considered with caution. Our aim is to consider the data available for analyzing and assessing the

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<sup>202</sup> Gimbutas 1982. For a critique of Gimbutas' methods, see Meskell 1995.

<sup>203</sup> Childe 1951.

<sup>204</sup> Burkert 1985, pp. 14-15.

feminine elements in the religious life of ancient societies without such preconceptions.

One question which is central to the present study is how and why ancient Middle Eastern societies created myths and rituals centered on powerful female deities given that women were physically weaker than men and had to deal with giving birth and monthly cycles. Exploring this issue through a cross-cultural perspective is necessary in order to assess the impact and influence on Anāhitā from societies with which the Iranians interacted. By its very nature, this kind of cultural exchange calls for integrating anthropological analysis into a religious studies framework.

As Mircea Eliade notes in his monumental *A History of Religious Ideas*, with the emergence of agriculture during the Neolithic period “woman and feminine sacrality are raised to the first rank.”<sup>205</sup> Clearer evidence for goddess-worship can be found in the oldest mythological texts, such as those pertaining to the Sumerian goddess Inanna, but the written versions of these materials do not go back to any presumed “matriarchal” period, and they likely bear editorial transformations reflecting the perspectives of their male writers at a time when patriarchy had already become firmly established.<sup>206</sup> At best, one can attempt to “read between the lines” of these texts in an attempt to discern possible older oral versions and the values they may have promoted.

In our case, vital importance of water in all forms (river/lake/stream/ etc.) for human survival was also involved. As we will see, fertility and healing were common functions of water goddesses and many rituals and offering were connected to them. In fact, much of this evidence would indicate that water was a central focus in the rituals of many cultures descended from the proto-Indo European people. Ritual ceremonies and sacrifices were offered on the banks of the rivers and lakes cast into the water (which was usually associated with female deities) as gifts honouring the supernatural powers of water and its associated deity.

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<sup>205</sup> Eliade 1978, v. 1, p. 40.

<sup>206</sup> As early as a century ago classicist Jane Harrison questioned exclusive reliance on male-authored ancient texts for the understanding of ancient religion. According to her, Hesiod’s version of the Greek myths was deliberately revisionist, motivated by “the ugly malice of theological animus” (Harrison 1962, p. 285).



To understand the importance of these religious symbols and rituals, we may consider the role of these rituals in the ancient societies. They reflected the deepest needs, concerns, and thus, values of a society. Is there any common “plot structure” between the various mythological stories and tales of water-goddesses? In our case, the theology of Zoroastrianism (like other religions), its symbols and world view, were created primarily from a male elite monopoly of discourse and functioned to legitimize them. Therefore, in an attempt to represent diverse perspectives, this study seeks to discover the role of the goddesses—more precisely the water goddess, and in this case Anāhitā—asking whether Anāhitā’s gender is an important analytic category for this study.

We will consider how issues of gender may be pertinent to this discussion, questioning what, if anything, we can conclude by the prominence of female deities in the Iranian pantheon, and whether Anāhitā’s prominence can be taken as a reflection of gender relations in ancient Iranian societies or whether the presence of goddesses might be merely a projection of male ideas about femininity.

We will discuss representative and paradigmatic primary texts to illustrate approaches to interpreting the goddess’s descriptions. We also will look (with caution and in a limited way) at the linguistic relationship between the myths of different cultures, for example the similarities between the names/epithets of deities. We will not, however, limit ourselves to philological and heuristic analyses of the historical and religious texts and materials, but will also employ approaches from comparative mythology and will apply historical, phenomenological, and the anthropological methods to our study, as well as women’s studies, due to Anāhitā’s complexity as a composite goddess. This study is thus consciously and necessarily selective: it will not attempt a comprehensive discussion of the philological issues of the Avestan and Pahlavi texts— which will be analyzed only in terms of what they can offer our topic—but rather, we will emphasize dynamic fields of cultural research and methods which can help to understand Anāhitā’s transformations over time. We will discuss the evidence provided by material culture, including

Anāhitā's royal iconography, in Chapter Nine.

Our research focuses in the first instance on the evidence for the worship of female deities, particularly Indo-European water goddesses. We will compare these goddesses and their rituals with Anāhitā, incorporating methods borrowed from gender studies, to uncover any possible common origins and/or any absorption of characteristics and functions. Secondly, we will attempt to understand the goddess according to how she is described in her most important texts: the *Ābān Yašt*, the Middle Persian texts, as well as other sources, with regard to her phenomenology in Mazdaean religion and to understand her transformation and its circumstances from a water goddess with (possibly) limited functions to her multi-functional features. In this regard, we will also compare her with the most important female deities in the Avesta. Finally, we will analyze her transformations over time and place and trace her possible survivals which can be detected in the literature and folk rituals of Islamic Iran.

In summary, the theoretical framework for this research will consist of a comparative study in mythology incorporating various relevant disciplines, in attempt to solve the complex questions about a composite goddess that can only be understood by combining the perspectives of several fields. These widely varying disciplines each affect in their own way the articulation, methodologies and theories applied in this dissertation. Thus, the research will involve several established fields of studies: cultural studies (religious studies and mythology in their multiple dimensions and visual cultures), anthropology, linguistics, and gender studies, in the pursuit of a common task. Because this dissertation connects so many different times, places, cultures, and academic methodologies, it can serve to help shape a conceptual research perspective whose overall approach can best be described as interdisciplinary.

## Chapter Four

### Goddesses in the Ancient World

The goal of this chapter and the one following (Indo-European Water Goddesses) is mainly to investigate the similarities, differences, and interactions between some selected goddesses and Anāhitā in order to recognize understand, and analyze the goddess, her roots and her transformations over time. In doing this, critical theoretical perspectives and methodological frameworks from comparative mythology and gender studies will be applied.

In approaching this goal, the following questions arise:

- (1) What do we know about goddesses in the lands that came to be occupied by Iranians and their neighborhood civilizations, and what were the roles of these goddesses? Which, if any, cultural exchanges occurred between these goddesses and the Iranian Anāhitā? If, as this dissertation argues, Anāhitā is in fact originally a water/river/lake deity in the Iranian pantheon, we must go back in time to seek out parallels to her characteristic features in the civilisations with which Iranians came into contact.
- (2) What do we know about the Indo-European water goddesses and do they have any similarities to Anāhitā? And can we find any possible connection between them to originate Anāhitā by using comparative mythology?

In order to answer these questions, we will first discuss the worship of female deities from ancient times, such as so-called Venus figurines, and goddesses from Mesopotamia and Elam. We will then continue with the Vedic deities, Slavic, Armenian, and the Celtic water goddesses. Finally, we will discuss roles of female deities in their respective societies in order to compare

these goddesses with Anāhitā, and to identify their common features and the possible cultural exchanges between them.

Worshipping goddesses was central to the religious practice of the various early societies that predated the migration of the Iranians into central and southwest Asia during the second half of the second millennium BCE, when Iranian-speakers began moving into these regions.<sup>207</sup> These pre-Iranian societies included those of the Bactriana-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) in Central Asia (ca. 2300 and 1700 BCE), the Elamites in Southwestern Asia, the various peoples of Mesopotamia, and numerous pastoral-nomadic groups of the Zagros Mountains and the plateau further east.

Goddesses and their functions and rituals in any tradition transform themselves over time, and always represent a composite drawn from a range of sources. Thus, Anāhitā as a composite goddess (as will be discussed in Chapter 8), shows many different characteristics which may have been absorbed from goddesses who existed before her arrival on the Iranian plateau. The existence of these goddesses from pre-historic time will be discussed shortly, with the aim of better understanding Anāhitā's functions, features, and rituals which may represent a combination of Iranian and non-Iranian origin and the goal of contextualising her within the larger framework of goddesses.

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<sup>207</sup> The break-up of the Proto-Indo-Iranian community, which is associated with Andronovo cultures of western Siberia, must have pre-dated the earliest documented reference to their deities, which is found in a treaty from northern Mesopotamia between the Mitanni and the Hittites and dating to 1400-1330 BCE (Mallory and Adams 2006, p. 32). While most of the so-called Indo-Aryan branch moved southeastward into the India subcontinent, a small number traveled in the opposite direction and established themselves as the Mitanni ruling elite; this is proven by the fact that the names of the Indo-Iranian deities appear in the treaty in their Indo-Aryan form, demonstrating that the split from Iranian-speakers had already occurred by that time (Thieme 1960).

## 4.1 “Venus” Figures

The best-known visual representations of women from the ancient period are figurines, generically referred to as “Venuses”, which have been found over a wide territory across western Eurasia and cover a vast historical timespan, from the Upper Palaeolithic Age (ca. 25,000 BCE) to the Bronze Age (ca. 2000 BCE).<sup>208</sup> Venus figures are usually nude, having different shapes but usually featuring prominent breasts (or sometimes the opposite), large buttocks, and thick thighs. Some appear to be pregnant. These features have led many archaeologists to assume that they might represent mother goddesses and are connected to fertility rites.<sup>209</sup> A number of other explanations are possible, however.<sup>210</sup>

Although there exists some measure of agreement among scholars regarding the rather broad scope of what these figurines may represent and the possible functions of them – which includes ancestor worship, successful agriculture, sex objects or guides to the underworld for the dead, substitutes for human sacrifice, and teaching social codes to children or simply as toys for them<sup>211</sup>—these functions most likely differed from one spatio-temporal context to another.

### 4.1.1 Venus Figurines in Iran

As the Indo-European-speaking peoples began to migrate outwards from their presumed

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<sup>208</sup> Ehrenberg 1989, pp. 66-76.

<sup>209</sup> The identification of Venus figures with goddesses was first made by Johann Bachofen in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Bachofen 1861).

<sup>210</sup> While a number of feminist scholars, most notably Marija Gimbutas, have argued that the predominance of female figurines over male ones is indicative of a goddess-based, matriarchal society, Douglass W. Bailey argues that in fact the majority of ancient figurines are “sexless”; according to him, the appearance of figurines should be seen as an emerging conceptualization of the human body as the “vessel of the human spirit” in Neolithic art (Bailey 2013).

<sup>211</sup> Ucko 1968, pp. 43-44. Ehrenberg adds that they may have been intended to provide sexual satisfaction for the dead, or as substitutes for human sacrifices, or a deity who would protect people after dead on their way to the underworld, or as images of ancestors (Ehrenberg 1989, p. 72).

home on the southern Russian steppes beginning some five to six thousand years ago,<sup>212</sup> their dispersal among a wide range of other cultures led to transformation, adaptation, and assimilation with the beliefs and practices of the latter. At the same time, all of the peoples descended from the proto-Indo-Europeans retained aspects of their ancestors' language and culture, allowing us to speak of a common Indo-European heritage.

The presence of Venus figurines throughout the territory of the Iranian plateau, including Tappeh Sarāb east of Kermanshah in north-west Iran, Giyān Tappeh near Nahāvand in the west, Tappeh Alī-kosh near Dēzfūl in Khuzestan to the southwest, Tappeh Sīalk near Kāshān in central Iran, Kalūraz near Tappeh Jalāliyah in Gilan in north,<sup>213</sup> and Turang Tappeh near Gorgan in the northeast,<sup>214</sup> may attest to the existence of a goddess worship across the region prior to the arrival of the Indo-European-speaking Iranians by the end of the second millennium BCE.

Contemporary studies of Iranian history have combined archaeology, linguistics, and textual approaches in an attempt to fill out the historical narrative for western Asia. Referring to the history of this region “Iranian”, however, tends to obscure the fact that there were already people living in the area before the Iranians arrived, in some cases with long-established civilizations of their own. Cultural exchanges between their culture(s) and that of the newcomers (Indo-Iranians, with their own goddesses) can be assumed, and in many cases demonstrated.

As Iranians migrated southwards and then westwards onto the Iranian plateau during the second millennium BCE,<sup>215</sup> one may assume some level of mutual influence between the new arrivals and the pre-existing local peoples of the region. Nasab and Kazzazi have detected distinct changes in style and body proportions between figurines over both time—from the Paleolithic to

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<sup>212</sup> For a discussion of the problems associated with dating and placing the proto-Indo-Europeans, along with methodologies for resolving them linguistically, see Mallory and Adams 2006, pp. 86-105.

<sup>213</sup> Ohtsu 2010.

<sup>214</sup> Shahmirzadi 1995, p. 136.

<sup>215</sup> Witzel 2013.

the Neolithic periods—and space, that is, between those from Central Europe and those found in Iran. These changes likely reflect an ongoing process of cultural encounter and mutual influence among different ancient peoples.<sup>216</sup>

#### 4.2 Pre-Iranian Goddess Worship in the Iranian Lands

Much of the material culture from the historical Iranian heartlands identified with goddess-worship dates to the period prior to the arrival of Iranian-speakers in the region. Moreover, the fact that we do not know for sure how any given artefact should be interpreted means we can only guess at the extent to which female figurines might have been connected to any kind of goddess worship.

In some cases textual materials can be connected with physical evidence such as objects or rock reliefs. Perhaps the most promising connection between written and material sources for ancient goddess-worship can be found in western Anatolia, where female figures from Çatal Hüyük—a site occupied from around 6250 to 5400 BCE—appear compatible with a prominent goddess-centred fertility cult which persisted in the region well into historical times.<sup>217</sup> As Ehrenberg notes, “...the worship of a fertility goddess is attested in historical records in Anatolia, some several thousand years after the Neolithic figurines were produced in the area, and this strengthens the possibility that the earlier Anatolian figurines are representations of the same goddess, particularly when their form and context are examined.”<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Vahdati Nasab and Kazzazi 2011.

<sup>217</sup> Archaeologist James Mellaart, who discovered the site, believed that the Neolithic religion of the region “was created by women,” and that “The supreme Deity was the Great Goddess” (Mellaart 1964, pp. 30-31).

<sup>218</sup> Ehrenberg 1989, p. 73.

#### 4.2.1 Elam

Of the various pre-Iranian inhabitants of western Asia, the Elamites are among the most significant. The “Persian” society that developed during the Achaemenid period (550-330 BCE) was in essence a hybrid between the native Elamites and intrusive Iranians associated with the Parsa tribe.<sup>219</sup> The Elamite presence covered a wide area, from their homeland in the southern Zagros Mountains and Khuzestan at the southeastern edge of the Mesopotamian plain to the east as far as Kerman on the southeastern part of the Iranian plateau. Their culture was heavily influenced by those of Mesopotamia—the Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian civilizations—and at the beginning appears to have been goddess-centered,<sup>220</sup> suggesting the possibility that ancient Elamite society was initially matriarchal.<sup>221</sup>

The Elamites were a major political force in the region for more than two thousand years, from around 2600 to 640 BCE. Their home territory is named as Elam (the “high land”, referring to its situation within the southern part of the Zagros Mountain range) in the Hebrew Bible (from the Sumeran transkription *elam(a)*, Akkadian *elamtu*, Elamite *haltamti*). In their own cuneiform texts the Elamites referred to their country as “*Ha(l)-tamti*”; this may have been pronounced something like “Haltamti”, meaning “gracious lord-land” or just “high land.”<sup>222</sup> It has been suggested that since *Hal* means “land,” and *tamti* means “god,” it would seem that they called their place “God’s Country.”<sup>223</sup>

Two specific features of Elamite belief are the ritual importance of women and the holiness of the snake, both possibly vestiges of an earlier matriarchal period. Representations of the snake are found in inscriptions, seals and various objects such as water containers. Snakes

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<sup>219</sup> This is the interpretation drawn by Wouter Henkelmann from his reading of the Persepolis Fortification Tablets (Henkelmann 2008).

<sup>220</sup> Bahār 1997, p. 139.

<sup>221</sup> Hinz 1973, p. 91.

<sup>222</sup> The name Elam is borrowed from Hebrew (‘*êlām*) which Greek *Aylam* derived from it. (Álvarez-Mon 2012).

<sup>223</sup> Hinz 1973, p.18 and Bahār 1997, p. 137.



were seen as offering protection from evil powers. They were symbols of fertility and wealth. Even in Iranian folkloric tales today, snakes have two-sided features: beneath their generally frightening appearance, snakes can also be symbols of treasure and wisdom.

The prevalence of Elamite figurines of the so-called “naked goddesses”<sup>224</sup> indicates that goddesses were important in this area. This hypothesis is supported by written sources, such as a contract from 2280 BCE on which the list of Elamite deities begins with the goddess Pinikir.<sup>225</sup> She was the great mother-goddess of Elam, and the Babylonians identified her with their own goddess Ištar.<sup>226</sup> Pinikir’s importance appears to have decreased somewhat over the subsequent millennium, perhaps reflecting changing gender relations within Elamite society. At some point she was displaced at the head of the Elamite pantheon by a male deity, Humban, yet she remained an important object of devotion as is shown in later Elamite texts.<sup>227</sup> Hinz argues that “the fact that precedence was given to a goddess, who stood above and apart from the other Elamite gods, indicates a matriarchal approach in the devotees of the religion.”<sup>228</sup>

The existence of a large number of female figurines dating from around 2000 BCE suggests that Pinikir was still very important at that time. She gradually came to be worshipped mostly in the south of Elam, where she was conflated with an existing local goddess, Kiririša, “the Great Goddess,” who was Humban’s wife. Kiririša was also known as the local goddess of a place near Bushehr on the northern side of the Persian Gulf. Shrines were dedicated to her at Susa, Čoga Zanbīl and Tappeh Liyān, all three of which came to be part of Persian territory. She often was referred as Kiririša-of-Liyān. Some evidence exists regarding ceremonies connected to water and

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<sup>224</sup> Hinz 1973, p. 44.

<sup>225</sup> Hinz 1973, p. 42.

<sup>226</sup> Hinz 1973, p. 42.

<sup>227</sup> Hinz 1973, p. 44.

<sup>228</sup> Hinz 1973, p. 42.

flowing streams in Elamite religion, particularly the rock relief at Da-o doxtar in western Fars province which Potts associates with Kiririša.<sup>229</sup>

Over time Susa became more and more important as a centre for Elamite culture, and Susa's patron deity, In-Šušin-ak, rose in importance as well. Humban as the great creator god, Kiririša the goddess, and In-Šušin-ak thus came to constitute a triangulate within the Elamite pantheon.<sup>230</sup> It would seem that this relationship was later transposed onto the Persian pantheon and influenced the triangulate Ahura Mazdā - Anāhitā - Miθra, as will be discussed in Chapter Eight. Hinz states that In-Šušin-ak "occasionally replace Kiririša in second place after Humban,"<sup>231</sup> but neither he nor Miθra ever achieved complete supremacy.

#### 4.2.2 Sumer and Mesopotamia

The Sumerians, like the Elamites a non-Semitic people of western Asia, who called themselves *ùĝ saĝ gíg-ga*, literally meaning "the black-headed people,"<sup>232</sup> are credited with establishing one of the earliest urban civilizations by around 5000 BCE. Like their neighbours the Elamites, their racial and linguistic affiliations remain open to debate, and their geographic origins are rather unclear.

Establishing themselves between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, in modern Iraq, to the Persian Gulf in Iran<sup>233</sup> and Syria, the Sumerians built a large number of cities, each of which had its own local gods and goddesses. They built their temples, called ziggurats, to resemble mountains rising up above the flat Mesopotamian plain, and imagined their gods on top. This practice suggests that they may originally have come from a mountainous area.<sup>234</sup> The Sumerian

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<sup>229</sup> Potts 2013, p. 135.

<sup>230</sup> Bahār 1997, p. 140.

<sup>231</sup> Hinz 1973, p. 45.

<sup>232</sup> Hallo and Simpson 1971, p. 28.

<sup>233</sup> Kramer 1963, p. 3.

<sup>234</sup> Bahār believed they had originally migrated from southern Iran. See Bahār 1997, p. 346.

worldview, enshrined in their myths which were written down as the earliest cuneiform texts, formed the basis of later Mesopotamian civilization.

The Sumerian creation myth centers on a primordial couple, a god and goddess who produce the younger generation of gods.<sup>235</sup> This myth first appears in cuneiform clay tablets dated to the end of fourth millennium BCE, found in a temple dedicated to the goddess Inanna (*nin-an-ak*, “Lady of Heaven”) in the city of Uruk. Scholars have pondered the location of the mythical city of Dilmun mentioned in the Sumerian creation myth. Some have associated it with excavations of ruins on the island of Bahrain<sup>236</sup> in Persian Gulf. Since the Elamite goddess Kiririša, was the goddess of the southern coastal region by the Persian Gulf,<sup>237</sup> can this be taken as a possible cultural exchange between these goddesses?

Mesopotamian civilization affected the development of Iranian culture both indirectly through the Elamite population which the Persian polity ultimately absorbed, and directly through ongoing encounters between Iranians and Mesopotamians. The economic and political dimensions of their relationship contained some religious rituals and ideological influences that shaped their cultural exchanges. This may be understood via the methodological framework related to the field of religious studies: “religions are embedded in culture and that “culture” is inclusive of political and economic influences”.<sup>238</sup>

The Achaemenid kings wrote their inscriptions in Elamite, Babylonian, and Old Persian; this fact demonstrates the enduring cosmopolitanism of the Persian Empire. It is therefore not surprising that Iranians might have absorbed some religio-cultural influences from these other civilizations, including the role of goddesses.

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<sup>235</sup> These include Apsu, who was associated with all freshwater bodies, and Tiamat, the primordial goddess of the saltwater seas. The Babylonian god Marduk killed Tiamat during a great battle, and then created the physical world from her dismembered body. Thus, humankind was created from blood of a monster. (See Dalley 2008, pp. 228-77.)

<sup>236</sup> Crawford 1998.

<sup>237</sup> Hinz 1973, p. 43.

<sup>238</sup> Moore 2015, p. 31.

### 4.2.3 Mesopotamian Goddesses

The ancient Mesopotamian peoples had a number of important goddesses, whose roles and functions were slowly taken over by male deities. Yet the importance of these goddesses survived for many centuries and influenced the Elamite people and later the Iranians.<sup>239</sup> The Sumerian goddess Inanna and the Babylonian Ištar, with many similarities in their functions and associated rituals, are two examples of goddesses who held central importance in their respective societies. Their functions and popularity show some similarities to those of Anāhitā, and raise some questions about their possible connection.

What, if anything, do Anāhitā and these goddesses (along with some Vedic and Celtic goddesses who will be discussed in Chapter Five) have in common, and to what extent? Which significant features or similarities make borrowings plausible? And how were these features adapted, changed and re-contextualized?

As Iranian tribes made their way westward and began to come into contact with the peoples of Mesopotamia beginning in the late second millennium BCE, the process of cultural interaction and religious syncretism continued to affect their understanding of their deities, including Anāhitā. From this new encounter Anāhitā began to assume the form by which she is best known through descriptions from the Achaemenid period onwards. It is quite natural that with the arrival of Iranian-speakers in Mesopotamia the identity of the primary goddess of the region would come to be conflated to some extent with that of an existing Iranian goddess, Anāhitā. From one region to another the specific visible identity of the goddess, as well as her particular blend of functions, might differ. Chaumont is among those who have suggested that at an early stage of the Iranian-Mesopotamian encounter (ca. 1000 BCE or later) the Iranian river goddess Anāhitā acquired some of attributes of the Mesopotamian Ištar/(I)nana, in particular her warlike

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<sup>239</sup> Stuckey 2001; Wakeman 1985, p. 8; Christ 1997, pp. 62-67.

character.<sup>240</sup> The fact that the sanctuary in Rabātak in Afghanistan was dedicated to Nana, as was the Sasanian sanctuary in Ēstaxr to Anāhitā, can be considered as additional evidence of the possible connection between the two goddesses as will be discussed below.<sup>241</sup>

#### 4.2.3.1 Inanna/Ištar and Nanai/Nana/Nanā

Nana and Inanna were long assumed by scholars to be one goddess, with Nana being a later incarnation of Inanna.<sup>242</sup> However, recent research has cast doubt on such claims. It is not clear whether these names were originally different—their resemblance being due to cultural exchanges—or whether they were counterparts of one ancient goddess. Potts (along with some other contemporary scholars) argues that Inanna/Ištar must be strictly distinguished from Nana, and that she (Nana) was not identical to Inanna.<sup>243</sup> He also notes that Nana “is frequently identified with the Iranian divinity Anāhitā and/or the Greek goddess Artemis.”<sup>244</sup>

#### Inanna/ Ištar

Inanna was a Sumerian goddess who was worshipped from ancient times. The Babylonians knew her as the counterpart of Ištar. It seems that she was associated with war, nature (water), and sex (but not marriage), possibly involving sacred prostitution at her temples and perhaps even the sacrifice of the male partner.<sup>245</sup> She was identified as the anthropomorphic projection of the planet Venus. The terms Inanna-HUD and Inanna-SIG have been translated as “Inanna of the Morning” and “Inanna of the Evening,” representing the two appearances of the planet Venus as the morning

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<sup>240</sup> Chaumont 1989.

<sup>241</sup> Gnoli 2009, pp. 144-145.

<sup>242</sup> Potts 2001, pp. 23-35.

<sup>243</sup> Potts 2001, pp. 23-35.

<sup>244</sup> Potts notes that “while it is true that Aelian (on the nature of animals XII.I.18) mentions a temple to Anāhitā in Elymais, there is no reason to equate this with the temple of Nane mentioned in II Maccabees.” (See Potts 2001, p. 26.)

<sup>245</sup> Bremmer 2007, p. 175.

and the evening star.<sup>246</sup> This leads us to one example of cultural exchange between Anāhitā and Inanna, or more precisely what Anāhitā absorbed from Inanna. Anāhitā, who is presented as Ardwī-sūr-Anāhīd in the Pahlavi texts, was identified with the planet Venus in a precisely determined astronomical position (GBd.VA.8). This clearly shows her syncretization with the goddess Inanna, which is important for our argument since Anāhitā's transformation cannot accurately be understood without grasping and analyzing these mythological comparisons (as will be discussed further in Chapter Ten).

The influences of Mesopotamian culture and rituals on the Indo-European Iranian-speaking tribes happened gradually. Perhaps the strongest example of this influence can be seen in the annual mourning ritual associated with the sacrificial “death” of the vegetation god, Dumuzi, in connection to the goddess Inanna; this symbolized the annual regeneration of nature and was thus centrally important to the Mesopotamian civilization which depended heavily on agriculture. One of the main components of the annual religious cycle connected with this myth was ritual mourning over the death of this divine lover, who was considered to have died a martyr. Variations on this myth and its attendant rituals can be detected throughout subsequent Iranian history, from the *Šāh-nāme* to Shi‘ism and will be discussed in Chapter Eleven.

A more perplexing question concerns the alleged emergence of henotheism, among the Iranians as well among the peoples of Mesopotamia. The rise of the god Marduk to his supreme position within the pantheon of the Babylonians, like that of Yahweh in the Israelite context, is best explained according to the henotheistic model, where a particular deity is championed as the patron of a specific group at the expense of its (and their) rivals. Cyrus II's attempt to associate himself with Marduk upon conquering Babylon in 539 BCE is the clearest example of how Iranian migrants deliberately appropriated Mesopotamian religion for their own purposes, but this is surely only the tip of the iceberg. From the elite classes down to the level of the general

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<sup>246</sup> Beaulieu 2018, p. 33.

population, Iranians must have taken what they needed from Mesopotamian culture and adapted it into forms familiar to themselves.

The divine couple of Marduk and the goddess Ištar shows some interesting similarities with the Iranian pairing of Miθra and Anāhitā. In fact, Miθra and Anāhitā are the only deities who have been documented along with Ahura Mazdā in the inscriptions of the Persian kings (for example those of Artaxerxes II, r. 404-358 BCE). The transformations accruing to Anāhitā during the Achaemenid period, during which she first comes into historical prominence, can be explained according to this model, as will be discussed in Chapter Nine.

#### Nana/Nanai/Nanā

As an originally Mesopotamian goddess and probably having undergone a degree of conflation with some other female deity, Nana eventually became popular in the South, especially at Uruk, Susa and Kušān,<sup>247</sup> as well as to the East within the pantheon of Bactria.<sup>248</sup> Associated with war, fertility, wisdom, and water, the goddess Nana was worshiped at Dura-Europos as “Artemis Nanaia,” reflecting the mixed Hellenistic-Semitic-Iranian culture there. In 2004 BCE a coalition of Elamites and “Su-people” from Shimaski (possibly the BMAC region in Central Asia) captured Ur and took a statue of Nanna back to Anshan “as a captive”. She was returned to Ur after 1984 BCE.<sup>249</sup>

She appears as Nanai on Kušān coins (1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE), indicating that her cult had spread as far eastwards as the territories of the Indus valley and beyond. The Bactrian Rabātak inscription of Kušān king Kaniška I (first half of the first century CE) calls Nanai *amsa Nana*; in Kušān coins she is *Nanašan* (“royal Nana”)—“she is the goddess who rules and thus ordains

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<sup>247</sup> Beaulieu 2018, p. 33.

<sup>248</sup> Potts 2001, pp. 23-35.

<sup>249</sup> Alvarez-Mon 2013, pp. 221-2.

kingship.”<sup>250</sup> Nana was the principle deity in Kaniška pantheon and, and the leader of the gods in the Rabatak inscription, and the Rabatak sanctuary was dedicated to her.<sup>251</sup> The idea that Nana was the principle deity in Kaniška’s pantheon was challenged by Gnoli<sup>252</sup> who argued that she, like Anāhitā, was indeed the deity to whom the sanctuary was dedicated but that neither she nor Anāhitā ever were the head of the pantheon. Michael Shenkar, however, disagrees with Gnoli’s opinion, arguing that “Contrary to Gnoli, there are no sufficient grounds to doubt that Nana was the most important deity worshiped by Kaniška and the head of the royal dynastic pantheon of his time. This is confirmed by her place in Rabatak inscription, the popularity of her image on coins and in personal names, and the fact that Nana was almost the most important goddess in neighboring Soghdiana and Chorasmia.”<sup>253</sup>

Grenet notes that Nana(ia) appears on the selection of five gods represented on Kaniška’s gold coins, where they receive Iranian names: *Nana* or *Nanašao*, *Miuro* (Mithra), *Mao* (Māh), *Athšo* (Ādur), *Oado* (Wād).<sup>254</sup> These selected deities are all connected to natural elements, directly or indirectly: To the sun, moon, fire, and wind. So where is the deity of water? Water figures not only in Herodotus’ list of the Persians’ prayers, but also in Y 1.16 and the *Niyāyišn*’s daily prayers to the sun, moon, fire and water. It seems that for the Kušans Nana has replaced the concept of the water-deity (Anāhitā). Grenet states that she was the patron and protector of royalty, another similarity to Anāhitā. In the Sogdian pantheon, meanwhile, Anāhitā appears separately from Nana “on a few occasions”.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Carter 2006, p. 325.

<sup>251</sup> Gnoli 2009, p. 144.

<sup>252</sup> Gnoli 2009, pp. 144-45.

<sup>253</sup> Shenkar 2014, p. 120.

<sup>254</sup> Grenet 2015, p. 132.

<sup>255</sup> Grenet 2015, p.134.



The prevalence of Sogdian coins bearing Nana's name suggests that she was the major deity of Sogdiana in pre-Islamic times.<sup>256</sup> Despite her Mesopotamian origin, she was the most deity most frequently represented in Sogdiana during the seventh and eighth centuries.<sup>257</sup> Since many of the ancient peoples living across this wide expanse of territory practiced agriculture, deities and rituals related to fertility are widely attested amongst them. The Indo-European Iranian-speaking tribes were relative latecomers to this region, and it is inevitable that their culture would have been shaped and influenced by those of the peoples already living there.

The spread of Nana's cult over such vast distances vividly illustrates the cultural connections (presumably stemming mostly from trade) that existed from prehistoric times linking the Mediterranean world to that of Central Asia and beyond, with the Iranian plateau at its centre. She was worshiped in Susa from the third millennium BCE, and her cult continued during the Seleucid and Parthian period as the principle deity of the city, known as Artemis-Nanaia cult.<sup>258</sup>

Azarpay notes:

The symbols and attributes of the early medieval Soghdian and Khwarezmian images of Nanā, though influenced by Indian formal models, indicate that the goddess preserved both her early Mesopotamian affiliation with the sun and the moon, and her identity as a love and war deity.<sup>259</sup>

The cult of Nana may have already existed in Central Asia prior to the arrival of the Indo-Iranians in the region, since she appears on a BMAC seal dating to the early second millennium

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<sup>256</sup> Azarpay 1981, 134.

<sup>257</sup> Compareti 2017, pp. 1-8

<sup>258</sup> Azarpay 1981, 136.

<sup>259</sup> Azarpay 1981, pp. 136-37.

BCE.<sup>260</sup> Similarly, her cult in Bactria may pre-date her appearance in the Kušan pantheon by over two millennia.<sup>261</sup>

The cults of Nana and Anāhitā were also present in Armenia. Nana was worshipped as Nane in a temple at the small town of Thil. She was believed to be the daughter of Aramazd (the Avestan Ahura Mazdā). Her cult was closely tied to that of Anahit (the counterpart of Avestan Anāhitā), and was the iconographic prototype for several goddesses on the Indo-Iranian pantheon.<sup>262</sup> Rosenfield notes that “As the feminine personifications of abundance among the Kušāns, Nana-Anāhitā had much in common with Ardoxšo, but the cult of Ardoxšo seems to have been centered upon dynastic and political abundance, whereas that of Nana emphasized natural phenomena.”<sup>263</sup> In Bactria the goddess Ardoxšo (Avestan *Aši vaŋ<sup>h</sup>i*) was worshipped by Kušāns, appearing on their coins (as will be discussed in Chapter Seven). Azarpay states that Nana was also equated with the Iranian goddess Ārmaiti, and that the cult of Nana-Ārmaiti was widely spread throughout eastern Iran.<sup>264</sup>

It seems that all of these goddesses had some functions in common, most likely through cultural borrowing. Since these borrowings were often only partial, they should be analyzed with caution when attempting to document Anāhitā’s transformations.

#### 4.2.4 The Steppes

The culture of the steppe-dwelling proto-Indo-Europeans (ca. fifth millennium BCE) from whom the Iranians descended focused primarily on male gods, particularly those connected with war, rule, and related activities. The goddesses of the proto-Indo-Europeans were mostly associated with natural phenomena such as the dawn, rivers, and the decomposition of bodies, as

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<sup>260</sup> Bremmer 2007, p. 176.

<sup>261</sup> Potts 2001, p. 30.

<sup>262</sup> Azarpay 1981, 134.

<sup>263</sup> Rosenfield 1967, p. 88.

<sup>264</sup> Azarpay 1981, p. 135.

well as fertility, healing, childbirth, love and sex.<sup>265</sup> Over time the proto-Indo-European deities, gods and goddesses alike, acquired new functions and shifting status depending on the different locations to which the various PIE tribes migrated and the other cultures with which they interacted.

For example, the indigenous peoples who lived around Caspian and Azov Seas in prehistoric times had a matriarchal society and worshipped goddesses.<sup>266</sup> By the late second millennium BCE they developed a close relationship with the nomadic Iranian Sakas, influencing them through their lifestyle and their rituals. This may help account for the fact that among the Sakas women had important roles, including governance and going to war, to a greater extent than among other Indo-Iranian groups.

On the list of Saka deities provided by Herodotus the most important is the goddess of the hearth-fire, whom he refers to as “Hestia/Tabiti”: “The gods whom they propitiate by worship are ... Hestia most of all...”<sup>267</sup> While the position of “Hestia” among the Sakas does not necessarily reflect gender roles in their society, it does raise the question of why the supreme deity of this warrior people would be a goddess, given that this is not the norm among the descendants of the proto-Indo-Europeans. The most plausible explanation is that the Sakas’ special reverence for a female deity was adopted from some of the non-Indo-European peoples they encountered on the steppes.

Other goddesses from Herodotus’s list are Api-Gē, the earth-goddess (who generally reminds one of the Zoroastrian Spəntā Ārmaiti), who figures third in importance, and “Urania” (“heavenly”) Aphrodite Argimpasa, the goddess of fertility and love, who comes fifth. In comparison to the pantheons of other Iranian groups, it is remarkable that of the five most important Saka deities mentioned by Herodotus, three are goddesses.

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<sup>265</sup> Mallory and Adams 2006, pp. 431-35.

<sup>266</sup> Aruz et al. 2007.

<sup>267</sup> Herodotus, Book 4. 59.

These three goddesses, moreover, seem to be related to each other. Hestia-Tabiti and Api-Gē are less anthropomorphized than Argimpasa-Aphrodite Urania, however. Of the three Argimpasa seems most similar to Anāhitā, with her tripartite characteristics as a multifunctional goddess with fertility, military, and sacerdotal aspects.<sup>268</sup> Furthermore, Argimpasa-Aphrodite *Urania* and Anāhitā were both worshipped as the divine patronesses of the kings, bestowing royal power.<sup>269</sup> Ultimately, all three major Saka goddesses seem to be connected in varying degrees to Anāhitā.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Ustinova 1999, pp. 84-87.

<sup>269</sup> Ustinova 1999, p. 87.

<sup>270</sup> Jacobson 1995, p. 54; also Ustinova 1999, pp. 84-86.

## Chapter Five

### Indo-European Water Goddesses

A central aim of this study is to untangle and clarify Anāhitā's roots. In her original form as a water goddess, she appears to share a number of similar functions with other Indo-European water goddesses, including Arnemetia, Nemetona, Sirona, Brigantia and others. Can these similarities be shown to be fundamental and thematic? How can they be explained? Can Anāhitā's original identity as an Indo-European water goddess be established in a convincing way?

To answer these questions, we will search mythological documents and archeological records through the use of comparative mythology. The primary objective of this chapter is to provide an overview of these water goddesses, their functions and their rituals, by applying a comparative study of their mythologies and comparing them with Anāhitā. A secondary objective will be to figure out whether these goddesses acquired additional functions and characteristics which influenced their power and popularity. These analyses will help us to better understand Anāhitā's roots and her transformation over time.

#### 5.1 Overview

There exists a range of evidence from across Indo-European societies that a goddess related to and personified as water in the form of rivers, lakes, and streams was present from ancient times. Indeed, much of this evidence would indicate that water was a central focus in the rituals of many cultures throughout Europe by around 1300 BC at the latest, and probably well before that. As a religious symbol, water was used as a healing, purifying, and sanctifying element in rituals.<sup>1</sup> The Celts, in particular, built sanctuaries at the source of rivers and lakes, as did the Aryans in

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<sup>1</sup> Bradley 2012, p. x.

Iran. Sacrifices were offered on the banks of the rivers, cast into the water as gifts honouring its supernatural powers, which was mostly associated with female deities. Items offered included such things as swords, and often the severed heads of vanquished enemies which were believed to hold special power.

Many Celtic sites throughout Europe are considered to have been religious in nature; La Tène on the edge of Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland is a particularly rich example.<sup>2</sup> Investigations at La Tène uncovered thousands of weapons, tools, jewelry and coins at the bottom of the Lake, suggesting that the lake was used for sacrificial offering.<sup>3</sup> A large quantity of objects—mostly weapons—thrown to the water as offerings have been found in European rivers,<sup>4</sup> which demonstrates that these rivers were considered as an abode of sacredness. The fact that these offerings were mostly connected with war suggests that the warriors of the time, according to their belief system, were seeking the support and protection of a water deity.

Indo-European cosmology posited a connection between water, earth, and sky, as reflected in their myths. Along with rivers and lakes, springs and wells were considered sacred places and were associated with many functions, notably healing. Among the Germanic peoples including the Scandinavians, the shores of lakes and waterfalls as well as the bank of rivers were used as sacred locations for offerings, and they cast their sacrifices in to the lakes.<sup>5</sup>

These sacred water-sites were typically connected to female deities. Widespread evidence for water goddess cults during the early first millennium AD is based upon iconographical, epigraphic and archaeological discoveries and records.<sup>6</sup> A large number of river/lake goddesses in ancient Europe gave their names to rivers or themselves received the river's names. Many major

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<sup>2</sup> Cunliffe 1997, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> Bradley 2012, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> In the Thames River weapons from different periods have been found (Cunliffe 1997, p. 194).

<sup>5</sup> Davidson 1988, pp. 25-27.

<sup>6</sup> Green 1999.

European rivers had a goddess-spirit; that of the Seine, for example, was called Sequana.<sup>7</sup> The river Marne and the goddess Matrona, the river Saône and the goddess Souconna, the river Yonne and the goddess Icauni, the river Boyne and the goddess Bóinn, the river Shannon and the goddess Sionnan, the river Inny and the goddess Eithne, and the river (or Lough) Érne and the goddess Érne, are further examples of such associations. Thus, water-river goddesses were widely distributed across Europe, from Ireland and England to France, Germany, and into Russia. These goddesses were usually associated with rivers, springs, and lakes, and possessed some similar functions and water-based rituals. Healing was one of these functions, and certain springs, which were considered to be sacred, were believed to have healing properties.

Since water was symbolic of health and healing, the goddesses who were related to water usually had a healing function as well. These goddesses were also sometimes represented with animals such as snakes or dogs. Snakes, due to the shedding of their skin, may have been a symbol for rebirth and thus fertility; alternatively, their winding shape may have suggested the meandering of a river. Dogs, for their part, were associated with self-healing.<sup>8</sup> There were sacred dogs in some healing sanctuaries,<sup>9</sup> which reminds us of the fact that in Zoroastrianism dogs were seen as righteous, sacred animals and were used in some rituals; they possessed purifying features and could exorcise demons.<sup>10</sup>

## 5.2 Celtic

In his account of the Gallic Wars, the Roman emperor Julius Caesar provides a list of Celtic deities which he identified with those of the Roman pantheon.<sup>11</sup> Among these he mentions

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<sup>7</sup> Green 1999; Kitson 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Ross 2005; Allason-Jones 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Green 1999, pp. 26-40.

<sup>10</sup> Boyce 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Julius Caesar 1870, Book 6; also Cunliffe 1997, p. 185.

Minerva, identified with various Celtic goddesses as a protector of rivers and springs.<sup>12</sup> As noted above, there is strong evidence for the association of flowing water with goddesses in the Celtic belief system.<sup>13</sup> Water goddesses were very popular among the Celts, whose migrations left traces all across Europe. These goddesses not only ensured fertility but also were able to cure the ill, a capacity embodied in the sacred power of water. The strength and vital necessity of rivers, springs and lakes were seen as demonstrations of the supernatural powers of the goddesses who inhabited the waters. The belief in the sacredness of water (wells/springs/lakes/rivers) survived in Christian Europe through the association of watery sites with female saints.<sup>14</sup>

### 5.2.1 Dānu

One of the main proto Indo-European word for “river-water” and “water-basin” is the stem *\*dānu-*,<sup>15</sup> which also is connected to the concept of a water-goddess. A widely recurring term connected with rivers in Indo-European, *dānu*, from *\*dehanu*, was apparently the name given to a proto-Indo-European river goddess since she also appears in the Vedas, as Dānu.<sup>16</sup> In Avestan, *dānu-* means “river, stream”; this sense survives in the modern Ossetic *don*.<sup>17</sup> The Iris Danu and the Welsh Dôn both come from the same linguistic root, which means “abundant, giving.” The Indo-European root  $\sqrt{*dā-}$  and its suffixed derivative *\*dānu-* means “river.”<sup>18</sup> Reflexes of this term can be found in the myths of many of the Indo-European peoples, often in connection with a river goddess.

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<sup>12</sup> Cunliffe 1997, p. 185.

<sup>13</sup> Allason-Jones 1999, pp. 107-119.

<sup>14</sup> Cunliffe 1997, p. 199.

<sup>15</sup> Sadovski 2017, pp. 566 -599. Another word is *\*ap-*, which also means the ‘current of water, river’. We will discuss this word in more detail in Chapter Six.

<sup>16</sup> Mallory and Adams 2006, p. 434.

<sup>17</sup> Russell 1990.

<sup>18</sup> In the domain of “waters and water-basins,” one of the main words for “river, water” was *\*dānu-* (*Av. dānu-*). See Sadovski 2017, pp. 566-99.



It is noteworthy for our discussion that the word *\*dānu-* (river-water), apart from providing theophoric names and categories, also embodies the very concept of water-river goddess. This shows that the words for “water” in proto Indo-European languages could be connected with the deity associated with it. Hence, it is also possible to connect another proto-Indo-European word, *\*ap-* “current (of water)”, with Anāhitā.

The term *dānu* survives most famously in the names of several European rivers, including the Danube, the Don (one in Russia and another in England), the Dnieper, the Dniester,<sup>19</sup> and others. Indo-European *\*deh<sub>2</sub>nu-* “river” is reconstructed from Sanskrit *dānu*, Irish *dānu*, Welsh *dôn*, and Ossetic *donbettys*. A shortened form of the name appears to have been *\*dā*.<sup>20</sup>

A water goddess named Dānu is found in Germanic as well as Celtic mythology (cf. Proto-Celtic *\*Danona*). She was thus very likely a proto-Indo-European mother/water goddess. The wide range of attestations for this term may indicate that Dānu was originally a title rather than a particular goddess, and was bestowed on various rivers by various Indo-European peoples during the course of their migrations into and across Europe over time. The Greek goddess Demeter (*\*dā-mater*, “river-mother”) is likewise connected to water,<sup>21</sup> and the goddess Dānu in the Vedas would seem to be related as well.

In Irish tradition Dānu was the mother goddess of the waters, as well as of the first Celtic tribes to settle in Ireland, the *Tuatha Dé Danann* (the “people of the Goddess Dānu/Danann”).<sup>22</sup> Human beings (or more specifically the Indo-European peoples) are even considered as “The children of Dānu”; she, as the mother-water goddess, has given them life.<sup>23</sup> There exist many folk-myths about “Dānu’s people”.<sup>24</sup> The Celtic scholar Peter Ellis notes that “The Dānube, first

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<sup>19</sup> Sadovski 2017, pp. 566-99.

<sup>20</sup> Mallory and Adams 2006, p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> Spaeth 1996, p. 137.

<sup>22</sup> Gibson 2013, pp. 76, 189; also Kondratiev 1998.

<sup>23</sup> Frawley 2001; also Berresford Ellis 2002, pp. 25-31.

<sup>24</sup> Hughes 2008, p. 166.

recorded as the Dānuvius, was named after the Celtic goddess Dānu, whose name means ‘divine waters’.”<sup>25</sup> Classicist Arthur Bernard Cook affirms that “Dānuvius and its cognates must moreover be connected with the Avestan *dānu-*, ‘river’.”<sup>26</sup>

The Celtic creation story mentions the “heavenly water” which floods downward.<sup>27</sup> Dānu is thus the divine water flowing down from heaven; the parallel with Anāhitā, who is described in exactly the same way, is too clear to be coincidental. Miriam Robbins Dexter has suggested that Dānu was originally a non-Indo-European river and earth goddess who was adopted at an early stage of Proto-Indo-European religion.<sup>28</sup> In any case, at least some of the notions associated with this goddess must be very ancient. Dānu can also be connected to Brigit, the Celtic goddess of wisdom, war, healing and fertility.<sup>29</sup>

### 5.2.2 The Goddesses

Some of the major Celtic water goddesses include Arnemetia, who was a water and spring goddess, Nemetona, a goddess of springs, the spring–water goddess Sirona in Hochscheid in Germany, Sulis, a goddess of healing springs including those at Bath in England,<sup>30</sup> and Brigantia who was the goddess of war, healing, water and also a goddess of fertility and prosperity. All of these goddesses had a variety of functions, similar to Anāhitā’s, among which fertility and healing were especially prominent. Some were popular over a wide area and possessed a range of characteristics and purposes, while the others were simply local goddesses. Very often a Celtic

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<sup>25</sup> Ellis 2002, p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> Cook 2010, p. 366.

<sup>27</sup> Ellis 2002, p. 25.

<sup>28</sup> Dexter 1990.

<sup>29</sup> Guirand 1996, p. 232.

<sup>30</sup> Bord and Bord 1985, p. 25.

goddess is portrayed in company with a god of differing origin (e.g., Roman).<sup>31</sup> The pairing of a temple to Mithras with one to a water goddess also has widespread parallels in Iran.

#### 5.2.2.1 Coventina/Conventina

An important Romano-Celtic water goddess was Coventina/Conventina, represented both as a single river goddess and as a triple nymph.<sup>32</sup> Originally a local Celtic water goddess, Coventina was associated with the functions of healing and childbirth, and possibly war as well. She became popular among Roman soldiers following the establishment of Roman power in Britain. At least ten inscriptions related to Coventina have been found at the Roman site of Carrawburgh near Hadrian's wall in Northumberland.<sup>33</sup> These inscriptions were accompanied by a number of statues and coins. The goddess has sometimes been identified as Brigantia in another guise, or even Venus.<sup>34</sup> Based on the date of coinage bearing her image, it would appear that Coventina's cult flourished during the second and third centuries CE. Several stone altars have been found bearing dedications to her as well, where she was referred to as *Dea nymp̄ha Coventina*.<sup>35</sup> The remains of a Roman temple devoted to Mithras (a Mithræum) have also been found and excavated at Carrawburgh near Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland, including three adjacent altars. This would seem to indicate a triad of deities, providing an interesting parallel with the Iranian grouping of Mazdā-Miθra-Anāhitā.

The association of Coventina with Mithras at Carrawburgh thus raises the following question: Why did these two deities, a water goddess who also is a healer with clear functional and cultic commonalities with Anāhitā (for example, both goddesses received the severed heads as offering), and Mithras, a martial deity whose cult was centered on the tauroctony or bull sacrifice,

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<sup>31</sup> Green 2004, p. 136.

<sup>32</sup> Green 1992, p. 156.

<sup>33</sup> Allason-Jones and McKay 1985, pp. 4-11.

<sup>34</sup> Allason-Jones and McKay 1985, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Jolliffe 1942, p. 58.

have adjacent temples and inscriptions? Can there have been a relationship between them similar to what we see in the pairing of Anāhitā and Miθra in the Iranian context? Cumont states that the Roman soldiers who followed the cult of Miθra had borrowed him (via the frontier zone of eastern Anatolia/northern Mesopotamia) from the Iranian pantheon,<sup>36</sup> but this is still a matter of discussion among scholars, and as Richard Gordon notes, several scholars have argued that the Roman cult of Mithras has no substantial connection with Iran.<sup>37</sup> These questions merit a separate study, but for our purposes it may be noted that the possible connection between the Iranian and European cases in terms of the Miθra/water goddess pairing is striking, and may support Cumont's position.

Although Coventina was seen as a healing goddess, based on the springs dedicated to her for both male and female devotees, she was not simply a typical Celtic healer deity; she had many other functions as well, related to spirituality, war, and fertility, and even to the personal lives of her devotees.<sup>38</sup> Some of the Carrawburgh relics, such as the small bronze masks, the head on the spout of a pottery jug, the head of a male statue, and the heads on the front of one of the altars, may suggest the presence of the kind of human head cult discussed above.<sup>39</sup>

#### 5.2.2.2 Brigantia/Bríg/Brigan

Among the ancient Celtic goddesses who often had similar functions, a few names occur in many different locations, an indication that these goddesses were honoured by diverse groups of Celts. Brigantia, “the eponymous deity associated with principle tribe of north Britain,” is one.<sup>40</sup> Variations of her name are found throughout Europe.<sup>41</sup> An interesting connection to Anāhitā can

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<sup>36</sup> Cumont 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon 2015, p. 453.

<sup>38</sup> Allason-Jones and McKay 1985, p. 11; also Hübner 1877.

<sup>39</sup> Allason-Jones and McKay 1985, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Jones and Mattingly, 1990, p. 277.

<sup>41</sup> Green 1995, p. 94.

be found in Brigantia's name itself, which is derived from the root *\*bherǵh-* “high”, which also occurs in *\*Brigentī*, *\*brigant-*, “high person/place”, *\*bhṛǵh-nt-ī* “the eminent”, proto-Celtic form *\*Brīgantī*, (from *brig-* high) as is the old Irish *Brigit*.<sup>42</sup> The term has Indo-Iranian reflexes, including the Sanskrit *bṛhatī* and the Avestan *bərəzaitī*, both of which are feminine adjectives meaning “high, lofty.” *Bərəzaitī*, “the lofty one”, is one of Anāhitā's most common adjectives, with which it would appear to be cognate, the name Brigantia comes from a root meaning “high”, “the high one,”<sup>43</sup> or “mountainous, tall; the high, lofty one.”<sup>44</sup> This provides an exact linguistic correspondence with Anāhitā's Irish counterpart, and is entirely fitting for a “celestial river”<sup>45</sup> who is symbolized by the Milky Way.

A widely-attested Celtic goddess connected to victory, water, wisdom, fire, war, healing, fertility (by protecting cattle),<sup>46</sup> and prosperity, Brigantia was specifically connected with sacred waters and wells, just like many other Celtic goddesses.<sup>47</sup> Jolliffe notes that Victory was a goddess worshipped by the Roman soldiers, and that equation of Brigantia with Victory might well have been made by them at the time.<sup>48</sup>

Brigantia was the daughter of Dagda, the protector god of the Celtic tribes.<sup>49</sup> She was worshipped in the Celtic regions of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Brittany, as well as other locations in Europe where Celts were present. The wide area of her popularity led to an expansion of her functions, transforming her into a more powerful multi-functional goddess, as was the case with Anāhitā in Iran.

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<sup>42</sup> Miller 2012, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Mallory and Adams 2006, p. 410.

<sup>44</sup> Miller 2012, p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> Yt 5.15.

<sup>46</sup> Davidson 1999.

<sup>47</sup> Berger 1985, p. 71.

<sup>48</sup> Jolliffe 1942, p. 40.

<sup>49</sup> Cunliffe 1997, p. 186.

Brigantia was also worshipped widely throughout the Roman Empire according to a Roman version of her cult. Her martial functions would have been particularly appealing to Roman soldiers and may have led to her conflation with certain Roman martial deities.<sup>50</sup> Variants of her can be detected in Brigindo of Gaul, Brigantia of northern England, and Bríg of Ireland. Her various names and functions ultimately derive from a common ancestor Brigantii, who was connected to Lake Constance around the river Rhine in central Europe.<sup>51</sup>

The Gallic deity Bricta may also be related to her. The rivers Brent in England, Braint in Wales, and Brigid in Ireland are all linguistically connected to this goddess—and most likely religiously as well—through the root Brig/Brigant.<sup>52</sup> This strongly suggests that Brigantia, like Anāhitā, originated as a water goddess who absorbed some additional functions over time.

Like Anāhitā, Brigantia was associated with the juxtaposition of fire and water. The water from many of her wells was believed to be effective against eye diseases, which points to another of her functions. She was also connected with wisdom, and it was said that (like the Norse god Odin) she lost her sight in order to gain wisdom and inner sight. Blinded, she restored her sight by washing her eyes in the sacred waters.<sup>53</sup>

The greatest number of sacred wells in Ireland are dedicated to Brigit, who became Christianized as the island's patron saint.<sup>54</sup> In Roman times she was identified with Minerva, the Latin goddess of war, wisdom, and crafts. She was also identified with victory, and described as “celestial” possibly under influence of *Dea Caelestis*,<sup>55</sup> a fertility goddess sometimes identified as Aphrodite Urania, and who was worshipped by Romans as the “heavenly goddess”. This provides

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<sup>50</sup> This occurred with the Roman goddess Victory, who was equated to the Greek goddess Nikē; Jolliffe 1942, pp. 38-40.

<sup>51</sup> Jolliffe 1942, p. 37.

<sup>52</sup> O Cathasaigh 1982, pp. 78-79.

<sup>53</sup> Gray 2009, p. 32.

<sup>54</sup> Cusack suggests that Brigit might have been a common epithet for *all* the goddesses in pagan Ireland (Cusack 2007).

<sup>55</sup> Jolliffe 1942, p. 46.

yet another similarity with Anāhitā, who carried the same epithet. She acquired a cosmic character since she was identified and Romanized as *Dea Caelestis Brigantia* (Goddess of the Heavens Brigantia).<sup>56</sup>

The second-century geographer Ptolemy mentions a tribe in Leinster, Ireland calling itself the Brigantes, who gave their name to the river Brigid.<sup>57</sup> Taken together, these signs suggest that similar to Anāhitā, Brigantia/Brigid may at some point have united the three Indo-European social group functions within herself. We may therefore suppose her to have originated as a local water goddess, and absorbing additional functions over time such as protection, the royalty and warriors during the war, and fertility functions such as healing. The Romans worshipped her primarily as a war goddess.<sup>58</sup> Apart from sharing many functions with Anāhitā including water and wisdom, she was of particular importance for the imperial family (like Anāhitā) as Jolliffe suggests.<sup>59</sup>

An archaeological site at Luxeuil in France has produced the remains of an ancient Celtic temple associated with healing, combining hot springs and sanctuaries. Several deities are depicted in the iconography at this site, including Bricta and Sirona (a goddess of fertility and healing), who were both worshipped widely and were associated with rivers and healing springs. Since Bricta appears to have been a variant of Bríg, she was probably a goddess of healing, protection, and fertility with both water and perpetual fire associations (like Anāhitā). One may note that the combination of healing water and perpetual fire was very widespread in ancient Europe,<sup>60</sup> suggesting that this combination was characteristically connected to proto-Indo-European water-goddesses whose descendants include Anāhitā.

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<sup>56</sup> Jolliffe 1942, pp. 43 and 47-49.

<sup>57</sup> Bitel 2001.

<sup>58</sup> Jolliffe 1942, p. 61.

<sup>59</sup> Jolliffe 1942, p. 61.

<sup>60</sup> Jolliffe 1942, p. 57.

Based on evidence given by Strabo<sup>61</sup> the pairing of fire and water cults seems to have ancient precedents in Indo-Iranian religion, including temples devoted to Anāhitā (Anāitis). We may recall that in Iran the so-called Adur Anahid fire temple in Eṣṭaxr, which was under the custodianship of the Sasanian royal family, can be seen as combining fire and water symbolism in the cult of Anāhitā.

It is worth noting that the goddess Brigantia is referred to in one of her inscriptions as “the goddess the Nymph Brigantia”,<sup>62</sup> (recalling the goddess Coventina, who was mentioned as *Dea Nimfa Coventina* in a Carrawburgh inscription<sup>63</sup>) reminiscent of the possible connection between Anāhitā and the *pairikas* who also had “nymph” functions (as discussed below in Chapter Eleven).

Brigantia appears in many inscriptions and reliefs, including the so-called Birrens relief (dated to 210 CE) where she appears as a winged-goddess.<sup>64</sup> This is interesting because the goddesses Ostia-Minerva and Victory sometimes have wings in their sculptures, which in turn reminds us of the Mesopotamian Innana/Ištar. These wings may have been an icon symbolising of the power of flight through the heavens.

*Imbolc*, the festival dedicated to Brigantia which is held on 1 February in Ireland, was the principal pagan spring festival there in pre-Christian times,<sup>65</sup> celebrating the “return of spring and of the reawakening of the fire that would purify the land for the new season.”<sup>66</sup>

### 5.2.2.3 Other Celtic Goddesses

Sulis or Sul was a native Celtic deity who was equated with Roman goddess Minerva; her cult was popular over a wide area, and is attested for a period of nearly four centuries.<sup>67</sup> “Sulis” is

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<sup>61</sup> Strabo (64 BC – c. AD 24) 2014, Book XV, Chapter III, Section 14.

<sup>62</sup> Jolliffe 1942, p. 42.

<sup>63</sup> Jolliffe 1942, p. 58.

<sup>64</sup> Jolliffe 1942, pp. 50-51, 54.

<sup>65</sup> Hughes 2008, p. 229; also Berger 1985, pp. 71-72.

<sup>66</sup> Rowley 1997, pp. 93-95.



philologically linked to the sun.<sup>68</sup> Her sacred spring in Bath with its hot mineral water, *Aquae Sulis*, which remains a popular tourist site to this day, appears to have served as the principal connection with the goddess, where her devotees requested her support. These requests sometimes included vengeance and curses, showing another possible function of the goddess.<sup>69</sup> In this respect they are highly reminiscent of those made by villainous characters mentioned in the *Ābān Yašt*, who ask (in vain) for Anāhitā's support in pursuing their destructive activities. Moreover, in the *Aquae Sulis* there was a perpetual fire,<sup>70</sup> which reminds one of Anāhitā's temples in the Iranian world.

Arnemetia was a Romano-Celtic water goddess associated with a spring in Buxton, England. Water from this spring was supposed to cure disease and illness.

Celtic mythology also includes a local river goddess named Verbeia. She was worshipped as a deification of the river Wharfe in England, as was the case with many other rivers in Europe associated with a female deity. The root of her name may represent a Celtic or British term (probably reflex of the proto-Indo-European root *\*wer-bhe-*) of “bend, turn,” and so might have meant “(she who is) constantly bending and turning.”<sup>71</sup> An image of a woman with an oversized head and two huge snakes in her hands may represent this goddess. Again, the presence of snakes may have to do with re-birth, symbolized by the snake's habit of sloughing off its skin, or the “serpentine” winding of rivers.<sup>72</sup> In Indo-European tradition dragons/snakes are the symbol of drought and chaos, embodiments of the destructive potential of rivers. This symbol is also present

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<sup>67</sup> Green 1999, pp. 26-40.

<sup>68</sup> Cunliffe 1997, p. 198.

<sup>69</sup> Green 1999, pp. 26-40.

<sup>70</sup> Jolliffe 1942, p. 56.

<sup>71</sup> Oakley 2006, pp. 10-11.

<sup>72</sup> Green 1999, pp. 26-40.

in depictions of another Celtic spring goddess, Sirona (whose name possibly is philologically related to “star”<sup>73</sup>), who is represented with a snake wrapped around her right forearm.

A number of legends associate female spirits, sometimes negative ones, with England’s river Wharfe. It was said that sometimes the goddess of the river appears as a white horse and claims a victim in her waters.<sup>74</sup> The concept of river goddesses having a negative form could be related to opposing aspects of the waters and their ambivalent role in the lives of humans. Rivers have two opposing aspects: They bring fertility and blessing to life, but in their dragon shape they can also cause destruction through flooding. As we will discuss later, it is noteworthy that two Vedic goddesses, Aditi and Dānu, also embody the opposing concepts of cosmic and non-cosmic waters.

Another Irish river-goddess is Boann or Boand, goddess of the river Boyne in Ireland. In a poem from the early Irish onomastic literature known as the *Dindshenchas*, she is equated with several well-known rivers including the Tigris and the Euphrates.<sup>75</sup> The fact that the *Dindshenchas* mentions such far-off rivers recalls a section of the *Bundahišn* (11.6), which provides a catalogue of the world’s major rivers.

Other Celtic river goddesses include Shannon, memorialized in the name of Ireland’s longest river, and Clota, which is associated with the river Clyde in Scotland. Yet another was Ancama, who is the subject of some inscriptions found in Germany. At Möhn, near Trier, a temple around a spring with sacred water was dedicated to her.<sup>76</sup> The goddess Damona was mostly worshipped in the French region of Burgundy; her main sanctuary, at Alesia, was a shrine connected to water. Her name means “divine/great cow”; she may thus have some connection to

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<sup>73</sup> Markey 2001.

<sup>74</sup> Clarke and Roberts, 1996, p. 96.

<sup>75</sup> *Metrical Dindshenchas*, v. 3, poem 2, Boand I.

<sup>76</sup> Green 1999, pp. 26-40.

the Vedic goddess Aditi, whose symbol is a sacred cow. This concept, moreover, connects them both with fertility.

The Celtic goddess Epona, goddess of horses and fertility, whose name etymologically connects her with horses, may draw our interest here. She may be compared with the Avestan goddess Druuāspā, whose name also connects her to horses (Druuāspā = “wild solid horses”<sup>77</sup>). Epona was a very popular goddess whose cult was found in Gaul, Britain, Rhine and Danube limes, Macedonia, Italy, Spain and Portugal.<sup>78</sup> She is depicted in several reliefs with horses surrounding her. Her iconography shows that horse symbols are central to her, since she invariably appears with them.

One of the best-known depictions of Epona has been found in a damaged small marble relief from Viminiacium dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE.<sup>79</sup> Although the relief has suffered heavy damage, to Epona’s right and left one may still discern horses turning toward the goddess. There are two horses to her right and it seems the left side was the same but due to damage, the figure of the second horse on the left side is missing. In another relief, from fourth century CE Salonica, the goddess similarly appears between four horses, with two on each side. The iconography of a goddess with four horses provides a clear parallel with Anāhitā. Moreover, there is connection between Epona and water: She occurs at a number of spring sites in Gaul. In one relief she appears as a water nymph with horse and water-lily leaf.<sup>80</sup> Epona had still other functions in common with Anāhitā: she was linked to the underworld and thus with regeneration and rebirth, and by extension with water and healing. Other motifs accompanying her are fruits, the dog, and the raven,<sup>81</sup> each connecting her to different functions.

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<sup>77</sup> Kellens 1996.

<sup>78</sup> Gavrilovic 2013.

<sup>79</sup> The relief was kept in the National Museum of Pozarevac where it disappeared (Gavrilovic 2013, p. 251).

<sup>80</sup> Green 1992, p. 17.

<sup>81</sup> Green 1992, p. 18.

All of these goddesses who are associated with water illustrate the fact that water's power and its connection with female deities are very old within the Celtic belief system, and their many similarities with Iranian and Indic examples suggest these associations may go back to proto-Indo-European times. Throughout much of Western Europe (especially in France) the major river names are all feminine.<sup>82</sup> Many of these water goddesses are recorded only in inscriptions, and are often paired with a male deity, offering a further parallel to the pairing of Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā with Miθra as represented and documented in Iranian inscriptions such as those of Artaxerxes II (r. 404-358 BCE).

#### 5.2.2.4 The Cult of the Head

The shrine of Sequana, goddess of the river Seine in France, was located at the river's source in Burgundy near Dijon.<sup>83</sup> The goddess was envisaged<sup>84</sup>, since she appears as large bronze figure of a goddess with a diadem standing in a boat. Several votive items were dedicated to the goddess, some of them showing her healing function.<sup>85</sup> Over one hundred carvings have been found in the marshes nearby, including a figure of Sequana herself as well as many others representing human heads. A considerable number of these, which appear to have been votive offerings in a religious or a ritual context, were found at the source of the Seine; carvings of human heads have been found there as well, possibly represent a method to honoring the goddess.<sup>86</sup> This leads us to another point about the warlike function of some Celtic goddesses, which is that the Celtic "cult of the head" or "cult of the severed head" offering the head as

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<sup>82</sup> Cunliffe 1997, p. 199.

<sup>83</sup> Cunliffe 1997, p. 199.

<sup>84</sup> Green 1992, p. 40.

<sup>85</sup> Including a pot filled of silver and bronze models of organs possibly to be healed by Sequana. (See Green 1992, p. 40.)

<sup>86</sup> Davidson 1987, p. 17.

sacrifice to their deities.<sup>87</sup> The Celts considered the head to be the source of body-life (what we might call the “soul”) and the power-center for the humans.<sup>88</sup> The head was thus identified with the source and origin of all of the waters, river-streams and lakes, and these headwater locations were usually considered as sacred. Human skulls have been discovered at a number of wells and springs, leading to speculation that there may have been a connection between the head cult and the sacred waters. Accordingly, the Celts’ sacrifices and offerings to the water goddesses (e.g., the Irish goddess Brigit, Coventina, etc.) sometimes included actual human heads.<sup>89</sup> The Iranians, as we shall see below, had the same practice.

Collecting the heads of slain enemies was believed to enable the warriors to absorb their power. Heads severed in battle seem to have been dedicated to goddesses with warlike functions. Evidence of this kind of sacrificial ritual has been found from the Roquepertuse (Bouches-du-Rhône) and Entremont near Aix-en-Provence, as well as in a large-scale excavation of the hill fort of Danebury in central Britain. Many complete human bodies have been found as well, along with both severed human heads and head-shaped carvings.<sup>90</sup> In the caves at Wookey Hole where the River Axe rises, fourteen skulls with no bodies have been found.<sup>91</sup> The human head also played a role in the cult of the Coventina, the river and water goddess described above, whose well is adjacent to a Mithraeum in Northumberland, England,<sup>92</sup> suggesting that the cult of the head was not without significance to worshippers of Coventina. Water also had connection to the Celtic “cult of head”. Severed heads were among the many offerings left at the bottoms of lakes.<sup>93</sup>

A strikingly similar phenomenon is found in ancient Iran, where for example the Sāsānian king Ardešīr demonstrated his devotion to Anāhitā by sending the severed heads of defeated

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<sup>87</sup> Green 2004, p. 47.

<sup>88</sup> MacLeod 2011, p. 17; Green 1993; Ross 2005.

<sup>89</sup> Allason-Jones and McKay 1985, p. 117.

<sup>90</sup> Cunliffe 1997, p. 196.

<sup>91</sup> Bradley 2012, p. 44.

<sup>92</sup> Allason-Jones and McKay 1985, p. 10.

<sup>93</sup> Media, p. 194.

enemies to her temple at Eṣṭaxr.<sup>94</sup> Two centuries later, in 430 C.E., the severed heads of Christian martyrs were exposed there, demonstrating the continuity of this tradition.<sup>95</sup> The Iranian form of the “head cult” clearly emphasizes Anāhitā’s warrior aspect. (This will be discussed more fully in Chapter Six.) The close similarity between these rituals in Europe and Iran can hardly be accidental, and must point to a common origin.

### 5.3 Slavic

The word *bog*, meaning “god” in various Slavic languages, is a loan from the Iranian *baga-* and this fact should remind us of the longstanding geographical and cultural proximity between Slavs and Iranians throughout history.

Mokosha (the patron of horses) was a pagan Slavic-Ukrainian goddess who was associated with water. Mokosha, however (who may have been originally a goddess of the Finno-Ugric tribes<sup>96</sup>), was first and foremost an earth goddess, called “Moist Mother Earth.” Her name is derived from the Slavic root (*mokryi/\*mok*) “moist” or “wet”,<sup>97</sup> which suggests her connection with water and moisture. She ruled over fertility and possessed all the aspects of a mother-goddess.<sup>98</sup> She also was associated with childbirth, as well as with warriors; the horse was sacred to her. Although her cult was more prevalent in the north, she left her mark on all of the Russian-inhabited lands. Her multiple functions are common between most Indo-European mother goddesses, who were associated with water and fertility, women and childbirth, as well as with warriors.

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<sup>94</sup> Al-Ṭabarī (224–310 AH; 839–923 AD) 1999, p. 15; also Nöldeke 1973, p. 17.

<sup>95</sup> Nöldeke 1973, p. 4, n. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Hubbs 1993, p. 20.

<sup>97</sup> Tatár 2007; also A. Kernd’l et al. 1961.

<sup>98</sup> Hubbs 1993, p. 20.

Mokosha's great feast was held in the beginning of autumn.<sup>99</sup> In Ukraine, in late August every year it was customary for locals to honor her by swimming in a river to cleanse themselves of evil; this practice continued after the introduction of Christianity. Her cult continued among Slavic women up to the nineteenth century.<sup>100</sup>

### 5.3.1 Non-Indo-European Neighbors of the Slavs

Some of the Finno-Ugric peoples, who are northern non-Indo-European neighbors to the Slavs, had a water goddess who shared some similarities with Indo-European river goddesses. For example, in Western Russia, the Mordvins worshipped Ved'ava, a "water mother" goddess who ruled the waters. Although Ved'ava was originally related to fertility, over time she came to be associated with drowning, and was envisioned as a mermaid; she was thus perceived as a sign of misfortune.<sup>101</sup>

As the Water Mother, Ved'ava provided life-giving moisture: she was the protector of love, marriage and childbirth. Family, calendar and especially wedding traditions refer to her.<sup>102</sup> A ritual considered integral to the marriage ceremony was to immerse the bride in water: the bride was taken to the river directly from the nuptial bed. The Mordvins believed that this ritual would assist in the delivery of children. We may recall, for example, that according to Zoroastrian belief three maids will swim in a lake containing Zoroaster's sperm, thereby becoming impregnated so as to give birth to three future saviours. Also, like Daēnā, Ved'ava could appear either as a young girl (naked or clothed) with long loose hair, or as a dreadful woman with hanging breasts.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ivanits 1992, p. 16.

<sup>100</sup> Hubbs 1993, p. 20.

<sup>101</sup> Doniger 1999, p. 1129.

<sup>102</sup> Yurchenkova 2011.

<sup>103</sup> Yurchenkova 2011, pp. 173-180.

Another striking parallel connecting Anāhitā with non-Indo-Europeans of the Ural region is found among certain Ugric peoples. As noted by Kuz'mina, they have a river goddess who, like Anāhitā, wears clothing made from beaver-skins.<sup>104</sup> Since the proto-Indo-Iranians inhabited the southern Urals during the late third and early second millennia BCE, a connection between the water goddess in the two cultures seems likely.

#### 5.4 Armenian

The Armenians, an Indo-European people who have long inhabited the southern Caucasus and western Anatolia, have undergone centuries if not millennia of influences from their Iranian neighbors. It appears that prior to their conversion to Christianity in the early fourth century, the religion of the Armenians was permeated with Zoroastrian features probably absorbed by them sometime during the Achaemenid period. Zoroastrian elements remain present in Armenian culture up to the present day.

Like the Iranians, the Armenians seemed to have referred to adherents of Zoroastrianism as “Mazdā-worshippers”. Aramazd (a loan form from Parthian) was the principal deity of pre-Christian Armenia.<sup>105</sup> They also worshipped a goddess named Anahit (*bānūg*, “the Lady”), a fertility and healing goddess clearly derived from the Iranian Anāhitā. In addition, the Armenians worshipped familiar Iranian deities such as Mihr (Miθra), Spantaramet (Sepanta-armaiti), and Nanē (Nanai/Inanna). At the same time, the Armenian pantheon differed somewhat from that of the Iranians.

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<sup>104</sup> Kuz'mina 2007, p. 105.

<sup>105</sup> Russell 1986.



### 5.4.1 Anahit

Influenced by the other goddesses in the area, the Armenian Anahit was very important and popular, like her Iranian peer Anāhitā, with many temples dedicated to her. She was considered to be the daughter of Aramazd (the Armenian corruption of Ahura-Mazdā). Recalling many other Indo-European water goddesses who were associated with springs, on the slopes of Mt. Ararat there is a spring called *Anahtakan albiwr*, “spring of Anāhīd,” an identification that remains up to the present day.<sup>106</sup> Thus, ancient Armenian religion preserved in their beliefs about Anahit what was likely a proto-Indo-European association between a water goddess and healing. Anahit is also associated with Armenian temples built high in the mountains.

According to Greek historians such as Strabo, there existed some ceremonies connected with Anahit that involved sacred prostitution.<sup>107</sup> Tiridates III, before his conversion to Christianity, prayed officially to the triad Aramazd-Anahit-Vahagn (Վառաժրայնա). He specifically prayed to “the great lady Anahit . . . the benefactress of the whole human race, mother of all knowledge, daughter of the great Aramazd”.<sup>108</sup>

After Aramazd, Anahit was the most important deity of Armenia. As in western Iran, she seems to have held a special place in the hearts of the common people. She was referred to as “the Glory,” “the Great Queen,” or “the Lady”. Unlike the Iranians, Armenians made statues of their deities, probably a sign of Hellenistic influence.<sup>109</sup> The symbol of ancient Armenian medicine was the head of the bronze gilded statue of Anahit, currently in the British Museum.<sup>110</sup> She was also called the “one born of gold” or the “golden-mother”, perhaps because her statues were made from solid gold in Erēz, which was the main center for her cult.<sup>111</sup> At other Armenian cult centres

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<sup>106</sup> Russell 1987, p. 250.

<sup>107</sup> Strabo 2014, 12.3.

<sup>108</sup> Chaumont 1989.

<sup>109</sup> Russell 1986.

<sup>110</sup> Russell 1986.

<sup>111</sup> Chaumont 1986.

associated with the god Vahagn and the goddess Astlik, Anahit was worshiped in the guise of a golden idol apparently known as *oskemayr*, “the Golden Mother”.<sup>112</sup>

Anahit was referred to as the “noble Lady and mother of all knowledge, daughter of the great and mighty Aramazd.”<sup>113</sup> There are references to offerings at her altars, and in 36 BCE one of the Roman commander Mark Antony’s soldiers carried off the famous gold statue of her from the temple at Erēz. The bronze head mentioned above, originally discovered at Satala, is similar to that of the Greek Aphrodite, recalling that according to Classical sources all statues in Armenia were made by Greek craftsmen.<sup>114</sup>

Although Armenian rituals connect Anahit with water, unlike in Iran she does not appear to have been connected to support warriors. This difference can be explained by the theory that Anāhitā’s martial functions might have been a later Mesopotamian influence accruing to the Iranian goddess from Inanna/Ištar, and furthermore suggests that the Armenians had already adopted her prior to that time. The Armenians seem rather to have adopted the Mesopotamian martial goddess as a distinct figure in her own right.

#### 5.4.2 Nanē and Astlik

It is noteworthy that whereas in western Iran Anāhitā seems to have become conflated with the Mesopotamian goddess Inanna/Ištar, in the Armenian pantheon Anahit is distinct from Nanē, the Armenian version of the Sumerian Inanna. In contrast to the Iranian case, in Armenia the functions of the two goddesses were not conflated, and each had her separate role. At the same time, the Armenian Nanē absorbed some of the functions of another Iranian goddess, Aši. The

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<sup>112</sup> Chaumont 1989.

<sup>113</sup> Boyce 1986.

<sup>114</sup> Boyce 1986.

relationship between Anahit and Nanē was mythologized by the Armenians as the two being “daughters” of Aramazd.<sup>115</sup>

In Hellenistic times the Armenians identified Nanē with Athena, perhaps indicating that she had come to be seen as austere and warlike. It is possible that the Armenians may have originally had a single goddess possessing a range of functions—love, fertility, beauty, motherhood, and war—which were later divided between different goddesses. Anahit acquired the functions of healing and motherhood, and Nanē those of war, while another goddess, Astghik or Astlik, who was identified with Aphrodite and Ištar, became the goddess of love and beauty.

Astlik means “little star” (*astl*, “star” + “ik,” the diminutive suffix).<sup>116</sup> This goddess probably has ancient Indo-European roots. Vahagn, the Armenian version of the Iranian Vərəθraγna, was her lover. In addition to her astral nature, Astlik was also connected with water and springs, and some water rituals were related to her. During the nineteenth century an Armenian priest recorded a legend according to which at the source of the Euphrates in the mountains there is a pool where Astlik bathes. Young men used to climb and light a fire in order to behold the beauty of the naked goddess, and this is why the waters send up a mist there to shield her from their prying eyes.<sup>117</sup> Although this story indicates Astlik’s possible Mesopotamian roots, the presence of the Euphrates and a pool at its source also connects her to water and water rituals. A closely related myth exists today among the Iranian-speaking Zaza of Bingöl in eastern Turkey.<sup>118</sup>

Armenians today have preserved an ancient ritual called Vardavar in which people sprinkle water on each other, echoing similar *āb-pāšī* rituals that survive in contemporary Iran. In the past this ritual was devoted either to Anahit or to Astlik. Russell reports that it was believed by the

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<sup>115</sup> Russell 1987a, p. 241.

<sup>116</sup> Bakuran 2014, p. 247.

<sup>117</sup> Russell 1987a, p. 214. Also see Bakuran 2014, p. 248.

<sup>118</sup> This information was provided by Zaza informants in October 2014 (personal communication).

inhabitants of the region that on the morning of Vardavar Anahit bathed in a place where two rivers meet, and that a similar story exists about Astlik.<sup>119</sup> Until a century ago, during this festival the Armenians of Dersim, Turkey slaughtered cattle bearing the brand of a star or half moon; it is thus possible that Anahit absorbed these cult symbols from the Mesopotamian goddess Ištar. Chaumont, on the other hand, considers that Astlik is the “local equivalent of Aphrodite”,<sup>120</sup> but the two assertions are not mutually exclusive.

If we accept that the sky light was considered as a personification of Astlik—and we should recall that Anāhitā is also a celestial river, the Milky Way, and was later identified with the planet Venus—and also accept Astlik’s water-related features, then it is not difficult to find a connection between her and Anāhitā. Actually, it seems that the Armenian Anahit, especially in her function as a healer goddess, and Astlik both possessed some of Anāhitā’s characteristics; in fact, each of the three major Armenian goddesses have some functions and rituals in common with her.

#### 5.4.3 Sandaramet (Spandaramet) and Dainanazdayašniš

The Avestan female deities Spənta Ārmaiti and Daēnā both appear in Armenian forms during the pre-Christian period. The Aramaic Arebsun inscriptions from late Achaemenid Cappadocia refer to Dainanazdayašniš as the wife of the god Bel.<sup>121</sup> The fifth-century CE Armenian historian Yeghishe Vardapet refers to the Aməša Spəntas as “adjutant gods” (*hamharz astuatsk’*), which raises the question of whether in looking at Armenian goddesses and their functions we may in fact be dealing with a “complex” of goddesses, in which functions between them may appear to overlap simply because on some level they represent a divine unity.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Russell 1987a, p. 252.

<sup>120</sup> Chaumont 1986.

<sup>121</sup> Russell 2004, p. 383.

<sup>122</sup> Suggested by James R. Russell, personal communication, 15 March 2015.

It is also possible to detect survivals of Anāhitā and other pre-Christian goddesses in later Armenian Christianity. For example, the tenth-century *Book of Lamentations* by St. Gregory of Narek refers to the Virgin Mary as *barjr*, “lofty,” recalling Anāhitā’s cognate epithet *bərəzaitī*.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, in the Armenian epic tradition the Holy Virgin of Marut’a possesses a shrine both on top of a mountain *and* under water.<sup>124</sup> Valentina Calzolari has identified a strong substrate of Anāhitā’s cult in that of the Armenian saint Thekla of Iconium, who was a close associate of St. Paul.<sup>125</sup>

## 5.5 Indo-Iranian

The grouping of Indo-European tribes collectively known as Indo-Iranian began moving southwards from east of the Ural Mountains presumably from the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE onwards. Some continued on to the Indian subcontinent, bringing with them the culture known from the Rig Vedā, while others pushed southwestwards onto the Iranian plateau and eventually to the edges of the densely-populated Mesopotamian plain.

According to the analysis of Georges Dumézil (which continues to be a matter of debate among scholars), the Indo-Iranian pantheon of deities and their relationships to humans reflects the tripartite class structure of Indo-European society—priests/rulers, warriors, and producers—with each class being associated with a particular group of deities.<sup>126</sup> The tripartite pantheon is predominantly male. Goddesses are most frequently associated with the third function, especially fertility, but some “synthesize” with other deities to cover all three functions. Thus, in Dumézil’s view, goddesses typically have a “base” in the third function, but have “extensions” into the other

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<sup>123</sup> I am grateful to James R. Russell for providing this observation (personal communication, 15 March 2015).

<sup>124</sup> Russell 2007.

<sup>125</sup> Calzolari 2017.

<sup>126</sup> Dumézil 1968-73; Belier, 1997, p. 10.

two.<sup>127</sup>

Two groups of Indo-Iranian deities are common to the Indian (Vedic) and Iranian (Avestic) traditions; however, in each of the two their status is inverted. One is the *devas* (Skt) or *daēuvas* (Av), who are viewed positively in the Vedas but considered as false deities/demons in the Avesta. The other is the *asuras* (Skt) or *ahuras* (Av), seen negatively in the Vedas but positively in the Avesta. Exactly how this inversion came about remains a matter of speculation and controversy among scholars. In the Iranian pantheon the main deities, including Anāhitā, belong to the *ahuras* group. As Hintze points out, “in Old Persian inscriptions and the Gaṇas the cultic competitors of Ahura Mazdā are the *daēuvas* the Iranian equivalent of the Vedic ‘gods’ (*deva-*), rather than Angra Mainyu.”<sup>128</sup> In Vedic mythology the Sky and Earth have *devas* as their children.<sup>129</sup>

In the Vedas, there are two smaller groups of deities related to *asuras*, the Dānavas (the children of Dānu, of dragon-shaped appearance) and the Ādityas (the children of Aditi, whose appearance is like men). Both Dānu and Aditi are feminine, and considered as goddesses. (Recall that Aditi is the mother of the Ādityas, the latter term being derived from Aditi.) Their functions are quite different, however.

Conceived as demonic, the Dānavas bind the cosmic waters, and are connected to cold, darkness and chaos. The demonic dragon, Vṛtra, belongs to the Dānavas. The Ādityas, on the other hand, possess the characteristics of liberation and unbinding, and are connected to light, cosmic water and order (*ṛtá*).<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Belier 1997, pp. 217-227.

<sup>128</sup> Hintze 2014, p. 233.

<sup>129</sup> Wash Edward Hale has argued that in Indo-Iranian religion the term *asura* did not refer to a class of deities, but simply meant “lord” or “ruler” (Hale 1999). According to this argument, the sense of denoting a class of deities would be a later semantic development.

<sup>130</sup> Brown 1978, p. 24.

## 5.5.1 Vedic Deities

### 5.5.1.1 Aditi: The Goddess of Infinite Expanse

Following the linguistic discussion of the term *anāhitā* in the Introduction, it may be noted that an exact parallel exists in Vedic Sanskrit: *aditi*, who, moreover, is also a goddess and is related to concept of the cosmic Waters. She is a universal abstract goddess who represents or is connected to the physical creation.<sup>131</sup> The Vedic term *diti* comes from the root  $\sqrt{dā}$ , meaning “to bind”. *A-diti*, therefore, like *A-nāhitā* (but from a different verbal root), as an adjective means “unbounded” or “boundlessness” and is the expression of the visible Infinite and what is free from bonds.<sup>132</sup> *A-diti* and *A-nāhitā* both are described as “mighty”, a linguistic parallel too striking to be merely coincidental.

As a goddess Aditi seems to have many different aspects. As the mother goddess she is mother of Varuna and Mitra (whose names are paired in many Vedic verses), she was originally distinct from the sky, and was mentioned as being “on the side” of heaven.<sup>133</sup> Aditi seems to be more than an individual goddess: she is a broadly multi-functional figure, and on an abstract level she is equated with aspects of the cosmos. In the *R̥g Veda* she is said to be the “heavens”, and interestingly (like *Anāhitā* but more abstractly) she is also the “mother”, the “father”, and indeed all the gods. She is what has been born and what will be born.<sup>134</sup> Thus, not only is the Vedic Aditi the original mother-goddess, she is mother not just of all the gods, but of everything in creation. She embodied everything: the sky, the earth, the heaven, the waters, and all the other deities.

Aditi’s symbol is a sacred cow, or *dhenu*, which offers “unlimited milk.” This cow is related to the seven basic rivers of Vedic geography. The sacred cow is something in common between the Iranian and Vedic traditions. It is interesting to note that in the Avestan world as

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<sup>131</sup> Pintchman 1994, pp. 32-33.

<sup>132</sup> Kinsley 1988, pp. 9-10.

<sup>133</sup> Müller 1891, v. 1, p. 250.

<sup>134</sup> RV 1.89.19; also Pinchman 1994, p. 33.

represented in the Pahlavi sources— just as in the Zoroastrian Creation myth – there exists a sacred cow, who is killed by Ahriman, but since Ohrmazd had first created the world in spirit form (*mēnog*), he had preserved Creation’s prototypes (*ēwēnag*) in the sun and the moon, which enabled the “soul creation” of the cow to survive within the moon as emphasized by Hintze.<sup>135</sup> The Pahlavi *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* (The Selections of Zādspram) specifies the female gender of this cow:

(WZ 2. 8–9)

*pas ō gāw mad ī ēk- dād.*

*...ud mādag spēd rošn būd čiyōn māh.*

and he (Ahriman) came to the sole-created cow<sup>136</sup> . . .

And it was a female, white and bright like the moon.<sup>137</sup>

The female gender of the sole-created cow is similar to that of the goddess Aditi’s symbol. The common connection between the cow in the Avestan and Vedic traditions, which points to a common origin, can be taken together with the linguistic parallel between the terms *anāhitā* and *aditi* to show that the very notion of a water goddess, along with its various ritual and mythological associations, was itself part of the common Indo-Iranian tradition.

A further point is Aditi also represents “the wide horizon”. She is the goddess of both the past and the future, of life events, the seven dimensions of the universe, and of consciousness. Some sources mention her as the consort of Brahma, though in later Hinduism she was downgraded in importance, taking on the role of guardian and guide.

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<sup>135</sup> Hintze 2005, (pp. 57-66), p. 59.

<sup>136</sup> The sole-created cow (Pahlavi *gāw ī ēk-dād*), is the fifth creation of Ohrmazd according to the Zoroastrian texts (Boyce 1975, pp. 138-140).

<sup>137</sup> Gignoux and Tafazzoli 1993, p. 36.



### 5.5.1.2 Diti

In Vedic mythology Diti is contrasted with Aditi, as a “being without any definite conception”.<sup>138</sup> Originally they may have represented a cosmic pair, with Aditi being the endless sky and Diti the earth. While Aditi is a positive figure, as are her children the Ādityas, Diti and her children are classified as *asuras*, or demons.

Taking into consideration the well-known process by which certain classes of Indo-Iranian deities were downgraded to demonic status while others were elevated as beneficent beings, Diti’s negative status may be a Vedic innovation; accordingly, her being identified as mother to the *asuras* would not have been a bad thing at an earlier time in Indo-Iranian history when those of deities were not seen as demonic. It might even be speculated that the name Aditi did not originally represent Diti’s opposite, but came about through a re-naming process so as to justify the maintaining of rituals devoted to a mother goddess now demoted to a demon.<sup>139</sup> At any rate, the “demonic” children of the *asuras* were broken into two family groups: the children of Dānu, who were called Dānavas, and the children of Diti (Dānu’s sister and sometimes identified with her), who were called Daityas. These two groups do not demonstrate any notable differences.<sup>140</sup>

In several instances, Vṛtra (the personified “dragon” who guarded the waters) is called Dānava, the son of the goddess Dānu who is connected to the sea (RV I.32.9; II.11.10; III.30.8; V.30.4; V.32). Vṛtra is referred both as *āhi-* (Av. *aži-*, “dragon”) and *dāsá-* (Av. *dahāka-*). A passage in the RV (1.32.11) describes the “bound waters” as having Vṛtra-dragon as their

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<sup>138</sup> Müller 1891, p. 256.

<sup>139</sup> The good/evil opposition of two sister goddesses and their offspring recall the Irish myths about the Children of Domnu and the Children of Dānu, mentioned above. An interesting parallel found in the later Persian epic tradition, the good/evil women Sūdābeh and Rūdābeh in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*, will be discussed in Chapter Eleven.

<sup>140</sup> Petrosyan 2007.

husband-guardian; this reflects a widespread and presumably ancient Indo-European myth of a dragon preventing access to a water source.<sup>141</sup>

There may also be a connection between *vaṅhī dāitiiā*, “the (good) Dāityā,” which is the name of a sacred river in the Avesta,<sup>142</sup> and the children of the Vedic Diti, a wife of Kaśyapa, who is sometimes equated with Dānu. Her children are called the Daityas, which might be connected to the name of the river.

According to Gnoli, the name Dāityā is related to religious law. He states that the river has mythical characteristics which can be explained within the framework of the notion of *Airiiana Vaējah*, the traditional concept of a world center with a world mountain, the peak of the Harā (according to the old Iranian cosmology).<sup>143</sup> It was also mythologically recognized as a heavenly river, though perhaps in reality it referred to the Oxus.

The Avestan term *vaṅhuiiā dāitiiā* “of the good Dāiti”, qualifies *airiiana-vaējah*; the entire phrase *airiianəm vaējō vaṅhuiiā dāitiiā*, “the Aryan expanse of the good Dāiti,” is the original name of the district *Airiiana Vaējah*.<sup>144</sup> In the *Bundahišn* the river is described as the “(spiritual) chief of the running waters” (*dāitī rōd tazāgān ābān rad*).<sup>145</sup> This river is also the location where Zaratustra is said to have sacrificed to Anāhitā.

### 5.5.1.3 Dānu

Dānu or *\*deh<sup>a</sup>nu-* the Indo-European river goddess also appears in the Vedas as Dānu whose sons hold back the heavenly waters.<sup>146</sup> Somewhat ambiguously, Diti is either identified with Dānu or the two are described as sisters. Dānu too (and contrary to the term *dānu-* in Indo-

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<sup>141</sup> Schwartz 2012, p. 275.

<sup>142</sup> *Videvdāt* I.3.

<sup>143</sup> Gnoli 1993.

<sup>144</sup> Benveniste 1933-35.

<sup>145</sup> Bn XVII.17.14; Pakzad 2005, p. 224.

<sup>146</sup> Mallory and Adams 2006, p. 434.

European myth) is considered to be a demonic goddess in the Vedic texts (as the mother of the dragon Vṛtra). From this Dānu there is the derivative Dāvana, again meaning “demon”. When and why the demons conquered by Indra came to be called Dānu is not clear,<sup>147</sup> and the meaning of the term Dānu is even less so. It has been suggested that it derives from a root meaning “to cut” or “to drip”; the second meaning could be more connected to the Indo-European *dānu-* and less to the Vedic goddess. However, Brown argues that from the root  $\sqrt{dha}$ , Dānu could mean “wise or powerful”, “bondage”, or “restraint”,<sup>148</sup> which fits precisely with Dānu’s function.<sup>149</sup> It may be that there are two distinct meanings for the word: “good water”, derived from *\*dānu-* (water or rain), and the second from *\*dānú-* (giving).<sup>150</sup>

Diti’s children, the Daityas, and those of Dānu, the Dānavas, were the two races of demonic *asuras*; the Dānavas, however, are divided into good and bad. One of the Dānavas mentioned in the Rig Veda (I.32.9) is Vṛtra, the demonic serpent-dragon who is killed by the god Indra. One can see a connection here between Dānu, now a demon but originally a water goddess, and the proto-Indo-European myth of the hero who kills the serpent guarding the water source.<sup>151</sup> (The relevance to Anāhitā will be discussed in Chapter Eight.)

A number of other elements in the Rig Veda indicate that Dānu was not always a demonic figure, and that at least the term *dānū-* itself retained a positive meaning. Mitra-Varuna and the Asvins are said to be *srprá-dānū* (RV VIII.25.5-6). The Asvins are called *dānūnaspati*, “lords of Dānuna” (RV VIII.8.16). The god Soma is also called *dānūda* and *dānūpinva*, “giving *dānū*” or “overflowing with *dānū*” (RV IX.97.23). A number of terms are derived from Dānu: “*dānukitra*”, for example, applied to the dawn, “water of the clouds”, which connects Dānu with water or with rivers. Soma, the deity and sacred beverage, is referred to as “*danuda*” and “*danupinva*”, again

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<sup>147</sup> Müller 1891, p. 114.

<sup>148</sup> Müller 1891, p. 115.

<sup>149</sup> Brown 1978, p. 25.

<sup>150</sup> Müller 1891, p. 113.

<sup>151</sup> Watkins 2005.

connecting Danu to water/liquid (RV IX.97.23). There is thus hardly any doubt that from the beginning *dānu-* had some strong conceptual connection with water or liquid.<sup>152</sup> We may note that the word exists in the Avesta (as well as throughout Europe, as previously mentioned) as a river, suggesting that *dānu-*, like *asura-*, was originally a positive word among the Indo-Europeans.

The Sanskrit term *su-dānava-* has been translated as “good (or bounteous) water”, and *su-dānu-* as “good river”. Also the word *su- dānu-* is applied to various deities in the sense of “bounteous” or “wise”.<sup>153</sup> The Vishvedevas—universal deities conceived negatively—are called *su-dānavas* (RV VIII.83.6, 8, 9), as are the Ādityas (RV VIII.67.16), Vishnu (RV VIII.24.12), and the Aśvins (RV I.117.10, 24). The term also occurs in a hymn to Sārasvatī (RV VII.96.4). In the Rig Veda, positive references to the *Su-dānavas* are far more frequent than negative references to *danava* or *Sadānuvās*.<sup>154</sup> The Sanskritic connection may survive on the Hindu island of Bali in Indonesia, where there is a temple in Pura Ulun Dānu in Bratan which is dedicated to Dānu.

#### 5.5.1.4 Sārasvatī

Many of the rivers in ancient India were considered sacred, and all of the holy rivers were worshiped in Vedic mythology. Being identified with Anāhitā on a number of grounds,<sup>155</sup> Sārasvatī is one of the most notable. Related to fertility, she is hailed both as a divinity and as the mythical river, which she personifies, exactly like Anāhitā. In the Rig Veda her movement is described as that of a chariot; she is “the greatest of all the waters” (RV VIII, 95, 1-2) and “the

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<sup>152</sup> Darmesteter also defines the word *dānu* as “water/river” (Müller 1891, p. 116).

<sup>153</sup> Müller 1891, p. 114.

<sup>154</sup> Lubotsky 2002, p. 11.

<sup>155</sup> Lommel 1954.

mother of all rivers” (RV VIII,36, 6).<sup>156</sup> Her name probably means “to flow; she who has flow” or “she who possesses waters.”<sup>157</sup> Thus, she was presumably at first associated with flowing water; at some later time, she came also to be associated with knowledge and wisdom, and her water origin was forgotten.

As the goddess of wisdom *Sárasvatī* was a very powerful deity, a warrior, believed to protect and support her devotees by annihilating their enemies. She is represented as a beautiful young woman, with four arms, or occasionally with two arms, seated on a lotus which, significantly, is a water based plant. She is usually depicted near a flowing river, further evidence of her origin as a river goddess. It is likely that *Sárasvatī* was originally the name of one of the branches of the river *Sind* (the sky/heaven river), now disappeared; it has also been suggested that she is to be identified with the Ganges, or perhaps a small but very holy river in *Madhyadeśa*.<sup>158</sup> Her Iranian equivalent is *Harahvatī* (Av. *Haraxvaitī*), which was applied to a region with various rivers.<sup>159</sup>

She later surpasses all other rivers, and like *Anāhitā* was said to flow from the mountains down to the sea. In other verses she is called to descend from the sky, again like *Anāhitā*.<sup>160</sup> *Bahar* states that *Sárasvatī* (like *Anāhitā*) may have some connection with *Ištar*, since apparently people performed sacrificial ceremonies around the river and prepared a holy fire to present to the deity *Agni* (fire).<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Müller 1891, p. 61.

<sup>157</sup> Boyce et al., “*Anāhīd*.”

<sup>158</sup> Boyce 1986.

<sup>159</sup> In Boyce’s words, “*Harahvatī* seems to have been the personification of a great mythical river which plunges down from Mt. *Harā* into the sea *Vourukaša* and is the source of all the waters of the world” (Boyce 1986).

<sup>160</sup> Wilkins 1973, p. 71.

<sup>161</sup> *Bahār* 1994, p. 200.

## 5.6 Conclusions

Almost all of the female deities discussed in this chapter are directly or indirectly associated with water. They thus held central and vital roles in their respective societies given the vital importance of water for human survival; even the earth (which was also most often associated with a female deity) could not be fertile without water. Water in all its forms (river, lake, streams, well, etc.) was considered as the source of the life, and the water deity followed the same concept. Fertility and healing were common functions of water goddesses; however, a vague link between these goddesses and death and the underworld sometimes existed as well. This could be connected to the uncontrolled and sometimes destructive power of water in its more violent forms, such as floods which cause destruction and drowning, or simply because water often disappears underground. In this way water represented the threshold between life and death, suggesting that water goddesses, in contrast to other kinds of more specialized deities, were connected with the complete circle of life.

Many (or perhaps even all) of the rivers, lakes, and streams in ancient Europe, India and Iran were considered sacred, and all of the sacred water and watery places were worshiped according to the mythologies preserved throughout these regions. Lakes, rivers, and springs were therefore chosen as the sites of important sanctuaries and rituals, which were most often identified with a female deity. River goddesses, who also were connected with fertility, were hailed both as divinities and as the mythical river(s) which they personified.

The Indo-European river goddess Dānu (*\*Deh<sup>a</sup>nu-*), the Iranian river-lake deity Anāhitā, the Vedic Sārasvatī, the Celtic Sequana, Verbeia, and Shannon and the Irish Boann are merely some of the best-known examples of these water goddesses. The compatibility of their shared functions is easy to reconcile with the practices and worldview found in Iranian mythology, specifically with the goddess Anāhitā. All of these ancient goddesses (Anāhitā included) were

associated with rivers, springs, and lakes, and were associated with similar functions and water-based rituals. These functions included fertility and healing, and streams, rivers and lakes that were considered to be sacred were believed to ensure both.

The commonalities and similarities between these various water goddesses express themselves in a variety of ways. One is through the etymology of their names or epithets. As noted, the Indo-European root *\*dā-* (“to flow, flowing,”) and its suffixed derivative *\*dānu-*, meaning “river”, exists in Avestan as *dānu-* “river, stream”. According to the Iranian cosmic framework, Anāhitā as a river is the ultimate source of all watercourses. She is originally a heavenly river symbolized by the Milky Way (as will be discussed in the following chapter), which flows down from a high mountain range. Similarly, Celtic mythology mentions the “heavenly water” which floods downward.<sup>162</sup> Dānu is one such watercourse flowing down from heaven; Anāhitā is described in exactly the same way.

Related to the flow of the river is the sense that the water is “unbound”. The morphological component “*hi-*” in the name Anāhitā means “to bind.” Thus, “*hita-*” is a verbal adjective meaning “bound.” *Anāhitā*, therefore, means, “unbound [to anything].”<sup>163</sup> One may compare this with Aditi in Vedic Sanskrit, where the term *diti* comes from the root  $\sqrt{dā}$ , meaning “to bind”. Thus, while the two are derived from different verbal roots, their semantic meaning is the same: *Aditi*, like *Anāhitā*, means “the unbound”.

As has been shown, these connections extend beyond proper names and include epithets as well. The example has been given of the Celtic goddess Brigantia (*\*brigant*, “high person”, *\*bhṛḡh̥ -ṇt-ī*, “(the) eminent”)<sup>164</sup> and the Avestan adjective *bərəzaitī-*, meaning “high, lofty,” which is one of Anāhitā’s most common epithets.

Connections among the water goddesses can also be discerned through the rituals

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<sup>162</sup> Ellis 2002, p. 25.

<sup>163</sup> Kellens 2002-03, p. 323; also Skjærvø 2013a, p. 114.

<sup>164</sup> Miller 2012, p. 18.

associated with them. In most cases, sacrifices to them were offered on the banks of rivers, streams or other watery places. Often, offerings were thrown directly into the water. In many cases these offerings were items connected with war, suggesting that the warrior classes of these ancient societies relied on the support and protection of a water goddess. In support of this contention, warriors are frequently mentioned in inscriptions and hymns devoted to these water goddesses.

Yet even more than war, these goddesses were associated with fertility and childbirth. The Iranian Anāhitā and the Celtic Coventina are good examples of this. It is surely not accidental that for each of these goddesses physical remains of temples exist today where one can identify a ritual pairing with the martial deity Mithra/Mithras.

Indeed, water goddesses represented so many different aspects of life that they commonly absorbed additional functions over time. In some cases, notably those of Brigantia and Anāhitā, these additional functions came eventually to overshadow and even obscure the goddess's original nature and function as a water deity.

This accumulation of functions could lead, as it did in the cases of both Brigantia and Anāhitā, to their coming to encompass all three of the major social castes—priests, warriors, and “producers”—among their devotees. In this way, goddesses such as Brigantia and Anāhitā developed in ways that gave them almost universal importance across ancient society, relied upon by the ruling class to maintain their rule, the warriors for victory in battle, and by “producers” for ensuring fertility and health.

Finally, parallels among goddesses including Brigantia, Sequana and Anāhitā suggest the existence of a “cult of the head” with roots in the pagan age. As late as the historical period, Ardešīr demonstrated his devotion to Anāhitā by sending the severed heads of defeated enemies to



her temple at Eṣṭaxr.<sup>165</sup> This recorded fact probably followed an earlier existing tradition and may have been one of the factors uniting the ancient water goddesses.

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<sup>165</sup> Nöldeke 1973, p. 17.

## Chapter Six

### Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā in the Avesta

The *Yašts* (a Middle Persian term derived from the Avestan verb *yaz-* “to worship ritually”/Av. *yazata-* “worshipped”), which preserve the Young Avestan oral tradition, are a collection of twenty-one devotional hymns to the various Iranian divinities (*yazatas*), dating back to approximately 1000-600 BCE.<sup>166</sup>

The most extensive appearance of *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* in the Zoroastrian texts is found in the fifth *Yašt*, the *Ābān Yašt*, which is an entire Avestan hymn devoted to her. A part of the Avestan sacrificial liturgy, the *Ābān Yašt* has 30 sections or *karde* and 133 stanzas, making it the third longest *Yašt* after the *Farwardīn Yašt* and the *Mihr Yašt*. The hymn (like much of the Avesta) is a dialogue between Ahura Mazdā and Zaraθuštra; each section begins with the refrain “O Spitama Zaraθuštra, may you sacrifice to her, *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā*.” The fifth *Yašt* is especially remarkable due to its richly descriptive verses of the Iranian goddess; it also includes some legendary epic material from ancient times. Although some of the material in the *Ābān Yašt* seems to be extremely archaic while parts might have been borrowed from other *Yašts*,<sup>167</sup> yet the whole hymn displays a masterful harmony of content.

One of the important features of the *Ābān Yašt* is that it contains the names of legendary figures from Iranian myths, including some negative figures who sacrifice to the goddess to obtain her support. Fraŋrasiian, Aži-Dahāka, Vaēsakaiia, and Vaŋdarəmainiš are the negative figures that sacrifice to Anāhitā but without receiving her support. The fact that these negative figures—

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<sup>166</sup> The crystalization of the Young Avestan text occurred sometime between 600-500 BCE (Skjaervø 2003-04, p. 37).

<sup>167</sup> Boyce 1982.

specifically Fraŋrasiian and Aži-Dahāka—are said to sacrifice to her is a key point for our discussion. This will be discussed further below and in Chapters Eight and Eleven.

There are similarities between some stanzas of the *Ābān Yašt* (102-127-130) and the *Ard Yašt* or *Aši Yašt* (6-11), which is devoted to the goddess Aši. Boyce states that “Linguistically Arəduuī Sūrā’s hymn appears older than Aši’s Yt. 17, which is short and badly preserved; and so it has been assumed that, where there are verses in common, it was Aši who was the borrower.” She goes on to note, however, that “In a fluid oral literature ... such criteria cannot be relied upon.”<sup>168</sup>

Skjærvø has proposed a schematic model of how the individual Yašts were structured.<sup>169</sup> Following this model, one may note the wide variety of material contained within the *Ābān Yašt*. Dividing the hymn’s content thematically in this way can help us to separate Anāhitā’s various functions in order, and thus lead us to analyze her multi-functional characteristics as will be discussed below.

The first section of the hymn (verses 1-5) serves as a kind of introduction to Anāhitā, describing her various functions. Anāhitā is first described as a water goddess with her fertility functions, easing childbirth, assuring timely lactation, and purifying men’s sperm and the woman’s womb. She increases power and wealth, specifically land and cattle.

Subsequent verses describe Anāhitā as a beautiful, powerful deity, who is transformed into a waterfall-river flowing down from a high mountain range (Yt. 5. 2, 4, 7, 15, 78, 96, 102). These paragraphs contain many visually rich scenes. Elsewhere, she is described as a powerful goddess riding her chariot (Yt. 5. 11, 13).

The second section of the hymn (Yt 5. 21-83) mentions many legendary and mythological figures, positive or negative, who worship Anāhitā and receive or do not receive her honor and her

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<sup>168</sup> Boyce et al. 1986.

<sup>169</sup> Skjærvø 1994. He gives the general structure on p. 211, and applies it to the *Ābān Yašt* specifically on pp. 213-15.

support. The next section (Yt 5. 85-88) is about the influence and importance of Anāhitā's role among different groups of people (priests, warriors, and ordinary people especially young women) and the ways that she should be worshipped by each of them. It also emphasizes her role in protecting the world. Stanzas 104 -118 read like a continuation of sections (Yt 5. 21-83), mentioning some other mythological figures (positive or negative), including Zaraθuštra, and their sacrifices to Anāhitā. Skjærvø, in his compositional taxonomy of the Avestan hymns, places these stanzas within his "Legendary section".<sup>170</sup>

The last sections of the *Ābān Yašt* (Yt 5. 120-129) deal once again with her physical description, which is given with great precision: she is a powerful deity who rides her chariot by controlling four white horses, representing the rain, wind, clouds, and hail – the most uncontrolled phenomena of nature, all connected to Anāhitā's role as a water goddess. Her beauty is also emphasized, including her clothes, shoes, and her crown, which are all described with precision and detail. The *Ābān Yašt* combines different divine aspects—likely acquired by the goddess at different stages in her development—re-fashioning her into an important Zoroastrian deity created by Ahura Mazdā.

In the present work I have relied primarily on Skjærvø's translation of the *Ābān Yašt* (2007, pp. 70-82), comparing it with the translations of Oettinger (1983), Malandra (1983), and Dustkhāh (1991). Based on these comparisons and my own reading of the original text (using the transcription provided by the Titus website<sup>171</sup>), I have occasionally modified Skjærvø's translation where I have felt it necessary to do so. I have referred to these authors and have explained the modifications, where necessary, in the footnotes.

The Avestan texts have most often been studied by linguists specializing in ancient Iranian languages. My approach, while making extensive and at times critical use of theirs, is different. As

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<sup>170</sup> Skjærvø 1994, p. 215.

<sup>171</sup> <<http://titus.unirankfurt.de/indexe.htm?/texte/texte2.htm>>

a scholar of mythology (and a visual artist), my attention to linguistic analysis and debates is not treated as an end in itself, but rather as a means to further my own goal of better understanding the origins of Anāhitā as an Indo-European water deity, her transformations over time, and her various portrayals in the evolving historical contexts of Iranian societies. I have a number of specific questions about Anāhitā (which I have raised in the Introduction), which I seek to illuminate through analysis of the texts. Since my questions are primarily mythological rather than linguistic ones, I am less concerned with challenging or proposing alternative explanations to the work of linguists—even if I do so in certain cases—than I am with understanding Anāhitā’s place in Iranian mythology.

For example, I have searched the Avestan texts for passages that could shed light on Anāhitā’s possible origin as an Indo-European water deity, focusing on her water origin, her healing function, and even her beaver-skin clothing. Such passages can be used to demonstrate similarities with other Indo-European goddesses, as discussed in Chapter Five. At the same time, the description of her crown, which bears similarity to that of Ištar (including an eight-pointed star), suggests Anāhitā’s assimilation of features from non-Iranian, Mesopotamian goddess(es), a discussion that will be continued in Chapter Ten. I will also suggest the possibility of linking Anāhitā’s cult to that of the “*daēuua*-worshippers” (*Ābān Yašt* 94).

In sum, my approach to the text in this chapter will centre upon reconstructing Anāhitā’s mythological image and answering the questions that have been put forward in the Introduction.

## 6.1 Anāhitā’s Name: A Linguistic Analysis

Anāhitā appears in the Avesta as *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā*, which is a series of three adjectives, grammatically feminine. Thus, her Avestan nomenclature is a grouping of epithets rather than a proper name as such. We should also note that the adjective *anāhitā* is elsewhere applied to some other deities, a point that will be discussed below.

### 6.1.1 *Arəduuī*

The first component of this compound name, *arəduuī-*, was rendered as “moist” by Johansson in 1893.<sup>172</sup> The notion of “wetness” was taken up by Bartholomae and has remained popular among many scholars ever since. The epithet *arəduuī-*, accordingly, would literally mean “the moist one.” This translation, however, has not been universally accepted. Benveniste suggested that *Arəduuī* was the goddess’s original name.<sup>173</sup> Lommel, on the other hand, proposed that the adjective *arəduuī-* was originally applied to *Sárasvatī*, the sacred river in Vedic mythology who is related to *Anāhitā*; according to him, the goddess’s proper name would have been \**Harahvatī*.<sup>174</sup> According to this model of transition, *Sárasvatī* as the sacred river was forgotten but her epithet, *arəduuī-*, remained.<sup>175</sup> As Panaino notes in this regard:

We may recall that both the warlike and fertility functions of *Ištar* are present in the Avestan goddess, who, in her turn, possibly had assumed the characteristics of an old Iranian divinity (the Heavenly River, i.e., Ir. \**Harahvatī*, given to a region rich in rivers, Av. *Haraxvaitī-*, OPers. *Hara(h)uvati-*, Greek *Arachosia*); originally \**Harahvatī* seems to have been the personification of a great mythical river which plunges down from Mt. *Harā* into the sea *Vourukaša* and is the source of all the waters of the world), but appears also as a syncretic figure, which perhaps was under the influence of Mesopotamian cults.<sup>176</sup>

Kellens argues that the Vedic adjective “*ārdra-*”, “moist”, does not directly correspond to the goddess’s second epithet, “*arəduuī-*”. He explains that the only phonetically solution is to pose

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<sup>172</sup> OInd. *ūrdhva-*, Av. *arədwa-*. But compare Digor *urdug*, Iron *uirdig* “upright” (Thordarson 2009). It may be that at some remote time this was the name of a specific river, which gradually came to be deified.

<sup>173</sup> Benveniste 1929, pp. 27-28, 38-39.

<sup>174</sup> Lommel 1954, pp. 405-413.

<sup>175</sup> Amouzgar 2001, p. 69.

<sup>176</sup> Panaino 2000, p. 38.

the adjective *arədu-* as a dialectical variant (or not technical) from Avestan *arədra-* (from Scr. *rādh*: Av. *rād*, “to succeed, be successful, accomplish”<sup>177</sup>). He proposes thus that the term should be translated as “the Competent One,” or “She Who Succeeds”.<sup>178</sup> Oettinger suggests that *arəduuī-* originally derived from the Vedic  $\sqrt{rdh}$ -. In his opinion, the most likely meaning for the word *arəduuī-* would be “efficient”, “beneficial” and “the one who impels”<sup>179</sup>. Malandra, meanwhile, considers it to be related to the Vedic *pr̥th(i)vī-* (“broad; Earth”).<sup>180</sup> Skjærvø suggests that *arəduuī-*, is the feminine form of an adjective corresponding to Old Indic term *ūrdhvā-* “tall, lofty.”<sup>181</sup> Skjærvø’s translation seems most convincing, since this would be consistent with the goddess’s characterization as the heavenly river (or waters) symbolized by the Milky Way. It is also consistent with the meaning of her attribute *bərəzaitī-* “high, lofty,” and well describes her as the “heavenly river” descending down from the sky to the earth (Yt.5.85).<sup>182</sup>

### 6.1.2 *Sūrā*

The second component of the goddess’s name, *sūrā*, has been most often taken to mean “mighty” or “powerful”. Skjærvø’s definition is “rich in life-giving strength”.<sup>183</sup> Thus, the meaning would imply a particular type of strength, specifically, the kind that gives life. Hintze, meanwhile, points to the noun form of *sūra*, meaning “hero,” specifically the Indo-Iranian term for the hero who slays a dragon (from the root  $\sqrt{sū}$ , “to be strong”).<sup>184</sup> The meaning “to be strong”

<sup>177</sup> Cheung 2007, p. 187.

<sup>178</sup> Kellens 2002-03, p. 322.

<sup>179</sup> Oettinger 2001, p. 360.

<sup>180</sup> Malandra 2013, p. 108, n. 2.

<sup>181</sup> Skjærvø 2013a, pp. 113-14.

<sup>182</sup> Anāhitā also is said to descend down from “the height of a thousand men” (Yt.5.102), which further fits with her epithet *bərəzaitī* “high, lofty.”

<sup>183</sup> Skjærvø qualifies this, however, stating that the term derives from the Iranian root *spā-/sū-* (old Indic *śvā-/śū-*), which refers to swelling, presumably here in the sense of “overflowing with life-giving abundance”. See Skjærvø 2013a, p. 114.

<sup>184</sup> Hintze 1995, pp. 77-97.

derives from “to be endowed with life-force”. It seems that the term functions as an adjective for “strong” in Anāhitā’s epithet, and as a masculine substantive when it means “hero”.

### 6.1.3 *Anāhitā*

The third term in the series, *anāhitā*, is perhaps most controversial of all. Boyce, apparently following Pahlavi glosses on the term,<sup>185</sup> defines *anāhitā* as “undefiled” or “immaculate.”<sup>186</sup> Kellens, however, points out that “undefiled” or “immaculate” cannot have been the original meaning, which, as suggested by Hertel<sup>187</sup> and later confirmed by Gotō<sup>188</sup> and Oettinger, must have been “unbound [to anything]”; that is, “unrestrained,”<sup>189</sup> like “her original nature as torrential river” or as a “powerful river”.<sup>190</sup>

Malandra attempts to resolve the discrepancy between the two meanings, “unsullied” and “unbound”, by drawing Vedic parallels with the term *aditi* (the goddess Aditi) from the root  $\sqrt{dā/di}$ - “to bind”,<sup>191</sup> which has the same meaning and morphology as the Avestan *āhiti*. As in the Avestan case, Vedic *aditi* refers to a goddess who is “unbound from defiling transgressions”; hence, the connection between the two senses of *anāhitā*.<sup>192</sup> Oettinger suggests that *āhiti*- is a derivative of *ā-hi*- “bind”.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Malandra (2013, p. 107) explains: “The key concept here is *āhōgēnišn*, “defilement”, *āhōgēnidan* “to defile”. The glosses are as follows:

*anāhitā*:- 1) *anāhōgēnīd* (F5 only); 2) (*ardwīsūr*) *ī awinast*

*āhita*:- *āhōgēnišnīh*

*āhiti*:- 1) Y.10.7 *āhōgēnišn(īh)*, 5.27 *āhōgēnišn (agarīh)*; 2) Vd. 20.3 *pūityā āhityā = āhōgēnīdār*, 11.9 *āhōgēnišn (aβzar)*”.

<sup>186</sup> Boyce 1986.

<sup>187</sup> Hertel 1927, p. 20, n. 1.

<sup>188</sup> Gotō 2000, pp. 160-61.

<sup>189</sup> Oettinger 2001, pp. 301-316.

<sup>190</sup> Kellens 2002-03, p. 323; see also Skjærvø 2013a, p. 114.

<sup>191</sup> Myrhofer 1992, p.716.

<sup>192</sup> Malandra 2013, pp. 106-7.

<sup>193</sup> Oettinger 2001, p. 360.



The alternative explanation for the Avestan fem. *Anāhitā-* (\**an-āhitā-*, the compound *ā-hitā-* “bound”) as “boundless” seems more convincing. In Avestan, as in several other Indo-European languages, the prefix “*a-*” or “*an-*” creates a negation. It is followed here by a directional marker preverb “*ā-*” and the verb “*hi-*” which is weak root derived from √*hā-/hi-*, “to bind.” To this is appended the suffix “*-ta*”, creating a past perfect participle. Thus, *hita-* is a verbal adjective meaning “bound” and in Olr. *ā\hai/hi-* meant, “to bind.”<sup>194</sup> More precisely, adding “*ā-*” to the verbal root *hā-/hi-* means “to bind (on) to”. So, its negated form would be thus “not bound onto anything”, or “not being tied to”.

The goddess therefore, seems to be the personification of the abstract *anāhitā-*, meaning “not bound onto [to anything]”, which is appropriately connected to her nature as (a) lofty powerful river(s). This etymology seems reasonable and (*an*)*āhitā-* has retained its etymological quantity.<sup>195</sup>

Like *sūrā*, in the Avesta *anāhitā* as an adjective is applied to a number of deities. For example, in Yašt 8.2 Tištriia is said to be “shining with rays far and wide hither from afar, with bond-less (or unsullied) lights” (*dūrāt viiāuuantəm bānubiiō raoxšnəbiiō anāhitaēibiiō*).<sup>196</sup> The term appears even more emphatically in Yt. 10.88, where the sacrifice of Haoma to Miθra is described thus:

(Yt 10.88)

*yim yazata haomō*

*frāšmiš baēšaziiō srīrō*

*xšaθriiō zairidōiθrō*

*barəzište paiti barəzahi*

<sup>194</sup> Malandra 2013, p. 106.

<sup>195</sup> De Vaan 2003, p. 66.

<sup>196</sup> Skjærvø 2013a, p. 118.

*haraiθiiō paiti barəzaiiā*

*yaṭ vaocē hūkairīm nəma*

*anāhitəm anāhitō*

*anāhitāt parō barəsmən*

*anāhitaiiāt parō zaoθraiiāt*

*anāhitaēibiiō parō vāγžibiiō*

Haoma, the radiant beautiful healer, the golden eyed majesty, who sacrificed on the highest peak of the high (mountain) Haraitī, which is called *Hūkaiiria* by name.

He, the unbound (or unsullied) one (sacrificing) to an unbound (or unsullied) one (Miθra)  
(with) the immaculate barsom  
the unbound (or immaculate) libation  
the immaculate words.

#### 6.1.4 So What is Her Proper Name?

If we accept that the three terms discussed above are the goddess's epithets, the question remains, what was the goddess's actual name? It may be noted that the composition of the Young Avesta (including the *Ābān Yašt* where she is mentioned as "*Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā*") presumably occurred during an approximate period of time between 1000-600 BCE. The fact that in Achaemenid period she is mentioned in the royal inscriptions as "Anah<sup>a</sup>ta" (e.g., Artaxerxes II "404-358 BCE", inscriptions: A<sup>2</sup> Ha and A<sup>2</sup> Sa<sup>197</sup>), shows that at least from that period she was known by her third epithet.

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<sup>197</sup> Artaxerxes II A<sup>2</sup> Sa; Kent 1953, p. 154.

In other Avestan passages both “*arəduuī*” and “*anāhitā*” describe ‘water’ (*ap-*): *arəduiā āpō anāhitāiā* (Yt 1.21, 5.0). However, in Yt 1.21 the river *vaŋ<sup>h</sup>ī dāitiā* is also called (*ap-*). This would suggest that (*ap-*) was not a proper name, but rather evokes the concept and nature of the goddess.

Another Scythian goddess, known to the Greeks as Apatouros (from Scythian *ap-* “water” + *toura* “quick, mighty”), was the principal deity of the Bosphorus region from at least the sixth century BCE; like Anāhitā, she was associated with water and fertility.<sup>198</sup> Herodotus equates the Scythian goddess Api with Gaia, the Earth.<sup>199</sup> The linguistic connection to *ap-* may be merely coincidental, but it is also possible that Herodotus was mistaken in his identification and that the Scythian Api was actually the goddess of water. In fact, Lincoln concludes that the goddess Api may be the same goddess mentioned by Herodotus as “the daughter of the river” who created the Scythian people, with Zeus-Papayus as a couple.<sup>200</sup>

Moreover, in common Indo-European fundamental concepts like “water” seem to have pairs of words: one neuter (*\*wodr*) and one animate, i.e., masculine or feminine (*\*ap-*). The neuter one is thought to have designated the substance as an entity in the world, the animate one the substance as probably a divine or any fundamental force of nature.<sup>201</sup>

The stem *\*ap-* (*áp-*) originally expressed the concept of “water”.<sup>202</sup> The proto-Indo-European languages had several words for “water”. The term *\*wódr* was mostly used for “water” in a generic sense, (OPers *vār-* rain) while the second term, *\*h<sub>2</sub>ep-* (the labial appears sometimes

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<sup>198</sup> Ustinova 1998. Moreover, Dandamayev states that some personal names have been found in Babylonian documents which include “*ap-*” “water” as part of the name. “Appiešu” is one example (from an Iranian form *\*Āpaiča*, *āp* plus the hypocoristic suffix *-aiča-*). See Dandamayev 1992, p. 30.

<sup>199</sup> Herodotus 4. 59.

<sup>200</sup> Lincoln 2014, p. 185 (cf. Herodotus 4. 5).

<sup>201</sup> Mark Hale 2018, personal conversation.

<sup>202</sup> Mayrhofer 1992, p. 81. Also see Cacciafoco 2013, pp. 73-75.

voiced, sometimes voiceless<sup>203</sup>) was used in some languages as “river” and in others more generally as “water”. Some examples are Welsh *Avon*, Latin *amnis* “river”, Old Prussian *ape* “river”, Hittite *hāpa-* “river”, Sanskrit *áp* “water”, Tocharian AB *āp* “river”, “water”. A dialectal variant *\*h<sub>2</sub>ek<sup>w</sup>* gives Lat. *Aqua*,<sup>204</sup> and occurs in Dacian and Illyrian *Apos*, French river *Asse*, and Lithuanian *Apse*.<sup>205</sup> The word *\*h<sub>2</sub>ep (ap-)* as the “living water” or “water on the move”—which apparently includes “river” among its possible meanings—strengthens the theory that the actual concept (though not necessarily her formal name) of the water-river goddess known as *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* could have been *ap-* “water”. Water also is worshipped in the *Yasna Haptanghāiti* (*Yasna* 38).

As has been mentioned previously, there exists another base word for “river/water” and “water-basin” which is *\*dānu-*<sup>206</sup> (Av. *dānu-* river), which is also applied to a goddess whose concept and/or name is connected to those of many European rivers (discussed in Chapter Five above). It is therefore possible that another proto-Indo-European word, *\*h<sub>2</sub>ep (ap-)*, “living water” or “water on the move”, could also indicate a river/water goddess. Kellens states that based on *Yasna* 65.1 which reads, *yazāi āpəm arəduuīm sūrəm anāhitəm*, “I sacrifice to the Water, *arəduuī sūrā anāhitā*”,<sup>207</sup> the word *ap-* in the singular was used in connection to *Anāhitā*, and Skjaervø states that “The deity (*Anāhitā*) may therefore well be intended also in the *Gāθās* where water is mentioned.”<sup>208</sup> The *Avesta* calls upon devotees to take care of the physical world, of which water is a major component.

In conclusion, one could propose the following as the full reference to the Iranian river goddess: she is “the lofty one, rich in life-giving strength, the unbound: Water”. It seems most

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<sup>203</sup> Mallory and Adams 2006, p. 126.

<sup>204</sup> Mayrhofer 1992, p. 81; also Cacciafoco 2013, pp. 73-75.

<sup>205</sup> Kitson 1997, pp. 183-240. n. 24. Yet another term, which could mean anything from a “river” to a “lake”, is *\*weh<sub>2</sub>p* “body of water. See Mallory and Adams 2006, p. 127.

<sup>206</sup> Sadovski 2017, p. 571.

<sup>207</sup> Kellens 2002-03, p. 324.

<sup>208</sup> Skjaervø 2011b, p. 85; also, Skjaervø 2002.

likely that *ap-* (water) in its general meaning was the actual concept of the water-goddess known as *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā*, which were epithets that were applied to her (water).<sup>209</sup>

## 6.2 Anāhitā's Functions

The stanzas from *Ābān Yašt* cited below are organized so as to show the transformation of Anāhitā and her characteristics over time (not according to their actual sequence in the *Ābān Yašt*). We begin therefore with the stanzas showing Anāhitā's nature as a water goddess who lives in the Sky. As a crowned goddess associated with the ruling, Anāhitā's priestly features make her worthy of sacrifice. However, since her sacrificers are not all "positive" figures, the connection between Anāhitā and the "*daēuua*-worshippers" also will be demonstrated and discussed.

As a powerful and mighty goddess who is a chariot rider, her warlike characteristics will be observed. Then, as a fertility goddess, there are examples of her as an increaser who creates abundance, who ensures fertility by purifying men's sperm and the woman's womb, and eases childbirth.

We continue our discussion by analyzing Anāhitā's visualizations in the *Ābān Yašt* through descriptions and visualizations of her body, which place as much emphasis on her feminine beauty as on her divine status or her natural descriptions as water/river goddess. The goddess's clothes (clothed in beaver skins), shoes, and her crown, as well as her image in the form of river/waterfall will all be considered.

One of Anāhitā's most noticeable features is that she comes to possess three very different aspects. As a recipient of priestly sacrifices (Yt. 5.1, 8, 9, 17-76), she supports the rulers and the priests (Yt. 5. 86). She also is a mighty deity who supports warriors (Yt. 5. 13, 86). Finally, she is

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<sup>209</sup> Skjærvø (2013, p. 113) also subscribes to this interpretation, noting elsewhere (Skjærvø 2011, p. 17) that her epithets "lofty, rich in life-giving strength, unattached" (or "unsullied") would seem to qualify an implied noun, "water" (explicit in Y 65.1).

a fertility goddess with purifying and healing functions (Yt.5. 2, 87). Her multiple functions are described in the Avesta (Yt 5. 86-87) in a less abstract and more anthropomorphic way than for other deities. This suggests that her devotees asked for her support in various aspects of their lives and saw her as closer to themselves.

One of the clearer examples from the *Ābān Yašt* showing Anāhitā's multi-functionality can be seen in these stanzas:

(Yt 5.86-87)

*θβqm naraciṭ yōi taxma*

*jaidiiāṅte āsu aspīm*

*x<sup>v</sup>arənaṅhasca uparatātō*

*θβqm āθrauuānō marəmnō*<sup>210</sup>

*āθrauuānō θrāiiaonō*

*mastīm jaidiiāṅte spānəmcā*

*vəṛəθraynəmcā ahuraδātəm*

*vanaiṅtīmca uparatātəm.*

The warriors shall ask you for possession of rapid horses, (and) superiority of *x<sup>v</sup>arənah*.

The memorizing priests (*āθrauuān*), the student priests, shall ask you for knowledge and life-giving wisdom for the Ahura- created victoriousness and conquering superiority.

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<sup>210</sup> *marəmnō*, athematic nom.pl from stem *marəmnā-*; √*mar-* to 'remember', (Bartholomae, *AirWb.* 1143), points to the priests who memorized the prayers. Macuch and Hintze: "One might consider that the final *-ō* is due to preservation in the oral tradition under the influence of the preceding *āθrauuānō* and of the following two words which likewise end in *-ō* and stands for *\*marəmnā*, the nom.pl.m. (with old collective ending) of *marəmnā-* (personal communication, 6 July 2017).

*ḡβqm kaininō vadre.yaona*<sup>211</sup>

*xšaθra huuāpā jaidiiaṅ nte*

*taxmāmca nmānō.paitīm*

*ḡβqm carāitiš zizanāitiš*

*jaidiiaṅ nte huzāmīm*

*tūm tā aēibiiō xšaiamna*

*nisirinuuāhi arəduuī sūre anāhite.*

The nubile maidens shall ask you for good wealth and a strong householder. The women in labour<sup>212</sup> shall ask you for easy birth delivery. You shall confer those things on them, having the power (to do so), O Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā.

Different social categories are indicated in this passage. The wishes directed to Anāhitā begin with the warriors, then continue with the priests, and finally women present their wishes connected to fertility. In these two stanzas three categories of people are asking her support connected to their needs: The warrior men (*naraciṭ*, together with the adjective *taxma*, “brave”), the priests, and the maidens/women and make her capable to support all of the three levels of Iranian society. These two stanzas richly demonstrate Anāhitā’s multi-functional nature which

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<sup>211</sup> De Vaan (2003, p. 51) posits the stem *\*vadairiu-* and gives the translation “seeking marriage”. This can be derived from *\*-iu-*, from a putative noun *\*vad-ar-* “marriage”, containing the root *\*vad-* and the Avestan *vāḍaiia-* “to wed”. Malandra also translates *kaininō vadre.yaona* to “Maiden in marriageable position”. See Malandra 1983, p. 126.

<sup>212</sup> *carāitiš zizanāitiš*: the pregnant women whose time for giving birth is close and ask the goddess for an easy birth.

includes victory, knowledge and fertility.

### 6.2.1 A Water/River Deity Who Lives in the Sky

The *Ābān Yašt* speaks of all the waters that Ahura Mazdā created, specifically mentioning seven rivers flowing to seven countries. Although Anāhitā might have originally been the goddess of a particular river, it seems that at some point she became the goddess of all of the rivers (Yt 5.5). Anāhitā has control and power over water, as it is described when she creates a dry-bed over the river “good *Vītanhaitī*”<sup>213</sup> (Yt 5.78).

Another noteworthy feature is that as a river, Anāhitā flows equally during the summer and winter.

(Yt 5.5)

*aiṛhā̎sca mē aēuuarhā̎ āpō*

*apaγžārō vī.jasāiti*

*vīspāiš aoi karšuuq̄n yāiš hapta:*

*aiṛhā̎sca mē aēuuarhā̎ āpō*

*hamaṭa auua baraiti*

*hąminəmca zaiianəmca*

*hā mē āpō yaoždadāiti*

*hā aršnq̄m xšudrā̎*

*hā xšaṭrinq̄m garəβq̄nā̎*

*hā xšaṭrinq̄m paēma.*

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<sup>213</sup> Yt 5.78: Some of the waters she made stand still, others she made flow forward. She conveyed (him) across a dry bed, over the (river) good *Vītanhaitī*.



And (now) the flow of this single water of mine, shall go out to all the seven continents, and (the flow) of this single water of mine flows down in the same way both in summer and in winter. She purifies the waters, the semen of the males, the wombs of the females, (and) the milk of the females (for me).<sup>214</sup>

According to Herodotus, among the Scythian rivers there was a river called the Ister which is described in terms similar to those used for Anāhitā, always flowing with equal volume in summer and winter alike:

The Ister, which is the greatest of all the rivers which we know, flows always with equal volume in summer and winter alike. It is the first towards the West of all the Scythian rivers, and it has become the greatest of all rivers because other rivers flow into it.<sup>215</sup>

Herodotus then carefully describes how this river has equal water in the summer and winter, which, significantly, is precisely how Anāhitā is described in the Avesta. According to Herodotus the mountain snows melt during the summer and this is how Ister always has water. His description also shows that this river had been centralized as the greatest river and the source of the water, which is an additional commonality with Anāhitā.

The Ister, according to Herodotus, passed through all of Europe in its way to the sea:

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<sup>214</sup> Skjærvø 2007, p.71.

<sup>215</sup> Herodotus 4. 48.

for the Ister flows in fact through the whole of Europe, beginning in the land of the Keltoi, who after the Kynesians dwell furthest towards the sun- setting of all the peoples of Europe; and thus flowing through all Europe it falls into the sea by the side of Scythia.<sup>216</sup>

“Ister” is, in fact, the ancient name for the river Danube. In the section on Indo-European river goddesses we discussed the common etymology of the Don, the Danube, and other rivers related to the IE root *danu*. The connection is even more remarkable when we note that Anāhitā shares a number of aspects of Herodotus’ description of the Danube. Moreover, the region through which the Ister passes (according to Herodotus) is a place with cold winters, reminding us of Anāhitā’s clothing, which seems most likely to have belonged to a cold climate. This is not to say that the Danube was the original river of the goddess. Rather, we merely intend to note some connections showing that our goddess might have inherited some very old traditions connected to her Indo-European roots. There are some additional points to be made about the Sumerian roots of the river Ister-Danube, raising the possibility of a connection between this river and the Sumerian goddess Ištar.<sup>217</sup> However, these are just speculations and we cannot go further without having more evidence.

That Anāhitā is symbolized by the Milky Way<sup>218</sup> could emerge from the following text stating that she lives “above the stars”. Since Anāhitā is in fact originally a river, it is not difficult to connect her with the Milky Way as a “celestial river”.

(Yt 5.85)

*yahmiia ahurō mazdā*

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<sup>216</sup> Herodotus 4. 49.

<sup>217</sup> Teleki 1967.

<sup>218</sup> Nyberg 1938, p. 262.

*hūuapō niuuaēδaiiaṭ*  
*āiḍi paiti auua.jasa*  
*arəduuī sūre anāhite*  
*haca auuaṭbiiō stərəbiiō*  
*aoi zqm ahuraδātqm:*  
*ḡβqm yazā nte auruuāṅhō*  
*ahurāṅhō daiṅhu pataiiō*  
*puḡrāṅhō daiṅhu paitinqm.*

The beneficent Ahura Mazdā informed her, come down, descend, O Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, from yonder stars, to the Ahura-created earth. The fleet lords will sacrifice to you, landlords (and) sons of landlords.

Āsmān<sup>219</sup> (sky/Heaven) is the highest level of the four-sphere material world in Zoroastrian cosmology, in which water is the second creation.<sup>220</sup> Closest to the earth is the level of the stars, where Anāhitā as the heavenly river lives. Similar to her, the Vedic goddess Sārasvatī (she too being a mighty river) also originates in heaven from whence she flows down to the earth.<sup>221</sup>

And again:

(Yt 5.88)

*āṭ frašusaṭ zaraḡuštra*  
*arəduuī sūra anāhita*

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<sup>219</sup> Āsmān was divided into four spheres. The first (the level closest to the earth) was the star level (*star-pāyag*), then the moon (*māh-pāyag*), the sun (*xwaršēd-pāyag*), and the *bālist ī āsmān*, the boundless light in the highest of the sky/Heaven (Pākzād 2005, IX, 2, p. 126).

<sup>220</sup> Pākzād 2005, I A. 4, p. 26.

<sup>221</sup> As discussed earlier Sārasvatī, like Anāhitā and many Celtic river goddesses, was associated with both wisdom and warriors. (See Kinsley 1988, p. 57.)

*haca auuaṭbiiō stərəbiiō*

*aoi zqm ahuraḍātqm:*

*āaṭ aoxta arəduuī sūrā anāhita.*

Then she went forth, O Zaraθuštra, Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā,

from yonder stars, to the Ahura- created earth

Then she spoke, Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā.

The text clearly states that Ahura Mazdā has made a path for Anāhitā from the sky to the earth, passing by the sun.

(Yt 5.90)

*paiti dim pərəsaṭ Zaraθuštrō*

*arəduuīm sūrqm anāhitqm:*

*arəduuī sūre anāhite*

*kana θβqm yasna yazāne*

*kana yasna frāiiazāne*

*yasə tauua mazdā kərənaoṭ tacarə*

*aṅtarə arəθəm upairi huuarəxšaētəm*

*yasə θβā nōiṭ aiβi družānte*

*ažišca*<sup>222</sup> *arəθnāišca*<sup>223</sup> *vaβžakāišca*<sup>224</sup>

*varənuuāišca varənuua.višāišca.*

Zaraθuštra asked her, Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā:

O Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā

With what sacrifice shall I worship you?

With what sacrifice shall I send you forth in sacrifice?

In order that Ahura Mazdā may make you a course, not in this side (but a course)

above the radiant sun, so that they shall not belie you, the serpents, and the \*scorpions, and the wasps, and the spiders, and the poisonous spiders.

Hukairiia or the “Mountain of Good Deeds”, according to Avestan cosmology, established a physical link between the earth and the sky.<sup>225</sup> This is how Anāhitā flows down from heaven to the mountain. The image conjured by the text is visually rich.

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<sup>222</sup> *ažišca*, singular here is used as plural noun, *aži-*, and Vedic *ahi-* is an Indo-Iranian word for “snake” and “dragon”. *Aži* (*ažiš*) is a three-headed dragon in Yt.5.29. *Aždahā* (or *Eždehā*), is the modern Persian word for dragon. Here the word is translated as “serpents”.

<sup>223</sup> *arəθnāišca/arəθna-* It is not clear which insect this word meant to the author(s); to compare, the word *arāneus* in Latin means “spider.” However, since the word *varənuua-* used in this stanza is translated by Malandra (1983, p. 127) as “spider” and by Skjaervø (2011, p. 61) as “spinner,” it is difficult to guess why the same meaning was repeated and which insects the author(s) meant. The word *arəθna-* is used immediately after *aži-* “snake, serpent”, and could be translated as “scorpion” which is actually in the arachnid group along with spiders. In NP these two (snakes and scorpions) are found together (as an expression) as harmful animals: “*mār va aghrab.*”

<sup>224</sup> *vaβžaka-*: “wasp”; Cf. Pahlavi *wabz*, “wasp.”

<sup>225</sup> Hintze 2005, p. 59.

(Yt 5.96)

*yazāi hukairīm barəzō*

*vīspō vahməm zaranaēnəm*

*yahmaṭ mē haca frazgaḍaite*

*arəduuī sūra anāhita*

*hazaṇrāi barəšna vīraṇəm*

*masō xšaiiete xvarənaḥō*

*yaḡa vīspā imā āpō*

*yā zəmā paiti frataciṇti*

*yā amauuaiti fratacaiti.*

I will sacrifice to Mount Hukairia, honoured with hymns by all, golden, from which (she) flows down to me, Areduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, at the height of one thousand men. (She) reigns over large Fortune (*x<sup>v</sup>arənah*), as (much as) all these waters that flow forth over the earth, (who) forceful, flows forth.

Hukairia can be identified with the highest summit of Mt. Hara-Barzaiti, from whence Anāhitā flows downward.

(Yt 5.102)

*kəm kəmcit̄ aipi nmāne*

*gātu \*saite<sup>226</sup> x<sup>v</sup>aēui starətəm*

*hubaoiḍīm barəziš hauuaṇtəm*

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<sup>226</sup> Or, as Oettinger (2001, p. 102) reads it, *saēte*; see also Kellens 1984, p. 91. Note that the subject of this sentence is omitted.

*ātacaiti zaraθuštra*  
*arəduuī sūra anāhita*  
*hazaṅrāi barəṣna vīraṅm*  
*masō xšaiiete xvarənaḥō*  
*yaθa vīspā imā āpō*  
*yā zəmā paiti frataciṅti*  
*yā amauuaiti fratacaiti.*

Also, in (each) and every home, there is a couch (for lying) beautifully spread out, well-scented, provided with pillows.

She flows, O Zaraθuštra, Areduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, at the height of one thousand men, (she) reigns over large Fortune (*x<sup>v</sup>arənah*), as (much as) as all these waters that flow forth over the earth, (she who), forceful, flows forth.

A parallel can be found in RV 7.95. 1-2, where Sārasvatī is said to flow down from the mountains as well.<sup>227</sup>

## 6.2.2 The Recipient of Priestly Sacrifices

The *Ābān Yašt* describes Anāhitā as the recipient of many different sacrifices. The offerings made to her clearly include “*haoma* (mixed) with milk, with *barsom*, and with righteous thoughts, speech and deeds” during the sacrifice ceremony.<sup>228</sup> Anāhitā’s priestly function,<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> RV 7.95. 1-2: This stream Sarasvatī with fostering current comes forth, our sure defence, our fort of iron.

As on a car, the flood flows on, surpassing in majesty and might all other waters.

Pure in her course from mountains to the ocean, alone of streams Sarasvatī hath listened.

Thinking of wealth and the great world of creatures, she poured for Nahuša her milk and fatness.

<sup>228</sup> Yt 5.9.

meanwhile, is clearly shown when Ahura Mazdā sacrifices to her beside “the good [river] Dāitiā”(vanhuyā dāitiāiā) asking for her support.<sup>230</sup> She also has the ability to resist and overcome the aggressions of impious warriors and demons.<sup>231</sup> And like many river goddesses, healing is one of her principal functions.<sup>232</sup> In the first stanza of the *Ābān Yašt* we can see a combination of Anāhitā’s diverse functions.

(Yt 5.1)

*mraoṣ ahurō mazdā spitamāi zaraḡuštrāi*

*yazaēša mē hīm spitama zaraḡuštra*

*yqm arəduuīm sūrqm anāhitqm*

*pərəḡū frākqm baēšaziiqm*

*vīdaēuuqm ahurō.ṭkaēšqm*

*yesḡiiqm aṅ<sup>v</sup>he astuuaitē*

*vahmiiqm aṅ<sup>v</sup>he astuuaitē*

*āḡū.frāḡanqm ašaonīm*

*vqḡβō.frāḡanqm ašaonīm*

*gaēḡō.frāḡanqm ašaonīm*

*šaētō.frāḡanqm ašaonīm*

*daṅ<sup>v</sup>hu.frāḡanqm ašaonīm.*

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<sup>229</sup> Yt 5.1.

<sup>230</sup> Yt 5.6.17-19.

<sup>231</sup> Yt 5.13.

<sup>232</sup> Yt 5.1-2.



Ahura Mazdā said to Zaraϑuštra Spitāma: Sacrifice to her for me, O Zaraϑuštra of the Spitāma, Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, who spreads abroad, the healer, opposed of *daēuuas*<sup>233</sup> and follower of Ahura Mazdā’s faith. She is worthy of sacrifices and worshipped by the material world. (She, the) righteous (one) who increases the grains.<sup>234</sup> (She, the) righteous (one) who increases the flocks, (She, the) righteous (one) who increases the world (and its being).<sup>235</sup> (She, the) righteous (one) who increases property. (She, the) righteous (one) who increases the settlements and the lands.

As we may notice, in this introductory passage Anāhitā is described as an increaser, and a healer deity who follows Ahura Mazdā and is opposed to the *daēuuas*.

In another passage Ahura Mazdā sacrifices for Anāhitā on the bank of the “good *dāitiā*” and directly seeks her assistance to send the good religion to Zaraϑuštra.

(Yt 5.17)

*təm yazata*

*yō daδuuā ahurō mazdā*

*airiene vaējahi*

*vanhuiā dāitiāiā*

<sup>233</sup> *vīdaēuuqm-* *vī-* means to be opposite something.

<sup>234</sup> Lommel (1954, p. 32) and Hoffmann (1975, p. 1/264) translate *ādū.frādanqm-* as “stream increaser”, considering that *ādū-* is related to the Avestan word *adu-* stream.

<sup>235</sup> *gaēθō*. Oettinger (1983, p. 36-37) translates *frādanqm* as “the home increaser”. *Gaēθō*. *frādanqm* may be translated as “the world- or the being-increaser”. In the *Vīdēvdāt* one finds this sentence: “*āat mē gaēθā frādaia*” (Vd 2.4); Ahura Mazdā asks Yima (Yima-xšaēta-; Vedic Yama) to increase his world for him. Throughout the paragraph one finds the theme that “increasing” includes the development of the world. The similarity between the two forms suggests a similar meaning and concept; however, increasing the earth is Yima’s duty and function, so that “world- and being-increaser” would seem to be more correct.

*\*haomaiiō gauua barəsmana*  
*hizuuō danhanha maθraca +vacaca śiiiaoθnaca*  
*zaoθrābiiasca aršuxdaēibiiasca vāγžibiiō*

He, Ahura Mazdā the creator, sacrificed to her (Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā) in the *airiiana* *vaējah* of the Good *Dāiitiā*, with *haoma* mixed with milk and with *barsom*, with the skill of the tongue and with poetic thought, with speech and action and libations, and with correctly spoken words.<sup>236</sup>

(Yt 5.18)

*āaṭ hīm jaiḍiaṭ:*  
*auuaṭ āiiaptəm dazdi mē*  
*vaṇuhi səuuište arəduuī sūre anāhite*  
*yaθa azəm hācaiene*  
*puθrəm yaṭ pouruṣaspahe*  
*aṣauuanəm zaraθuṣtrəm*  
*anumatāe daēnaiiāi*  
*anuxtāe daēnaiiāi*  
*anu.varštāe daēnaiiāi.*

Then he asked her: “Grant me that prosperity, O good, O mighty, Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, that I shall induce Pouruṣaspa’s son, righteous Zaraθuṣtra, to think, to speak, to act, according to inner self towards religion.

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<sup>236</sup> Skjaervø 2007, p.71.

One could ask why a creator-god would have needed a goddess to transmit his religion to his prophet? Actually, it would appear that in the *Ābān Yašt* Anāhitā has the role of supreme deity: it is she who grants (or does not grant) the wishes of a long list of sacrificers, a list that includes Ahura Mazdā. The *Ābān Yašt* tells us that different figures in different locations (usually around rivers, lakes and mountains) sacrificed to Anāhitā and asked for her support. This list, of Anāhitā's supplicants and their wishes, occupies a considerable portion of the *Ābān Yašt*.<sup>237</sup> The fact that this passage shows Ahura Mazdā as one who sacrifices and makes supplication to Anāhitā is a clear demonstration of the goddess's exceptional importance.

### 6.2.3 Martial Aspects, Devotees, and Those Who Sacrifice to *Daēuuas*

Anāhitā's various supplicants include warriors who ask her for help in defeating their enemies. Yima, Өraētaona, Kərəsāspa, Kauua.usa, (Yt 5.45) Haosrauua (Yt 5.49) and Tusō (Yt 5.53) are examples.

Moreover, the visual image of Anahita evoked by certain passages in the *Ābān Yašt* is distinctly martial, driving her war chariot like a typical Indo-European mythical hero:

(Yt 5.13)

*yeŋhe caṅβārō vaštāra*

*spaēta vīspa*

*hama.gaonā ŋhō hama.nāfaēni*

*bərazanta tauruuaiianta*

*vīspanq̄m t̄bišuuatq̄m t̄baēšā*

*daēuuanam mašiiānq̄mca*

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<sup>237</sup> Yt 5. 6.21-23; 7.25-27; 9.33-35; 10.37-39; 12.45-47; 13.49-51, 14.53-55; 16.61-66, 17.68-70, 18.72,74; 19.76-79; 20.81-83.

*yāθβqm pairikanqmca*

*sāθraqm kaoiiqm karafnqmca.*

(She) the one with her four white stallions, all of the same color, the same breed, tall, victorious over the hostilities of all the hostiles, the *daēuuas* (false deities) and people, the sorcerers and the *pairikās*, the tyrant rulers: the *kauuis*, the *karapans*.

However, not all of Anāhitā’s supplicants are righteous. In the *Yašts*, of all the Zoroastrian divinities only Anāhitā and Vāiiu<sup>238</sup> are said to receive sacrifices from evildoers (we may list them as the “*daēuuaiiasna*,” those who sacrifice to *daēuuas* or *daēuua*-worshippers, that is, worshippers of the old deities). However, these sacrifices are not accepted.<sup>239</sup>

The fact that some well-known negative characters sacrifice to Anāhitā asking for her support is significant. The Avestan Fraŋrasiian (later Afrāsīāb) and Avestan Aži-Dahāka, the three-headed dragon (later Žahhāk) are examples of such figures.<sup>240</sup> At least some of these characters (Aži- Dahāka as an example) are considered to be mythological. Aži-Dahāka is said to have sacrificed to Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā in the land of Baβri, and to Vāiiu in his inaccessible (*dužita*) castle, Kuuirinta castle. These two deities, Anāhitā and Vāiiu, are the only ones in the

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<sup>238</sup> Vāiiu is an ancient Indo-Iranian deity who is a hypostasis of infinite space, the atmosphere and the wind. Vāiiu is an ambivalent deity with two sides and functions. In *Yašt* 15, which is devoted to him, he appears as a mighty martial deity capable of protecting the creation of Ahura Mazdā. He can also take a deadly form, however, like the wind that brings both rain clouds (fertility) and devastating storms. Like Anāhitā, both good and evil characters fear him, and like her, he rejects his evil supplicants. And again like Anāhitā, in the Pahlavi texts there is a clear separation and spacing between the Good Wāy (*Wāy ī weh*) and the Bad Wāy (*Wāy ī wattar*). Yima sacrifices to him on Mt. Hukairiia, where Anāhitā flows down at the height of one thousand men. The connection between these two powerful deities is considerable, but beyond the scope of the present work. The name “Vāiiu” derives from the verb *vā-* “to blow” (IE  $*\sqrt{*h_2ueh_1}$ ). Bartholomae, *AirWb*. 1358. And Malandra 2014.

<sup>239</sup> Yt 5. 8.29-31; Yt 15.5.19-21.

<sup>240</sup> Yt 5. 8.29-31, 11.41-43.

entire Avestan pantheon who count Fraṅrasiian and Aži-Dahāka among their devotees. It seems that both Baβri and Kuuirīnta were located in Babylon.<sup>241</sup> Anāhitā did not accept the sacrifices offered by these two negative characters; on the contrary, she accepts Ɖraētaona’s supplication that he gain the power to slay the dragon Aži-Dahāka.<sup>242</sup> We will discuss these two figures, Fraṅrasiian and Aži-Dahāka in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

Returning to the *Ābān Yašt*, in stanzas 94-95 Zaraθuštra asks Anāhitā a striking question: what would happen if her worship ceremony were to be performed by “those who sacrifice to *daēuuas*” after sunset?

(Yt 5. 94)

*paiti dīm pārəsaṭ zaraθuštrō*

*arəduuīm sūrqm anāhitqm*

*arəduuī sūre anāhite*

*kəm ida tē zaoθrā bauuaiṅti*

*yasə tauua frabarəṅte*

*druuaṅtō daēuuaiiasnāḡhō*

*pasca hū frāšmō.dāitīm.*

Zaraθuštra asked her, Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, O Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā,

What become to the *zaoθra* (libations) of you,

Which is sacrificed to you by the lie-possessed *daēuua*-worshippers,

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<sup>241</sup> Skjærvø 1987.

<sup>242</sup> Yt 5.9.33-35.

after the sunset?

Anāhitā replies that she would not be there or bless the ceremony.

This dialogue implies the existence of nocturnal ceremonies among the Iranians, rituals which likely predated Zoroastrianism. The implied opposition to such ceremonies presumably reflects the views of the Mazdaean priests trying to assert their own authority, and suggests that at some point significant numbers of Iranians in fact did sacrifice to Anāhitā at night, a practice the Avestan priests sought to abolish. The fact that the text’s reference to the *daēuua* cult taking place at night<sup>243</sup> could be connected to the depiction of Anāhitā as a heavenly river identified as the Milky Way. Moreover, the fact that at least one of Anāhitā’s worshippers, Fraṇrasiian (later Afrāsīāb), referred to in the text as “those who sacrifice to *daēuuas*”, performed sacrifices to Anāhitā in his underground cave, which evokes a connection with Miθra. He sacrifices to Anāhitā in his underground fortress:

(Yt 5.41)

*təm yazata*

*mairiiō*<sup>244</sup> *tūiriiō fraṇrase*

*hankaine*<sup>245</sup> *paiti aiḥhā zəmō*

*satəm aspanəm aršnəm*

*hazaṇrəm gauuəm*

*baēuuarə anumaiianəm.*

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<sup>243</sup> Ahmadi 2015, pp. 238-239 and 356.

<sup>244</sup> *mairiia-* is used in the Avesta as a negative adjective for Fraṇrasiian. It also is the demonic word for a “young man”, in opposition to the Ahuric word *nar-*. These connections will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.

<sup>245</sup> *hankaine*, from the stem *hankana-* √*kan-* “to dig”, means “cave” – the underground fortress of Fraṇrasiian. His place in the *Bundahišn* is described as an underground dwelling made by magic, with four magical rivers and bright with the light of sun and moon (Bd XXXII.13).

(He) sacrificed to her, the villain Tūranian Fraŋrasiian, in (his) underground fortress (inside) the earth, one hundred stallions, one thousand bulls, ten thousand rams.

The texts' claim that Anāhitā rejects all of the offerings devoted to her by the negative figures also begs consideration. Why do “those who sacrifice to *daēuuas*” figures bother to make offerings to a deity who rejects them, who does not support their wishes and does not attend their ceremonies performed in her honour? The simple fact that the composer(s) of *Ābān Yašt* mentions these ceremonies shows that they existed and could not be easily ignored by the Zoroastrian priests following their attempt to enforce Mazda-worship.

The Avestan word *daēuua-*, from the same root as the Latin *deus* and the old Indic *deva*, is ultimately derived from the Proto-Indo-European *\*deiyó-*, “god”<sup>246</sup> or Indo-European *\*deiwos*. In ancient times the term seems to have only meant “deity,” and was given a negative meaning (and we do not know for certain in what context this change occurred) as the false deities only later, presumably after the Indo-Iranian split during the second millennium BCE.<sup>247</sup> The demonization of the *daēuuas*, as Skjaervø notes, is “one of the most striking features of the Old Iranian religion”,<sup>248</sup> and probably happened gradually. In any case the category of *daēuua* ended up on the enemy side of the Zoroastrian cosmology, in contrast to the *ahuras*. The derivative word in modern Persian, *dīv*, means a kind of monster or demon, and is the root of the Persian word for “crazy” (*dīvāneh*; cf. Arabic *majnūn*, “be-genied,” English “bedeviled”).

Originally the *daēuuas* were the old gods (of Indo-Iranian inheritance) who were rejected, either by Zaratustra himself as part of his reform or/and by priests as an act of Mazdaean

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<sup>246</sup> Mallory and Adams 2006, p. 408; cf. Watkins 2000, p. 22.

<sup>247</sup> Bausani 2000, p. 30.

<sup>248</sup> Skjaervø 2003-04, p. 23.

monotheism<sup>249</sup> against the *ahuras*, and their rejection has been historically linked to the prophet's alleged reforms of the old religion. Although it appears that the rejection of the *daēuuas* was a primary focus of the Gathic vision, in the *Gāθās* the *daēuuas* are not yet considered “demons” as such but are listed along with a number of other categories, as will be discussed further below.

The combination “*daēuuanam mašiiānqmca*”, gives the sense of a “fixed expression”, combining “the *daēuuas* and people” and implies that the *daēuuas* were still considered as gods (although the false ones). The expression “*daēuuanam mašiiānqmca*” seems to be an Indo-Iranian tradition since it exists as well in the Vedas as “*devá-/martya.*”<sup>250</sup> We will discuss this in more detail in Chapter Eleven in connection with the *pairikas*. But to sum up, the *pairikās* were female figures with goddess roots, possessing features that may be derived from those attributed to goddesses in ancient times; they are mentioned in the Avesta as demonic creatures. More accurately, they are rejected ancient deities.

The *sāθrqm*, from *sāθr-/sāstar-* (root form  $\sqrt{sāh}$ ) means “to name/to learn”; traditionally they are the “tyrant rulers who are against the Mazdeans.” Skjærvø renders the term as “the false teachers”, and Malandra as “tyrants”.<sup>251</sup> The *kauuis* and *karpans*, meanwhile, were probably ruler-priests possessing some ancient rituals who opposed Zaraθuštra. The *kauuis* have a Vedic equivalent, *kaví-* meaning a “wise/sage poet”. However, the last ruler of *kauuis* from eastern Iran was the *kauui*-Vištāspa- (Goštasp) who accepted Zoroastrianism and helped Zaraθuštra to develop his religion. The other *kauuis* were blamed by the Mazdaean priests, probably because of their insistence on keeping their older gods and rituals. The *kauuis* reappear through titles or epithets associated with many kings in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*. The *karpans* were another category of priests opposed to Zoroastrianism. The texts’ gathering together of these various groups and their

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<sup>249</sup> Skjærvø 2011b, p. 64.

<sup>250</sup> RV. Book 5.17.

<sup>251</sup> Skjærvø 2011a, p. 60 and Malandra 1983, p. 120.



association with the older gods and goddesses would appear to reflect a substantial opposition in Iranian society to the agenda of the Mazdaean priests.

In fact, the *daēuuas* probably continued to be worshipped widely (if not necessarily openly) even by people who had accepted the Gathic religion (those who sacrifice to “Mazdā”). Thus, despite the efforts of Mazdaean priests to drive the old deities underground, many of them re-emerge in the Younger Avesta, and this may have included some that belonged to the (originally neutral) category of *daēuuas*. If one perceives a rejection of the *daēuuas* in the *Gāθās* (and it is not even clear which gods were included in that category), they are not even mentioned in the other Old Avestan text, the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* (Sacrifice in Seven Sections). As Herrenschildt and Kellens have noted:

That they were national gods is confirmed by the fact that they were invoked by means of the Iranian versions of expressions common in Vedic rhetoric, for example, *daēuuu-/mašiiia-: devá-/mártya-*, *vīspa--daēuuu-: víšva- devá-*, and *daēuuu.zušta-: devájušta-*.<sup>252</sup>

Dandamayev even has suggested that the *daivas* mentioned in Xerxes’ inscription were in fact Miθra and Anāhitā.<sup>253</sup> Skjærø argues that the *ahuras* gained in Iran at the expense of the *daēuuas* because Ahura Mazdā received the role of the creator god whereas in India Indra, as an important god who belonged to the *daēuuu* grouping, made the *asuras* into enemy gods.<sup>254</sup>

Again, it should be emphasized that in the *Gāθās*, neither is it clear which deities comprised the category of *daēuuas*, nor that they were necessarily negative; their “demonization” only becomes evident in later texts.<sup>255</sup> As Kellens observes:

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<sup>252</sup> Herrenschildt and Kellens 1993.

<sup>253</sup> Dandamayev 1992, p. 328.

<sup>254</sup> Skjærø 2011b, p. 65.

<sup>255</sup> Herrenschildt and Kellens 1993.

They (the *daēuua*) were still venerated by the leaders of the larger Iranian nation (*daξiiu-*; *Y.* 32.3, 46.1) and had formerly been worshiped even by the people who accepted the religion of the *Gāθās* (*Y.* 32.8); they thus formed part of the Mazdaean social and religious system.<sup>256</sup>

Thus, it may be that many rituals performed in honour of Anāhitā by so-called “*daēuua*-worshippers” or “those who sacrifice to *daēuuas*” were merely the ancient rituals of Iranians, some (or many) of whom who did not follow the religious prescriptions of the Mazdaean priests.

In his study of Sasanian Zurvanism, Zaehner speaks about “Iranian sorcerers” who apparently were connected to the “*daēuua*-worshippers” mentioned in the Pahlavi texts. Their cult was conducted at nighttime,<sup>257</sup> suggesting that they kept their ceremonies hidden from the view of the Mazdaean authorities.<sup>258</sup> We do not know that whether this had always been the case, or what exactly the notion of “demon” might have meant to them. Again, the most likely explanation is that the people concerned were merely worshipping their ancient deities in the traditional way and did not follow the changes the Mazdaean priests were attempting to impose. If they were coming under pressure from the Mazdaean priesthood, perhaps they kept their cult hidden in order to protect it. Did the worship of “*daēuuas*” represent some kind of movement and reaction against the formal religion and its main deity, Ahura Mazdā? Could this phenomenon also be related to the existence of so-called “Satan-worshippers” in the region today, notably the Kurdish Yezidis? This intriguing question, unfortunately, is beyond the scope of the present work.

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<sup>256</sup> Herrenschildt and Kellens 1993.

<sup>257</sup> Zaehner 1955, pp. 14-15.

<sup>258</sup> Zaehner 1955, p. 16.

#### 6.2.4 A Chariot-riding Deity, “Rich in Life-Giving Strength”

All the passages in the *Ābān Yašt* emphasize the fact that Anāhitā is a mighty deity. The kind of power that only could have been remained from the older time, when the goddesses, probably human shaped in imagination, were involved in all sides of their worshipper’s life. As powerful as she is, however, within the Zoroastrian pantheon Ahura Mazdā is specifically said to have created her.

(Yt 5.6)

*yqm azəm*

*yō ahurō mazdā*

*hizuuārəna uzbaire fradaθāi*

*nmānaheca vīsaheca zaṇtəušca daijḥəušca*

*pāθrāica harəθrāica aiβiiāxštrāica*

*nipātaiiaēca nišaṇharətaiiaēca.*

And I, Ahura Mazdā, created her by the impetus of my tongue (speech?), to develop over the home, the village, the tribe and the land, and to protect, guard, care, and watch (them).

Whether stemming from the notion that any deity created by Ahura Mazdā is “worthy of worship”<sup>259</sup> or because Anāhitā and her cult were too important to be ignored, Ahura Mazdā is said to offer her sacrifice and his respect.

(Yt 5.9)

*ahe raiia xʷarənaṇhaca*

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<sup>259</sup> Hintze 2014, p. 225.

*tqm yazāi surunuata yasna*  
*tqm yazāi huiiašta yasna*  
*arəduuīm sūrqm anāhitqm ašāonīm*  
*zaoθrābiiō*  
*ana buiiā zauuanō.sāsta*  
*ana buiiā huiiaštatarā*  
*arəduuī sūre anāhite*  
*haomaiiō gauua barəsmāna*  
*hizuuō dayhaŋha mąθraca vacaca śiiaoθnaca*  
*zaoθrābiiasca aršuxdaēibiiasca vāγžibiiō.*

For her wealth and munificence, I shall sacrifice to her with audible sacrifice. I shall sacrifice to her with well-performed sacrifice, with *zaoθra*,<sup>260</sup> Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, sustainer of order, thereby may you present (yourself) by (this) invocation, and may you be better sacrificed, O Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, with *haoma* (mixed) with milk, (and) with *barsom*, with the skill of tongue and with *mąθra* (poetic sacred thought), with speech, action, with *zaoθra* (libations) and with words correctly spoken.

Important Indo-European gods typically have vehicles, and Anāhitā is no exception. She holds the reins to her own splendid chariot (5.11), drawn by four white stallions. These four stallions under her control represent the rain, wind, cloud, and hail – appropriate to a water goddess, since these elements are all different forms of water or connected to it in some way, uncontrolled natural phenomena over which people most needed to have control.

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<sup>260</sup> *zaoθrā/zaoθra*: libations, sacrifice to water and fire.

(Yt 5.120)

*yejhe caθβārō aršāna*

*hqm.tāšaṭ ahurō mazdā*

*vātəmca vārəmca maēγəmca fīaηhumca*

*mīšti<sup>261</sup> zī mē hīm*

*spitama zaraθuštra*

*vārəntaēca snaēžiηtaēca*

*srasciηtaēca fīaηhuηtaēca*

*yejhe auuauuaṭ haēnanqm*

*nauua.satāiš hazanrəmca.*

For whom Ahura Mazdā has made four stallions, the wind, the rain, the cloud (or fog), and the hail, for by (their) care, always O Spitama Zaraθuštra, they rain, snow, drip and hail on her for me, who (Anāhitā) has so many armies<sup>262</sup> as nine-hundreds and a thousand.

Anāhitā possesses many palaces, built beside a thousand lakes. Each palace stands upon a thousand columns and has a hundred bright windows. Apart from the aesthetic aspect describing of the goddess's many palaces, the stanza also shows that she could in fact present herself in

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<sup>261</sup> *mīšti zī mē hīm*... Lommel (1954, p. 43) translates *mīšti* as an adverb, "always". Note that in Pahlavi "always" is *ha-mešag*. Malandra, however (1983, p. 129), and Oettinger (1983, p. 118) both translate the word as "by/through urine," probably because in the Pahlavi translation the word *mešag* (urine) is used. Skjærvø (2005, p. 81) gives "For by (their) \*care," adding the footnote: "Release of semen?"

<sup>262</sup> *haēnā-* in Avestan normally refers to "the enemy's army". It is somewhat strange that here the term is used for Anāhitā's army. Perhaps the author(s) of the *Ābān Yašt* imagined that Anāhitā casts hail and snow upon the enemy.

any location on the earth where there is a lake (or a river, Yt5.2). And as we have seen in the other stanzas cited she presents herself as the righteous people are in the process of carrying out the well-performed sacrifice. The word “a thousand” in this stanza (as well as in many other stanzas in *Ābān Yašt*, for example stanza 96 show Anāhitā’s height, stanza 101, etc.,) seems to be more iconic, emphasizing multitude or height, the maximum quantity in imagination of the *Ābān Yašt*’s composer(s).

(Yt 5.101)

*yejhe hazanrəm vairiianəm*  
*hazanrəm apayžāranəm*  
*kasciṭca aēšqm vairiianəm*  
*kasciṭca aēšqm apayžāranəm*  
*caθβarə.satəm aiiarə.baranəm*  
*huuaspāi naire barəmnāi*  
*kajhe kajhe apayžāire*  
*nmānəm hištaitē huḍātəm*  
*satō.raocanəm bāmīm*  
*hazanrō.stunəm hukərətəm*  
*baēuuarə.fraskəmbəm sūrəm.*

(She who) has a thousand bays, and a thousand inlets, and each of these bays and each of these inlets are a forty-days ride for a man riding a good horse. In (each and every) inlet stands a well-made house, radiant with a hundred windows, well made with a thousand

columns, strong with ten thousand (supporting) beams.<sup>263</sup>

Thus, Anāhitā also possesses (or generates) a thousand rivers, each as long as “a man can ride in forty days, riding on a good horse.”

### 6.2.5 A Fertility Deity

Anāhitā increases power and wealth, specifically land and cattle. She is, fundamentally, an increaser. She creates abundance, ensures fertility by purifying men’s sperm and the woman’s womb (Yt5.5), eases childbirth, and assures timely lactation (Yt. 5.1). She helps women to easily give birth to their children, and she brings milk to their breasts in a timely manner.

(Yt 5.2)

*yā vīspanq̄m aršnam xšudrā̄ yaoždadāiti*

*yā vīspanq̄m hāirišinq̄m zaθāi garəβq̄n yaoždadāiti*

*yā vīspā̄ hāirišiš huzāmitō dadāiti*

*yā vīspanq̄m hāirišinq̄m dāitīm raθβīm paēma.auua.baraiti.*

(She who) purifies the semen of all males and the wombs of all females for birth. (She who) gives easy delivery to all females and brings down their milk in a timely manner and at the proper time.

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<sup>263</sup> *sūrəm/sūra-* is translated by Skjaervø (2011a, p. 62) as “rich in life-giving strength”. However, the adjective would seem more appropriate in describing deities than beams.

As has been previously noted, images of Anāhitā in the Avesta are specific; she is easily and vividly transformed from an anthropomorphic goddess into the mighty, flowing waters. The diversity present in her various descriptions, some more realistic and others more abstract, support the notion that she is a composite deity, comprised of a multiplicity of precedents rather than from a single model. Her strength and power, her beauty and glory, and her fertility and capabilities, combine together to make of her a goddess worthy of worship in connection with the full range of human activities. The multiple potencies evoked by her image would have appealed to devotees from all branches of ancient Iranian society, which perhaps helps explain her extraordinary popularity.

### 6.3 Visualizations of Anāhitā in the *Ābān Yašt*

As discussed above, as an originally Indo-Iranian water goddess Anāhitā possesses some functions in common with other Indo-European water goddesses. Moreover, during the course of her long transformation throughout early Iranian history she acquired additional functions, which established her role within the Zoroastrian religion as an important deity.

Alongside the many passages that depict Anāhitā as a beautiful, powerful deity, she is artistically transformed into a waterfall-river, which flows down from a high mountain range, *Hara*, with its highest peak *Hukairiia* (the “Mountain of Good Deeds”).

In fact, the *Ābān Yašt* also is noteworthy, especially as an oral composition, for presenting an interesting linkage between mythology and art (or creative composition) in some of its verses (Yt 5. 4, 78). It displays a mythological description of the goddess and her visualizations, transforming from river to a goddess, which gives us the experience of watching a scenic performance. In fact, these visual spectacles may have played like an additional enactment of the text in the audiences’ imagination, accompanied by the priest’s recitations. Indeed, one can easily



imagine such scenes being reinterpreted by artists in modern times. Although there exist some visual descriptions in some other *Yašts*—the eighth *Yašt* (*Tištar Yašt*- Stanzas 13-34) for example—the *Ābān Yašt* is nevertheless unique among the Avestan texts from this point of view.

In the passage below, where Anāhitā approaches the mythological Vouru-kaša Sea, the scene is rich in unique visualizing imagery:

(Yt 5.4)

*yaozənti. vīspe. karanō*  
*zraiīāi. vouru.kašaiia*  
*ā vīspō maidiio yaozaiti*  
*yaṭ hīš aoi fratacaiti*  
*yaṭ hīš aoi fražgaraiti*  
*arəduuī sūra anāhita:*  
*yejhe<sup>264</sup> hazanrəm vairiianəm*  
*hazanrəm apayžāranəm:*  
*kasciṭca aēšəm vairiianəm*  
*kasciṭca aēšəm apayžāranəm*  
*caθbarə.satəm. aiiarə baranəm*  
*huuaspāi naire barəmnāi.*

All the shores of the Vourukaša Sea are in surge, the entire interior rises up in surge, when she flows forth into them (the shores), when she streams along into them, Areduuī Sūrā

Anāhitā, who has a thousand bays and a thousand outlets, and each of these bays and each

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<sup>264</sup> *yejhe* could also be translated as “which,” if we accept the word as *yejhe* gen. sg. n(eut) following *zraiīāi. vouru.kašaiia*. If we accept *yejhe* gen. sg. fem, then it follows Areduuī Sūrā Anāhitā and thus means “who.”

of these outlets, (is) a forty days' ride for a man riding a good horse.

These verses are a good example of the vivid imaginary description of Anāhitā as a river, flowing towards the Vourukaša Sea. From this vivid description one can clearly imagine the scene: towers of swirling water, before which one is immobilized with awe; one can practically feel the spray, hear the ocean's deafening roar.

The *Ābān Yašt* depicts Anāhitā as a powerful spirit helping Ahura Mazdā and some other positive figures, changing into a beautiful woman of superhuman size. Although her description in this *Yašt* emphasizes her femininity, it also has many adjectives emphasizing her strength. One example is that she is said to have “strong arms” (*bāzu.staoiiehi*). Her white arms are said to be the size of a horse's thigh, perhaps evoking the ancient concept of imagining the deities as being super-human in size.

(Yt 5.7)

*āaṭ fraṣūsaṭ zaraḡuṣtra*

*arəduuī sūra anāhita*

*haca daḡuṣaṭ mazdā*

*srīra vā aḡhən bāzauua*

*auruša aspō.staoiiehīš*

*frā srīra zuṣ<sup>265</sup> sispata*

*uruuaiti<sup>266</sup> bāzu.staoiiehi*

*auuaṭ manarḡha mainimna.*

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<sup>265</sup> Oettinger (1983, p. 41) and Kellens (1974, pp. 104-6) both read this as *zuṣ-* (from *zū-*) and translate it as “hastily”.

<sup>266</sup> *uruuaiti-*, *uruuaṅt-* adj, from *√ru-* to roar (Kellens 1974a, pp. 104-105, and Idem 1984, p. 319).

And so, O Zaraθuštra, Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā went forth<sup>267</sup> from the Creator Mazdā. (her) arms were verily beautiful, white, (and) thicker than (the thighs) of a horse, a beautifully rushing swell. Roaring, with strong arms, thus she thinks in her thought(s).

Below are examples of the descriptions and visualizations of Anāhitā's body, which place as much emphasis on her feminine beauty as on her divine status, or her natural descriptions as water/river.

(Yt 5.78)

*upa.tacaṭ arəduuī sūra anāhita*

*kaininō kəhrpa srīraiiā*

*aš.amaiiā huraodaiiā*

*uskāṭ yāstaiiā ərəzuuuiθiiō*

*raēuuāṭ ciθrəm āzātaiiā*

*zaraniia aoθra paitišmuxta*

*yā vīspō.pīsa bāmiia*

*arəmaēštā aniiā āpō kərənaoṭ*

*fraša aniiā fratacaṭ*

*huškəm pəšum raēcaiiaṭ*

*taro vaṅhīm vītaṅhaitīm.*

She flowed, Areduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, in the shape of a beautiful young girl, mightily strong, well-shaped, girded-high, standing tall, of splendid seed, high-born, pure, wearing shoes up

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<sup>267</sup> *frašūsaṭ*- Malandra (1983, p. 120) translates this as “went away”.

to the ankle, with golden laces, radiant, some of the waters she made stand still, others she made flow forward. She conveyed (him) across a dry bed, over the (river) good *Vītaṅhaitī*.

(Yt 5. 126)

*yā hištaitē<sup>268</sup> frauuaēḍamna*

*arəduuī sūra anāhita*

*kaininō kəhrpa srīraiīā*

*ašamaiīā huraodaiīā*

*uskāt yāstaiīā ərəzuuiaiḡiīō*

*raēuuat ciḡrəm āzātaiīā*

*frazuṣəm aḍkəm vaṅhāna<sup>269</sup>*

*pouru paxštəm zaranaēnəm.*

The one (who) stands to be observed, (the one) Areduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, in the shape of a beautiful young woman, very strong, well-shaped, girded high, righteous, noble and high-born, wearing a robe [with long sleeves]<sup>270</sup> with rich designs, embroidered with gold.

The goddess's clothes, shoes, and her crown, all are described with precision and detail.

Her belt is bound tightly about her waist to better show off her breasts.

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<sup>268</sup> Verb  $\sqrt{stā}$ -; 3rd person, sing. middle; the participle of the present with  $\sqrt{stā}$ - shows a continuous action. *frauuaēḍamna*: adj. *fra*+*vaēd*- to observe, “who is always to be observed”.

<sup>269</sup> The word *vaṅhāna*- is written in most texts as *vaṅhānəm* probably to coordinate with *frazuṣəm aḍkəm vaṅhānəm*. The correct form would be *vaṅhāna*, (nom. sg. fem), from  $\sqrt{vah}$ - to wear (comparing with the *frauuaēḍamna* at the beginning of the stanza) “dressed with a precious mantle” (Reichelt's translation). Oettinger (1983, p. 121) reads *vaṅhāna*. The next five lines from *arəduuī sūra anāhita* to *āzātaiīā* are a repetition of 5.78.

<sup>270</sup> Both Skjaervø (2011a, p. 62) and Malandra (1983, p. 129) consider *frazuṣəm*, “with long sleeves,” to describe the garment.

(Yt 5.127)

*bāḍa yaḡa.mq̄m barəsmō.zasta*<sup>271</sup>

*frā.gaoṣāuuara sīspəmna*

*caḡru.karana zaranaēni*

*minum baraṭ huuāzāta*<sup>272</sup>

*arəduuī sūra anāhita*

*upa tq̄m srīrq̄m manaḡrim*

*hā hē maiḡim niiāzata*

*yaḡaca hukərəpta fštāna*

*yaḡaca aṅhən niiāzāna*<sup>273</sup>.

(Indeed), when she (sacrificed to?) me with barsom in her hand, to display (her) four-sided golden earrings, wear a broach, high-born and noble, Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, upon her beautiful neck. She would pull tight her waist, both so that (her) breasts would (appear) well-formed and that (the breasts) would be prominent (swell out).

Anāhitā’s diadem, on the other hand, tells a somewhat different story. Her diadem, described as “with eight crenulations,” is possibly connected to the Mesopotamian solar system, which symbolized the identification of the planet Venus with Iṣtar/Innana using the icon of an

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<sup>271</sup> Skjaervø (2011a, p. 62) translates *bāḍa yaḡa.mq̄m barəsmō.zasta* as “Ever and again, when she (sacrificed to?) me with barsom in her hand.” Malandra, on the other hand (1983, p. 129), gives “Holding barsom in her hand in the correct way.” (He probably follows *Yaḡa* as a conjunction, meaning “as,” and *mq̄m* could mean “measure,” from  $\sqrt{mā}$  to measure. The combination *yaḡa.mq̄m* as an adverb could mean “according to custom” or “the required measure,” or as Malandra translates, “in the correct way.”) *mq̄m* seems to mean “me”, as Skjaervø translates. Kellens (1974, p. 242) thinks that the phrase *yaḡa.mq̄m* with *bāḍa* is used for emphasis.

<sup>272</sup> *huuāzāta* adj.; analyzed as \* *hu-ā-zāta* “noble-born” (*āzāta*- “noble”).

<sup>273</sup> Oettinger (1983, p. 121) and Kellens (1984, p. 287) both read *niiāzāna* (adj.).

eight-pointed star.<sup>274</sup>

(Yt 5.128)

*upairi pusqm bandaiiata*

*arəduuī sūra anāhita*

*satō.straṇhqm*<sup>275</sup>*zaranaēnīm*

*ašta.kaoždaqm raθa.kairiiqm*

*drafšakauuaitīm srīrqm*

*anu.pōiθβaitīm hukərətqm.*

On (her head) she binds a diadem, Areduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, with a hundred stars, golden, (with) eight crenulations, (appears) chariot shaped and with inimitable, splendid, having a prominent rim, well-made.

Again, Anāhitā’s clothing, shoes, and diadem are all described with precision, in marked contradistinction to the Avesta’s portrayals of most other deities. The fact that Anāhitā is described as wearing a beaver skin is significant, as will be discussed below.

(Yt 5.129)

*baβraini*<sup>276</sup> *vastrā vaṇhata*

*arəduuī sūra anāhita*

*θrisatanqm*<sup>277</sup> *baβranqm*

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<sup>274</sup> Black and Green 1992, pp. 156-157, 169–170; also Noegel and Wheeler 2003, pp. 174-176.

<sup>275</sup> Both Skjaervø (2011a, p. 63) and Malandra (1983, p. 130) translate *satō.straṇhqm* as “with a hundred stars”. The word *straṇhqm* could be connected to “star”. Oettinger (1983, p. 124) translates the phrase as “das hundert Schnüre (?) (hat)”, “with a hundred strings”.

<sup>276</sup> adj. from *baβrini-*, *baβra-* “beaver”.

*caturə.zīzanatəm*  
*yaṭ asti baβriš sraēšta*  
*yaθa yaṭ asti gaonōtəma*  
*[baβriš bauuaiti upāpō.]*  
*yaθa.kəratəm θβarštāi zrūne*  
*carəmə<sup>278</sup> vaēnaṅtō brāzəṅta*  
*frāna ərazatəm zaranim.*

Garments of beaver fur, she wears, Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, (from the fur of) three hundred beavers, give birth to four young,<sup>279</sup> because, the female beaver is most beautiful, because she is most dense-haired,<sup>280</sup> the female beaver lives in the water normally for a determined period of time, (then the) furs shine (in the eyes) of the viewers, in abundance of silver (and) gold.

Although there is some geographical evidence for the existence of the beavers in Iran in the past, this particular aspect of Anāhitā’s imagery possibly could date back at least to around 4,000 years ago, prior to the Indo-Iranian split, when proto-Indo-Iranians occupied the southern Ural region as evidenced by remains at Sintašta and elsewhere.<sup>281</sup> Herodotus describes Scythian land as below:

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<sup>277</sup> For *θrisatanəm*: *θri-sata-* Skjaervø gives “three hundred” (Skjaervø 2011, p. 63), whereas Malandra (1983, p. 130) and Oettinger (1983, p. 124) give instead “thirty beavers,” *θrisatanəm* as pl. gen of *θri-sant-*, “thirty”.

<sup>278</sup> *carəmə* from *carəman-*; (NP *čarm-* “leather, skin”) here as “the fur” of the beaver.

<sup>279</sup> Skjaervø (2011a, p. 63) gives “about to give birth for the fourth time”.

<sup>280</sup> Malandra (1983, p. 130) and Oettinger (1983, p. 124) give the same translation, but Skjaervø (2011a, p. 63) prefers “when she is \*adorned most colorful”, probably *gaonōtəma* from *gaonem-*; “color”.

<sup>281</sup> Kuz’mina 2007, pp. 174-5.

...Their land is all thickly overgrown with forests of all kinds of trees, and in the thickest forest there is a large and deep lake, and round it marshy ground and reeds. In this are caught otters and beavers and certainly other wild animals with square-shaped faces. The fur of these is sewn as a fringe round their coats of skin, and the testicles are made use of by them for curing diseases of the womb.<sup>282</sup>

In any case, whether beaver fur existed in the Avestan lands<sup>283</sup> or harkens back to an even earlier era, references to beaver skins in the *Ābān Yašt* suggest that its composer(s) is quoting a very old oral tradition, which cannot be, for example, from Mesopotamia. Rather, it shows that at least initially, Anāhitā was originally a goddess of the lands with cold climate.<sup>284</sup>

The description of a goddess clothed in beaver skins, like the snow-queen (because of her crown) who appears in many legends belong to cold climates, allows us to imagine some things about the climate and natural environment where she was first conceived. Most of all, it suggests someplace cold. This is consistent with the Avesta’s description of the original homeland of the

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<sup>282</sup> Herodotus, Book 4.109.

<sup>283</sup> Another connection to the beaver exists among the neighboring Finno-Ugrian peoples (a non-Indo-European linguistic group) who have a myth of the “mother-beaver.” Michael Witzel’s (2001) point that this provides evidence against a South Asian origin applies to the Iranian plateau as well: “... the beaver is not found inside S. Asia. It occurs, however, even now in Central Asia, its bones have been found in areas as far south as N. Syria and in mummified form in Egypt, and it is attested in the Avesta (*bawri* < \**babhri* < IE \**bhebhri*-) when speaking of the dress (‘made up of 30 beaver skins’) of the Iranian counterpart of the river goddess *sárasvatī*, *areduui sura anāhitā*: Yt 5.129 ‘the female beaver is most beautiful, as it is most furry: the beaver is a water animal’

*yat asti baβriš sraēšta*  
*yaθa yat asti gaonōtāma*  
*(baβriš bauuaiti upāpō)*

Avestan *baβri*- is related to the descriptive term, IE \**bhebhru* “brown, beaver” which is widely attested: O.Engl. *bebr*, *beofor*, Lat. *fiber*, Lith. *be~brus*, Russ. *bobr*, *bebr*-”.

<sup>284</sup> Malandra (1983, p. 119) also notes that Anāhitā’s origin, although uncertain, could be connected to the stanza translated above (Yt 5.129). He suggests that since in former times beavers lived in Caucasus region, so “perhaps Anāhitā was a local goddess of the extreme northwest whose cult, for whatever reasons, diffused throughout western Iran, eventually to join with that of Inanna-Ištar”.



Iranians, *Airyānəm vaējō* (Airiana Vaējah).<sup>285</sup> In the *Yašts*, this cold country is the place where Zaratuštra (Y. 9.14), sacrificed to *Arəduuī Sūrā* and the other deities (Yt. 5.104; 9.25; 17.45). Likewise, in the *Vīdēvdāt* this land is described as follows.

(Vd 1.3)

*dasa auuaθra māη hō zaiiana*

*duua hq̄mina*

*taēca hānti sarəta āpō*

*sarəta zəmō*

*sarəta uruuaraiiā*

*aḏa zimahe maiḏim*

*aḏa zimahe zarədaēm*

*aḏa ziiā scit pairi-pataiti*

*aḏa fraēštəm vōiγnanqm*

There are ten months of winter there and two of summer and (even) those are (too) cold for water, for earth, for plants. It is the middle and the heart of winter, and (when) the winter ends there are many floods.

*Airiana Vaējah* (*Ērān-wēz*) is described in similar terms in the *Bundahišn*, with ten months of winter and two months of summer.<sup>286</sup> (Despite this description, the *Bundahišn* claims that *Ērān-wēz* was the best place in which to live (Bd XXXI.1). Thus, it is not difficult to link the climate of the Iranians' former homeland with the clothing style of their water goddess.

<sup>285</sup> The development of an OIr. *\*aryānām waijah*, according to MacKenzie 1998.

<sup>286</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 353.

Beavers are also mentioned as sacred animals in some Pahlavi texts, either because they lived in water and were related to Anāhitā or perhaps because they were important in the older tradition. Killing beavers was considered to be a serious sin.<sup>287</sup>

#### 6.4 Anāhitā's Description

The *Yašts* contain descriptions of various deities, but for the most part they do not evoke any specific visual image. Thus, while Tištriia and Vərəθaγna occasionally take on human or animal form (Yt 8 and Yt 14), it is their traits and functions that are emphasized rather than their actual appearance. Vāiiu, the deity of wind and weather, is merely described as being a warrior (Yt 15). Daēnā, the deity of the conscience and anthropomorphized moral concept (whom every person encounters on the *Činuuat* bridge after death, appearing either as a beautiful maiden in the case of a good person or as a smelly, disgusting hag in the case of sinners) does not have a description in the *Yašts*. Rather, her description appears mainly in the *Hāδōxt Nask*, whereas the *Dēn Yašt* (*Yašt* 16) which is named after her is actually devoted to another female deity, Čistā (this will be discussed in Chapter Seven). There exist other goddesses, Spentā-Ārmaiti for example, who are worshipped but whose visual aspect is never described in the Avesta. There are similarities in some stanzas between the *Ābān Yašt* and the *Yašt* 17 devoted to Aši (the goddess of fortune and reward; Yt 17.6-11), but Aši never is described in as much detail as Anāhitā.

In fact, it is noteworthy that in contrast to the Greek and Mesopotamian cases, Iranian texts mostly do not portray their deities as having human-style lives. It would seem that Iranians, for the most part, did not conceptualize their deities in human terms to the extent that the Greeks and Mesopotamians did. As Herodotus noted:

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<sup>287</sup> Amouzgar and Tafazzoli 2000, p. 44.

I am aware that the Persians observe the following customs: so far from being in the habit of setting up statues, temples, and altars, they regard those who do so as fools; the reason being, in my opinion, that, unlike the Greeks, they never considered their gods to be of the same nature as man.<sup>288</sup>

The deities in the Avesta are sometimes described in visual terms. However, as mentioned above, it seems that Iranians did not generally interact with their deities on any kind of anthropomorphic level. In cases where the Avesta does provide visual descriptions, they tend more to reflect the conceptual meaning of the deity's function and duty rather than any actual physical reality. For example, when Miθra is described as having ten thousand eyes or a thousand ears (Yt 10.7), the point is to emphasize his particular divine function: his ability to see and hear everything going on in the world, to help human beings when they ask him, or to catch anyone committing any sin. Such visualizations are primarily symbolic. Anāhitā and Miθra are the two very important deities among the young Avestan deities and strongly stand out in their *Yašts*.<sup>289</sup> Anāhitā is described as the ultimate source of all watercourses created by Ahura Mazdā (Yt 5. 3, 4, 5, 15, 78, 96, 101). She is thus first and foremost a river, originally a heavenly river symbolized by the Milky Way (Yt 5.85).<sup>290</sup> In earthly terms she descends from the top of the mythical Mount Hukairyā ("the mountain of good deeds" Yt.5. 96). The *Ābān Yašt* lists her as a multivalent deity with many functions and conceptualizes different aspects of her divine personality.

The *Ābān Yašt* is distinctive among the *Yašts* in a number of ways. Not only it is one of the longest *Yašts* (consisting of 133 stanzas), but also its evocation of *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā*'s visual characteristics differs fundamentally from those of other deities described in Avestan texts. No other Iranian deity is visualized on the basis of textual descriptions to the extent Anāhitā is,

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<sup>288</sup> Herodotus, Book 1.131.

<sup>289</sup> Skjaervø 2011b, p. 70.

<sup>290</sup> Witzel 1984, p. 226; cf. Skjærø 2005, p. 22.

specifically the vivid way that she is portrayed partly as a river and partly as a beautiful super-sized woman (with detailed descriptions of her clothing and jewelry) who transforms into a waterfall-river. In fact, the *Ābān Yašt*'s descriptions of various imaginary scenes presents some unique interactions and connections between the written text and the visual aspects it evokes (Yt 5. 4, 78). As Skjærvø notes, “she is partly described as a river and partly as a richly dressed woman.”<sup>291</sup>

Anāhitā's description in the *Ābān Yašt* is rich and specific, enabling one to visualize the goddess almost as much as through visual art (Yt 5. 4, 56). Her feminine body is described in rich detail (Yt 5.7, 78, 126, 127). She hears, speaks, rides the chariot (Yt 5.11, 13, 120), and either walks as a goddess or flows as a river (Yt 5. 7, 64, and 4, 15). Water is normally in motion, flowing and transforming; therefore, it is not particularly surprising if the water goddess changes from a woman into water/a waterfall (Yt 5. 96, 102). She thus also is a shape-shifter, perceived alternately as a woman and as a river. Her clothes, her body, her palaces, her horse-drawn vehicle, and many other details are elaborately drawn in the *Ābān Yašt*. In some parts of the *Ābān Yašt*, it is as if the composer(s) had a clear physical image of her in his mind as he/they composed the verses (Yt 5. 64, 78, 126-129).

In the *Ābān Yašt* Anāhitā has many functions, but the most significant is that she is a first and foremost a water goddess (Yt 5. 3, 4, 5, 15, 78, 96, 101). Accordingly (as has been noted previously) many of her functions—including healing, fertility, and wisdom—are shared by her to a greater or lesser extent with the many other Indo-European water goddesses. Moreover, according to the *Ābān Yašt* all of the waters that Ahura Mazdā created are linked to her (Yt 5. 5, 15, 96). Thus, her multifarious functions also connect her to many different groups of deities.

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<sup>291</sup> Skjærvø 2005, p. 23.

For example, the *Ābān Yašt*'s combining of female beauty and splendor on the one hand with strength and power on the other associates Anāhitā with the attributes and characteristics of ruling and spirituality on the one hand, and healing and fertility on the other; she supports warriors, while also supporting life itself and representing the overwhelming force of the Waters. As a shape-shifter, she transforms herself from a river into a beautiful woman and back into a river again, symbolizing her multiple functions.

The *Ābān Yašt* describes Anāhitā as an awe-inspiring deity, super-human in size, a chariot rider with four natural horses, and strong enough that even Ahura Mazdā occasionally seeks her assistance, hence she has the attribute *ahurō. tkaēša-*, “(she) who follows the Ahura’s teaching” (Yt 5.1).

## 6.5 Conclusions

In summary, it may be affirmed that many Indo-European and proto-Iranian characteristics of *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* are clearly present in the *Ābān Yašt*. We may note her three different functions where three specific categories of people ask for her support, beginning with the warriors, continuing with the priests, and finally women who present their wishes connected to fertility (Yt 5. 86-87). Anāhitā’s multiple functions in the Avesta are laid out concretely and at times even anthropomorphically, which suggests that her devotees felt her as more real and immediate than other deities.

Thus, and firstly as a crowned goddess, Anāhitā is associated with the ruling group of deities. Her importance in this respect, as with other significant Indo-Iranian deities, is shown by her possessing a vehicle with four stallions who represent the rain, wind, clouds, and hail, the uncontrolled natural phenomena over which people most needed to have control. She is worthy of sacrifice, connecting her with the priestly functions among the deities. Indeed, Ahura Mazdā himself is said to sacrifice to her.

Second, she is also a mighty deity who helps the warriors, assuring them of victory. The Avestan Anāhitā is notable for her warrior aspect. In fact, the *Ābān Yašt* mentions many warriors' names and their wishes in the form of legendary heroes and figures both positive and negative.

Third, Anāhitā is a fertility goddess with healing functions, assisting births and giving affluence; she possesses the traits of blessing, abundance and prosperity associated her with the “producer” category of deities.<sup>292</sup> The *Ābān Yašt* clearly lays out this tripartite paradigm by specifying that the priests, the warriors, and young women wishing to have children, must each sacrifice to her if they wish to be successful.<sup>293</sup>

Another significant feature of Anāhitā is her vivid description in the *Ābān Yašt* as she changes from a woman into water or a waterfall (Yt 5. 96, 102). Her shape-shifting feature enables one to visualize the goddess almost as vividly as through visual art (Yt 5. 4, 56). Indeed, certain aspects of Anāhitā's description in the *Ābān Yašt* seem more likely to be based on a vision than on actual observation, for example Yt 5.129 which states that her coat is made from the skins “of thirty beavers of those that bear four young ones”—how would such a detail be discernable from a statue? The question of how a sculptor might have indicated such a detail is beyond the scope of this study, but it makes more sense to assume that the basis for Anāhitā's “beaver skin” clothing can be sought elsewhere. Certain elements of Anāhitā's description, at least, could be the product of long oral tradition; for others, the composer(s)' imagination cannot be excluded. Furthermore, it seems this particular aspect of Anāhitā's imagery likely dates back to at least 4,000 years ago and represent a goddess from lands having a cold climate.

Finally, as we have discussed above, Anāhitā may have been worshipped by “those who sacrifice to *daēuuas*”, which may connect her to the warrior groups of deities *-daēuuas*. The cults of these “*daēuuas*-worshippers” were partly conducted after sunset (Yt 5.94-95). Was this the time

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<sup>292</sup> One is of course reminded here of the three Dumézilian functions (Mallory and Adams 2006, p. 433).

<sup>293</sup> Yt 5.21.85-87.

that they imagined Anāhitā living “above the stars”, by looking to the sky at nighttime, as mentioned in the *Ābān Yašt* (Yt 5.85), or was it because they wanted to keep their ceremonies hidden from the Mazdaean authorities? These are the questions that are difficult to answer with any certainty.

## Chapter Seven

### Other Goddesses: Comparisons with Anāhitā

Anāhitā is not the only goddess to appear in the *Yas̥ts*. In fact, there are a number of other female deities in the Avestan pantheon, each of whom has her own importance. The most important goddesses in the Avestan texts are Spəntā Ārmaiti—the abstract concept of “right-mindedness” and the spirit of the earth—the pre-Zoroastrian deity Aši, goddess of “Reward, Fortune”—Daēnā, the Avestan term for an anthropomorphized moral concept but also a hypostasized goddess—and finally, the Gathic deities of health and immortality, Hauruatāt and Amərətāt. Among these female divinities, Spəntā Ārmaiti, Hauruatāt, and Amərətāt, are the three female Aməša Spəntas, “Bounteous Immortals” (Pahlavi *amahrspands*, *amešāspands*).

In order to fully understand the evolving role of Anāhitā in ancient Iranian religion it is important to place her within the context of the pantheon as a whole, particularly in terms of her relationship to other goddesses and the division of functions among them. This comparison can serve to identify similarities as well as differences. A comparative study of these goddesses can shed light not only on their possible similarities in how they are personified, but also—and perhaps more importantly—clarify what makes Anāhitā different (and perhaps unique) from the others.

We have already applied a comparative study of Indo-European water goddesses in order to trace Anāhitā’s origin and roots. In the present chapter our focus of comparison will be on other Iranian goddesses’ relationships to Anāhitā, and their main functions within the Zoroastrianism pantheon in relation to hers. As was the case when we looked at Indo-European goddesses, these comparisons will give rise to some questions. What, if anything, do Anāhitā and these goddesses



have in common, and to what extent? How and when were these similarities transmitted? These questions reflect our interdisciplinary comparative research approach.

Most of the Iranian deities mentioned in the Avesta—where they are emphasized to have been created by Ahura Mazdā—are in fact pre-Avestan gods. Some, like Miθra, can be dated at least as far back as the common Indo-Iranian period, that is to say more than four thousand years ago.

Among these female divinities, Spəntā Ārmaiti, Aši and Daēnā are the most important ones appearing in the Avesta. We will review these deities in terms of how they compare with Anāhitā in various respects. One comparison can be how each deity is characterized and where it is placed within the pantheon in relation to other deities. In order to make these comparisons we must rely largely on the Avestan and the Pahlavi texts. What exactly do these texts contribute to this study's topic—that is to say, Anāhitā? To answer this question we will concentrate on specific passages in the Avestan and Pahlavi texts, not just as a collection of material but rather citing and discussing those passages that can illustrate the differences and similarities between these female deities and Anāhitā. Their importance, their described functions and cults in the *Yas̄ts* and the other texts, and their visual aspects in the texts are the main points for this comparison.

As with any comparative research, we are looking for resemblances by analogy and/or possible homologies. The distinctions and differentiations of characteristics and functions between Anāhitā and these other Iranian goddesses can be seen to have evolved over time, especially when comparing their portrayals in the Avesta with those in the later Pahlavi texts; these changing relationships are important to trace in order to understand the transformations of Anāhitā as the principal Iranian goddess. Moreover, in each case the beauty of the deity is emphasized, sometimes in a similar way to how Anāhitā is described.

## 7.1 Spəntā Ārmaiti (Phl. Spandarmad)

Spəntā Ārmaiti (Phl. Spandarmad)—representing an abstract concept of “right-mindedness”, “life-giving humility,”<sup>1</sup> or literally, according to Skjærvø, “thinking in right measure”<sup>2</sup>—and is the spirit of the earth. Alongside Hauruatāt and Aməratāt, she is one of three female Aməša Spəntas mentioned in the Avesta, being a symbol of femininity and motherhood. An Indo-Iranian deity, she appears in the Vedas as Aramati who is also associated with the earth; she can be recognized as well in later Iranian and Armenian literatures.<sup>3</sup> Among the Aməša Spəntas, who are said in the texts to have been created by Ahura Mazdā from his own aura to represent his different aspects, she numbers fourth, but she is first among the female ones. While she represents the earth, she also is considered to evoke the luminous cover of the sky.<sup>4</sup> If we accept that Ahura Mazdā was originally the ancient sky god, then Spəntā Ārmaiti as the earth and his daughter likely formed a pair with him.

Spəntā Ārmaiti represents the qualities of wisdom, patience, faith and devotion. She thus has a collective personality. She is the spirit of the earth who sits on the left side of Ahura Mazdā in the sky. The *Gāθās* describe Spəntā Ārmaiti as the daughter of Ahura Mazdā (Yasna 45: 4), and also, as Skjærvø states, as Ahura Mazdā’s spouse or consort.<sup>5</sup> She is mentioned in association with the earth and its settlement by living beings (Y 47:3). Zaratuštra considers Spəntā Ārmaiti as a manifestation of Ahura Mazdā, and as a source of achieving goodness, the correct path and cosmic order (*aša*) (Y 33: 12). In the Young Avesta Spəntā Ārmaiti is the symbol and guardian of the earth. In the Story of the Jam (Yima) in the *Vīdēvdāt*, she is addressed as the earth itself, when Jam asks her to provide bounty (Vd 2: 10). As a female symbol, Spəntā Ārmaiti is an object of

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<sup>1</sup> Skjærvø 2011b, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Skjærvø 2011a, p. 14. Other translations of her name have been suggested: “Ārmaiti” as “holy devotion”, for example, with “Spəntā” being an adjective meaning “bounteous,” with her actual name being “moderation” or “piety” (Humbach 1959, Bd. I, p. 139; Nyberg 1938, p. 112).

<sup>3</sup> Molé 1963, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Skjærvø 2007, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Skjærvø 2011a, p. 14.

worship by women. Righteous (*ašavan*) women worship her first when they worship the Aməša Spəntas (Y 21. 2). Like Anāhitā, Spəntā Ārmaiti also is a healer (Yt 1.27) and also, she empowers those warriors who fight against demons, instilling them with intense ferocity (Yt 1.27).

Spəntā Ārmaiti's identification with the earth has been mentioned. In this way she follows the old Indo-European mythological paradigm of "sky father - earth mother". In Iranian myth, however, Ahurā Mazdā is "the father" only of the Iranian pantheon, whereas Vedic mythology preserves the older pairing in which *Dyaus-Pita* is the "Sky Father" who appears in conjunction with *Mata Prithvi*, "Mother Earth". *Dyaus* is etymologically identical to the Greek *Zeus* and the Latin *Ju(piter)*. The goddess has been identified by the Sumerian goddess Nana.<sup>6</sup> Azarpay proposes that Spəntā Ārmaiti was identified by Nana and, "the syncretic cult of Nanā- Ārmaiti was fairly wide spread throughout the east Iranian world in early medieval times".<sup>7</sup> If we accept this, then it follows that Nana's cult has affected both of these two important Iranian goddesses, Ārmaiti and Anāhitā.

Alongside her identification with the earth, Spəntā Ārmaiti is associated with obedient, enduring, tolerant and patient femininity, putting her in contrast with Anāhitā whose divine femininity emphasizes her strength. She is associated with the terrestrial sphere, whereas Anāhitā lives above the stars as "the heavenly river" and is symbolized by the Milky Way (Yt 5.85).

#### 7.1.1 Spəntā Ārmaiti (Spandarmad) in the Pahlavi Texts

In the Avesta, and unlike Anāhitā, Spəntā Ārmaiti does not have any visualized image. There are, on the other hand, some images of Spandarmad in the Pahlavi texts. In the *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* (The Selections of Zādspram), for example, she is embodied and personified as follows (WZ 4: 4-8):

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<sup>6</sup> Tanabe 1995, pp. 309-334.

<sup>7</sup> Azarpay 1981, p. 139.

4.4) *paydāgīh ī dēn pad Spandarmad pad ān gāh būd ka Frāsyāb āb az Ērānšahr abāz dāšt. āb abāz ānīdan, kanīg-kirbīhā pad xānag ī Manuščihr ī Ērānšahr dahibed, anērān pāsox-guftār būd, oh paydāgīhist.*

4.5) *u-š paymōxt dāšt rōšnīg paymōzan, kē be frōgīhist ō wispān kustagān hāsr-ē drahnāy ī ast frasang dō homānāg.*

4.6) *u-š pad mayānag bast dāšt zarrēn kustīg, ī xwad būd dēn ī māzdēsnañ, čē dēn band ast kē-š awīš paywastag sīh ud se band ī abar sīh ud se wināh, kē-š hamāg wināh aziš baxtag.*

4.7) *kanīgān kē-šan spandārmad bast kustīg dīd, hu-čihr sahistan rāy, pas az ān pad bastan ī kustīg taftīg būd hēnd.*

4.8) *ēn-iz būd mādarīh ī pad dēn ī pad spandārmad be dahīst, pēš az zardxušt bē ō hampursīh madan pad panj-sad ud wīst ud hašt sāl. ī-šān gōkān az dēn mādayān nibēg ī pēšēnīgān.*

4.4) The revelation of the religion through Spandarmad was at that time when Frāsyāb kept the water from the country of Iran. To bring the water back, (Spandarmad) in the shape of a maiden appeared in the house (court) of Manuščihr, Iran's king who was responder to foreigners.

4.5) She wore radiant clothing which shone out on all sides for the length of a *hāsr*, which is, like two *frasang*.

4.6) And, tied on her waist, she wore a golden “*kustīg*” (the Zoroastrian's religious belt) which was itself the religion of the Mazdā-worshippers, since the religion is a cord to

which are connected thirty-three cords,<sup>8</sup> which are above the thirty-three sins into which all the sins are divided.

4.7) The maidens who saw Spandarmad with a tied *kustīg* in order to appear beautiful were afterwards ardent to tie it themselves.

4.8) And this was the motherhood of the religion, which was created through Spandarmad, in the year 528 before Zarduxšt took counsel, the details of which (are) in the essential religious writings of the ancestors.<sup>9</sup>

The emphasis on Spandarmad's clothing is noteworthy. She wears a *kusti* (the Zoroastrian religious belt) tied around her waist, but in a way that reminds of Anāhitā's belt described in the Avesta (Yt 5.126-7). Moreover, and since this is a story about water, one may ask why in the Pahlavi text it is Spandarmad who is charged with solving the problem of bringing the water back that Frāsyāb (Av. Fraŋrasiian-) had kept back, and not Anāhitā as one would expect? It is also striking that this passage offers a rare example where Spandarmad is described anthropomorphically, with an emphasis on her clothing and her beauty similar to how Anāhitā is presented in the much older Avestan text, the *Ābān Yašt*. Is this an indication of Spandarmad's taking over some of Anāhitā's aspects by the Pahlavi period?

Fraŋrasiian- (Pahl. Frāsyāb, Frāsyāg; NP Afrāsiāb) who in the Avesta sacrifices to Anāhitā (although she does not accept his offering), is mostly associated with the causing of drought through the suppression of the waters and the draining of rivers (as will be discussed further in Chapter 8). Might the connection in the later Pahlavi text between the "demonic" character

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<sup>8</sup> The *kusti* normally has 72 cords, representing the 72 chapters of the *Yasna*. So, why is Spandarmad's golden *kustīg* connected to thirty-three cords? Perhaps there is some connection to what Kreyenbroek mentioned in a different context: "According to the *Farḍiyāt-nāma*, one must celebrate the *Vendidād* accompanied by a *Yasna*, *Bāj* (i. e., *drōn*-service), and *Āfringān* of thirty-three *yazads*, in order to expiate any sin one may have committed against one of these." See Kreyenbroek 1985, p. 155.

<sup>9</sup> My translation, adapted from Gignoux and Tafazzoli 1993 and Rashīd-Mohāsel 2010.

Frāsyāb and the divine Spandarmad (the earth?) have to do with Frāsyāb's fortress being located underground? (Bd XXXII.13) An additional connection between these two figures can be found in another Pahlavi text, the *Šahrestānīhā-ī Ērān-Šahr*, where Spandarmad is described as a woman whom Frāsyāb (here with the variant Frāsyāg) wants to marry:

(ŠĒ 38)

*šahrestān zarang naxust gizistag Frāsyāg ī tūr kard, u-š warzāwand ātaxš karkōy ānōh nišāst, u-š manuščīhr andar ō padišxwārgar kard, u-š Spandarmad pad zanīh xwast ud Spandarmad andar ō zamīg gumēxt, šahrestān awērān kard, u-š ātaxš afsārd ud pas kayhusraw Siyāwaxšān šahrestān abāz kard, u-š ātaxš karkōy abāz nišāst ud ardašīr pābagān šahrestān bun pad frazāmēnīd.*<sup>10</sup>

Frāsyāg accursed (of) Tūr ('s race), first built the city Zarang, and established the holy *karkōy* fire there, and surrounded Manuščihr in *Padišxwārgar*<sup>11</sup> and wanted to marry Spandarmad and Spandarmad mixed (*gumēxt*) with the earth, and (he) devastated the city and extinguished the fire and then Kaykhosrow the son of Siyāwaxš re-built the city (Zarang) and re-established the *karkōy* fire and Ardešīr-e Bābakān finished (building) of the city.

In the Pahlavi text known as *Čīdag Andarz ī Pōryōtkēšān*, human beings recognize Ohrmazd and Spandarmad as their primordial and uncreated father and mother:

<sup>10</sup> Oryān 1993, p. 225.

<sup>11</sup> A mountain range in Iran, probably the Alborz.

(ČAP 2)

*... ohrmazd dām hēm nē ahreman dām, u-m paywand ud tōhm az gayōmard, u-m mād  
Spandarmad u-m pid ohrmazd...*

...I am created by Ohrmazd and not Ahreman, and my pedigree is from Gayōmard, my mother is Spandarmad and my father is Ohrmazd...

In Book 7 of the *Dēnkard*, Spandarmad is described by Zaraθuštra himself:

(Dk 7. 4. 58)

*guft-iš zarduxšt kū: “bē-m ān nigerīd kē Spandarmad andar ān ī rōšn rōz ī an-abr, ud ān  
man sahist Spandarmad hu-ōrōn ud hu-parrōn ud hu-tarist, kū hamāg gyāg nēk būd, pasīh  
frōd ward kū šnāsēm agar tō hē Spandarmad”?*<sup>12</sup>

Zarduxšt said: But I saw Spandarmad on a clear day without clouds, and she appeared to me beautiful from near and far and from across, meaning on all sides (she) was beautiful.

Turn around back so, that I can recognise if it is you Spandarmad!

This passage describes Spandarmad as a personification of the earth and is an allusion to the beauty of the earth, consistent with the Zoroastrian view of the world as a fundamentally good place.

The *Bundahišn* also describes Spandarmad as patient and enduring, like the earth, which is

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<sup>12</sup> Rāshed-Mohāsel 2009, p. 65.

her symbol. She is presented as friendly and softly maternal, very different from Anāhitā. Like the earth, Spandarmad receives with tolerance and forbearance any harm humans do to her:

(Bd XXVI. 81-88)

26.81) *Spandarmad xwēš-kārīh parwardārīh ī dāmān ud har(w) xīr pad dāmān bowandag be kardan. u-š gētīg zamīg xwēš.*

26.82) *čiyōn gōwēd kū Spandārmad ī weh ī bowandag-menišn ud kāmag- dōys<sup>a</sup>r ī Ohrmazd-dād ī ahlaw.*

26.83) *u-š wehīh ēn kū wīdwar ud gilag-ōbār ēn kū anāgīh ī ō Spandārmad zamīg rasēd hamāg be gugārēd.*

26.84) *u-š bowandag-menišn ēn kū hamāg anāgīh ī-š padīš kunēnd hunsandīhā padīrēd.*

26.85) *u-š radīd ēd kū hamāg dāmān az ōy zīwēnd.*

26.86) *ahlawān mēnōg pākīh ī zamīg rāy dād éstēd kū ka-š dēwān pad šab nasrušt abar barēnd ōy yōjdahr be kunēd.*

26.87) *u-š ēn-iz xwēš-kārīh kū har(w) ēbārag-ē(w) az har(w) dahišn-ē(w) xwarrah-ē(w) abāz ō pēš ī Ohrmazd šawēd. pad ušahin gāh ān xwarrah ō star-pāyag āyēd ud Ōš(e)bām be padīrēd. ud pad bāmdād gāh be ō war ī Ūrwes āyēd ahlaw mēnōg padīrēd ud pad rah ī wardayūn āyēd ud har(w) jān-ē(w) xwarrah ī xwēš awiš abespārēd.*

26.88) *kē-š zamīg rāmēnēd ayāb bēšēd ēg-iš Spandārmad rāmēnēd ayāb bēšīd bawēd.*<sup>13</sup>

26.81) The proper function of Spandarmad is the nourishment of the creatures (of Ohrmazd), and making every thing perfect for the creation. And the *gētīg* (material) earth is her own.

26.82) (As) is stated: “The good Spandarmad, the perfect-minded, with the desire to

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<sup>13</sup> Pākzād 2005, pp. 306-7.



observe widely,<sup>14</sup> created by Ohrmazd, the righteous (one).

26.83) Her goodness is this that she is patient and suppresses (lit.: swallows) complaints; it is such that she bears (lit. ‘digests’) all the harm, which reaches to the earth of Spandarmad.

26.84) And her perfect mindedness is that she accepts with contentment all the harms which (people) do to her.

26.85) And her generosity is that all the creations live because of her.

26.86) The “*mēnōg*” of the righteous beings is created for the purity of the earth, when the “*dēwān*” pollute it with abomination at nighttime, then she purifies it.

26.87) And she also has this proper function that every evening a *xwarrah* from each creation reverts towards Ohrmazd. The *xwarrah* comes at the *ušahin gāh* (the night *gāh*) to the star station, and the *ōš(e)bām* (dawn) accepts it. And at the time of dawn it comes onto the sea of *Ūrwes*, and the “*mēnōg*” of the righteous being accepts it. And she comes in the chariot, and every time gives back to every one his own *xwarrah*.

26.88) Anybody who pleases or distresses the earth shall have pleased or distressed Spandarmad.

The portrayal here of Spandarmad provides an interesting resonance with contemporary environmentalist thinking, which sometimes anthropomorphizes nature’s reactions to how people treat her.

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<sup>14</sup> *kāmag-dōys<sup>ar</sup>*. *kāmag-* means “will, desire”, and *dōys<sup>ar</sup>* (Av. *dōiθra-*) means “eye”; the Avestan adjective *vouru.dōiθra-* “whose eyes observe widely” (Bartholomae 1904, col. 1430 “des Augen weithin gehen, weitschauend”) describes the deity Saokā- (Bartholomae 1904, col. 1549). A similar idea seems to be expressed here with regard to Spandarmad. Bahār (1999, p. 191) translates the term as “wide-observer”.

## 7.2. Daēnā

Daēnā (Pahlavi *dēn*) is an Avestan term for an anthropomorphized moral concept. *Yašt* 16 of the Avesta, the *Dēn Yašt*, is named after her but is actually devoted to another female deity, Čistā, whose connection to Daēnā is close but not entirely clear.<sup>15</sup> The word *daēnā-* is derived from the root  $\sqrt{dī}$ , “to see,” connected to *Daēnā*’s enabling one’s vision-soul to “see.” One may say that it is the hypostasis of one’s own moral qualities or inner self especially towards religion, and as Hintze points out, “basically refers to the mental view and attitude of a person toward his own life and towards the world around him.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Hintze explains:

A peculiarity of the ancient Iranian (and indeed Indo-Iranian) religion is the personification of abstract notions. In this process, the grammatical gender of a noun could turn into natural gender. For instance, the grammatically feminine noun *daēnā-* ‘conscience, vision’ came to be represented as a maiden.<sup>17</sup>

The Avestan words *māzdaiiasni-* (of a Mazdayasnian) and *āhūiri-* (ahuric) function as adjectives modifying the *daēnā-* in the liturgical parts of *Yasna*.<sup>18</sup> The *daēnā-* or *dēn*, contains each person’s inner belief, conscience, and insight. The idea appears in the *Vīdēvdāt*, the *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag*, the *Hādōxt Nask*, and also in some other texts<sup>19</sup>. According to this belief, at the dawn of the fourth day after death the soul of the deceased finds itself in the presence of either a beautiful maiden (who is the mobile and seeing soul) and leads it to the heaven, or an ugly disgusting hag (who is the mobile and seeing soul, again) who takes it to the hell, depending on whether the

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<sup>15</sup> Yt 16.1 speaks about them as the two names of one deity (Kellens 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Hintze 1995, p. 84.

<sup>17</sup> Hintze 2003.

<sup>18</sup> De Vaan 2003, pp. 91-92.

<sup>19</sup> Skjærvø states that the *Dēn* in Zoroastrianism encompasses the concept of religion itself including the complete corpus of religious texts, which constituted “the Tradition” (with a capital “T”) and was called the *Dēn* by the Sasanian priests. (See Skjærvø 2012, p. 23.)

person has led a righteous or sinful life.

With the function and capacity of distinguishing good actions from bad ones, the *daēnā* is an embodiment of moral conscience, given to humans as a gift from Ahura Mazda. In the *Gāθās* this capacity is presented as mostly conceptual, rather than having an actual divine form (Y 31: 11). And it changes in accordance with the free choice of the individual (Y 48-5).

Commenting on the Indo-European myth of the marriage between the sky god and his daughter, Cantera explains that In the mythology of the long liturgy, it is the wedding of Ahura Mazda with the vision, Daēnā,<sup>20</sup> and through the recitation of the *Ahuna Vairia* and the long liturgy (Y 53), Zaraθuštra emulates Ahura Mazda by marrying his own daughter, thus in turn each Mazdaean priest emulates Zaraθuštra; his soul is thereby united with the Vision-Daēnā and gains access to Ahura Mazda. Cantera states that since the Vision is also “the capacity for consultation and transmitting the consultation to the ritual community as the contents of the consultation, thus the meaning of *daēnā* could be seen as “tradition” or “corps of the religious texts. Every consultation transmitted to humans in the long liturgy is *daēnā*,” according to Cantera.<sup>21</sup>

In the Young Avesta, however, this capacity for moral discernment is hypostatized, as a beautiful maiden in the case of a good person’s soul after death as discussed above. The soul and Daēnā first exchange some questions and answers, then Daēnā explains that while she is by nature beautiful and worthy of adoration, the soul’s good deeds have made her even more so.

The scene where the soul meets Daēnā also occurs in the (Vd 19: 30). Daēnā is accompanied by the goddess Aši, who is said to be her sister. Together, they are the spiritual guardians of women (Y 13.1).

The *daēnā* in the *Haθaoxta-nask* is a beautiful young girl who has just reached the age of fifteen:

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<sup>20</sup> Cantera 2016, p. 71.

<sup>21</sup> Cantera 2016, pp. 71-73.

(HN 2.9)

*āat tām vātām nāḡhaii uzgərəmbiiō sadaiieiti yō narš ašaonō uruua kudat aēm vātō vāiti  
yim yauua vātām nāḡhābiia hubaoiđitəməm jigauruua?*

*aḡhā dim vātaiiā frərənta sadaiieiti yā hauua daēna.*

*kainīnō kəhrpa srīraiīā xšōiθniīā auruša-bāzūuō amaiīā huraođaiīā +uzarštaiīā bərəzaitiīā  
ərəduuafšniīā sraotanuuō āzātaiīā raēuuasciθraiīā pəncadasaiīā raodaēšuuua kəhrpa  
auuauuatō sraiīā yaθa dāmən sraēštāiš.*

Then the righteous soul feels he (she) smells the (aromatic) wind. “where does this wind come from, the most aromatic wind that I have ever smelled with my nose?

the soul imagines that his conscious (*daēna*) comes along (*frərənta*) with this wind.

Displayed in the shape of a beautiful bright maiden with white strong arms and well-shaped and girded high, upright with well-formed outstanding breasts, well-shaped, noble-born and righteous who seems fifteen with the best body among the other creators.

And further:

*āaṭ hē paiti-aoxta yā hauua daēna: azəm bā tē ahmi yum humanō huuacō hušiiəθana  
hudaēna yā hauua daēna xvaēpaiθe tanuuō.*

then his (her) conscience (*daēna-*) answered him: O young righteous good-thinking, good-doing, good-speaking man, I am brightly yourself and your conscience.

The dual conceptualization of Daēnā demonstrates that it is one's behavior during life that makes the difference. Good behavior makes one's Daēnā more beautiful and cherished:

(HN 2.30)

*aaṭ maṣm friθqm haitīm friθō.tarqm srīrqm haitīm srīrō-tarqm bərəxδqm haitīm bərəxδō.tarqm.*

then I already was cherished, you (made) me more, I already was beautiful, you (made) me more, I already was precious, you (made) me more.

Both the good and evil versions of the spirit are accompanied by a wind. In the case of Daēnā the wind blows from the south. In the case of the disgusting hag the wind blows from the north. Daēnā is said to have a precise age: she is a fifteen-year-old girl. This detail clearly represents an aspect of ideal beauty in the mind of ancient Iranians, and it is surely not coincidental that in Persian poetry of the Islamic period the *sāqī*, or wine-bearer with whom the poet falls in love, is said to be this age as well.

Daēnā's depictions in the Pahlavi texts are similar to those cited above. She is described with precision in the *Ardā Wīrāz nāmag*, a text that recounts the journey of a Zoroastrian priest, Wīrāz,<sup>22</sup> through heaven and hell in order to demonstrate the validity of Zoroastrian beliefs. Similar journeys to that of Wīrāz exist elsewhere in Zoroastrian literature, including inscriptions of the third-century priest Kirdīr and the legend of Zaraṯuštra recorded in *Dēnkard* VII by King Wištāsp.<sup>23</sup> In the case of Kirdīr, it is a matter of a vision of heaven and hell in the course of a soul-journey which he describes in the Naqš-e Rājab inscription near Persepolis.

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<sup>22</sup> His name has been transcribed as "Wirāf" in the preliminary edition of Haug and West 1872 and in older publications; however, the Avestan form from which it derives (*Yašt* 13.101) is Virāza (Gignoux 1986).

<sup>23</sup> Molé 1967.

In three different Pahlavi books—the *Ardā Wīrāz nāmag*,<sup>24</sup> the *Bundahišn*, and the *Dādestān ī Mēnog ī Xrad*—Daēnā/Dēn is mentioned as a beautiful young maiden. In the *Bundahišn*, she has a beautiful body, white clothes, and is fifteen years old; her image is generated in relation to the nature of the individual’s deeds while alive:

(Bd XXX.30.14 and 16)

30.14) *did kanīg kirb padīrag rasēd ī hu-kirb ī sped wistarag ī pānzdah sālag kē az hamāg kustag nēk kē ruwān padiš šādīhēd.*

30.16) *ēdōn awēšān ēk ēk passox gōwēnd <ku> man hēm ahlaw dēn ī tō ān kunišn ī-t warzēd ka tō ān nēkīh kard man tō rāy ēdar būd hēm.*

30.14) Then a maiden-shaped comes to welcome, with good body, white dress, fifteen years old, who looks good from all sides, and the soul feels comfort by (seeing) her.

30.16) And thus they answer, one by one, “O righteous one, it is me, your conscious (*dēn*), I am that deed that you committed. When you did that good manner, I was there (in) you.

And its Dēn who meets the souls of the deceased as they cross over the *Činuuat* Bridge:

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<sup>24</sup> Gignoux 1984.

(AWN. 4. 9)

*u-š ān ī xwēš dēn ud ān ī xwēš kunišn (padīrag āmada) kanīg kirb ī nēk pad dīdan ī \*hurust kū pad frārōnīh rust ēstād frāz-pestān kū-š pestān abāz nišas ī dil ud gyān dōst<sup>25</sup> kē-š kirb ēdōn rōšn čiyōn dīd hu-dōšagtar nigerišn abāyišnīgdar.*

And his own religion and his own deeds, in the shape of a well-appearing (*hurst: hu-rust*) maiden came toward him, as a beautiful appearance, that is, raised in rectitude (*frārōnīh*), with prominent (*frāz*) breasts, that is, her breasts swelled upward, and charming to the heart and the soul, the shape of whose body was as bright and luminous, so was so pleasant to see and desirable.

In summary, the descriptions of Daēnā is precise, emphasizing her beauty. Interestingly, many of the adjectives applied to Daēnā are elsewhere applied to Anāhitā. The beautiful maiden appearance of Daēnā could have some connection to the descriptions of *Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* in the *Ābān Yašt*, which in fact uses many adjectives similar to the description of her.<sup>26</sup> Thus, as a divine power the *daēnā-* takes shape according to an individual human's behaviour and deeds while alive in the world. We can confirm Daēnā's quality as a shape-shifter, as is the case with Anāhitā. The difference is that Daēnā's changes vacillate between two basic anthropomorphic female forms, one positive/beautiful, and the other negative/disgusting, reflecting the moral quality of the individual. Anāhitā, meanwhile, can either take on the shapes of nature phenomena (such as rivers, cascades, etc.) or else that of an beautiful, over-sized goddess who moves from the sky to the earth.

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<sup>25</sup> In the transcription provided by the Titus website it is *\*dērand \*angust* which means the "long fingers".

<sup>26</sup> Mīr-Faxrā'ī 1993, p. 87.

### 7.3. Aši

Known as an ancient pre-Zoroastrian divinity<sup>27</sup> and as a Gathic and Young Avestan deity, Aši is the goddess of fortune and abundance who behaves both as a deity and as an abstract concept in the younger Avesta.<sup>28</sup> Her name, an abstract feminine noun in Avestan derived from the root *ar-* meaning “to grant” followed by the suffix *-ti*, is an Avestan feminine noun meaning “thing attained, reward, share, portion, recompense,” and, as a personification, the goddess “Reward, Fortune.”<sup>29</sup> The term is one of a group of Young Avestan personified abstracts including Rāman (“joy,” “peace”) and Daēnā (“conscience,” “religion”). In the Young Avesta she is one of deities who receive the epithet *Vaṇuhī*, meaning “the good one,” giving the later Pahlavi form Ahrišwang (from *Aši Vaṇuhī*).<sup>30</sup> According to Boyce, Aši also possesses a characteristic epithet of “great-gifted” and fertility function.<sup>31</sup>

Aši was worshiped widely in Iran (mostly in Eastern Iran<sup>32</sup>), possibly is originating from the pre-Zoroastrian time,<sup>33</sup> is mentioned in the *Gaṇas*, and has a specific Yašt (Yašt 17 of the Avesta, the *Ard Yašt* or *Aši Yašt*) devoted to her. According to this Yašt, Aši is the daughter of Ahura Mazdā and Spəntā Ārmaiti (showing their pairing). She also has Sraoša, Rašnu, and Miθra, as her brothers and the Mazdayasnian Religion (Daēna) as her sister (Yt 17.16). She also is the sister of the Aməša Spəntas (Yt 17.2). She is the one who comes with all wisdom of the Sošiantas (Yt 17.1-2). If one accepts that the *Gaṇas* are the oldest preserved expression of Zoroastrian thought, it would seem highly significant to note that apart from the Aməša Spəntas, the only other deities they mention (although not clearly as deities) are Sraoša, Fire, and Aši.

Looking at a later period, Grenet has observed that in the Kushan Empire (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries

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<sup>27</sup> De Jong 1997, p. 104.

<sup>28</sup> Skjærvø 2011b, p. 71.

<sup>29</sup> Schlerath and Skjærvø 1987.

<sup>30</sup> Schlerath and Skjærvø 1987.

<sup>31</sup> Boyce 1975, pp. 65-66.

<sup>32</sup> De Jong 1997, p. 104.

<sup>33</sup> Raffaelli 2013, p. 288.



CE) the Miθra cult seems to have been paired with that of the goddess Aši (known as *Ardoxšo*); this would suggest that parallel male-female cults existed at that time.<sup>34</sup> On Kušan coins, Ardoxšo (Aši) appears with a cornucopia in hand. She was also worshipped in Manichaeism. In a Manichaean Middle Persian text the goddess appears as Bay-ard (written *by'rd*), the guardian spirit of the border of Khurāsān.<sup>35</sup>

In the *Gāθās* Aši is represented as an abstract concept, actually identified with *aša* (“truth”). Schlerath allows that she may have been a fertility goddess in pre-Zoroastrian times, even though she does not appear in the Vedas.<sup>36</sup> It is in the younger Avesta that Aši emerges clearly as a divinity, the subject of her own *Yašt*. In the Zoroastrian calendar the twenty-fifth day of the month is dedicated to her.

As a Gathic and Young Avestan figure Aši must be considered an important deity, providing wealth, happiness and rest. She is said in the *Aši Yašt* to be the daughter of Ahura Mazdā and Spəntā Ārmaiti, and the sister of the Aməša Spəntas and of Sraoša, Rašnu, Miθra, and Daēna. Like other important deities she has a chariot, and also appears driving Miθra’s chariot.

She is worshipped with many adjectives such as “radiant,” “honorable,” “mighty,” “beautiful and tall” (like Anāhitā), “healer” (again like Anāhitā), and successfully fighting enemies (Yt 17 1:1-2). She is a wealth producer. Thus, she produces alimention, development, peace and opulence in the Iranian lands. It is not difficult to understand that her description reflects the desires and priorities of her worshippers, as illustrated by the refrain found in her *Yašt* invoking good fortune through her support (Yt 17.2.7). And wherever she goes, amenity, amicable and tolerant thoughts will accompany her (Yt 17.2:6).

There exists a whole list of characters, including the Iranian deity Haōma, *Zaraθuštra*, and the Old Iranian heroes, who sacrifice to Aši. Interestingly, this list is identical with another list

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<sup>34</sup> Boyce and Grenet 1991, pp. 486-7, n. 629.

<sup>35</sup> Schlerath and Skjærvø 1987.

<sup>36</sup> Schlerath and Skjærvø 1987.

found in the *Gōš Yašt* (Yt 9. 3-31), devoted to Druuāspā (an Avestan goddess, who, according to her name, “wild solid horses,”<sup>37</sup> was presumably connected to horses.) Following Boyce, Skjærvø thinks that “Druuāspā” could originally have been an epithet of Aši.<sup>38</sup> The list is also identical with that of Anāhitā’s sacrificers provided in the *Ābān Yašt*, except that in the *Ābān Yašt* the list is longer and contains some negative figures as has been previously mentioned. Since the *Gōš Yašt*’s formulary contains no original material, in all likelihood it was borrowed from these other two *Yašts*, as Malandra observes.<sup>39</sup>

As the deity of fortune, Aši is characterized as one whose support brings victory in battle (Yt 17.2.12). The *Aši Yašt* mostly describes an ideal society. In the scenes where she is depicted as assisting humankind, wealth is emphasized. The men whom she helps are wealthy. Their country is wealthy. The agriculture in their country is very productive and there is plenty of food for everybody (Yt 17.2.7). The houses are described as strongly made, and in these beautiful bright houses, lucky women wearing square earrings are lying down in their beds waiting for their husbands. This ideal world is full of happy, successful rulers, beautiful young girls, fast and scary horses, large-humped camels, and strong, enduring houses. It is a happy society, which seems incidentally to be highly patriarchal (Yt 17.2:10). As Skjærvø<sup>40</sup> observes:

Among the old *yašts*, however, *Ard Yašt* is quite outstanding both for its literary qualities, especially in its sensually graphic description of the homes of Aši’s favorites and their wives, who lie awaiting their men’s return from battle on sumptuously decorated couches, and for the concern for marital values expressed in it.

In terms of the distribution of their respective characteristics the Avestan Anāhitā and Aši

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<sup>37</sup> Kellens, “Drvāspā.”

<sup>38</sup> Skjærvø 1986.

<sup>39</sup> Malandra 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Skjærvø 1986.

are closely interrelated, often contrastingly or in complement with each other. There are similarities in some stanzas between the *Ābān Yašt* and the *Yašt* 17 devoted to Aši (Yt 17.6-11), but Aši is not described in as much detail as Anāhitā. Some passages in the *Ābān Yašt* indicate aspects of Anāhitā's power which correspond closely with others addressed to Aši, and there seems to have been "some blurring of identity between these two beautiful, chariot-driving goddesses" as Boyce points out<sup>41</sup>. Indeed, many of the hymns contained in the *Ābān Yašt* are repeated in the *Aši Yašt*. Like Anāhitā, Aši is mostly concerned with women, but unlike Anāhitā Aši's "support" reflects men's interests or benefit on their idealistic wives. In other words, when Aši is described as giving her assistance, it is not support given to women in their own life but rather to the men who possess them (Yt 17.10-11).

Both Anāhitā and Aši are fertility goddesses. Also like Anāhitā, Aši is also closely connected to Miθra, appearing in the *Mihr Yašt* as his charioteer (Yt 10.17.68). As in Anāhitā's case, Aši's *Yašt* contains a list of heroes and kings who sacrifice to her asking for her support and are rewarded for it, although unlike Anāhitā's this list is made up uniquely of "good people." Also in contrast to Anāhitā, whose aristocratic female devotees in Anatolia are said by Strabo to have engaged in sacred prostitution prior to marriage, Aši is free of any association with such "immoral" rituals. On the contrary, Aši is portrayed as a strong advocate of female morality. She laments about women who abort their children, who cheat on their husbands, and who lie to their husbands about their children's paternity (Yt 17.10.58).

Thus, as a major Iranian goddess Aši differs from Anāhitā in important respects. These differences are likely connected to socio-economic transformations in ancient Iranian society, which become increasingly prominent by the Sasanian period. Aši can be seen as the guardian of a "new morality" for women living in a world dominated by Iranian men. Her complaints regarding "immoral" behaviors of women demonstrate that such behaviors existed and were perhaps even

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<sup>41</sup> Boyce et al. 1986.

prevalent, and that her role was to remove them. She embodies the female characteristics desired by those in control of this society-in-transformation.

In contrast to Anāhitā, Aši appears to fulfill a patriarchal dream as the goddess of “stay-at-home women” who submissively wait for their husbands. Female happiness equates to domestic happiness, as the author of the *Bundahišn* argues:

(Bd 26.99)

*Ard mēnōg ī ardāyīh ud wahištīgīh ast ī ka Ahrišwang ī weh ast kē Ašišwang gōwēd.  
xwarrah-abzāyišnīh ī mān čē har(w) čē be ō arzānīgān dahēnd ōy pad abzōn ō ān mān  
rasēd. pānāgīh ī ganj ī wehān kunēd čē wahišt-iz mān ēwēnag ī gōhr-pēsīd. čiyon gōwēd  
mān ud mānišn ī weh čiyon harwisp axw ī astōmand nē pad ēn dēn ī Ohrmazd hēnd.*<sup>42</sup>

Aši is the spirit of the righteousness and being from paradise, (she is) the good “Ahrišwang”, (who also) is called Ašišwang. (She is) the increase of *xwarrah* in the houses. Because whatever is given to the worthy people she shall revert in abundance to that house. She protects the treasure of the good people and the paradise as well (she protects) since it (paradise) also is like a home for the good people and adorned with precious jewels. As it says, “(paradise) is as the house for the good (beings).” Since all the beings in the material world are not following this Religion of Ohrmazd.

Aši, a non-pre-Avestan goddess who begins her rise to divine status in the Avesta, assumes an increasing importance and respect for the Pahlavi priests, who seem to exalt her in an effort to reduce the prominence of the older and originally more powerful Anāhitā and the values she represents.

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<sup>42</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 310.

#### 7.4. Hauruatāt and Amərətāt

Hauruatāt (MP Hordād, NP Khordād), who is the subject of Yt 4, means “integrity,” “wholeness.” Amərətāt (MP Amurdād, NP Mordād) literally means “immortality.” These two Gathic divinities mostly act in tandem with each other. According to the *Bundahišn* (26.8) they stand on Ahura Mazdā’s left, together with Spəntā Ārmaiti.<sup>43</sup>

Hauruatāt is devoted to water. She also ensures the healthy growth of plant life:

(Bd 26. 106-107)

26.106) *Hordād rad ī sālān ud mähān ud rōzān ēn kū harwīn rad. u-š gētīg āb xwēš. čiyōn gōwēd bawišn ud zāyišn ud parwarišn ī hamāg astōmandān gēhān az āb ud zamīg-iz ābādānīh az ōy. ka andar sāl weh šāyēd zī(wi)stan pad rāy ī Hordād.*

26.107) *čiyōn gōwēd kū hamāg (nēkīh ka az abargarān ō gētīg) āyēd Hordād rōz ī nog-rōz āyēd. ast ī gōwēd kū hamāg rōz āyēd bē ān rōz wēš āyēd*

26.106) Hordād is the chieftain of the years, months, and days, as she is the chieftain of all these. And the *gētīg* water is her own. As it says the existence, birth, and nourishment of all corporeal life are due to water, and the fertility of the land too is due to it. If (people) can live well during the year, it is on account of Hordād.

26.107) As it says, “When all happiness comes to the earth from the supernal beings, it comes on the day Hordād, the new year day.” There is one who says, “It comes on all the days, but it comes the most on that day”.

Humans can either please or offend her, depending on how they treat water: “one who will please or distress the water shall have pleased or distressed Hordād” (Bd 16:106).

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<sup>43</sup> Op. cit., p. 294.

Amərətāt is devoted to plants. In the Iranian creation story as related in the *Selections of Zādspram*, after the first plant is destroyed by demons during the primordial battle Amərətāt or Amurdād re-generates plant life all across the earth. According to the version in the *Bundahišn*, Amurdād is either pleased or angered by humans depending on how they treat plants:

(Bd 26. 116-117)

26.116) *a-margān Amurdād a-margān urwarān rad čē-š gētīg urwar xwēš. ud urwarān waxšēnēd ud ramag ī gōspandān abzāyēnēd hamāg dām az ōy xwarēnd ud zīwēnd. pad i-z fraš(a)grid anōš az Amurdād wirāyēnd.*

26.117) *kē urwar rāmēnēd ayāb bēšēd ēg-iš Amurdād rāmēnēd ayāb bēšīd bawēd.*

26.116) The immortal Amurdād is the chieftain of the innumerable plants. For the *gētīg* plants (are) her own, and she causes the plants to grow and the flocks of animals to increase. For all the creatures eat and live on account of her, and even at the renovation of the universe *fraš(a)grid* they will prepare the nectar out of Amurdād.

26.117) He who will please or distress the plants shall have pleased or distressed Amurdād.

Hauruatāt and Amərətāt are said to be offended by chatter (MX 2.33), and harmed by women who do not observe the stipulated procedures when menstruating (AWN 72.5).

Some scholars have sought to connect Hauruatāt and Amərətāt to certain Vedic deities, which would imply a very archaic origin to this pairing. Dumézil, for example, has drawn a functional correspondence between these two Aməša Spəntas and the Vedic Nāsatyas.<sup>44</sup>

Duchesne-Guillemin and Widengren have supported this hypothesis,<sup>45</sup> while others such as

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<sup>44</sup> Dumézil 1945 and 1977.

<sup>45</sup> Duchesne-Guillemin 1958, pp. 40-41 and 1962, pp. 197-202; also Widengren 1965.

Narten<sup>46</sup> and Gnoli<sup>47</sup> have rejected it.<sup>48</sup> Narten, meanwhile, has pointed out that in the *Yasna Haptañhāiti*, *dāenā-* and *Fsəratū-* occupy the place of Hauruatāt and Aməratāt.<sup>49</sup> Some scholars have also raised the possible but problematic connection between Hauruatāt and Aməratāt and the Vedic Ādityas.<sup>50</sup>

Echoes of Haurvatāt and Aməratāt are found in Gnostic-Manichaean, Christian, and Islamic traditions. They appear as Harwōt and Marwōt in a Sogdian glossary, as Arioch and Marioch in the Book of Enoch, and the demons Hārūt and Mārūt in the Qur'an (2:96). The flowers referred to as *hawrot-mawrot* in Armenian used in the *hambarjman tawn* ceremony, are another reflex of this pair.<sup>51</sup> Most significantly for our purposes, however, the Zoroastrian texts provide no visual description of either Hauruatāt or Aməratāt.

## Conclusions

There are many female deities in the Iranian pantheon, whose relative importance in relation to each other changes over time. The goal of this chapter has been to help us understand how Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā's multi-potential characteristics situated her within the context of Iranian goddesses as a whole, and how the distribution of these characteristics and the importance accorded to them by successive generations of Mazdaean priests changed the dynamics of Anāhitā's relationship to the other Iranian goddesses from the Avestan through to the Pahlavi periods.

Apart from Anāhitā, Spəntā Ārmaiti, Hauruatāt, and Aməratāt, who are the three female Aməša Spəntas mentioned in the Avesta, along with two others, Aši and Daēnā, are the most

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<sup>46</sup> Narten 1982, pp. 104-5;

<sup>47</sup> Gnoli 1991, pp. 123-24.

<sup>48</sup> Panaino 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Narten, *Die Aməša Spəntas im Avesta*, p. 72.

<sup>50</sup> Thieme 1970, pp. 208-16; Narten 1982, pp. 104-5; Humbach 1991; Panaino 2004.

<sup>51</sup> Russell 2004.

important Mazdaean goddesses. Among these, Spəntā Ārmaiti, Aši and Daēnā figure most prominently in the Avesta, where their beauty is also emphasized. Spəntā Ārmaiti is the spirit of the earth. Her relationship with Ahura Mazdā as her father (-husband) echoes an Indo-European mythological model in which the male sky god is counterbalanced by the female goddess of the earth. This earth goddess, of whom Spəntā Ārmaiti is the Iranian example, represents the qualities of kindness, patience, faith and devotion. Alongside her identification with the earth, Spəntā Ārmaiti's traits are more maternal and rather soft, in contrast to Anāhitā whose divine femininity emphasizes her power and her strength. Anāhitā does not have a maternal role, and is not associated with obedience, tolerance or patient femininity; neither is she passive. (She is not, however, sexually active like the Mesopotamian goddess Ištar). The Avestan Anāhitā is notable for her warrior aspect, both powerful and chaste as Jenny Rose has pointed out.<sup>52</sup>

The Avestan Daēnā is both a goddess and the hypostasis of one's own inner moral quality. She is the post-mortal embodiment of an individual human's behaviour while alive in the world. Though her functions are entirely different from those of Anāhitā, the terms in which their respective beauty is described are similar.

The Gathic and Young Avestan Aši is the goddess of Reward and Fortune with some additional fertility and wisdom functions. Her importance is demonstrated through Yašt 17 of the Avesta which is devoted to her, the *Ard Yašt* or *Aši Yašt*, where she also is considered as the daughter of Ahura Mazdā and Spəntā Ārmaiti. She produces alimentation, development, peace and opulence in the Iranian lands. It is not difficult to understand how these traits would have attracted many devotees to her cult. As in the case of Anāhitā, a whole list of characters are said to sacrifice to Aši; this list is longer in the *Ābān Yašt* than in the *Aši Yašt*, yet the former also includes some negative figures which suggests some tension between the cults of the two goddesses.

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<sup>52</sup> Rose 2015, p. 275.



As mentioned above, scholars have assumed that where there are verses in both texts (The *Ābān Yašt* and the *Aši Yašt*) it was the latter that borrowed from the former. Some of these borrowings reflect similarities between these two beautiful, chariot-driving goddesses, suggesting that notions of divine female beauty originated with Anāhitā and then were partially transposed onto other goddesses. In terms of their actual qualities, however, the two goddesses are virtual opposites. Both goddesses are concerned primarily with women, but the values promoted by Aši—obedience and submission—are those of patriarchy, in contrast to Anāhitā’s strong and independent character. Aši is portrayed as a strong advocate of female morality, fulfilling a patriarchal dream as the goddess of “stay-at-home women”. Within the ongoing evolution of the Iranian pantheon she can be seen as the guardian of a new domestic morality, while Anāhitā’s martial role is increasingly emphasized as demonstrated by the Sāsānian rulers sending the severed heads of their enemies to her temple.

## Chapter Eight

### Anāhitā: A Composite Goddess

#### 8.1 Indo-Iranian Characteristics of Anāhitā

Though a number of modern scholars have sought to characterize Anāhitā as either an “imported,” non-Iranian goddess, or at best as a hybrid product of cultural syncretism, it has been the contention of this dissertation that she should be seen primarily as an Iranian manifestation of an ancient Indo-European water-river goddess, who acquired additional features and functions in different places and times throughout history. Her specifically Indo-European characteristics have been discussed in Chapter Five.

Anāhitā is the best-known Iranian goddess, due at least in part to her frequent mentions in ancient Greek sources. As De Jong explains:

After the period of the Old Persian inscriptions [i.e., of Artaxerxes II] and the presumed date of composition of Berossus’ *Babyloniaca*, Anāhitā has captured the West to such an extent that she came to be regarded as the most important Persian divinity. Her cult has been amply described by Classical authors, is attested in many descriptions and her statue is represented on the coins of several Anatolian cities. Anāhitā (in her Armenian name *Anahit*) was certainly the most popular divinity in Armenia, the patron divinity of a country which named an entire province after her [Anaitica, another name for Acilisene on the Upper Euphrates].<sup>1</sup>

De Jong has noted that while the frequent mentions of Anāhitā in Greek and Armenian sources attest to her popularity especially in Western Iran, the Aməša Spəntas do not seem to have

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<sup>1</sup> De Jong 1997, p. 105.

received much attention from those foreign commentators living in closest proximity to Iranians. On the other hand, “the enormous popularity of Anāhitā in Western Iran may be assured, but can be shown to have produced little doctrinal reflection in priestly circles.” De Jong concludes from this that “The [Iranian] pantheon thus appears to have varied locally and in different periods,”<sup>2</sup> an observation with which one can only concur.

As a composite goddess, Anāhitā’s principal characteristics appear to have been absorbed on the one hand from those of a river-lake-stream goddess or goddesses found in many Indo-European societies, and from Mesopotamian goddesses associated with both war and fertility on the other. In accordance with this model, it may be assumed that certain basic elements of her role and personality date as far back as the common Indo-European period, since many major European rivers and lakes had a goddess-spirit. While throughout much of the historical period, during the time of her greatest importance in Iranian society, Anāhitā possessed many functions reflecting a broad range of influences, it is possible to trace a line of continuity connecting her back to an archaic Proto-Indo-European belief in a river goddess.

## 8.2 Anāhitā’s Absorption of Non-Iranian Features

As has been pointed out, deities and their associated myths and rituals in any tradition transform themselves over time, and always represent a composite drawn from a range of sources. Anāhitā, in her best-known version from the time of the Iranian empires, is no exception: she is a goddess whose features, functions, and rituals represent a blend of Iranian and non-Iranian roots.

### 8.2.1 The Bactria–Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC)

The Bactria–Margiana Archaeological Complex, also known as BMAC, refers to an ensemble of archaeological remains attributed to the so-called Oxus or Amu Darya Civilization,

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<sup>2</sup> De Jong 1997, p. 61.

which existed in Central Asia between roughly 2300 and 1700 BCE. This civilization first was discovered through archeological sites in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and included some ancient cities with buildings and tombs filled with treasures. More discoveries followed, and many other archeological remains were found in eastern Iran and Pakistan, which were very similar to the first discoveries.

From the time of the Bronze Age (ca. 7000 BCE) a civilization developed throughout this region which had many connections with the peoples of Mesopotamia and Elam. The progressive arrival of Indo-European tribes into the area from around 2400 BCE led to cultural exchanges and mutual influences between the newcomers and the existing inhabitants. The resulting BMAC culture, which was centered along the Oxus river valley, thrived in Central Asia for more than half a millennium.

Michael Witzel has highlighted the relationship between the non-IE and Indo-Iranian elements in BMAC culture as depicted in seals and other art forms. For example, he sees a local non-IE influence on the Avestan version of the widely-attested Indo-European dragon-slaying myth, discussed later, where the hero (*Vərəθraγna*) overcomes the dragon of drought (*Aži/Ahi*). Specifically, Witzel perceives a transformation of the IE myth into one evoking the releasing the waters of the late spring snow melt in Afghanistan (Avestan version) or in the northwestern Indian subcontinent (Rig Veda version). According to Witzel, the prominence of the BMAC goddess of waters and fertility influenced, at least to some extent, the character of the Avestan river goddess *Anāhitā* and that of the Vedic *Sárasvatī*, setting them apart in some ways from the other Indo-European river goddesses discussed in Chapter Five.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Witzel 2004.

### 8.2.2 Elamite and Mesopotamian Features

By around 2000 BCE, Susa had become the capital of Elam and its most important city. Parallel with this development, its local deity In-Šušin-ak (lit., “the god of Susa”), grew in importance. This trend mirrored the rising importance of Marduk during the growth phase of Babylon.

In-Šušin-ak thus became one of the three important deities in the Elamite pantheon. In-Šušin-ak, Humban, and Kiririša together constituted a triangulate of deities, bearing a striking resemblance to that found later in Iran among Ahura Mazdā, Miθra, and Anāhitā. The similarity is probably not accidental. In both cases, we may note the curious fact that while in neighboring Mesopotamia the functions of various deities were becoming subsumed under a single supreme god, among both the Elamites and the Iranians a divine triangulate—consisting of two gods and one goddess—was maintained.

Panaino suggests that the descriptions of Anāhitā’s jewelry and other ornaments in the *Ābān Yašt* is an example of the influence of the Babylonian Ištar on Anāhitā:

The image of Anāhitā in Yt 5, 128, wearing “above (the head) a diadem (studded) with one hundred stars, golden, having eight towers, made like a chariot body, adorned with ribbons, beautiful (and) well-made,” immediately recalls that of Ištar with her high hat and the eight-pointed star behind.<sup>4</sup>

#### 8.2.2.1 The Triangulate of Deities: A Mesopotamian Inheritance?

During the second half of the first millennium BCE, Marduk, the great god of Babylon, and Ištar, the principal Mesopotamian goddess, became a mythological couple. In Babylonian religion Marduk first became prominent during the late nineteenth century BCE; by the time of

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<sup>4</sup> Panaino 2000, p. 38.

Nebuchadnezzar I (1125-1104 BCE) he is named as the “King of the gods” and is portrayed as the original creator deity in the *Enuma Elish* (“Epic of Creation”).<sup>5</sup>

Reflecting the political rise of Babylon as the center of Mesopotamian power, Marduk and Ištar were elevated in relation to other regional deities, who became subordinated to their influence and had many of their functions transferred to them. For example, Marduk absorbed many of the functions—including justice and judgment—formerly associated with Šamaš, the Mesopotamian sun god. A similar phenomenon occurred in Elam, with Humban being raised to the status of creator god and In-Šušin-ak, the principal deity of Susa, and the goddess Kiririša joining him to form a divine triangulate within the Elamite pantheon.<sup>6</sup>

When comparing the divine couple of Marduk and Ištar with the Iranian pairing of Miθra and *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* some interesting similarities emerge. In fact, in the *Yašts* and in some documents from the Achaemenid period the functions and powers of Miθra and *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* are very similar to those of Marduk and Ištar.<sup>7</sup> Although, according to the Younger Avesta the former pair were not a couple but “co-creations of Ahura Mazdā”. The pair of Miθra and *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* among the other deities were very important.

Whereas in Indo-European religion the functions of various deities tend to be associated with social groups, within the new triangulate Ahura Mazdā - *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* - Miθra – which is established no later than the early fourth century BCE—important functions connected with all three groups are absorbed: dominion, war, and fertility. The devotional liturgies to Miθra and Anāhitā contained in the Younger Avesta demonstrate their continued religious importance in society—which most likely predated the rise of Mazdaism—while simultaneously subordinating them to Ahura Mazdā who is said in the *Yašts* to have created them.

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<sup>5</sup> Dalley 2008, p. 229.

<sup>6</sup> Bahār 1997, p. 140.

<sup>7</sup> Voegelin 2001, p. 88.

The Ahura Mazdā - Anāhitā - Miθra triangulate is first documented in the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II (r. 404-358 BCE), at a time when a large portion of the population under Persian rule was still culturally Elamite. It is thus very likely that the Elamite triangulate Humban - In-Šušin-ak - Kiririša and/or the Mesopotamian pairing of Marduk with Ištar served as a model for the Iranian one, reflecting Artaxerxes' attempt to increase his political base by incorporating the local (non-Iranian) cults of a justice deity and a fertility/war goddess, identified in Iranian terms as Miθra and Anāhitā.<sup>8</sup>

In Central Asia as well, where Anāhitā was considered by some to be the goddess of the Oxus River, a variation of this triangulate existed: Anāhitā as the goddess, Ahura Mazdā as the father-god and Miθra as the son.<sup>9</sup> This does not mean in mythological terms that Anāhitā and Ahura Mazdā “married” or produced a child together; rather, the “family” paradigm expressed the hierarchy of their actual functions and roles. As in the case of western Iran, this triangulate would seem to be related to that found among the southern Elamites.

### 8.3. The Dragon-slaying Myth, *Saošiiaņts* and Possible Connections to Anāhitā

The myth of an archetypal hero (either deity or human) slaying a dragon/serpent (who is most often blocking access to a body of water, and frequently also holding a maiden captive) is very ancient; based on its prominence in the myths of many Indo-European peoples—including those of Iran, India, Greece, and Rome with parallels among the Balts, the Slavs, the Armenians, and the Hittites—it would strongly seem to date back to the proto-Indo-European period or even earlier.<sup>10</sup> A large number of Indo-European deities—who were perhaps once heroic or royal ancestors who became deified over time in the popular imagination—are placed in this

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<sup>8</sup> Mendez 2012. Mendez speaks only of Artaxerxes' political aims, not of the Mesopotamian triangulate model specifically.

<sup>9</sup> Bahār 1997, p. 388. It seems that for the most part, however, the Sogdians identified the Oxus with a male deity, Wakhsh.

<sup>10</sup> Watkins 2005.

ritualization in the role of the hero who slays the dragon.

For purposes of our discussion it is pertinent to look at the relationship between the dragon (holding back the waters) and women (representing fertility) in the Indo-Iranian version of the dragon-slaying myth. In Indo-Iranian mythology dragons were associated with natural phenomena such as drought and chaos. They imprisoned the “good waters” (personified either as women or as clouds) or were the carriers of the “destructive and furious waters” (i.e., uncontrolled water, such as rivers in flood). The good waters could not be released until slain by a deity or hero.

It may be that the association of dragons with rivers arose from the rivers’ serpentine shape. We should also note that in agricultural societies, rivers played an ambivalent role: on the one hand, they brought fertility, the most necessary factor of life, but at the same time (in their dragon shape), rivers could also cause massive destruction through floods. Moreover, they might dry up and abandon humans altogether if there was a lack of rain. Dragons were thus sometimes also symbolized as clouds, due to their connection with rain.

Rituals and their attendant myths therefore arose out of the vital dependence of ancient Indo-European peoples on rivers to maintain their way of life. Killing a dragon was one symbolic way of exercising control over the potentially chaotic vicissitudes of flowing water. In performing this task, the dragon-slaying hero ensured fertility. Bahar suggests in this connection that because the waters were so vital and sacred, the dragon-slaying heroes who released it could thereby attain immortality.<sup>11</sup>

In the Vedic version of the myth, it is the god Indra who slays the dragon, Vṛtra, who lurks at the foot of the mountain where he holds back the heavenly waters.<sup>12</sup> Indra slays the dragon by

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<sup>11</sup> Bahār 1997, p. 310.

<sup>12</sup> RV II. 11.5. Vṛtra also is called Danava, the son of the goddess Danu, as previously discussed in Chapter Five.



cutting off his three heads.<sup>13</sup> After Indra thus frees the seven rivers, the waters rush out in the shape of cows (representing fertility), running to the sea.

The Vedic dragon *Vṛtra* is referred to both as *áhi-*, “dragon” (similarly, *až-i* is a three-headed dragon in the Avesta) and as *dāsá-* (Av. *dahāka-*), meaning he is man-like.<sup>14</sup> Tracing the etymology of the former term, in Indo-Iranian the word *áhi-/aži-* means “snake/dragon”.<sup>15</sup> *Aždahā* (or *Eždehā*), the modern Persian word for dragon, is derived from a combination of the two terms, *aži-* and *dahāka-*. The above-cited passage in the Rig Veda describes the “bound waters” as having *Vṛtra* as their husband-guardian, thus linking the waters with an imprisoned maiden.<sup>16</sup> After slaying *Vṛtra*, Indra receives the epithet *vṛtra-hán-* “slayer of *Vṛtra*”, from which the Avestan word *Vərəθraϥna* (the war deity) is also derived. Indra is associated with the divine group of *devas*, deities of the warriors (and thus seen positively) who are demoted to demonic status in the Avesta.

In the Iranian version, meanwhile, the functions of Indra are divided between *Miθra* and *Vərəθraϥna* (*Bahrām*), whose name literally means “slayer of [the dragon] *Vṛtra*”; in Iran the epithet became the name of the god himself. According to the *Bahrām Yašt*, the *Yašt* devoted to *Vərəθraϥna*, if people do not sacrifice to him, or if they share his sacrifice with non-Mazdāyasnians, then a huge flood (uncontrolled waters) will cover the Iranian lands.<sup>17</sup> It seems that “*Vərəθraϥna*” was at first just an epithet and did not exist independently, although by the Young Avesta he has become a strong deity with warrior characteristics. His ten forms, animal and human, remind us of the ten incarnations of Indra. More interestingly, as a deity *Vərəθraϥna* existed in Armenian pantheon and was in fact one of the three principal deities, all having Iranian

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<sup>13</sup> RV X.8.8-9.

<sup>14</sup> Schwartz 2012, p. 275.

<sup>15</sup> The word is etymologically related to words in other Indo-European languages such as Latin *anguis* (Skjaervø 1987).

<sup>16</sup> RV 1.32.11; also Schwartz 2012, p. 275.

<sup>17</sup> Yt 14.17.48-53.

origins. The other two were Ahura Mazdā-Aramazd and Anāhitā-Anahit; the three deities were called *višapak'al/drakontopniktēs* “the strangler of dragons.”<sup>18</sup>

Dragons are found throughout the Iranian Zoroastrian literature, such as the sea monster Gandarəβa, (Pahlavi Gandarb/Gandarw), a monster with yellow heels (*Zairipāšna-*) who is fought and vanquished by Kərəsāspa (Yt 5.38, 15.28 19.41). Gandarw’s name is etymologically equivalent to the Vedic *gandharva*, who said to be surrounded by the heavenly waters, which flow down at his glance.

The *Zamyād Yašt* also mentions the hero Kərəsāspa (Garšasp) who slays the dragon Aži-Sruuara, also called Aži Zairita, a horned dragon who swallows horses and men (Yt 19.6.40.). Aži Raoiḍita, the red dragon (in contradistinction to the Aži Zairita “yellow dragon”), is, together with the “daēuua-created winter”, Aṅra Mainiiu ’s counter-creation to Ahura Mazdā’s creation of Airiiana Vaējah (Vd 1.2.) In Zoroastrian tradition these dragons are all created by the evil, Aṅra Mainiiu, Ahriman.

### 8.3.1. Possible Connections between Anāhitā and the Avestan *Saošiiant*

In light of the mythological connection between dragons and rivers, we may consider whether dragon-slaying myths can be further connected to the Iranian river goddess, Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā, and probably to the Avestan *saošiiant-*. Let us begin with a linguistic analysis. Sōšiians, the Pahlavi’s final saviour has different meaning comparing to the Gathic Avestan *saošiiant-* as the “benefactor.” The Gathic *saošiiant-* has a ritual function, or as Kellens states: “le sacrificiant,” “celui qui va qui veut prosérer,” who takes part in the exchange of gifts between (the) god(s) and humans.<sup>19</sup> Hintze however, posits that the *saošiiant-* were persons who played a central role in

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<sup>18</sup> Gnoli 1988.

<sup>19</sup> Kellens 1974b.

early Mazdayasnianism, but not necessarily in the ritual inherited from the Indo-Iranian period.<sup>20</sup>

As she explains:

In the oldest part of the Avesta, the Gathas, *saošiiant-* even used in the singular, denotes a member of a group of people following Zaratustra's religion: the Saošyants fight evil during their lifetime and are characterized by an exemplary good "(religious) view" (Av. *daēnā*).<sup>21</sup>

She argues that in Old Avestan a *saošiiant-* refers to a member of a group of people who follow Zaratustra's religion and fights evil during his lifetime. She states that the concept of a *saošiiant-* as a fighter and a saviour who ushers in a new age and bring about the final defeat of Evil was in fact developed later in time."<sup>22</sup>

In at least is one of the Gathic passages (Y 48.12), the *saošiiant-* is someone who fights against enemies and thus could possess the "saviour" concept already; this aspect is very prominent later in the Young Avesta, where the victorious *saošiiant-* as a single person is called *astuuqt.ərəta* and is mentioned with the epithet *vərəθra-jan-* "victorious" (Yt 13.129 and Yt 19.89), which in fact is the Vedic epithet of Indra, *vṛtra-hán-*, as has been previously mentioned. Applying the same epithet to Indra (who slew the dragon *Vṛtra*) may link the Avestan *saošiiant-* to the dragon slaying myth. Furthermore, there is a possible connection between the Avestan word *saošiiant-* ("benefactor"), who also bears the epithet *vərəθra-jan-* (here, "breaking the defense"), with the myth of the hero slaying a dragon.<sup>23</sup> As we will discuss below, in Zoroastrian eschatology

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<sup>20</sup> Hintze 1995, pp. 77-97.

<sup>21</sup> Hintze 1999, p. 76.

<sup>22</sup> Hintze 1999, pp. 72-89.

<sup>23</sup> Hintze 1995, p. 94.

there is a connection between the *saošiiant*s and the river and lake belonging or connected to Anāhitā.

According to stanza 89 in the Zamyād Yašt, this victorious *saošiiant*- is the hero who will bring about the final defeat of Evil. He is expected to be born out of Lake Kašaoiia, and will overcome the devil by removing falsehood from the world with a special weapon – again similar to Indra, who slew the dragon with his special weapon. In order to accomplish this feat, and to bring about the renovation of the world (Av. *frašō.kərəti*-), the victorious *saošiiant*- will have the power and the support of the *xvarənah*- (the mighty gleaming glory).

Moreover, the word *saošiiant*- contains the verbal root *sū*-, “to be strong (to swell)”, from the root  $\sqrt{sū}$ . *saošiiant*-, therefore, is the participle, and *sūra*- the noun. The Avestan noun *sūra*-, from which the second of Anāhitā’s epithets derives, is the Indo-Iranian term for the hero who slays a dragon.<sup>24</sup> Hintze notes that in the Rig Veda, *śūra*- (heroic) is also an epithet for Indra.<sup>25</sup> She notes that in Indo-Iranian myths this noun, *sūra*, seems to have referred to the hero who kills the dragon.<sup>26</sup> Since *sūra*- as part of the name (or epithet) of Anāhitā means “strong” and also functions as a masculine substantive meaning “hero”, one can posit a connection between the dragon (whose connection with water is mainly that it prevents the water of the rivers from flowing) and/or the heavenly water, and Anāhitā as the heavenly waters associated with the rivers. If we accept that the myth of slaying dragon is connected to the warrior groups of deities (*daēuuas*) then Anāhitā’s function could originally be connected to the *daēuuas*<sup>27</sup> as well.

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<sup>24</sup> Hintze 1995, p. 94.

<sup>25</sup> RV II 11.5.

<sup>26</sup> Hintze 1999, p. 78.

<sup>27</sup> Like Anāhitā, the Vedic deity Indra also bears the epithet *śūra*- (heroic). He is the “hero” who fights fearlessly with the drought-inducing dragon in order to release the water so that it may flow back to the world (RV II 11, 5). Indra slays the dragon, Vṛtrá, also known as Ahi, who kept and imprisoned the heavenly water captive (RV IV 17,7) and the dragon’s mother, the goddess Danu. Vṛtrá has many features in common with the Iranian Aži-Dahāka. In the *R̥g Veda* the dragon Vṛtrá belongs to the *asuras* (who are demonic deities in the RV).

The relevant stanzas of the Zamyād Yašt (66-68, containing the detailed delineation of eschatological events in the Avesta), also provide the location of the *Saošiiant* as the future ruler, which is where the river Haētumant (as well as the other rivers) flow to the Lake Kāsaouiia and where there is mountain in the middle of the lake:

(Yt 19.66)

*yaṭ upaṅhacaiti.*

*yō auuadāṭ fraxšaiieite*

*yaθa zraiiō yaṭ kṣaēm haētumatəm*

*yaθa gairiš yō ušaδā*

*yim aiβitō paoiriš āpō*

*həm gairišācō jasəntō*

(The *x<sup>v</sup>arənah-*), which belongs to (the one) who will rule from the area where Lake Kāsaouiia is fed by the (river) Haētumant, where the Mount *Ušaδā* (is), where from (the mountains) around many water-sources come together and flow downwards

(Yt 19.67)

*auui təm auui.haṅtacaiti*

*auui təm auui.həm.vazaite*

*x<sup>v</sup>āstraca huaspaca fradaθa*

*x<sup>v</sup>arənaṅuhaitica yā srīra*

*uštauuaitica yā sūra*

*uruuaδca pouru.vāstra*

*ərazica zarənumatica:*

*auui təm auui.haṅtacaiti*

*auui təm auui.həmv.azaitē*

*haē...raēuuā x<sup>v</sup>arənaṅuhā*

*spaētiniš varəmiš sispimnō*

*..əmnō paoirīš vōiṅmā*

Into this (lake) come and flow together the (rivers) *X<sup>v</sup>āstraca*, *Huuaspaca* (and) *Fradaḡa* and beautiful *X<sup>v</sup>arənaṅuhaiti*, mighty *Uštaiuaiti*, and *Uruua* rich in the pastures, *ərazi* and *zarənumati*. Into this (lake) come and flow together, the plenteous (and with the) *x<sup>v</sup>arənah-* (the river) *Haētumant*, swelling with (its) white surges and sending down many floods.

(Yt 19.68)

*hacaiti dim aspahe aojō*

*hacaiti uštrahe aojō*

*hacaiti vīrahe aojō*

*hacaiti kauuaēm x<sup>v</sup>arənō*

*astica ahmi ašāum zaraḡuštra*

*auuauuat kauuaēm x<sup>v</sup>arənō*

*+yaḡa yaṭ iḡa anairiā daṅhuš*

*hakaṭ usca us.frāuuaiiōiṭ*

(The river *Haētumant*) is dedicated (with) the strength of a horse, the strength of a camel, the strength of a hero, and the *x<sup>v</sup>arənah-* (the mighty gleaming glory) of the Kauui-dynasty is endowed to it. O Righteous *Zaraḡuštra*, in it (there) is so much *x<sup>v</sup>arənah-* (the mighty

gleaming glory) of the Kauui-dynasty that could completely sweep away all the non-Aryan lands at once.

Stanza 68 refers to the river Haētumant in a way that is linguistically masculine (especially with the word *vīrahe-* which Humbach translated as “hero”<sup>28</sup>). Since the reference is to a river (specifically Haētumant), one might ask why the term is not feminine? Hintze has also translated the passage using masculine terms (Strength of a hero accompanied (him) etc.) in her study of the Zamyād Yašt.<sup>29</sup> Privately she admits other possibilities, however.<sup>30</sup> While in stanza 68 the pronoun *dim* which could be either masculine or feminine, in the preceding stanza the pronoun is *təm* which is masculine. One possible explanation is that both the *təm* of stanza 67 and the *dim* of stanza 68 refer to the lake Kāsaōiia mentioned in stanza 66. If so, the masculine form would be used instead of the neuter, as *zraīiah-* is a neuter noun. Alternatively, the pronouns could refer to *gairiš yō usaḍā* in stanza 66. In that case, the pronouns would have the correct gender, as *gairi-* “mountain” is masculine.

At any rate, these stanzas describe the area full of power which seems to refer to the “water” (i.e., of the rivers which come from the mountain and flow to the lake), thus, there is a lot of power in that water and in that area in general.

It would thus seem that by the Younger Avestan period the ancient myth of the deity/hero slaying a dragon had found a new interpretation. It may be speculated that perhaps the Zoroastrian priests of the time transferred the dragon-slaying role (which was retained as a key concept) to the *Saošiiant*, now the new hero, rising and stepping forth from the lake (connecting him to Anāhitā), who will defeat Anra Mainiiu (who takes the place of the dragon) and his army and thus bring about the renovation of the world.

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<sup>28</sup> Humbach and Ichaporia 1998, p. 50.

<sup>29</sup> Hintze 1994, p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> Almut Hintze, e-mail conversation, 20 July 2016.

### 8.3.2. The Dragon-slaying Myth in Iran

Returning now to the Dragon-slaying myth, the *Zamyād Yašt* mentions a hero, *Kərəšāspa* (*Garšasp*), who slays the dragon *Aži-Sruuara*, also called *Aži Zairita*, a horned dragon who swallows horses and men.<sup>31</sup> There is another dragon who is mentioned only in the *Nērangestān*, in the context of making an offering to water, whose name is *Aži Višāpa* (N 48). We should take note of the fact that the last part of this dragon's name has the suffix *āpa*, "water". *Skjaervø* suggests that the meaning of the dragon's name is the dragon "of foul waters", or the dragon "which fouls the waters".<sup>32</sup> Russell notes in this regard that "in modern Armenia, the steles with snakes and other figures carved on them are called *višap* "dragon" by the Armenians".<sup>33</sup>

In the Iranian version of the dragon-slaying myth there are women or clouds (cows, in the Indian version) who are imprisoned by the dragon and are freed when the hero slays the dragon. In different versions of this myth, rain-clouds, cows and women have been alternately identified with the waters.<sup>34</sup>

In the Iranian tradition in fact not just *Bahram/Vərəθraγna*, but a wide range of Iranian heroes—including *Rostam*, *Sām*, *Θraētaona* (*Frēdōn*), *Kərəšāspa* (*Garšasp*), *Goštasp*, *Esfandīār*, and in the historical period *Ardešīr Bābakān*, *Bahrām Gōr*, and *Bahrām Čōbīn*—are said to have killed dragons, and thereby established themselves as champions of freedom, women, water and fertility.

In the Vedic tradition the dragon-slaying myth was symbolically connected with the new year and the end of the season of drought (i.e., the coming of the monsoon in late spring).

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<sup>31</sup> Yt 19. 6,19,40.

<sup>32</sup> Skjaervø 1987.

<sup>33</sup> Russell 1987b.

<sup>34</sup> There is some discussion about the Indo-Iranian word *\*dhainu* (Sanskrit *dhenu*), which is usually translated as "cow". Lincoln (1976) states (following Benveniste 1969, pp. 22-23) that the word could mean "the one who gives milk", in which case it may be used for any female.



Skjaervø notes that in ancient Iran there is no trace of a connection between the killing of the dragon and Nowrūz.<sup>35</sup> However, in the story of Āḍar Barzīnin the *Bahman-nāmeḥ* the hero recognizes black clouds as a dragon who comes out of a mountain every year during the springtime.<sup>36</sup>

In the *Bahman-nāmeḥ* story the dragon rapes the daughter of the local king—whose name, interestingly, is Bēvarasp, an epithet of Žahhāk. Subsequently, the hero slays the dragon with arrows and then bathes in a spring. This story connects several symbolic elements with which we have been dealing: a dragon, clouds, an imprisoned/abused woman, and a spring.<sup>37</sup> Similar tales of a hero slaying a dragon in order to rescue a girl (usually a princess) abound in Iranian folklore. Indeed, the slaying of a dragon is found so frequently in heroic tales that it would almost appear to be an indispensable rite of passage defining one's heroic status.

One can also see a direct relationship between the dragon who imprisons the water and creates drought, and the water itself which is personified as an “imprisoned” female needing to be rescued. In many Iranian folkloric tales a dragon guards the river/spring/well and prevents people having access to the water they need; at the same time, the dragon holds a woman captive. In some cases the dragon accepts a girl as a sacrifice in order to allow the people to have a little water. In most cases, however, the killing of the dragon by the hero results in the freedom of the captive girl.

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<sup>35</sup> Skjaervø 1987.

<sup>36</sup> *Bahman-nāmeḥ*, B. M. Or. 2780, fols. 180ff. Khaleghi-Motlagh (1987) accordingly suggests that “Another interpretation of the dragon-slaying by Indo-Iranian gods is that the god in question was a god of thunder and lightning, that the dragon was a black cloud, and that by slaying the dragon, the god released water impounded in its stomach to fall as rain”.

<sup>37</sup> *Bahman-nāmeḥ*, 180f. (Khaleghi-Motlagh 1987).

A more recent iconographic transformation can be seen in the Iranian appropriation of dragon imagery from China following the Mongol conquests of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Ignoring the fact that in Chinese culture dragons are a symbol of blessing and power, later Iranian paintings such as Mirzā Ali's "Goshtasp Slays the Dragon of Mt. Sakila" depict dragons in a Chinese visual style, but with an Iranian meaning which is the *opposite* of the Chinese.<sup>38</sup>

It may be speculated that the association in the Indo-European mind between rivers and dragons arose from the serpentine shape of most rivers. The dragon came to symbolize all the harmful forms a river could take: drying up (the water "imprisoned") which caused drought, or overflowing its banks, which caused destructive floods. Like many peoples, the ancient Indo-Europeans were utterly dependent on rivers, upon the banks of which they built their settlements and eventually their civilizations. These rivers were ambivalent neighbors; they could ensure fertility and enable life or wash it away in a torrent.

### 8.3.3 Aži-Dahāka and Fraŋrasiian

It has been noted that the only named negative characters who sacrifice to Anāhitā asking for her support are Aži (Ahi)-Dahāka and Fraŋrasiian (NP Afrāsīāb). Aži (*Ahi*)-Dahāka (MP Azī Dahāg; NP *Aždahā*) as the dragon and the Arabic *Žaḥḥāk* as the mythological person, *aži-* (Vedic *ahi-*), is the most common name for a dragon-snake in Indo-Iranian. As we have discussed before, Aži-Dahāka thus could be translated to "the dragon with the human face (and body)," according to Schwartz.<sup>39</sup> Dahāka could have connection with Vedic *dāsa-* and *dasyu-*, meaning "enemies, strangers", and referring to the enemies of Indra, the most important god in Vedas who belong to the group of *devas*.

It is therefore worth looking more deeply into the details of these two characters (Aži (Ahi)-Dahāka and Fraŋrasiian) and their possible connections to water and the water goddess.

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<sup>38</sup> Saadi-nejad 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Schwartz 2012, p. 275.

They both share dragon features: the first, Aži-Dahāka, is himself a dragon, and the second, Fraŋrasiian, *behaves* like a dragon by drying up the rivers in Sīstān. What should we understand by this connection? Of course both are “demonic” characters, created by Ahriman, and Anāhitā does not accept their sacrifices. Based on the dragon-river relationship, we may note that both are also referred to as “foreign kings” in Pahlavi texts and the *Šāh-namēh*, which may connect them to the rejected group who worshipped the *daēuuas*. Might we surmise that Anāhitā too was worshipped by “*daēuua*-worshippers”, that is, people who did not follow the religious prescriptions of the Mazdaean priests?

Aži-Dahāka in the Avesta is a huge monster-dragon with three heads and six eyes, who wishes to bring drought and destruction. He prays to Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā and Vaiiu asking to have the power to empty the world of people. Skjaervø specifies that “it is not clear whether he was originally considered as a human in dragon-shape or a dragon in man-shape”,<sup>40</sup> but the same may be said for other dragons as well since they show both attributes.

According to the *Zamyād Yašt*, it is Oraētaona (Frēdōn), Aži-Dahāka’s chief opponent, who slays the dragon.<sup>41</sup> The verb that describes the act of killing a dragon is *jan-*. In the *Ābān Yašt*, Oraētaona sacrifices to Anāhitā, asking her to help him to defeat Aži-Dahāka and to obtain the dragon’s two captured wives, Saŋhauuāci and Arənuuuāci.<sup>42</sup> These two women are described in terms of fertility: both as natural phenomena and in terms of the seasonal freeing of the waters. In later Iranian texts Aži-Dahāka is not slain, but is imprisoned by Frēdōn on Mt. Damāvand.

Aži-Dahāka in the *Šāh-nameh* is Žaḥḥāk, who appears as a foreign (Arab) tyrant with snakes growing out of his shoulders; he carries the epithet Bēwarasp (“owner of ten-thousand

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<sup>40</sup> Skjaervø 1987.

<sup>41</sup> Yt 19.37.

<sup>42</sup> Yt 5.34.

horses”), which is given in the Pahlavi texts.<sup>43</sup> Reflecting the fact that in Zoroastrian texts snakes are considered demonic, he is under the influence of Ahriman. Žaḥḥāk thus belongs to the demonic world, and is related to *dīvs* (demonic monsters). According to the *Šāh-namēh* the *dīvs*, perhaps as part of his army, are members of his court. As in the Avesta, he imprisons two daughters of Jamšīd as his wives. Because of their captivity, the world becomes less fertile. As it was mentioned, Frēdōn (Θraētaona) frees the wives and chains Žaḥḥāk to Mount Damāvand.<sup>44</sup>

Skjærvø notes that, Žaḥḥāk (Dahāg) is portrayed as the propagator of “bad religion”, in opposition to the “good” Mazdayasnian religion; and is also said to be connected with Judaism, and to be of Arab origin.<sup>45</sup> The dragon-man Žaḥḥāk is specifically associated with a river in the *Bundahišn*’s chapter on rivers, where he is said to have asked a favour from Ahriman and the demons by the river Sped in Azerbaijan.<sup>46</sup>

Fraṅrasiian (NP Afrāsīāb), is another demonic character in the Avesta, the name of whose morphophonemics is not clear. However, the *-fras-* part of his name could be derived from the old Indo-Iranian *sras-* and come from *\*sṛṇk*, “to strike”.<sup>47</sup> Hence, his name could be translated as “to strike forth.” This concept is reasonable if we accept that he was originally a dragon who captured the water; our discussion below will confirm this idea.

The epithet *mairiia-* (“deceitful, villainous”), which is an adjective and also a noun, is a demonic term for man, specifically a young man, opposed to the Ahuric word *nar-*. Wikander states that the word comes originally from an Indo-Iranian expression and referred to a group of warriors with “Aryan male fellowship” who sometimes disguised themselves as wolves. These

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<sup>43</sup> He is often referred to as Bēwarasp in the Pahlavi texts (e.g., Dk 9.21.7; tr. West, p. 214; *Mēnōg ī xrad* 7.29, 26.34, 35, 38; tr. West, pp. 35, 60f.; Bd TD<sub>1</sub>, p. 66.7-8; TD<sub>2</sub>, p. 80.6-7; tr. Anklesaria, pp. 98f.; tr. West, p. 40) (Skjærvø 1987).

<sup>44</sup> According to the *Shāh-nameh* Žaḥḥāk will be freed at the end of time. He will attempt to cause destruction, for example by devouring one third of the human population along with some other creatures of Ohrmazd, but he will be killed by Kərəšāspa/Kiršāsp/Garšasp.

<sup>45</sup> Skjærvø 1987.

<sup>46</sup> Pakzad 2005, p. 154.

<sup>47</sup> Mayrhofer 1979, no. 123, 1/39-40.

warriors highly revered “dragon slayers”, such as 𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀𐬎𐬀, in their rituals, and at the same time they did not accept the standard morality of their society but engaged in wild behaviour and had promiscuous intercourse with women referred to as *jahī-* or *jahikā-*.<sup>48</sup> The term *jahikā-*, which is often understood to have the meaning of “whore,” seems not to refer to actual prostitutes per se but was simply applied in a derogatory way to women who did not recognize the Avestan culture being promoted by the priestly authors of the Mazdaean texts.<sup>49</sup> In Yt 17. 57-58, the *jahikā-* is used to describe (and by the goddess Aši, to criticize), women who either do not bear their husband a son or bear him the son of another man; obviously one can envision real-life situations in which such actions would not necessarily be blameworthy, and in any case the issue is not technically prostitution. Vd 18.60 provides another case more directly connected to religious ritual, where the *jahī-* is reproached for “mixing the sperm of those who are experts in the rite with those who are not, and those who offer the sacrifice to demons with those who don’t, of those who are condemned and those who aren’t.” The problem here seems not to be the *jahī-*’s sexuality as such, but rather the standard priestly aversion to mixing things that should not be mixed. In Y. 9.32, the issue is again not the *jahī-*’s sexuality but rather her use of sorcery. Her fault, Kellens concludes, is not sexual licentiousness but simply lack of (or different?) culture.<sup>50</sup>

Ancient Indo-Iranian warrior rituals included orgiastic sacrificial feasts, and were characterized by a positive attitude towards what were called “the dark forces of life”; this apparently included the gods Rudra and Indra in India and the god Vaiiu in Iran.<sup>51</sup> It is reasonable to surmise that these warriors also sacrificed to Anāhitā, since according to the Zoroastrian texts she and the god Vaiiu are the only deities who received (but did not accept) sacrifices from negative characters. Moreover, stanzas 94-95 clearly refer to the ceremonial sacrifices made to her

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<sup>48</sup> Wikander 1938, pp. 21-24/58-60/84f.

<sup>49</sup> Kellens 2013, p. 125.

<sup>50</sup> Kellens 2013, p. 125.

<sup>51</sup> Wikander 1938, pp. 94-96.

by “*daēuua*-worshippers” after sunset. All of this evidence could indicate that she was indeed connected to warriors and the warrior group of deities.

The new morality and ritual system promoted by the Mazdaean priests banished and rejected the *mairiias* and their rituals as well, yet the Avestan demonic word *mairiia*- survived in Pahlavi as *mērag* with the meaning of “husband, young man” showing that at least in some parts of Iran their memory was not conceived in negative terms.

The description of Fraŋrasiian, in the *Ābān Yašt* as well as in the other *Yašts*, as discussed above, provides a possible connection between him and these warriors whose group, the *mairiias*, became his epithet. Later, in the *Šāh-nameh* Afrāsīāb becomes Iran’s most notorious enemy. The first question about this figure concerns his origin. He is said to be from Turān, portrayed as a non-Iranian region in *Šāh-nameh*, although its inhabitants all seem to have Iranian names. Turān was located in the northeast, beyond Xorāsān and the Āmū-Daryā (the Oxus river). The Āmū-Daryā served as the traditional boundary between Iran and Turān.

In the *Yašts* the “Danū-Turānians” are mentioned as enemies of the Iranians.<sup>52</sup> In fact, the Turānians were almost certainly of Iranian origin, possibly Sakas who had different rituals and were condemned by the Zoroastrian priests, yet their Iranian roots were strong. Tellingly, even the demonically-created Afrāsīāb is said in the *Bundahišn* to be a seventh-generation descendant of Frēidūn, demonstrating his Iranian roots.<sup>53</sup>

As noted above, dragons can prevent the rivers from flowing, or dry them up, and this is precisely the act committed by Afrāsīāb, who dries up the rivers in Sīstān.<sup>54</sup> In Iranian mythology Afrāsīāb is mostly associated with the suppression of waters, draining of rivers, and causing of drought;<sup>55</sup> along with Bēvarasp (Žahḥāk), and Alexander, he is among the three most hated figures

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<sup>52</sup> For example in Yt 5.18.73 and Yt 13. 9.37.38.

<sup>53</sup> Pākzād 2005, pp. 394-5.

<sup>54</sup> Bahār 1997, p. 312.

<sup>55</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 363.

in the Zoroastrian texts.<sup>56</sup> His suppression of the waters clearly connects him with dragon behavior. Perhaps this connection explains his name change from Fraŋrasiian to Afrāsīāb, the latter containing the word *āb* (“water”).

Elsewhere in the same text, there is further evidence connecting Afrāsīāb to the waters; he is said to have diverted a thousand springs, including the river Hēlmand, the source of the river Vataēnī, along with six navigable waters as far as the sea of *kayānsē* in Sīstān;<sup>57</sup> It is somewhat strange to mention these things in the context of a demonic figure whom the *Šāh-nameh* considers Iran’s worst enemy. As Yarshater suggests, “it appears that either he was originally an adverse deity who like the Indian Vrtra (the dragon) withheld rain and personified the natural phenomenon of drought, or else he absorbed the features of such a deity.”<sup>58</sup>

#### 8.4 Conclusions

In this chapter the Indo-Iranian characteristics of Anāhitā, as well as her absorption of Non-Iranian features, have been discussed. Anāhitā should be seen primarily as an Iranian manifestation of an ancient Indo-European water-river goddess (as discussed in Chapter Five), who acquired additional features and functions in different places and times throughout history.

As a composite goddess, Anāhitā’s principal characteristics appear to have been inherited from those of a river-lake-stream goddess or goddesses found in many Indo-European societies. Moreover, she has absorbed many other feature from Elamite and Mesopotamian goddesses such as Inanna and/or Ištar. The descriptions of Anāhitā’s jewelry and other ornaments in the *Ābān Yašt* show the influence of the Babylonian Ištar on Anāhitā.

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<sup>56</sup> It is said in the *Mēnōg ī xrad* that Ahriman created Afrasīyāb, Bēvarasp (Žahhāk), and Alexander immortal, but Ahura Mazdā changed their statute (8.29-30; cf. ZWY 7.32; MX 8.29); cf. Yarshater 1984.

<sup>57</sup> Pākzād 2005, p.156.

<sup>58</sup> Yarshater 1984.

The divine couple of Marduk and Ištar and the Iranian pairing of Miθra and Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā also display some interesting similarities. In fact, in the *Yašts* as well as in inscriptions from the Achaemenid period, the religious status of Miθra and Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā is similar to that of Marduk and Ištar for the Babylonians.

The Ahura Mazdā/Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā/Miθra triangulate is first documented in the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II, at a time when a large portion of the population under Persian Empire was still culturally Elamite. It is thus very likely that the Elamite triangulate Humban/In-Šušin-ak/Kiririša (and to some extent perhaps also the Mesopotamian pairing of Marduk with Ištar) served as a model for the Iranian king to increase his political base by incorporating the local (non-Iranian) cults of a justice deity and a fertility/war goddess, identified in Iranian terms as Anāhitā and Miθra.

Further east in the Central Asian context through which the Iranian tribes migrated, the prominence of the BMAC goddess of waters and fertility influenced to some extent the character of the eventual Avestan river goddess Anāhitā as well as that of the Vedic Sārasvatī, setting them apart in some ways from other river goddesses of Europe who shared their ultimate origin.

This chapter has also highlighted possible connections between Anāhitā and the ancient Indo-European dragon-slaying myth. Dragons were symbol of drought and chaos; they imprisoned the “good waters” or were the carriers of the “destructive and furious waters” (i.e., uncontrolled water, such as rivers in flood). The good waters could not be released until slain by a deity or hero. There was thus a relationship in the Indo-Iranian version of the dragon-slaying myth between dragons who hold back the waters and women who represent fertility. The fact that dragon-slaying indirectly ensured fertility suggests an additional dimension to its relationship to Anāhitā.

The *Ābān Yašt* richly evokes Anāhitā’s control and power over water (Yt 5.78). She is in fact the very conceptualization of water (Yt 5.96). At the same time, descriptions of her chariot-riding victories (Yt 5.13) and her support for warriors who sacrifice to her—including Yima,



Θraētaona, Kərəsāspa, Kauua.usa, (Yt 5.45) Haosrauua (Yt 5.49) and Tusō (Yt 5.53)—reflect her martial aspect. Moreover, at least two of these warriors, Θraētaona and Kərəsāspa, occupy the role of the “hero who slays the dragon”, linking Anāhitā to that well-known myth. The goddess is so vital to the interests of the warrior class that even “demonic” warrior figures sacrifice to her, although according to the Avestan priestly authors she rejects those sacrifices.

In the Vedic version of the dragon-slaying myth it is the warrior god Indra who slays the dragon, frees the rivers, and in doing so receives the same epithet *śūra-* (heroic) as Anāhitā. This epithet, *sūra-*, seems specifically to have referred to the hero who kills the dragon, as Hintze states.<sup>59</sup> It is interesting that the two named “demonic” characters who sacrifice to Anāhitā asking her support to defeat their enemies are Aži-Dahāka and Fraṇrasiian. The first is in fact himself a dragon, while the second *behaves* like a dragon by drying up the rivers. One may conclude that at least one aspect of the Avestan editorial effect on the ancient myth was to attempt to divorce the power of the river goddess from the *daēuua-* group of deities with whom she appears to have been originally associated; later evidence from the Sasanian period indicates that this priestly effort was not entirely successful.

It is not difficult to see the connection between the hero who slays the dragon and Anāhitā: the good waters could not be released until slain by a deity or hero. Interestingly, in Armenia, Anāhitā-Anahit is one of the three deities who were called *višapak'al/drakontopniktēs* “the strangler of dragons.”<sup>60</sup>

The *Saošiiants* as well are connected to Anāhitā, since they will be born out of a lake which is Anāhitā’s domain. The victorious *Saošiiant* in his form as an individual entity, Astuuat.ərəta, bears the epithet *vərəθra-jan-* “victorious” (Yt 13.129 /Yt 19.89), which is the same as the Vedic epithet bestowed on Indra, *vṛtra-hān-*. Thus, the Avestan *Saošiiant*, Astuuat.ərəta,

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<sup>59</sup> Hintze 1995, p. 94.

<sup>60</sup> Gnoli 1988.

may have had a dragon-slaying role. Moreover, the word *saošiiant-* contains the verbal root *sū*, “to be strong (to swell)”, from the root  $\sqrt{sū}$ ; as does the noun *sūra-* “heroic”, which is also an epithet for Indra. The Avestan noun *sūra*, from which the second of Anāhitā’s epithets derives, is the Indo-Iranian term for the hero who slays a dragon. If we note that *Saošiiant* will rise from the lake *Kṛsaoiia* (*Zamyād Yašt* 15.92-94), gazing with his “insightful eyes of intelligence”, we may also consider that he absorbs wisdom from the goddess of the lake, providing yet another connection with water and Anāhitā.

## Chapter Nine

### Anāhitā in the Historical Period

#### 9.1 The Achaemenid Period

The earliest material evidence specifically relating to Anāhitā may date from the Median Period. The Medes were an Iranian people who conquered the Assyrian Empire during the late seventh century BCE and established the first independent Iranian kingdom in western Asia. Though a paucity of evidence has not allowed us to form a detailed picture of their culture, we do know that their Achaemenid successors inherited many of their royal rituals. The rock tomb attributed by Diakonov to the Median ruler Uvaxštra I (Cyaxares I)<sup>1</sup> at Qyzqapan near Sulimani in Iraqī Kurdistan has divine symbols carved upon the entryway; these may represent the triad of Ahura Mazdā, Anāhitā, and Miθra attested later during the Achaemenid period.<sup>2</sup>

It would seem that sometime during the Achaemenid period an attempt was made by the Mazdaean clergy to co-opt the cult of Anāhitā by bringing her into the Zoroastrian pantheon, albeit in a subordinate role to Ahura Mazdā. According to both the Avesta and the royal inscriptions of three successive Iranian empires, Anāhitā (along with Miθra) was the most powerful deity created by the supreme being Ahura Mazdā.

Evidence for the cult of Anāhitā exists across three successive Iranian empires: the Achaemenids, the Parthians (Arsacids), and the Sasanians. In the earliest Achaemenid inscriptions, the existence of deities other than Ahura Mazdā is acknowledged, but their names are not given. Nevertheless, goddess worship is evident during the time of the first Achaemenid king, Cyrus II (“the Great”, r. 559-530 BCE). His Greek biographer, Xenophon, like Herodotus, describes Cyrus

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<sup>1</sup> Some have dated this site much later, to the Parthian period, but the question remains at present unresolved (Von Gall 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Bahār 1997, p. 148.

as sacrificing in the first instance to an important goddess, whom he equates with the Greek

Hestia:

...And Cyrus when he entered sacrificed to Hestia, the goddess of the Hearth, and to Zeus the Lord, and to any other gods named by the Persian priests.

...But Cyrus himself went home and prayed to the gods of his father's house, to Hestia and Zeus, and to all who had watched over his race.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, the ancient Greek writers variously identified Anāhitā with several different Greek goddesses, including Aphrodite (Urania), Athena and Artemis. The earliest written trace of Anāhitā is found in Herodotus, who mentions a goddess whose cult, according to him, had only recently been introduced into the Iranian Pantheon.<sup>4</sup> He wrongly names this celestial goddess as “Mitra” (Miθra), who we know is a god and not a goddess.<sup>5</sup> Rather, both from his description and by comparison with the Arabian goddess al-Lāt and Assyrian goddess Mylitta, as well as his equating the deity with the Celestial Goddess, it would seem that the figure in question is actually Anāhitā.<sup>6</sup> Herodotus states that the Iranians sacrificed to a heavenly goddess,<sup>7</sup> whom later Greek writers called Aphrodite-Anaītis.

It may be noted in this regard that although the Indo-Iranian pantheon was dominated by male deities, the Sakas had an important mother-goddess, as evidenced by the Herodotus’ list of Saka deities (as discussed in Chapter Four: the list begins with “Hestia,” the Greek equivalent for the chief Saka goddess). Herodotus’ account suggests that in his time Saka society may have

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<sup>3</sup> Xenophon (c. 430–354 BC) 1968, Book VII, C.5.57 and C.6.1; also Olmsted 1948, p. 447.

<sup>4</sup> Herodotus, Book I.131.

<sup>5</sup> For more discussion on this see De Jong 1997, pp. 107-109.

<sup>6</sup> De Jong 1997, p. 104 and p. 269.

<sup>7</sup> Herodotus, Book I.131.

accorded a broader public place to women than in later periods of Iranian history, which is a common feature of nomadic steppe societies.

The Sakas, like other Indo-Iranian peoples of Central and West Asia, blended their culture with that of the earlier native peoples of the region, exchanging influences in both directions. In the case of Mesopotamia, we know that goddesses of the native peoples were more powerful and central to the pantheon than those of the Indo-Iranians, and the same may have been true of the pre-Iranian inhabitants of Central Asia (the BMAC peoples, for example). This could explain why the Sakas had an important mother-goddess while other Iranian groups such as the Persians apparently did not.

The oldest known Iranian shrine in Anatolia, at Zela in Cappadocia, built in the sixth century BCE, was devoted to Anāhitā and a deity referred to as “Omanos.”<sup>8</sup> Iranian settlers in Anatolia maintained their cultural traditions, including Anāhitā worship, for many centuries thereafter. As Boyce observes: “if a Greek inscription discovered in Asia Minor from Roman times has been rightly interpreted ... this appears to be dedicated to “the great goddess Anaītis of high Harā”.”<sup>9</sup> Greek inscriptions from the Roman imperial period have been found in the same region, including one that gives her the epithet *Barzoxara* “high Harā”.<sup>10</sup> In Lydia further west, another region with a large Iranian population, nearly one quarter of the dedications so far discovered are to Anāhitā.<sup>11</sup>

Later inscriptions from the time of Artaxerxes II (r. ca. 404-358 BCE) at Hamedan (A<sup>2</sup> Ha) and Susa (A<sup>2</sup> Sa, on four columns of the Apadāna palace), specifically invoke Miθra and Anāhitā, demonstrating that these two deities were worshipped alongside Mazda. The Greek historian Xenophon describes a glorious royal ceremony with three chariots that was performed every year

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<sup>8</sup> Strabo (64 BC – c. AD 24) 2014, 11.8. 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Boyce 1975, p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> Schmitt 1970.

<sup>11</sup> Paz de Hoz 1999.

during the time of Cyrus the Great. Following the performance of the sacrifice a chariot with a white horse, representing that of Ahura Mazdā (Zeus), chariots representing those of the sun, Miθra (Helios), and with purple trappings followed by a fire altar—possibly for Anāhitā (Hestia)—then passed before the king and the aristocrats of his court.<sup>12</sup>

This ritual may demonstrate an attempt by the Mazdāean clergy to co-opt the existing cults of Anāhitā and Miθra by bringing them into the Zoroastrian pantheon, albeit in a subordinate role to Ahura Mazdā. Boyce claims that in ancient Iran the colour purple was associated with the warrior class,<sup>13</sup> but even if this is correct, it could reflect a connection between Anāhitā and the warriors as we have discussed in Chapter Six, particularly as regards her epithet *sūra-*. Recall that this epithet is related to the word *sura-*, which in Hintze’s view means “hero”, specifically the Indo-Iranian term for the hero who slays a dragon and was discussed before.<sup>14</sup> Silverman suggests that the martial aspects which Anāhitā assimilation from Ištar may explain the purple trappings.<sup>15</sup> As noted above, another example of Anāhitā’s association with the warrior groups is the old Indo-European ritual of sending the severed heads of enemies to her temple in Eštaxr which were habitually dedicated.<sup>16</sup>

Notwithstanding the vigorous promotion of the Mazdā cult by the Magian clergy and its adoption by certain individual Achaemenid rulers, by the late Achaemenid period Anāhitā was recognized as one of the three most important deities in western Iran alongside Mazdā and Miθra. Berossus (ca. 345-270 BCE), a Hellenistic-era Babylonian priest, mentions the erection of many statues of Anāhitā (whom he calls Aphrodite Anaïtis) by Artaxerxes (Old Persian Artaxšaça) II in

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<sup>12</sup> Xenophon (c. 430–354 BC) 1968, V-VIII, 355.

<sup>13</sup> Boyce, 1982, p. 147.

<sup>14</sup> Hintze 1995, p. 94.

<sup>15</sup> Silverman 2012, p. 58.

<sup>16</sup> Shepard 2008, p. 140.

different cities throughout the empire, specifically Babylon, Susa, Ecbatana, Persepolis, Bactra, Damascus, and Sardis.<sup>17</sup>

The erection of cult statues appears to have represented a major innovation in Iranian religious practice, since they had been previously noted precisely for *not* creating physical representations of their gods. The building of Anāhitā statues, which began in Artaxerxes' time, has thus usually been attributed to foreign influence. Some scholars, including Meyer, Cumont, and Boyce, see a Semitic origin for this practice, while others, such as Windischmann and Wikander, attribute it to the Greeks.<sup>18</sup>

In either case, it may be that the departure from ancient Iranian religious norms represented a conscious attempt on the part of the Achaemenids to accommodate and co-opt those of their highly cosmopolitan subject population, among many of whom a goddess cult may have been strong. Whether or not this innovation generated controversy and debate among competing priestly groups active at the royal court, we do not know. Artaxerxes appears to have made the Anāhitā temple at Persepolis the premier religious site in the Empire. Her statue there was later replaced by a fire, probably shortly before the establishment of the Sasanian Empire six centuries later.

Chaumont notes that the royal cult of Anāhitā under Artaxerxes II and later Achaemenid rulers emphasized her martial aspect. Plutarch mentions that Artaxerxes II was crowned in the temple of a “warrior goddess,” presumably Anāhitā, whom he equates with Athena: “Here (in Pasargadae) there is a sanctuary of a warlike goddess whom one might conjecture to be Athena.”<sup>19</sup> Plutarch also mentions of another temple devoted to “the Artemis of Ecbatana who bears the name

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Clement of Alexandria 1958, 5.65.3. For a new edition of Berossus see G. De Bruecker 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Riel 2002, p. 200.

<sup>19</sup> Plutarch (c. AD 46 – AD 120) 2016, 3.1-2. Also see Chaumont 1989.

of Anaïtis,” whom possibly also was Anāhitā.<sup>20</sup> These nominally different goddesses all demonstrate the multi-functional characteristics of Anāhitā; “Athena” reflecting her warrior aspect connected with the royal investiture, while “Artemis” evoking her purity.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, both the Greek and Persian evidence would suggest that unlike his predecessor Darius I who clearly considered Ahura Mazdā to be his patron deity, Artaxerxes II considered himself first and foremost a devotee of Anāhitā. As suggested above, in Xerxes’ (Xšayārša) inscription it is possible that the “punished rebellions” mentioned by the king actually refer to people from parts of Iran where the *daivas* were still worshipped. These *daivas* may have included Anāhitā and Miθra.<sup>22</sup>

De Breucker sees the erection of cult statues of Anāhitā as a deliberate attempt by the Mazdaean clergy to bring non-Iranian subjects into the fold and more closely tie them to the Achaemenid regime.<sup>23</sup> Anāhitā’s acquisition of martial functions, which would seem to indicate an innovation within the existing cult of the Iranian water goddess, may have resulted from this process. The most likely explanation is that she took over this role from local non-Iranian goddesses.

Indeed, Anāhitā’s iconography, in the different spatio-temporal contexts in which it appears, seems to lack any unifying features. During the Achaemenid period she is depicted in royal regalia. Shenkar mentions a well-known Achaemenian seal, which is possibly intended to represent Anāhitā’s physical appearance.<sup>24</sup> In the Parthian period she is mainly depicted as an armed warrior-goddess, whereas in Sasanian times her original role as heavenly river is more often evoked, holding a pitcher from which water pours. In all cases her appearance seems to reflect

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<sup>20</sup> Plutarch (c. AD 46 – AD 120) 2016, 27.3.

<sup>21</sup> De Jong 1997, p. 280.

<sup>22</sup> Herrenschmidt and Kellens 1993.

<sup>23</sup> De Bruecker 2012, p. 566.

<sup>24</sup> From the De Clercq collection. See Shenkar 2014, pp. 67-68.



local artistic traditions more than any essential recurring iconographic features.<sup>25</sup> This diversity of representation supports the contention that Anāhitā's diverse manifestations in different places and times reflects her taking over the roles and symbols of whichever pre-existing local goddess had previously been most important. As Kuhrt notes, while acknowledging the difficulty in sifting through Anāhitā's identification with other, non-Iranian goddesses during the Achaemenid period, "The one thing that seems plausible is that the figure of Anahita was flexible enough to be merged with other female deities. And this must have worked differently in different places and been transmogrified over time."<sup>26</sup>

According to Strabo, the Armenians shared in the religion of the Persians and the Medes, and particularly honoured "Anaïtis" (Anāhitā).<sup>27</sup> An Anāhitā temple at the Armenian town of Erez (modern Erzincan in eastern Turkey) contained a solid gold statue which was looted by the Romans in 36 BCE.<sup>28</sup> The ancient practice of sacred prostitution before marriage was practiced there, reflecting a survival of Mesopotamian ritual in an Armenian environment. Other Anahita temples in Armenia existed at T'il, Aštišat (where she was paired with Vahagn/Vərəθraγna), and at the capital, Artasat (where she was paired with Tir).

## 9.2 The Parthian and Sasanian Periods

Incorporating influences from Greek goddesses such as Aphrodite and Artemis and their associated rituals, the Anāhitā cult became even more widespread during the Seleucid and the Parthian periods. Hellenized Iranian settlers in Anatolia and Mesopotamia retained many Iranian rites—in which Anāhitā's cult was especially prominent—even while blending them with local

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<sup>25</sup> Ricl 2002, pp. 200-1.

<sup>26</sup> Kuhrt 2013, p. 153.

<sup>27</sup> Strabo (64 BC – c. AD 24) 2014, 11.14.16.

<sup>28</sup> Pliny (AD 23-79) 1944, v. 33, 82-83.

traditions. Her “warrior” aspect persisted through the Parthian period, and she was recognized as “the Persian Artemis/Diana”.<sup>29</sup>

Anāhitā’s cult remained strong in Lydia and Cappadocia, where she was worshipped as Anaitis, Anaitis-Artemis, or “Persian Artemis”. Her image predominated on Lydian coins. The geographer Pausanias (ca. 100-180 CE) uncomprehendingly describes her cult rituals, presided over by Iranian priests chanting before a fire in a language he did not understand.<sup>30</sup>

Ghirshman believed that during the Parthian period Anāhitā’s cult surpassed that of Mazdā in western Iran and Armenia.<sup>31</sup> Within the Parthian heartlands, Ecbatana, the greatest city during the Median period, retained a temple of Anāhitā where sacrifices were regularly offered. This temple was apparently very rich: according to Polybius, in 209 BCE the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III took 4,000 talents of precious metals from it.<sup>32</sup> Isidore of Charax mentions two Anāhitā temples on the banks of the Euphrates in Mesopotamia, one at Basileia (OP *apadāna*), and the other at Beonan.<sup>33</sup> Susa likewise had a place of worship, described by Pliny as a “great temple to Diana” (*Dianae templum augustissimum*), perhaps continuing the local Elamite goddess tradition, and which the resident Iranian population likely identified with Anāhitā.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of religion the Parthian period is unique in Iran’s history, in that there does not appear to have been any official state cult and all religions—not just local expressions but also foreign ones such as Judaism, Buddhism, and Christianity as well as Babylonian cult in the west and Indic ones in the east—were practiced freely. Descendants of Greek settlers from the Seleucid period continued to follow their traditional rites, which were sometimes conflated with local Iranian ones. Already at the tomb of Seleucid ruler Antiochus I (r. 281-261 BCE), Zeus was

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<sup>29</sup> Plutarch (c. AD 46 – AD 120) 2016, 27; Tacitus 2012, 3.62; also Rose 2015, p. 257.

<sup>30</sup> Pausanias (ca. 100-180 CE) 1965, 7.27.5.

<sup>31</sup> Ghirshmann 1961, p. 269.

<sup>32</sup> Polybius (c. 200 – c. 118 BC) 2010, 10.27.

<sup>33</sup> Isidore of Charax 1976.

<sup>34</sup> Pliny (AD 23-79) 1944, 6.35.

identified with Ahura Mazdā, Apollo with Miθra, and Vərəθraγna with Herakles. During the Parthian period this tendency continued. There is evidence for a substantial Herakles cult in western Iran, the statue and inscription at Bisotun being merely the best-known example. Further evidence is found at Karafto in northern Kurdistan,<sup>35</sup> Seleucia-on-the-Tigris,<sup>36</sup> Sang-e Tarvak and Tang-e Butan in Khuzestan.<sup>37</sup>

The Parthians' attitude of religious tolerance allowed for a considerable degree of syncretism and mutual influence between different communities. The deities of one group were often identified with those of another; for example, Ba'al and Zeus were both equated with Ahura Mazdā, Šamaš and Helios with Miθra, and Ištar and Aphrodite with Anāhitā. Anāhitā and her goddess analogues were certainly widely venerated throughout the Parthian Empire, and Ghirshman has identified goddess images on several ossuaries with her.<sup>38</sup>

There are many references in Greek and Roman sources to the Iranian reverence for water. Herodotus reports that "...into a river they neither make water nor spit, neither do they wash their hands in it, nor allow any other to do these things, but they reverence rivers very greatly." He also describes the Iranians' cultic practices, which differed considerably from those of the Greeks:

These are the customs, so far as I know, which the Persians practise: Images and temples and altars they do not account it lawful to erect, nay they even charge with folly those who do these things; and this, as it seems to me, because they do not account the gods to be in the likeness of men, as do the Hellenes. But it is their wont to perform sacrifices to Zeus going up to the most lofty of the mountains, and the whole circle of the heavens they call Zeus: and they sacrifice to the Sun and the Moon and the Earth, to Fire and to

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<sup>35</sup> Callieri and Chaverdi 2013, p. 694.

<sup>36</sup> Hauser 2013, p. 734.

<sup>37</sup> Kawami 2013, pp. 757, 763.

<sup>38</sup> Ghirshman 1962, p. 313.

Water and to the Winds.<sup>39</sup>

Strabo (ca. 63 BCE-24 CE) corroborates this: “Iranians do not bathe in water, do not throw a cadaver or corpse into it. All in all they do not throw anything unclean in it.” Yet he also mentions that bloody sacrifices were offered to the waters, echoing the severed head sacrifices of the Celts and others (including later the Sasanians) mentioned in Chapter 5:

But it is to fire and water especially that they offer sacrifice... They sacrifice to water by going to a lake, river, or fountain; having dug a pit, they slaughter the victim over it, taking care that none of the pure water near be sprinkled with blood, and thus be polluted. They then lay the flesh in order upon myrtle or laurel branches; the Magi touch it with slender twigs, and make incantations, pouring oil mixed with milk and honey, not into the fire, nor into the water, but upon the earth. They continue their incantations for a long time, holding in the hands a bundle of slender myrtle rods.<sup>40</sup>

The pairing of fire and water cults seems to have ancient precedents in Indo-Iranian religion. Fire temples were sacred to both Ahura Mazdā and Anāhitā.<sup>41</sup> Strabo’s descriptions of Iranian shrines, including Anāhitā temples, likewise demonstrates that her cult also involved fire:

The Persians have also certain large shrines, called Pyrætheia. In the middle of these is an altar, on which is a great quantity of ashes, where the Magi maintain an unextinguished fire. They enter daily, and continue their incantation for nearly an hour, holding before the fire a bundle of rods, and wear round their heads high turbans of felt, reaching down on

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<sup>39</sup> Herodotus, Book I. 131.

<sup>40</sup> Strabo (64 BC – c. AD 24) 2014, 15.3.14.

<sup>41</sup> Shepard 2008, p.141.

each side so as to cover the lips and the sides of the cheeks. The same customs are observed in the temples of Anaitis and of Omanus.<sup>42</sup>

The Parthian king of Armenia, Tīrdād, who was himself a priest, when traveling to Rome to receive his crown from the Emperor Nero refused to travel by the sea so as not to pollute the water.<sup>43</sup> Although these sources do not mention Anāhitā specifically, her connection with water and rivers makes these references relevant to her discussion.

Anāhitā was worshipped in Eṣṭaxr (near Persepolis) possibly in her aspect of war-goddess,<sup>44</sup> just as she had been at Pasargadae in the Achaemenid period. Around the end of the second century CE, the temple of Anāhitā at Eṣṭaxr was under the custodianship of a certain Sāsān, the eponymous ancestor of the Sasanian dynasty.

### 9.2.1 Anāhitā as Patron Deity of the Sasanian Royal House

The Sasanian family who established Iran's last great pre-Islamic dynasty (224-651 CE) were originally custodians of a major Anāhitā temple at Eṣṭaxr in Pārs province, and the goddess remained the dynasty's patron deity.<sup>45</sup> The Sāsānian king Ardešīr I (r. 224-242) showed his devotion to Anāhitā, to whom—paralleling a tradition found throughout ancient Europe—he offered the severed heads of his enemies.<sup>46</sup> This cult was continued by his son Šāpūr I, who sent the heads of twelve Christian martyrs to be exposed in the Anāhitā temple at Eṣṭaxr.<sup>47</sup>

Anāhitā, Ahura Mazdā and Miθra are the main deities found on Sasanian rock reliefs. Of the three Anāhitā and Ahura Mazdā are shown as proffering the divine ring of glory (probably

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<sup>42</sup> Strabo (64 BC – c. AD 24) 2014m 15.3.14.

<sup>43</sup> Bahār 1997, p. 100.

<sup>44</sup> Chaumont 1989.

<sup>45</sup> Ghirshman 1962, p. 149; also Chaumont 1989.

<sup>46</sup> Al-Ṭabarī 1999, p. 15; cf. Nöldeke 1973, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> Labourt 1904, p. 71, n. 2.

*xvarənah*-<sup>48</sup> or the *xwarrah ī kayān*) to the Sasanian kings.

Perhaps the best-known historical image of Anāhitā is her representation in the rock engraving at Naqš-e Rostam in Fārs, where she is depicted crowning the Sasanian monarch Narseh I (r. 293-302 CE)<sup>49</sup>—in fact the symbolic object is a ribboned ring—a possible parallel to the earlier instance mentioned by Plutarch. In the inscription at Paikuli (in modern Iraqī Kurdistan) carved for Narseh in 283, the king of the kings invokes Ōhrmazd, “Anāhīd, the lady,” and “all the gods (NPi. 9.19?)”.<sup>50</sup> At an earlier Sasanian site she appears alongside Ahura Mazdā in stone reliefs commemorating Šapur I (242-272 CE). She also figures in an engraving commemorating the investiture of Xosrow II (r. 590-628 CE) at Tāq-e Bostān near Kermānšāh, an important rock relief from the Sasanian period and also rare because it is located outside of Fārs, their origin provenance, while being close to their capital at Ctesiphon.

Throughout the Sasanian period there were many temples devoted to Anāhitā, as the patron deity of the ruling dynasty, and she was venerated through a number of rituals and celebrations. She was worshipped as an important goddess in the whole period of Sassanian with ups and downs. Also she seems to have faded out after the period of the King Narseh, she rose up again into importance under the last Sasanian kings from Xosrow II to Yazdgard III.<sup>51</sup>

The two best-known temples of Anāhitā indeed are those located at Bīšāpūr in Fars and at Kangavar near Hamedan. The Bīšāpūr temple was discovered by the archeologist Ali-Akbar Sarfaraz in 1968. It is an open-air temple, with channels where running water from the nearby

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<sup>48</sup> Kavian (Kayāniān); *xvarənah*- is listed in the Avesta in *Yašt* 1.21 with *Airiiana Vaējah*, Saōka, the waters, and Anāhitā.

<sup>49</sup> Brosius (2010) has doubted the attribution of these images as the goddess Anāhitā, arguing that they may be women of the royal house or other figures. However, given the importance of Anāhitā in epigraphic evidence and her fundamental association with the Sasanian dynasty there seems no compelling reason to question the standard attribution in the absence of strong evidence to the contrary.

<sup>50</sup> Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Shepard 2008, p. 143.

river used in ceremonies was brought via *qanāts* and could be controlled through the opening or blocking of water conduits. In the square central courtyard worshippers could see their images reflected in the water, reminding us that even today Zoroastrians perform the *āb-zohr* ceremony beside a body of water, pouring their libation into usually a spring, river, or pool at the center of a garden. The Kangavar temple has been identified with the “temple of Artemis” mentioned by Isadore of Charax.<sup>52</sup>

The archeological complex at Taxt-e Soleimān in the northwest of Iran also includes both a fire-temple and a temple dedicated to Anāhitā.<sup>53</sup> The fact that all these sites possessed locations for worshipping both fire and water suggests a pairing of their rituals—and by extension, a pairing of the deities associated with them.

Shenkar summarizes Anāhitā’s iconography in Sasanian period:

In the Sasanian Empire, Anāhitā was always represented investing the king and had three variants of her crown and three attributes: a barsom, a diadem, and an ewer. The Kushano-Sasanian Anāhitā had two types of crown and a spear, a diadem and a bow as her attributes. If the goddess in the Northern Chapel of Temple II at Panjikent also represents Anāhitā, to her attributes in Eastern Iran we may also add a banner and a sistrum.<sup>54</sup>

(The Panjikent painting mentioned by Shenkar will be discussed below in section 9.3.)

Anāhitā’s royal iconography underwent significant changes by the later Sasanian period. In a rock engraving attributed to Xosrow II (591-628) Matthew Canepa detects an emerging Roman influence:

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<sup>52</sup> Isadore of Charax 1976, 6.

<sup>53</sup> Von der Osten and Naumann 1961, pp. 85-92.

<sup>54</sup> Shenkar 2014, p. 76.

The diadems that appear on Xosrow II's monuments preserve the long fabric ties from the traditional Sasanian diadems; however, the portion that encircles the head is composed of inlaid metal plaques joined with round jewel or precious metal segments. The closest analogue to this portion of the diadem is the Roman diadem...<sup>55</sup>

By Sasanian times if not earlier, Anāhitā was identified with the planet Venus, probably reflecting an association between Aphrodite, Venus and Ištar. Panaino observes:<sup>56</sup>

It is also possible that from Indo-Iranian times Sárasvatī and Anāhitā were associated with the Milky Way, but, if so, such a link was no longer operative in the later Mazdean context when Anāhitā/Anāhīd was connected with the planet Venus.

What effect this identification had on her cult in Iran, however, is unclear. Given the likelihood that the cult surrounding Ištar, which connected her to the planet Venus, became conflated with that of Anāhitā, it is not surprising that by the Sasanian period she was associated with this planet as well. This association would seem to be an intrusion, however, since in the Mazdaean belief system based on the Pahlavi sources, planets, in contrast to stars, mostly were seen as demonic. Panaino states that the planets assumed a negative role in Pahlavi sources while this "hostile function" in the Avesta was played by *yātus* and *pairikas*.<sup>57</sup>

Apart from the rock carvings of Naqš-e Rostam and Tāq-e Bostān, many artistic works have been considered as possibly representing Anāhitā, but in no case is this identification absolute. As Bier notes, "neither the images in art nor the architectural monuments correspond precisely to descriptions in literature, and none of the numerous (contested) attributions to her of

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<sup>55</sup> Canepa 2009, pp. 200-1.

<sup>56</sup> Panaino 2015, pp. 235-57.

<sup>57</sup> Panaino 2015, p. 248.



images and sanctuaries rests upon firm ground.”<sup>58</sup> Anāhitā has been argued to appear on an Achaemenid cylinder seal,<sup>59</sup> on some reliefs from the Parthian period,<sup>60</sup> on two ossuaries, one found near Bīšāpūr and the other Sogdian,<sup>61</sup> and in some Sasanian silver utensils. Some scholars believe that the colonnaded or serrated crowns on Sasanian coins belong to Anāhitā.<sup>62</sup> A manor house in Hājīābād (Fars) contained an Anahita temple which included statues of her.<sup>63</sup>

### 9.2.2 Sacred Place Names

Many popular religious sites and sanctuaries in different parts of Iran have *doxtar*, *Bībī*, or *Bānū* as part of their name, suggesting a possible connection to Anāhitā. The sanctuaries such as Bībī Šahrbānū near Ray, Pīr-ē sabz (the most important Zoroastrian holy site, known as Pīr-ē ček-ček among non-Zoroastrians), Pīr-ē harišt, and many other places have legends about a Sasanian princess (usually known as the daughter of Yazdigerd III) who was chased by Arabs and saved by the mountain. At Pīr-ē sabz, also known as Pīr-ē ček-ček (NP ček/čekeh, “drop/drip”), water drips from the cliff above into a pool in the prayer room; the popular name for the shrine refers to the constant dripping of water. In the case of Bībī Šahrbānū there also is a *daxmeh* (tower of silence) near the site, which demonstrates its Zoroastrian roots. In Bāstānī-Pārīzī’s view the archeological evidence and written sources (as well as folkloric legends) connected with sacred sites having *doxtar*, *bībī*, or *bānū* as part of their name indicate the former location of a temple and/or a cult of Anāhitā,<sup>64</sup> and Mary Boyce came to the same conclusion.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Bier 1989.

<sup>59</sup> Duchesne-Guillemin 1971, p. 378 and pl. III, fig. 3

<sup>60</sup> Idem. 1962, p. 333.

<sup>61</sup> Ghirshman 1962, p. 106 and fig. 120, p. 313 and fig. 255.

<sup>62</sup> Göbl 1968, pp. 7, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Azarnoush 1987 and 1994.

<sup>64</sup> Bāstānī-Pārīzī 1988.

<sup>65</sup> Boyce 1967.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, in 2001 an interesting discovery was made in two copper mines at in the western central Iranian plateau, where a cave containing a small lake was used as a sacred site with ritual activities covering the period from 800 BCE until the eighth century CE.<sup>66</sup> Archaeologists found thousands of objects which had all been deposited into the water. These offerings were almost certainly made to a water deity, presumably Anāhitā. The objects included ceramics, jewellery, a Parthian coin, a Sasanian coin, and even an Islamic coin dating to the eighth century CE, showing that the offerings to the waters continued over a long period. The sacrificial items also included a weapon, a single bronze two-winged arrowhead, but most of the offerings were feminine accessories.<sup>67</sup> These offerings remind us the tradition of offering ritual to many Indo-European river/lake goddesses with objects thrown to the water as offerings. Among these one may mention Sequana, goddess of the river Seine in France. A considerable number of objects, as offerings in a religious or a ritual context, were found at the source of the Seine (See Chapter Four).

As Jennifer Rose observes in this regard:

The similarity of provenance as part of a dedicatory group of offerings placed in water, raises the possibility that such action was not confined to a central Iranian cult, but could evidence a more widespread ritual activity, possibly a lay offering to the waters mirroring the ancient priestly libation, known as *āb-zōhr*... Sacred sites from many religious traditions comprise a cave with a water source, which are said to evoke the womb and amniotic fluid respectively, thus connecting any ritual activity with fertility or rebirth.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Bagherpour and Stöllner 2011, p.1.

<sup>67</sup> Rose 2011, pp. 141 and 153.

<sup>68</sup> Op. cit., p. 143.

### 9.3 The Panjikent Paintings

Certain frescos among the wall paintings adorning the Sogdian-era temples at Panjikent, Tajikistan are related to very old rituals. A painting in Temple II depicts a scene of mourning around a dead young prince, whom Guitty Azarpay has identified as the legendary Iranian hero Siāvaš (Av. Siiāvaršan).<sup>69</sup> Azarpay describes a female figure (haloed, with a lotus-shaped crown) in the painting as clearly being a river goddess (Anāhitā) but “her exact identity remains tentative”.<sup>70</sup> If these identifications are correct, what we have in this scene is a fascinating example of convergence of deities between east and west, Semitic and Indo-European, Siāvaš being merely a Central Asian reflex of the Mesopotamian Dumuzi.

Anāhitā and Siāvaš are thus both connected with two of the central characters in Mesopotamian mythology, Anāhitā with Inanna-Ištar, and Siāvaš with the beautiful young man, son or lover of Inanna- Ištar, known as Dumuzi and other names. Inanna, the Sumerian name for the goddess and Ištar is Akkadian name for her. She was associated with battle and war as well as with the sexual desire. The sixth tablet of the Babylonian Epic Gilgameš speaks about Ištar’s lust towards Gilgameš and also lists her many lovers (this subject will be further discussed in Chapter Eleven).

Inanna’s lover was Dumuzi. (As a goddess was associated with sexual desire, she never had a permanent lover). There are various Sumerian poems about her love for Dumuzi,<sup>71</sup> even though she was responsible for his untimely death. It is worth noting that Inanna/Ištar was associated with the planet of Venus, just as Anāhitā is in the Pahlavi texts.

During the centuries leading up to the Arab conquests, the goddess Nana/Nanai, as she was locally known, was apparently the principal Sogdian deity. She was the patron goddess of the city

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<sup>69</sup> Azarpay 1975.

<sup>70</sup> Azarpay 1981, p. 134 and p. 140, n. 61.

<sup>71</sup> Black and Green 2003, p. 109.

of Panjikent, where she was referred to as “the Lady.”<sup>72</sup> Further south in Bactria, she was the principal protector of the Kušān king Kaniškā, where, as Skjaervø notes, she probably replaced Anāhitā.<sup>73</sup> Skjaervø adds that the phonetic (acoustic) similarity of the names “Nanai and Anāhitā” may have played a role in this identification. Anāhitā absorbed many of Nanai’s characteristics and was syncretised with her widely. As with the Achaemenids centuries earlier, the transformation of the Mesopotamian Nanai into the Iranian Anāhitā appears to have been due to a conscious effort on the part of the Sasanians, who took over the eastern regions during the third and fourth centuries: a Bactrian coin from the time of Hormizd II bears an image of Artemis the Hunter but with the Pahlavi inscription “Lady Anāhid,” whereas the coinage of the previous Kušān ruler used similar iconography but identified the figure as “the goddess Nana”.<sup>74</sup>

The Mesopotamian vegetation god and his goddess lover, his death and descent into the underworld, symbolized winter, while his revival and return to the world signaled the coming of spring. (We will discuss this matter further in Chapter Eleven, under the subsection Sūdābeh and Rūdābeh: Two Sides of Female Power.) Nevertheless, such mourning rituals, which involve much crying and sometimes self-flagellation and recur every year, seem to have been borrowed from the Sumerian, Semitic, and Mediterranean cultures with which Iranians came into contact, along with the myths and mythical characters (specifically Ištar and Dumuzi) associated with those rituals. One of the main components of the annual ritual cycle connected with this myth was mourning and lamentations over the death of the divine son/lover, who was considered to have died the death of a martyr.

Returning to the mourning scene in Temple 2 at Panjikent, if indeed the goddess figure is Anāhitā, then we may recall that by Sogdian times her cult had been deeply influenced by rituals

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<sup>72</sup> Henning 1964, p. 252, n. 68.

<sup>73</sup> Skjaervø 2005, p. 33.

<sup>74</sup> Grenet and Marshak 1998, p. 8.

associated with Ištar and other Mesopotamian goddesses. It is thus not unreasonable to interpret this scene as an Iranian version of the Ištar and Dumuzi story. Grenet and Marshak, while confirming that the Panjikent mourning scene derives from the Mesopotamian myth, argue that the dead figure is actually a girl, whom they propose derives from Dumuzi's sister Geštinanna. In this latter feature the two authors see a Greek layer as well, with the dead girl as an echo of Persephone; the goddess Demeter is also present at the mourning.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Grenet and Marshak 1998, p. 9.

## Chapter Ten

### Anāhitā in the Pahlavi Texts

One of the intriguing questions about the transformations of Anāhitā over time has to do with the difference between her portrayal in the Avesta versus references to her in the Pahlavi texts. The Avestan *Ābān Yašt*, together with a range of other sources from the Achaemenid period into Sasanian times a millennium later, demonstrate her central importance in the religious life of Iranians. The Pahlavi texts, on the other hand, speak rather little of her, and when they do their mentions are often ambiguous. There are some problems, however, regarding these valuable sources: (1) most texts are late redactions of the Islamic period, containing several strata, which reach from the Old Iranian to the Islamic period, hence extracting a ‘Sasanian’ version is problematic and often hypothetical, if not sustained by older material; (2) they reflect theological or scholastic views, which might have differed considerably from popular beliefs in the Sasanian period.

Therefore, several questions arise regarding the role of Anāhitā in the Pahlavi texts. Does her treatment in the Pahlavi texts represent some kind of reluctant, perhaps even awkward priestly concession to accommodate (but also subordinate) an overwhelmingly popular goddess figure within the society or her believers? Or should it be read more as evidence of an ongoing tension between the dominant Mazdaean priestly cult and its various rivals for religious authority within Iranian society?

Shaked notes that:

Although she was integrated fairly early on into the Zoroastrian body of scriptures, Anāhīd stands out as an incongruous part of Zoroastrian

worship, and in fact very little of the official priestly ritual of later times is directed towards her. Her prominence in Sasanian life seems to be in defiance of the canonical religion, as can be deduced from the fact that she sinks into a kind of oblivion once we have to rely mainly on the Pahlavi books for our information about what is the ‘correct’ Zoroastrian religion.<sup>1</sup>

Anāhitā is referred to as both *Anāhīd* and *Ardwī-sūr* in the Pahlavi texts. This bifurcation of her earlier Avestan epithets will be discussed further below. Skjærvø suggests that the Pahlavi rendering of the Avestan word *anāhitā-* can be read either as *awinast*, “unsullied”, or as *aniwast*, “unattached.” He notes that the “unattachedness” of heavenly entities in the material world (including the heavenly river, Anāhitā) is well attested in Zoroastrianism, and thus the heavenly river like the sky, does not require any “ties” to keep her suspended in the heavenly sphere without falling down.<sup>2</sup>

(GBd X.10.6)

*čiyōn gōwēd kū Hugar ī buland az hamāg sūrāg ī zarrēn kē padiš frāz jahēd Ardwīsūr ī awinast/aniwast hazār wīr bālāy.*

It is said that the high *Hugar* (is the one) that from all of its golden holes, the unpolluted (or unattached) *Ardwī-sūr* descends from the height of a thousand men.<sup>3</sup>

In this paragraph *awinast* ‘unsullied, unpolluted’, a rendering of *anāhitā-*, can also be read *aniwast* ‘unattached’ according to Skjærvø, though he inclines somewhat towards the latter

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<sup>1</sup> Shaked 1994, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Skjærvø 2013a, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> Pakzad 2005, p. 141.

definition (*aniwast* being the *negated* past participle of *niwend-* (*niwenn-*) with the negative prefix *a-*, “tie (something) to (something)”<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, the reading *aniwast* would evoke Anāhitā’s original mythological status as a water/river goddess, as discussed above.

### 10.1 Women in Pahlavi Texts

Anāhitā is rarely (and only briefly) mentioned in the Pahlavi texts, and her role there is not one of great importance. It may be that with the passing of time, goddess-worship became less important (perhaps even less acceptable) in Iranian society, with male deities securing the major divine roles to a growing extent. We may recall that Iranians are descended from Indo-European peoples, whose pantheon was dominated by male deities.

Although many contemporary Zoroastrians claim that their religion promotes gender equality between men and women—a view supported by scholars such as Boyce<sup>5</sup> and De Jong<sup>6</sup>—Choksy has argued that in the Pahlavi texts the prevalent attitude towards women was negative. Zaehner and Widengren attribute this negativity to Zurvanite influence (of which Widengren saw traces even in the Avesta<sup>7</sup>), but Choksy explains it as part of a cosmic dualism where “In specific situations, the feminine was perceived by the Mazdean tradition of ancient and medieval times as negative owing to its having been linked with agents of cosmic disorder.”<sup>8</sup>

These same texts, Choksy points out, repeatedly warn male Zoroastrians to protect themselves against the threats posed by both women and demonesses.<sup>9</sup> As he states, “the demonic feminine was more powerful than the divine feminine” and “shaped the day-to-day lives of many

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<sup>4</sup> Skjærvø 2013a, pp. 113 and 117.

<sup>5</sup> Boyce 1975, p. 308, n. 83.

<sup>6</sup> De Jong 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Widengren 1967.

<sup>8</sup> Choksy 2002, p. 115.

<sup>9</sup> Choksy 2002, p. 119.



Mazda-worshippers, especially women.”<sup>10</sup>

Rose points out that the concept of the *ašauuan-* (righteous believers) is applied to both men and women. Referring to the *Ardā Wirāz-nāmag*, she says that both genders will be “held accountable for their action in life”. However, Rose also observes that:

“Although such texts present the concept of spiritual parity for both men and women, Zoroastrianism developed historically as a patriarchal religion in which the priesthood is male and the liturgical life of the religion is in men’s hand. Zoroastrian women have largely been excluded from holding higher religious positions and becoming priests.”<sup>11</sup>

In fact, the Avestan texts seem to convey a very different image of women in the Zoroastrian cult from that in the Pahlavi texts, and negative portrayals of the female are more numerous in the Pahlavi texts that it is hard to deny they must represent strongly rooted social attitudes of the time.<sup>12</sup>

Hintze points out that “a passage in the *Yasna Haptanghaiti* (Y 41.2), carefully analyzed by Narten,<sup>13</sup> suggests that in ancient Zoroastrianism both men and women (*nā vā nāirī vā*) could function as good leaders (*huxšθra-*) in both physical and spiritual life (*ubā- ahu-*).”<sup>14</sup> Yet it seems that it refers more to the time that the Avestan texts were composed although as Hintze points out, “The appointment of both men and women as spiritual leaders appears to have continued for a long time.”<sup>15</sup> Still in Sasanian times, Macuch notes that women had the right to obtain some kind of education, specifically “religious education” such as the knowledge of the *Zand* (Pahlavi

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<sup>10</sup> Choksy 2002, p. 120.

<sup>11</sup> Rose 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Hintze 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Narten 1986, pp. 292-293.

<sup>14</sup> Hintze 2003, p. 410.

<sup>15</sup> Hintze 2013, p. 53.

version of the Avesta with commentaries), which could be obtained by all men and women.<sup>16</sup>

Macuch qualifies, however, that “Women were generally regarded (with only a few exceptions) as dependent persons having either no legal capacity or in certain cases only limited legal capacity.”

She notes that they were under the guardianship (*sālārīh*) of the male members of their family, that “it would not even have been conceivable” for women to have any kind of education that required them to leave their home without their guardian’s permission,<sup>17</sup> and that they would never gain full legal capacity:

In contrast to the adult man the woman remained under the legal guardianship of a man not only as a minor, but during her whole life. She never gained full legal capacity, since she was as a rule first under the *manus* of her father, brother, uncle or any other relative who became family guardian (*dūdāg-sālār*), later under the guardianship of her husband in the marriage “with full matrimonial rights” (*pādixšāy-wedlock*). There were, however, many exceptions to this regulation.<sup>18</sup>

There were, nevertheless, some exceptions to this, “For example, when the woman became a widow or entered the so-called “consensus- marriage” (*xwasrāyēn/gādār*) in which she was her own guardian, she could attain to a certain extent the right to litigate and to enter into legal transactions.<sup>19</sup> Even so—and we must recall that modern notions of “rights” and “freedoms” cannot be applied to the Sasanian period when men and women alike were bound with many restrictions— “the range and limit of a woman’s legal capacity was ... generally determined by her guardian.”<sup>20</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the more or less equal standing between men and women

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<sup>16</sup> Macuch 2009a, pp. 135–151.

<sup>17</sup> Macuch 2009b, pp. 251–78.

<sup>18</sup> Macuch 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Macuch 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Macuch 2010, p. 207.

in a *religious* sense must be distinguished from their position within the *legal* system of the Sasanian era, in which women's status is clearly subordinate to that of men.

Hintze argues (in a *religious* sense) that the idea of equality between men and women in terms of their potential to be “righteous Zoroastrians,” active both morally and spiritually in the universal fight between good and evil, is “deeply rooted” in Zoroastrian thought as expressed in the Avesta and the Pahlavi texts.<sup>21</sup>

As has been mentioned, in the *Bundahišn* (“Primal Creation, the establishment in the beginning”<sup>22</sup>) male deities are more prominent than the female ones. The often misogynistic tone of this late (i.e., ninth century) Pahlavi text would appear to indicate an atmosphere of “emerging patriarchy” in Iranian society. As the writer of the *Bundahišn* clearly states:

(GBd XIV A.1)

*guft-iš Ohrmazd ka-š zan brēhēnīd kū dād-iz-m hē tō kē-t jehān sardag petyārag. u-m nazdīk ī kūn dahān-ē(w) dād hē kē-t māyišn ēdōn sahēd čiyōn pad dahān mizag ī xwarišnān šīrēntom. az man tō ayārīh čē-t mard aziš zāyēd. man-iz āzārē kē Ohrmazd hēm. bē agar-im windād hād jāmag kē mard aziš kunēm ā-m nē dād hād hagrīz kē-t ān ī jeh sardag petyārag. bē-m xwāst andar āb ud zamīg ud urwar ud gōspand ud bālist ī garān ān-iz ī zoḡr rōstāg nē windād jāmag kē mard ī ahlaw aziš bawēd jud zan kē jeh petyārag.*

When *Ohrmazd* created woman, he said: I created you while your nature is from Jeh the wicked prostitute. I created a mouth near your buttocks so that coupling would be like the sweetest dishes in the mouth, and you have my support, because man would be born from

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<sup>21</sup> Hintze 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Skjærvø 2005, p. 12.

you. (Nevertheless) You (women) annoy<sup>23</sup> me too, I who am *Ohrmazd*. But if I had found a vessel/container out of which I could make man, I would never have created you because your nature is from Jeh the wicked prostitute. But in water, earth, plants and livestock (lit. sheep) and on the top of the high mountain and in the depths of the villages (I searched) and I did not find a vessel/container out of which the righteous man could be born from but woman, whose nature is from Jeh the wicked prostitute.<sup>24</sup>

This passage would seem to provide a clearly negative statement about women. In the Pahlavi literature “Jeh” (*Jahikā*) is the name of Ahriman’s (*Aṅra-Mainiiu/ Gannāg Mēnōg*) daughter. When one considers that according to Zoroastrian tradition it was Jeh, daughter of Ahriman, who encouraged her father to attack Ohrmazd’s creation, finding a generalized negative attitude towards women throughout the *Bundahišn* is not surprising. Moreover, in the *Bundahišn* (Bd IV. 4.5), the origin of women’s menstruation (which is strongly considered ritually polluted and unclean) is specifically attributed to Ahriman, and is said to have first accrued to Jeh after her words revived Ahriman and he kissed her on the head:

(GBd. IV.4-5)

*u-š ān duš-kunišnīh ōwōn pad gōkān ōšmurd kū Gan(n)āg-Mēnōg be rāmīhist ud az ān stardīh frāz jast ud sar ī Jeh abar busīd. ēn rēmanīh ī daštān xwānēnd pad Jeh paydāg būd.*

<sup>23</sup> *Āzārē, āzārdan, āzār-*: (‘*c’l-tn*’); means “to annoy” or “harass” in New Persian.

<sup>24</sup> Pākzād 2005, pp. 194-5. I have used Pākzād’s edition in making my own translation into English and have followed his chapter divisions. I have also taken consideration of Bahār’s translation into modern Persian (based on three manuscripts TD1- TD2- DH; Bahār 1998).

She (Jeh) described the evil-acts (with) such detail (that) *Aṅra-Mainiiu* relaxed and overcame<sup>25</sup> his stupefaction, and kissed her head. This filth that they call it menstruation (*daštān*), revealed itself through Jeh.<sup>26</sup>

Hence, in the Zoroastrian tradition women were considered polluted for a period of time every month because of their menstruation, which was seen as the consequence of evil entering into them during their period (precluding the possibility of pregnancy) and thus making them ritually impure (Vd XVI.I-II). Moreover, as has been mentioned above, menstruation was interpreted as being the result of demonic harm wrought upon women rather than as something natural. Does the connection between the lunar cycle and women's menstrual also connect women to darkness? It seems possible that the answer is yes.

One may note the reference to a Zoroastrian myth as an example: According to the Avesta, a figure by the name of Taxma Urupa (Tahmūras) had managed to defeat all of the demonic creatures including *Aṅra-Mainiiu* himself.<sup>27</sup> He succeeded in changing *Aṅra-Mainiiu* into the shape of a horse and rode him for thirty years (Yt 18.28-29). In the *Rivāyāt* version of the story, Ahriman seduces Tahmūras's wife and is able to kill Tahmūras through his wife's weakness. Ahriman gives the wife a gift that causes her to menstruate, which remains in women forever after.

All of this could lead us to speculate regarding the situation of women during the periods in which these texts were composed. The ancient "goddess-centered" influence (which derived in large part from Mesopotamian society) seems to have faded over time, not only among Iranians but also within the culture of their neighbours as well. However, since goddess worship was a strongly rooted belief among the people due to its close connection to fertility and production

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<sup>25</sup> *frāz jāst*: "happened forward".

<sup>26</sup> Pākzād 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Yt 19.5.28-29.

upon which their survival depended, the sanctity of goddesses (in this case primarily Anāhitā and Aši) persisted throughout the Sasanian era and even into Islamic times. It seems that the situation of women mostly depended on their social class, as was the case for men as well. Women were dependent on men, but they were by no means at the bottom of the hierarchy; non-Iranians and slaves ranked lower.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, due to the huge importance placed by Zoroastrianism on marriage and the producing of children (especially male children), one could imagine that women might have been seen most importantly as the “vessels/containers” for bearing future righteous men (GBd X1V A.1). However, the fact of their having to live under the control of male guardian reflected male interests concerning their standards. In the ideal Zoroastrian society both male and female Zoroastrians would fight for the victory of Ohrmazd. This concept can be clearly seen in the Yašt devoted to the important goddess Aši (Yt 17), which emphasizes her characteristic as a strong advocate of female morality. In fact, Aši embodies precisely the feminine characteristics most desired by those in control of this patriarchal society-in-transformation, notably that of obedience. In any case, the negative attitudes towards women and their possible reasons require separate and detailed theological and anthropological studies and analyses that are beyond the scope of this research.

In conclusion, Anāhitā’s decreasing visibility in the Pahlavi texts in comparison with the Achaemenid period may actually be an indication that her cult and its rituals enjoyed continuing popularity and thus posed a threat to the agenda of the Mazdaean priests. This hypothesis can be considered in light of the ongoing tensions between the priesthood and the royal house – who, we should remember, were descended from the custodians of an important Anāhitā temple – tensions

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<sup>28</sup> Macuch 2009c, pp. 181-196.

that persisted throughout the entire Sasanian period.

The available Pahlavi sources are all late redactions and consist of several strata. More specifically, they reflect a priestly, “orthodox” viewpoint that does not necessarily correspond with the diverse forms of Zoroastrianism or more correctly, Mazdaism practiced by the Iranian population in the Sasanian and early Islamic periods. Furthermore, it seems that the official Sasanian Mazdaism was also dualistic, which affected their interpretation of the traditional pantheon. The evident popularity and persistence of goddess-centered rituals throughout Iranian history might be an indication of a disparity between the Mazdaean priestly caste and the general population, or perhaps of attitudes among the non-Iranian (e.g., Mesopotamian) substratum of Iranian society, who were inheritors of a religious tradition in which goddesses were more central. Moreover, we should recall that as the patron deity of the Sasanian royal house, she and her associated rituals could be used by the Sasanians as a natural counterweight during periods when individual emperors were seeking to rein in the power of the Mazdaean priests. The iconographic representations of the goddess appeared in the Sasanian rock reliefs (e.g. her representation as crowning the Sasanian monarch Narseh I (r. 293-302 CE) in the rock engraving at Naqš-e Rostam can be seen in this light. While again a detailed analysis of the reasons for this is beyond the scope of the present work, anthropological and economic changes as well as developments in people’s religious beliefs may all have played a role.

## 10.2 Similarities and Transformations between the Avestan *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* and *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd* in the Pahlavi Texts

The Pahlavi books do offer some evidence for an ongoing sacrificial cult to Anāhitā. There are, however, some differences and changes in her features and functions compared to the Avesta. Interestingly, her astronomical aspect (originally the celestial “river”; i.e., the Milky Way) shifts

towards association with the planet Venus. As Panaino notes: “It is possible that from Indo-Iranian times *Sárasvatī* and *Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* were associated with the Milky Way, but, if so, such a link was no longer operative in the later Mazdaean context, when *Anāhitā/Anāhīd* was connected with the planet Venus.”<sup>29</sup>

One significant change is that sometimes the goddess seems to be mentioned as two separate deities: *Ardwī-sūr*, and *Anāhīd*. Sometimes *Ardwī-sūr* is mentioned without *Anāhīd* (e.g., Bd III.19), while elsewhere *Anāhīd* is mentioned as the spirit of the planet Venus (Bd VA.2). In yet other instances, *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd* (e.g., Bd III.20) is mentioned as a single entity.

When the *Bundahišn* describes the world’s lakes and seas, it says they all have their origin with *Ardwī-sūr* (Bd X.1-9). In some other sections, however, she said to be is concerned with the stars and planets. This suggests that her *Ardwī-sūr* designation mostly retains her original features connected to water, whereas her alternate designation of *Anāhīd* is used primarily in reference to the planet Venus. Mesopotamian dualism could be a factor here as will be discussed further.

Further, in the *Bundahišn* *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd* comes to be transformed from a goddess into a deity with the features of both genders, like a hermaphroditic deity: s/he is the mother – and, interestingly, also the father – of the waters. This issue will be discussed in more detail below.

*Anāhīd* and *Ardwī-sūr* in the *Bundahišn* both retain many of the earlier Avestan *Anāhitā*’s functions, as we will discuss further. *Ardwī-sūr*, like *Anāhitā* (Yt 5.4.101), possesses the springs and lakes (Bd X.10.2-10.9, XVI.16.5 and some other verses). Just as in the *Abān Yašt* (Yt 5.96), she descends from the heights of the mountain as a waterfall, as high as a thousand men:

(GBd IX.9.7)

*Hugar ī buland ān kē-š āb ī Ardwī-sūr aziš frōd jahēd hazār mard bālāy.*

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<sup>29</sup> Panaino 2015, p. 242.



The high *Hugar* (is) the one that the water of *Ardwī-sūr* descends from the height of a thousand men.<sup>30</sup>

(GBd XVII. 17.17)

*Hugar ī buland kē āb ī Ardwī-sūr padīš jahēd bālistān rad.*

The high *Hugar* where the water of *Ardwī-sūr* descends (from), is the Chieftain of the mountains.<sup>31</sup>

As in the Avesta (Yt 5.2), *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd* is associated with fertility, which she ensures by purifying men's sperm and women's wombs before and during their pregnancy:

(GBd XXVI.26.91)

*u-š (mēnōg ī) hamāg ābīhā Ardwī-sūr āb ī anāhīd mād ī ābān tōhm ī narān ka az xōn pālūd ēstēd ud mādagān-iz ka zāyēnd ud dudīgar ābus bawēnd xwēš-kārīh ī Ardwīsūr.*

And the spirit of all the waters, *Ardwī-sūr*, water *Anāhīd*, mother of the waters, (to protect) the male's seed, by purifying it of blood, and also the females while they give birth, and be pregnant again, these are *Ardwī-sūr*'s functions.<sup>32</sup>

The Pahlavi *Anāhīd* also retains her role as protector, identified with the waters. According to the *Bundahišn*, *Zaraθuštra*'s seed (here *xwarrah*) is preserved and kept by *Anāhīd* in water (Bd III: 3.20), again similar to the Avesta (Yt 18.56.66). *Zaraθuštra* copulated with his wife *Hwōvī*

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<sup>30</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 129.

<sup>31</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 224.

<sup>32</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 308

three times, and each time his seed penetrated into the earth. *Nēryōsang*, the deity of lighting and (male) power, received *Zaraθuštra*'s seed and sent it on to *Anāhīd* to be kept and protected by her (Bd 35.61).

Lake *Kayānsē* (which can most likely be identified with the modern Lake *Hāmūn* in *Sīstān*),<sup>33</sup> fed by the river *Helmand*, is mentioned several times in the *Avesta*. Once it appears together with the name *Kaṣaoiia-*. In *Yt* 19 (66-69) the *xʷarənah-* of the *Kauuis* is connected with the “*Helmandic*” *Kaṣaoiia* (*Kaṣaēm haētumatəm*), where nine rivers flow together. At three appropriate times in the future, a young virgin will swim in the lake and become impregnated by *Zaraθuštra*'s seed, so as to bear him sons. The place where *Zaraθuštra*'s seed resides is shining, like three lights within the lake:

(GBd XXXIII.43-45)

*ēn sē pus ī Zardu(x)št čiyon Ušēdar ud Ušēdarmāh ud Sōšyans rāy gōwēd kū Zardu(x)št  
be juxt ēg-šān xwarrah ī Zardu(x)št andar zrēh ī Kayānsē pad nigāh-dārīh ō ābān  
xwarrah ī ast Anāhīd yazad abespārd. nūn-iz gōwēd kū sē čirāY andar bun ī zrēh waxšēd ī  
pad šab hamē wēnēnd.*

*ēk ēk ka-šan zamānag ī xwad rasēd ēdon bawēd kū kanīg-ē(w) sar šustan rāy ō ān āb ī  
Kayānsē šawed u-š xwarrah andar ō tan gumēzēd ud ābustan bawēd. awēšān ēk ēk pad  
zamānag ī xwēš ēdōn zāyēnd.*

About these three sons, who are *Ušēdar*, *Ušēdarmāh* and *Sōšiians*, it says that when *Zarduxšt* copulated, they entrusted his *xwarrah* in the *Kayānsē* Sea to the *xwarrah* of

<sup>33</sup> This theme has a strong presence in both the *Avesta* (*Vd* 19.5) and the *Pahlavi* literature. As *Gnoli* (2003) notes, “In the eschatological myth there is a correspondence between the sea *Vouru.kaša* and Lake *Kaiiānsē*”.

*Ābān*,<sup>34</sup> who is the deity Anāhīd, to be protected by her. And it is said that even now three lights blaze in the deep of the sea, which can be seen at the night-time. One by one, when their time arrives, a young virgin goes to the Kayānsē water (lake) to wash her head and the *xwarrah* goes to her body and impregnates her. Then they (the saviours) also one by one each will be born in their own period.<sup>35</sup>

*Dēnkard* 7 provides the names of these three maidens, who all have roots from Zaratuštra's lineage. According to this text they are called Nāmīg-pīd, Weh-pīd, and Gōwāg-pīd.<sup>36</sup> The prophet's seed is protected by the 99,999 *frauuāšis* (Yt 13.62),<sup>37</sup> the guardian spirits, which, interestingly, are described collectively as female beings<sup>38</sup> (Yt 13.45-49, 67-70) from whom will be born the three *saošiiants* (the beneficent ones) who are Ahura Mazdā's "soldiers" and "messengers".

The coming of the third saviour, Sōšiians, will mark the advent of the Resurrection and the end of the world. He comes from an area around the Haētumat river in Sīstān (note the connection with water). His epiphany is the sign of justice. This theme has a strong presence in both the Avesta (Yt 19.92 and Vd 19.5) and in the Pahlavi literature.

The story of the three sons of Zaratuštra and their connection to the lake is repeated in other Pahlavi texts. In the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* also Zaratuštra's son, Ušēdar, is said to be born in a Lake:

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<sup>34</sup> *ābān xwarrah*: "the glory of waters".

<sup>35</sup> Pākzād 2005.

<sup>36</sup> 8.55; 9.18; 10.15; (Rashīd-Mohāsel 2009, pp. 107-112-118). In West's translation (1897) these three maidens are called "Šemīg Ābu, Šapīr Ābu and Dšnubak Ābu". These names differ from the versions given in the Avesta, where they are called *srūtaṭ-fəδriiō*, *vaṇhu-fəδriiā* and *ərədaṭ-fəδriiā*, Yt 13.141-142.

<sup>37</sup> Yt 13.62, 13.28; *Dēnkard* 7.8.1 ff.; cf. Boyce 1975, p. 285; also Gnoli 2003b.

<sup>38</sup> Rose 2015, p. 277.

(ZWY 7.2)

*guft-iš ohrmazd kū, spitāmān zarduxšt, ka dēw ī wizard-wars ī xēšm-tōhmag ō paydāgīh  
āyēd pad kust ī xwarāsān nazdist nīšān ī syā paydāg bawēd. zāyēd ušēdar ī zarduxštān pad  
war ī frazdān {hād<būd> kē pad \*zrēh < ī> kayānsē guft. hād būd kē pad \*kāwulistān  
guft}.*

He, Ohrmazd, replied: “O *spitāmān Zarduxšt*, when the *dēw* having dishevelled hair, of the seed of *dēw Xēšm* (anger), will show his appearance in Xwarāsān, first a black sign will appear, Ušēdar the (son) of Zarduxšt will be born on the lake *Frazdān*; {that there (was) some one who said that it was on the Sea (lake) *Kayānsē*; that there was some one who said that it was in *Kāwulistān* (Kābolestan)}. ”<sup>39</sup>

The lake also is called the “Lake of Three Seeds”: *war ī sē-tōhmag*.<sup>40</sup> It will be observed that in the ZWY apart from the “Lake of Three Seeds”, which, we may recall, belongs to Anāhitā, who protects the seeds – the author mentions an Iranian army from Xorāsān whose banner is made from beaver skin (Anāhitā’s clothing in the Avesta) and from the wind (one of Anāhitā’s horses in the Avesta):

(ZWY 7.14)

*ō pušt ī ērān dehān amar spāh ī \*xwarāsānīg abrāstag-drafs hēnd {<hād> kū drafs ī  
\*babr(ag) pōst dārēnd. u-šān wād-drafs < ī> \*bandag < ī> spēd}.*<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cereti 1995, p. 142.

<sup>40</sup> Cereti 1995, p. 143.

<sup>41</sup> Cereti 1995, p. 143. Here *babar* (*bpl*), “tiger,” could also be read as *bplk’ babr(ag)*: “beaver”. I have translated the term as “beaver”.

In support of the Iranian countries, there will be the innumerable armies of *Xwarāsānīān* with raised banners {that is, they have banners of beaver's skin and wind banners, which will be (of) white cotton}.

In another Pahlavi text, the *Abdīh ud sahīgīh ī sagistān* (The Wonder and Remarkability of Sagastān/Sīstān); the author notes the importance of Sīstān in the Zoroastrian religion according to several different reasons.<sup>42</sup> First, the birth and the appearance of Ušēdar, Ušēdarmāh, and Sōšiiāns, the future prophet's sons, will take place there (which, as we may note, is the location of one *Arđwī-sūr Anāhīd's* lakes). But in addition, the text mentions *Arđwī-sūr Anāhīd* (connecting her with water) when Frēdōn (Θraētaona) goes to the “sea” (lake) Frazdān, asking *Arđwī-sūr Anāhīd* for her support:

(AS 4-8)

4) *ēk ēn kū paywand ud tōhmag ī kayān dahibedān ī pad ēn kišwar wizend awiš mad. 5) az frazandān ī frēdōn salm kē kišwar ī hrōm ud tūč kē turkestān pad xwadāyīh dāšt, ērij ērān dahibed būd, u-š <ān > bē ōzad. 6) ud az frazandān*

*< ī > ērij bē kanīg-ē ēnyā kas bē nē mānd. 7) ud pas frēdōn ō war frazdān nīd ud pad nihān dāšt dā < n- > ohom paywand ka az ān kanīg pus zād. 8) pas frēdōn ō war ī frazdān šud, u-š az arđwi-sūr anāhīd < ud > abārīg yazdān kē andar sīstān gāh < ud > mehmānīh abartar, āyafī xwāst, pad abāz ārāstan < ī > ērān-šahr ud xwarrah < ī > kayān, āyafī windād abāg abāg manuščīhr ud awēšān ērān āfrīn.*

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<sup>42</sup> Tafazzoli 1982.

One reason is this, that the lineage and family of the *Kauii*-dynasty, i.e., the rulers of this country sustained some damage. Of the children of *Θraētaona*, *Salm* (\**Sairima*) who had the reign of the Roman (/Western) Empire, *Tūč* (\**Tūraca*) who had the reign of Turkeštān, killed *Ērij* (\**Airyāēca*) who was the ruler of the Aryan (land). And of the children of *Ērij* none remained except a daughter. Then *Frēdōn* conducted (her) to the lake *Frazdān* and kept her hidden for ten generations, when a son was born from that daughter. Then *Frēdōn* went to the *Frazdān* sea (lake), and from *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd* and the other deities (who had) higher authority in *Sīstān*, asked for their favour (*āyaft*) to strengthen *Irān* (*ērān-šahr*) and the (*xwarrah* <ī> *kayān*). He obtained the boon, together with *Manuš-čiθra* and the Aryans. Blessing.<sup>43</sup>

The *Frazdān* lake also is connected to *Anāhitā*. According to Avestan geography the region of the *Haētumant* had several rivers, including *Xvāstrā*, *Hvaspā*, *Fradaθā* (*Frazdān*), *Xvarānahvaitī*, *Uštavaitī*, *Urvā*, *Īrāzī*, and *Zarānumatī*. In the *Ābān Yašt* there is a paragraph about *Kauii Vištāspa*, who is presented as making a sacrifice to *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* near *Fraz-dānu*, the same *Frazdān* as is found in the *Abdīh ud sahīgīh ī sagistān*.<sup>44</sup>

Several Pahlavi texts confirm the importance of the *Haētumant* and its region in the Zoroastrian tradition. The most important of these, as Gnoli discusses, is the *Abdīh ud sahīgīh ī Sagistān* as was mentioned above, which lists the wonders of *Sīstān*, collecting all of those themes already present in the Avesta.<sup>45</sup> Also, the important role that Lake *Frazdān* and the rivers in the region of *Sīstān* have played in Zoroastrian tradition is linked to the special connection between

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<sup>43</sup> I have used the transcription provided by the Titus website in making my own translation: <<http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/iran/miran/mpers/jamasp/jamas.htm>>. Also see Utas 1983, p. 261.

<sup>44</sup> Yt 5.25.108.

<sup>45</sup> Gnoli 2003a.

them and the *xwarrah* /*xʷarənah*/ (*farrāh*, *farr*) of the *Kauuis*, the Kayanids of the national tradition.<sup>46</sup> We see in the *Abdīh ud sahīgīh ī sagistān* that Frēdōn went to the shore of lake Frazdān to ask the deities’ support for *xwarrah* <ī> *kayān*. There is the *war ī frazdān*, which may be the *gawd-e zira* (the lowest part of an inland drainage basin covering large parts of southern Afghanistan and Iran, known as the Sistān Basin).

Again regarding Lake Frazdān, the *Bundahišn* says that when a generous righteous person throws anything into the lake, the lake accepts it. However, if a person is not righteous, the lake throws it out again (GBd XII.12.6-7, see below). This paragraph also evokes other water-goddess cults, showing the continuation of an older version of offering and sacrifices to the water goddesses which we have discussed before in connection with “the offerings by the worshippers” to the lake/river, which are linked to the water goddess cult (as we have discussed in Chapter 5):

(GBd XII.12.6-7)

*War ī Frazdān pad Sagestān. gowēnd kū āzād mard-ē(w) ahlaw kē tis-ē(w) andar awiš abganēd padīrēd ka nē ahlaw abāz ō bērōn abganēd.*<sup>47</sup>

The *Frazdān* Lake is in Sīstān. It is said that if a noble, righteous person (man) offers something to it, (then the lake) accepts. If (the person) is not righteous, (the lake) throws it (the offering) out.

According to the *Bundahišn*, water, earth, plants, and fish are all female (Bd IX.113).

Furthermore, the world’s nature is water, and the creation had a watery nature at the beginning.

Human beings also have a watery nature (Bd XIII.190). Finally, one notes a connection between

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<sup>46</sup> Gnoli 2003a.

<sup>47</sup> Pākzād 2005.

the moon, the clouds and water (Bd XI.165).<sup>48</sup>

In sum, in the Pahlavi literature (and in the Avesta as well), the third saviour Sōšiians will rise from the lake, which belongs to Anāhitā who protects the seed of Zaratuštra that has been preserved within it. The idea of the lake as feminine is pertinent to our discussion: the prophet's seed is given from the male deity *Nēryōsang* to the female deity, *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā*, who is identified as a lake (Bd XXXIII.43-45 above). As noted above, the Zoroastrian tradition speaks of the coming of three saviours. Apart from the *Bundahišn* and the other previously mentioned Pahlavi texts, in the Avesta in Yt 19.92 and in Vd 19.5 there are references to the birth of the *saošiiant*-/saviour, *astuuat.ərəta-*, from the waters of Lake Kašoia.

All of the passages mentioned above connect Anāhitā to the *saošiiant*-/ Sōšiians who brings about the final defeat of Evil and thus could embody the “saviour” concept. As mentioned in Chapter 8, the Sōšiians figure shares some common roots with the goddess in terms of their names: Sōšiians, from the word *saošiiant-*, contains the verbal root *sū-*, “to be strong (to swell)”, as well as *sūra-* which is the noun form and the goddess's epithet. Moreover, in the Rig Veda (*sūra-* heroic) is an epithet for Indra,<sup>49</sup> or as Hintze notes,<sup>50</sup> the noun *sūra-* seems to have referred to the hero who kills the dragon (as discussed in Chapter Eight).

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<sup>48</sup> There is another spirit (*mēnog*), called *Sōg*, who is related to the moon, water and *Ardwī-sūr*: *mēnog-ē(w) ī abāg Mihr ham-kār Sōg xwānēnd. hamāg nekīh ka az abargarān ō gētīg brēhēnīd nazdist ō Sōg āyēd Sōg ō Māh abespārēd ud Māh ō Ardwīsūr abespārēd ud Ardwīsūr ō spīhr abespārēd ud spīhr pad gēhān baxšēd. ...the mēnog who is partner with Mihr is called Sōg. All of the goods things when created for the world by the spirits first come to the Sōg. The Sōg sends them to the moon, the moon sends them to Ardwī-sūr, Ardwī-sūr sends them to the sky, and sky disseminates them throughout the world (Bd XXVI. 26.34).*

<sup>49</sup> RV II 11.5.

<sup>50</sup> Hintze 1999, p. 78.



### 10.3 A Goddess with the Features of Both Genders

As has been previously mentioned, in the *Bundahišn Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd* (here united as one deity) is described as the mother and the father of the waters:

(GBd. III. 20)

*Panjom az mēnōgān Spandārmad u-š az dahišn ī gētīg zamīg ō xwēš padīrift u-š dād ō ayārīh ud ham-kārīh Ābān ud Dēn ud Ard ud Mānsarspand ud Aršišwang ud Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd. čiyon +Ābān mēnōg ī yojdahrgar ī zamīg ud ābān tōhmag u-š padīš Māraspand ī Mānsarspand gōwišn ī Ohrmazd. Ard ud Dēn andar xwarrah mān ast kē Aršišwang gōwēd xwarrah ī wahištīg ardāyīh Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd pid ud mād ī ābān pad ēn hamkārīh andar ēbgatīh win(n)ārd ēstēnd ud ēn mēnōgān ham-kār xwarrah pāk dārēnd.*

The fifth of the spirits (*mēnōgān*) is Spandārmad. From the material (*gētīg*) creation, she accepted earth as her own and he created for (her) help and collaboration Ābān and Dēn and Ard and Mānsarspand and Aršišwang and *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd*. As +Ābān, who is the purifying spirit (*mēnōg*) of the earth and the seed of the waters, in which (is) Māraspand, the Mānsarspand, Ohrmazd's (holy) word, Ard and Dēn have their domain in the *xwarrah*, which is called Aršišwang, *xwarrah* of the righteousness of heaven, (and) *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd* (is) the father and mother of the Waters. In this cooperation during the (period of the onslaught of) Evil they are arranged and these cooperating spirits keep the *xwarrah* pure.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 50.

The *xwarrah* should be kept pure, since according to the Zamyād Yašt the Renovation of the world is connected to it (Yt 19.92).<sup>52</sup> Also, in the paragraph above *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd* is a purifier among the other deities, yet she alone is mentioned as the father and mother of the Waters who cooperates to keep the *xwarrah* pure.

This process of androgenisation, however, also associates *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd* with Ohrmazd who is described the same way – that is, as both the mother and the father of his creatures:

(GBd. I.58)

*Ohrmazd pad dām-dahīšnīh mādarīh ud pidarīh ī dahišn ast če ka-š dām pad mēnōg parward ān būd mādarīh ka-š bē ō gētīg dād ān būd pidarīh.*

Ohrmazd (has) by (the process of) creation (both) the motherhood and fatherhood of creation because when (he) created them spiritually (in the *mēnōg* state), that was motherhood, and when he created them as material (in the *gētīg* state), that was fatherhood.<sup>53</sup>

*Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd* comes to be transformed from a goddess into a deity with the features of both genders, like a hermaphroditic deity, the mother and the father of the waters. Perhaps one way to explain this apparent folding of both genders into one divine entity is due to the influence of the Mesopotamian goddess Ištar and her hermaphroditism,<sup>54</sup> as will be discussed below in section 10.4.

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<sup>52</sup> Anāhitā has her own role in the last scene of the Renovation: with this sacred *x'arənah*, the last Avestan *saošiiant-* will arise from the water of Lake Kayānsē where she had kept the seed of Zaratuštra.

<sup>53</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 25.

<sup>54</sup> Venus was considered hermaphroditic according to her position in relation to sun (Koch-Westenholz 1995, pp. 125-126).

#### 10.4 The Connection between the Goddess and the Planet Venus

Most significant, as it was mentioned before, in the Pahlavi texts Anāhitā sometimes seems to be two separate deities: *Ardwī-sūr*, as the river, and *Anāhīd*, identified with the planet Venus. Since she also is mentioned as one deity with two genders (as noted above), one might ask why she is receiving these very opposite functions. Being influenced by Mesopotamian culture and astrology (Venus: Inanna/Ištar as two different planets, each with its own specific identity) seems to be a more acceptable explanation, as will be discussed further below. Again, however, references to Anāhitā in the *Bundahišn* appear to subsume or conflate figures that may not be identical.

As mentioned before, Anāhitā (*Anāhīd*) is identified with the planet Venus. As a planet, even Anāhitā's precise astronomical position in relation to the sun is given:

(GBd.VA.8)

*ud Anāhid pad dō hazār ud hašt sad ud sīh ud ēk lipī<sup>55</sup> az mihr bast ēstēnd.*

*Anāhid* is located at a distance of two thousand, eight hundred, and thirty-one minutes from Mihr (the sun).<sup>56</sup>

The association between Anāhitā and Venus, which becomes highly manifest during the Sasanian period, most likely derives from an earlier syncretism between the cults of Anāhitā and those of Inanna/Ištar and Aphrodite. It is surely significant that Inanna/Ištar, the Mesopotamian goddess of love and war, was also associated with the planet Venus. Because Venus (with whom Ištar was linked) appears both in the morning and the evening, and due to her mythological

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<sup>55</sup> *lipī*: (*lpyh*) a minute (of an arc).

<sup>56</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 79.

hermaphroditism,<sup>57</sup> it was perceived as two different but related “stars”, the goddess of the evening star being held to be female, and the morning star considered as male.<sup>58</sup> We know that Mesopotamian astrology had a strong influence on Iranian beliefs, Tištar/Tir being another prominent example.<sup>59</sup> And as has been mentioned previously, Anāhitā possibly was syncretized with the goddess Inanna/Ištar.

The idea of Venus (Inanna/Ištar) as two different planets, each with its own specific identity, perhaps came to be absorbed into the Iranian pantheon, giving two different versions of *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd*. One was related to the waters – Anāhitā’s original identity – and the other related to the planet Venus, *Anāhīd ī abāxtari*, who has a negative spirit, although the planet’s light (like the other *abāxtars*) comes from Ohrmazd. Because of this light, the *abāxtars* cannot cause too much damage and sin in the world (Bd VA.10). It is interesting to note that Ohrmazd is also the name of the planet Jupiter, which has the same negative features as Anāhitā. Yet these two planets are both less “sinful” than the other *abāxtars*.<sup>60</sup> As Panaino explains:

The name of the five planets visible by the naked eye are clearly attested only in Middle Iranian sources, although the knowledge of these astral bodies should be much more ancient; in Pahlavi they are: *Anāhīd* (Venus), *Tīr* (Mercury), *Wahrām* (Mars), *Ohrmazd* (Jupiter), and *Kewān* (Saturn). The later demonization of the planets appears to be in evident contrast with the peculiar fact that some of them have the same names of the most important Mazdean gods. When western Iranians discovered the existence of the planets, they followed the earlier Mesopotamian denominations, exactly as the Greeks did. The Mesopotamian schools of astral divination first distinguished and then denominated the

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<sup>57</sup> Venus was considered hermaphroditic according to her position in relation to the sun. See Koch-Westenholz 1995, pp. 125-126.

<sup>58</sup> Boyce 1986.

<sup>59</sup> Panaino 2005.

<sup>60</sup> Pākzād 2005, pp. 79-80.

single planets, associating them with some of the highest divinities of the Iranian pantheon. Then their names became so deep-rooted that they could not be changed even when the planets were demonized.<sup>61</sup>

#### 10.4.1 The Negative Connotations of Anāhīd as the Planet Venus

Within the Sasanian dualistic astrological framework, the planets seen as negative, are set against the positive forces of the stars, with whom they are locked in constant battle. The planets are actually referred to as *gēg*, that is, “thieves” or “bandits”. As Panaino explains:

In the heavenly conflict between the two celestial armies, the starred one against that of the planets, the stars give—and in their own quality of divine beings (in Avestan *yazatas*) they “give” only in positive manner—while, to the contrary, the planets subtract, diverge, and damage, i.e., they try to rob the positive impact of the lights shed by the luminaries upon the sublunar world.<sup>62</sup>

Somewhat inconsistently, the astrological chapters of the *Bundahišn* do not consider the planets negative but rather “as harmonic parts of the creation”.<sup>63</sup> One explanation for this apparent inconsistency could be that the process of demonization took time and did not happen quickly. During this process, possibly in the intermediate stage, the planets Anāhīd and Ohrmazd were considered less “sinful” and were thus categorized as “beneficent” (*kirbakkar*) (Bn VB.12).

The *Bundahišn* also introduces *Anāhīd ī abaxtari* as a new, negative version of Anāhītā, who is the spirit of the planet Venus (Bn V.4). As an example of this negative quality, the astral

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<sup>61</sup> Panaino 2015, p. 253.

<sup>62</sup> Panaino 2013, p. 138.

<sup>63</sup> Panaino, “Cosmologies and Astrology,” p. 251.

deity, Sadwēs<sup>64</sup> (Avestan *Satavāesa-*), restrains the planet Venus from engaging in destructive activities: “Sadwēs happened to be of greater vigour than Jupiter and Venus; they disabled Jupiter and Venus from doing harm.”<sup>65</sup> *Abāxtars* are a group of demonic planet-spirits, each of which has a specific opponent among the “good” stars (*axtars*):

(GBd VA.10)

*hamāg rāyēnišn ī āwām čiyōn band ō axtarān čiyōn čašm-dīd paydāg wišōbēnd ul frōdēnd ud kast abzōn kunēnd. u-šān rawišn-iz nē čiyōn axtarān če ast ka tēz ast ī dagrand ast ka abāz-rawišn ast ka éštādāg hēnd. u-šān abāxtarān-nāmīh ēd kū nē axtar hēnd. u-šān ēn rōšnīh aziš paydāg ham rōšnīh ī Ohrmazdīg. Handāzag ī wattarān kē paymōzan ī debag paymōxt hēnd. čiyōn rōšnīh andar čašm ī xrafstarān aziš sūdōmandīh u-š ēk ēn kū paymoxtān ī ān rōšnīh rāy<sup>66</sup> wināh kardan kam tuwān ud ēk ēn kū mardōm wēnēnd aziš nē tarsēnd.*

All of the order of the cosmos which is connected to the (*axtarān*), they (*Abāxtars*) make it to chaos, as it is clear to see. Make the upward down, increase the diminished. And their movement (also) is not like (*axtarān*), since it (the movement) is sharp, and is slow (long), and is back-motion since (they) are standing. They are named as *Abāxtarān* because they are not *Axtar*. Their luminous appearance is of Ohrmazd’s light, like the vulgar ones<sup>67</sup> who wear the brocade. Like the light in the eyes of noxious creatures, there is benefit in this, and one is that they can do little harm, due to wearing the light, and (another) one is that when people

<sup>64</sup> The Avestan *Satavāesa-* clearly a star divinity related to waters and rain who helps Tištria according to Yt 8.9 and 13.43.

<sup>65</sup> Pakzad 2005, p. 85.

<sup>66</sup> *paymoxtān ī ān rōšnīh rāy*: “due to wearing the/that light”.

<sup>67</sup> “*wattar-*” means “worse”, with the plural ending *ān*, but here it probably means “the vulgar, the populace”.

see them they are not scared of them.<sup>68</sup>

The Iranian cosmos as a battlefield between Good and Evil can be seen clearly in the following paragraph, where the planets and the stars take a side and each has a corresponding opponent:

(GBd V.5.4)

*andar-iz spihr mihr ī tamīg ō xwaršēd māh ī tamīg ō māh ī gōspand-tōhmag<sup>69</sup> mad hēnd. u-  
šān ō rah ī xwēš bast hēnd pad ham-paymānagīh. abārīg jādūgān parīg abāg harwīn  
murnjēnīdārān<sup>70</sup> abāxtarān <ō> axtarān. haft abāxtarān spāhbedān /ō haft spāhbedān\  
axtarān čīyōn Tīr /ī abāxtar <īg> \ ō Tištar {Ohrmazd ī abāxtarīg ō Haftōring} Wahrām ī  
abāxtarīg ō Wanand Anāhīd ī Abāxtarīg ō Sadwēs Kēwān {kē abāxtarīgān spāhbedān  
spāhbed} ō Mēx ī mayān āsmān Gōzihr-iz muš-parīg ī dumbōmand ō xwaršēd ud māh ud  
stāragān mad hēnd.*

Even in the Firmament the dark Mihr came against the Sun, and the dark Moon against the Moon having the seed of the *Gōspands* (Beneficent Animals). They bound them (the sun and the moon) to their own rays for adherence, other sorcerers and witches, with the licentious fatal *Abāxtars* came against the *Axtars*: the seven *Abāxtar* leaders (against) the seven *Axtar* (leaders), such as Tīr (*Abāxtar*-Planet Mercury) against Tištar (*Axtar*-Sirius), the *Ohrmazd ī Abāxtari* (Jupiter) (against) *Haftōring* (the ‘Seven Bears), the *Wahrām ī Abāxtari* (Mars) against *Wanand*, the *Anāhīd ī Abāxtari* (Venus) against *Sadwēs, Kēwān* (Saturn) who is the Chieftain of the leaders of the Planetary (against) the wedges of the sky.

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<sup>68</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 80.

<sup>69</sup> *gōspand-tōhmag*: here is an adj. for *māh*.

<sup>70</sup> *murnjēnīdārān*: *murnjēnīdan*, *murnjēn*-: “fatal”, adj. for the *abāxtarān*.

*Gōzihr*,<sup>71</sup> also the tailed *muš-parīg*<sup>72</sup> (Rat-*pairikā*) came (against) the sun and the moon and the stars.<sup>73</sup>

The passage below could belong to an intermediate stage of the myth's development in which the status of planets gradually changed, since both Ohrmazd and Anāhīd are here seen as “beneficent”:

GBd VB. 5b.12

*pad bun ka ēbgat*<sup>74</sup> *andar dwārist ōwōn jast kū mihr ud māh ī tamīg* <ham-> *paymānagīh abāg rah ī xwaršēd ud māh rāy wināhgārīh kardan nē tuwānist ud Haftōring ud Sadwēs az Ohrmazd ud Anāhīd freh-nērōgtar jast hēnd u-šān Ohrmazd ud Anāhīd az wināh kardan padīrānēnīd. ham čim rāy axtar-āmārān awēšān rāy pad-kirbakkar xwānēnd.*

In the beginning, when evil (*Ahriman-ēbgat*) attacked, it so happened that the dark Mīhr and Moon could not do any harm, because of their dependence on the rays of the Sun and the Moon; and *Haftōring* (the Seven Bears) and *Sadwēs* became more powerful than *Ohrmazd* and *Anāhīd* (Jupiter and Venus) (thus) they made *Ohrmazd* and *Anāhīd* incapable of committing sin. This is why the astrologists call them “the beneficents”.<sup>75</sup>

Being paired with the Creator god as two “beneficents” shows the importance of the goddess. It is noticeable that in some parts of the *Bundahišn* Ohrmazd and Anāhīd are mentioned

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<sup>71</sup> The middle Persian *Gōzihr*, the imaginary dragon, from an old Iranian compound adjective \**gau-čiθra* in Yt 7 as an epithet of the moon. It became the name of the imaginary dragon who stretched across the sky between the sun and the moon (Mackenzie 2002 and 1964).

<sup>72</sup> The *muš-parīg* is considered by Skjærvø as belonging to the category of dragon/snake-like monsters, probably because of its tail. It seems to be an evil opponent of the sun, the moon and the stars, and to have been considered as the demon who causes eclipses (Skjærvø 1987).

<sup>73</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 73.

<sup>74</sup> *ēbgat*: 'ybgat': “devil.”

<sup>75</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 85.



together. As we have previously noted, they are also mentioned as “the mother and father” of the “waters” (*Anāhīd*) and “creation” (*Ohrmazd*) (*Bd* I.58, III.20).

In the following verse, however, both *Anāhīd* and *Tīr* (Mercury) are portrayed in negative terms:

(GBd VB.14)

*gōwēd kū Anāhīd āb-čihrag<sup>76</sup>čē-š hamēstār Sadwēs āb-čihrag ud Tīr wādīg gōwēnd čē-š hamēstār Tištar ud wād ud wārān-kardārān.*

It is said that *Anāhīd* has a watery nature, because her opponent, *Sadwēs*, has a watery nature. And (also) *Tīr* (Mercury) has a windy (nature), because his opponent *Tištar* creates the wind and the rain.<sup>77</sup>

Even so, it is not just *Anāhīd* who has a watery origin. The author(s) of this passage also describe(s) *Ardwī-sūr* as a water spirit, and hence state(s) that their pairing arises from the fact that they are both of a “watery nature” (*Bd* VB, 5b.14). The priestly author(s) of the *Bundahišn* cannot escape or ignore the original watery nature of the goddess. However, they do produce an explanation in order to justify the separation of *Anāhīd* from *Ardwī-sūr*. Malandra has argued that the separation between *Anāhīd* and *Ardwī-sūr* shows that the Avestan *Anāhitā* is a late combination of two originally distinct goddesses, *Anāhīti* and *Ardwī-sūrā*.<sup>78</sup> However, the water-origin of both *Anāhīd* and *Ardwī-sūr*, as mentioned above, makes it more likely that this separation was in fact absorbed under the influence of *Ištar* and the planet Venus. We should recall that *Ištar*

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<sup>76</sup> *āb-čihrag*: *čihr* means “face, appearance”, and *čihrag* means “nature”.

<sup>77</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 86.

<sup>78</sup> Malandra 2013, p. 106.

was associated with the planet Venus, who was considered bisexual, changing her sex according to her position in the sky. Venus also was considered as the “beneficent” as the morning star.<sup>79</sup>

Moreover, the Mazdaean opposition of *aša-* vs. *druj-* required the Pahlavi-text writers to create an opponent for each of the various Iranian deities in their priestly official version of the ancient myths. Apart from such editorial considerations, the influence of Mesopotamia, Greek and India and the cultural exchanges between them and Iran also should be borne in mind.

### 10.5 Wisdom and its Connection to the Water Goddess

As previously discussed, wisdom is one of the functions (among with healing, fertility and victory) of Indo-European water goddesses, including the Avestan Anāhitā. (The Celtic Brigantia, of whom it was said that she lost her sight in order to gain wisdom, is another example.) Wisdom thus has some connection to both water and femininity. In Iranian religion the main female deities are all somehow related to nature: Spəntā Ārmaiti- the earth, Haurvatāt and Amərətāt- the plants, water and the growth and fertility of the life, and Anāhitā- the waters (*āb*). The question arises as to why this is the case.

Almost everything in nature has a disciplined cycle—as precise as if there is a wisdom driving it—and women are central to this wisdom. In contrast to men, the ability of females to give birth to children makes them more closely related to nature and the cycle of the life, to the trees and their fruits, and to the annual agricultural harvests. Even the monthly period of women’s cycle is like the monthly appearing and disappearing of the moon (and, as we know, connected to it).

In the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* (the most important apocalyptic work in Zoroastrian literature<sup>80</sup>), Ohrmazd foretells for Zaratuštra all of the events that will happen to Iran until the

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<sup>79</sup> Koch-Westenholz 1995, pp. 125-126.

end of the world. The book consists of a dialogue between Zaraθuštra and Ohrmazd. Zaraθuštra drinks in the wisdom of all knowledge (*xrad ī harwisp-āgāhīh* (the “all-in-encompassing wisdom”))—which, significantly, is in the form of water—then goes into a visionary trance enabling him to see the future until the end of the world. (The trope of a seer drinking a hallucinogenic beverage to enter into a trance is widespread, and presumably very ancient; it is seen also in stories about the early Sasanian high-priest Kardēr and in the *Ardā Wīrāz nāmāg*.)

Having entered into a trance, Zaraθuštra sees several future time periods. After seven days of being unconscious, when he returns to his normal state Ohrmazd helps him to understand and analyze what he has seen.<sup>81</sup>

Zaraθuštra’s asking for *xrad ī harwisp-āgāhīh* (the “all-in-encompassing wisdom”) to know about the future resembles a less complete version of the well-known soul-journeys of *Ardā Wīrāz* and Kerdīr, although with a different purpose. The journeys of the latter two are intended to prove the correctness of Zoroastrianism, but in the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, Zaraθuštra’s request to see the future and his receiving the wisdom of omniscience from Ohrmazd appears more like a consultation between them about future events.

Arguably, the most significant issue in the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* is not the end times per se as much as it is about wisdom as such and its form. Zaraθuštra is able to see future events by receiving the “wisdom of omniscience”, in the form of water, from Ohrmazd, according to the text:

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<sup>80</sup> Primarily because its vision of the tree (mentioned in Chapter Three, and in an older form in Chapter One) is clearly comparable with Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of the image of the world empires (Sundermann 1988).

<sup>81</sup> The book also deals with Ušēdar and Ušēdar-māh, the first and the second of the promised saviours, who battle with the awakened demon Žaḥḥāk (Aži Dahāka) and the great harm done to the world by this monster before his death at the hands of Garšāsp (Kərəsāspa); the section concludes with a portrayal of the final deliverance by Sōšiiāns (Rashīd-Mohāsel 1991; Sundermann 1988).

(ZWY 3.5-7)

*Ohrmazd pad xrad ī harwisp-āgāhīh dānist kū-š čē menīd, spitāmān zarduxšt ī ahlaw frawahr.*

6) *u-š ān ī zarduxšt dast frāz grift. u-š- - ohrmazd, mēnōg <ī> ābzōnīg, dādār ī gēhān <ī> astōmandān ī ahlaw- - u-š xrad ī harwisp-āgāhīh pad āb kirb abar dast ī zarduxšt kard u-š guft kū, “frāz xwar”.*

7) *ud zarduxšt aziš frāz xward. u-š xrad ī harwisp-āgāhīh pad zarduxšt andar gumēxt.*

Ohrmazd through the all-in-encompassing wisdom (*xrad ī harwisp-āgāhīh*) knew that what the Spitāmān Zarduxšt, with righteous *frawahr*, thought. He took hold of Zarduxšt’s hand, He, Ohrmazd, with the increasing and bountiful (*ābzōnīg*) spirit (*mēnōg*), Creator of the material existence, He laid the all-in-encompassing wisdom, in the shape (*kirb*) of water, on the hand of Zarduxšt, and He (Ohrmazd) said: “drink (it)”. Zarduxšt drank it and the all-encompassing wisdom of Ohrmazd was mixed with Zarduxšt.<sup>82</sup>

It may be noted that the word used here for “form-shape” is *kirb*, which in fact means “body.” This is a combination of *xrad*, the wisdom, which is a moral concept and belongs to Ohrmazd, and something related to nature: the water (*āb*), which connects this wisdom to the water, which as we know is linked with Anāhitā. And this latter point is significant.

Thus, while moral-cultural concepts mostly belong to the male deities, it seems that in this case having water stand as the form of the “wisdom of omniscience” would connect this *xrad* to nature—and hence, to the female—remembering that Ohrmazd is also described as both the mother and the father of his creatures as has already been mentioned: “...*Ohrmazd pad dām-*

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<sup>82</sup> Cereti 1995, p. 134; Rāshed-Mohāsel 1991, p. 51.

*dahišnīh mādarīh ud pidarīh ī dahišn ast ...*<sup>83</sup> Apparently, the maternal characteristic was considered necessary for the creation and the creator, since as it was mentioned before, Anāhīd is also called “mother and father” of the water.

According to the *Dēnkard*, when the creator made the two kinds of *xrad*, he made the *gōšōsrūd-xrad* (Av. *gaošō.srūta-xratu-*, “wisdom acquired through hearing”) as male, and the *āsn-xrad* (Av. *āsna-xratu-* “inborn (or innate) wisdom”) as female. And knowledge is born from the combination of innate wisdom (*āsn-xrad*) (and) the acquired wisdom (*gōšōsrūd-xrad*). Through their *xwēdōdah* (consanguinal marriage), all of human’s knowledge is born:

(Dk 3.80):

*hamāg-iz dānišn ī mardōmān az xwēdōdah bawīhēd čē dānišn zāyīhēd az hamīh ī āsn-xrad gōšōsrūd-xrad. āsn-xrad mādag gōšōsrūd -xrad nar ud ēd rāy čē har 2 az dādār āfurišn xwāh ud brād hēnd.*<sup>84</sup>

All human knowledge comes from the *xwēdōdah*, because knowledge is born from the combination of innate wisdom (*āsn-xrad*) (and) the acquired wisdom (*gōšōsrūd-xrad*). The innate wisdom (*āsn-xrad*) (is) female, acquired wisdom (*gōšōsrūd-xrad*) is male, and this (is) because both are ever since the creation of the Creator sister and brother.

Thus, the *āsn-xrad* is “female” wisdom, and the *gōšōsrūd-xrad* is “male” wisdom (as has been previously mentioned, the *Bundahišn* attributes Anāhitā both the male and female genders: *Ardwī-sūr ī Anāhīd, pid ud mād ī Ābān*).<sup>85</sup> It seems that although there is no gender connection in

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<sup>83</sup> Bn I.58; Pākzād 2005.

<sup>84</sup> Madan 1911, pp. 79-80; Skjærvø 2013b; Macuch 2009a.

<sup>85</sup> Bd III.20; Pākzād 2005.

the Avesta in regard to this, there is one in the Pahlavi texts, which Macuch suggests recognizing as “gender symbolism”; i.e., mind and body, nature and culture, etc.<sup>86</sup>

Macuch states:<sup>87</sup>

In this assignment of the two types of reason to the sexes we can easily recognize a procedure that in philosophy and literature is denoted by the term “gender symbolism”. This concept is based on the idea that, in all dichotomies of human perception, in basic dualism such as nature and culture, mind and body, feeling and reason, emotion and rationality, private and public, beauty and ugliness, etc., the duality of the sexes is implicitly thought of. These basic dualisms can vary considerably in different cultures, but one can observe that they are simultaneously connoted with classifications of femininity and masculinity in a manner that reflect social structures exactly, so that they can be recognized immediately by a person socialized in that specific culture.

The two wisdoms also complete each other; one cannot learn the acquired wisdom without having the innate wisdom, and one cannot use his innate wisdom without learning the acquired wisdom, according to the *Bundahišn*:

(GBd XXVI.17)

*āsn-xrad ud gōšōsrūd-xrad nazdist abar Wahman paydāg bawēd. kē-š ēn har(w) dō ast ō ān ī pāhlom axwān rasēd. ka-š ēn har(w) dō nest ō ān ī wattar axwān rasēd. ka āsn-xrad nēst gōšōsrūd-xrad nē hammōxtēd. kē-š āsn-xrad ast ud gōšōsrūd-xrad nest āsn-xrad ō kār nē dānēd burdan.*

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<sup>86</sup> Macuch 2009a.

<sup>87</sup> Macuch 2009. pp. 144.

The innate wisdom (*āsn-xrad*) and the acquired wisdom (*gōšōsrūd-xrad*) first come to Wahman. One who has both of these wisdoms could have the best life force. One who does not have these two (wisdoms) would have the worst life force.<sup>88</sup> Without the innate wisdom, the acquired wisdom could not be learned. One who has the innate wisdom and does not have the acquired wisdom cannot use the innate wisdom.<sup>89</sup>

Piras suggests that the Pahlavi commentators on this passage may have missed a key aspect of the Avestan notion of *āsna-* as an adjective. *āsna-xratu* reflects a particular situation and *āsna* which he proposes (thorough etymological analyses)<sup>90</sup> may mean “rising [with the dawn]” or the “rising *xratu-*.” Piras states: “Actually, this connotation of the substantive *xratu-* with the qualification of *asna-* “innate” (or natural in the Pahlavi texts, or “congenital” to the soul according to Piras<sup>91</sup>) fails to take in the specific nature of the Avestan *xratu-* in the *MihrYašt* or *ArdYašt*, where the context is better defined in terms of a mythological scenario centred on the moment of sunrise.”<sup>92</sup> Piras quotes two verses of paragraph 92 of the *Zamyād Yašt*, about how *Saošiiant* looks to the creation with *xratu-* (after rising from the lake *Kašaoiia*):

(Yt 19. 92)

*āaṭ astuuauṭ.ərətō fraxštāite*

*haca apaṭ kašaoiitāṭ*

*aštō mazdā ahurahe*

<sup>88</sup> *wattar axwān*, from *wattar*, “worse”. *axw* has several meanings, among which one is “the world”. So “*wattar axwān*/ the worse world” could also refer to the very essence and the concept of “inferno/hell”.

<sup>89</sup> Pākzād 2005.

<sup>90</sup> the root  $\sqrt{san}$  and the root  $\sqrt{zan}$ , preverb *ā-* +  $\sqrt{san}$  + suffix *-a*, which form *āsna*.

<sup>91</sup> Piras 1996, p. 10.

<sup>92</sup> Piras 1996, pp. 10-12.

*vīspa.tauruuaiiā puθrō*  
*vaēdām vaējō yim vārəθraγnəm*  
*yim baraṭ taxmō θraētaonō*  
*yaṭ ažiš dahākō jaini.*<sup>93</sup>

When Astuuṭ-ərəta (Saošiant), Ahura Mazdā's messenger, son of Vīspa.tauruuaiiā, shall rise up from the lake *kəsaοiia-*, he will have a victorious mace, (the same mace that) the brave θraētaona bore when the dragon Dahāka was slain.

(Yt 19.94)

*hō diḍāṭ xratəuš dōiθrābiiō*  
*vīspa dāmṇ paiti vaēnāṭ*  
*+pasca išō dušciθraiiāiā*  
*hō vīspəm ahūm astuuantəm*  
*ižaiiā vaēnāṭ dōiθrābiiā*  
*darəsca daṭaṭ amərəxšiantīm*  
*vīspəm yṇm astuuaitīm gaēθṇm*<sup>94</sup>.

He (Saošiant) shall gaze upon all of the creatures with (his insightful) eyes of intelligence to the one with demon nature; then attack. He shall gaze with the eyes that render strength at the whole of material life, with eyes that shall deliver immortality to the material world.

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<sup>93</sup> Hintze 1994, p. 39.

<sup>94</sup> Hintze 1994, p. 39.



It seems that “this particular type of *xratu*-sight” is “thus characteristic of *Saošiiant* rising up from the lake *kqsaoiia*”<sup>95</sup> The expression *xratēuš dōiθrābiia* is connected to *āsna-xratu-*, according to Piras,<sup>96</sup> which is the kind of wisdom as a source of visionary insight and mental enlightenment. We may add that in the verses mentioned above (Yt 19.92-94), a connection may be noticed between wisdom as one of Anāhitā’s functions and “this particular type of *xratu-*. Moreover, if we note that *Saošiiant* is rising from the lake *kqsaoiia-*, and the first thing that he does is to gaze with his “insight eyes of intelligence” upon creation, we may consider that wisdom is absorbed from the lake *kqsaoiia-* from whence he rises and thus may be linked with water and Anāhitā.

The word *xratu-*, usually translated as “wisdom”, has been widely analyzed<sup>97</sup> in terms of its philology and its Indo-Iranian historical-cultural background for its meaning and translation, among which “mental,” and/or “magic-spiritual” may be mentioned.<sup>98</sup> As already noted above (and in contrast to the Avesta) in several Pahlavi texts the *āsn-xrad* “innate or inborn wisdom” is connoted with “female” wisdom and its functions are related to the body and nature. The *gōšōsrūd-xrad*, “wisdom acquired through hearing”, on the other hand, is “male” wisdom, which is more involved with morality, rationality and abstract moral concepts. Both wisdoms together, seem to lead humans toward a righteous life.

Maria Macuch states:

In this assignment of the two types of reason to the sexes we can easily recognize a procedure that in philosophy and literature is denoted by the term “gender symbolism. This concept is based on the idea that in all dichotomies of human perception, in basic dualisms

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<sup>95</sup> Piras 1996, p. 13.

<sup>96</sup> Op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>97</sup> König 2018, pp. 56-114.

<sup>98</sup> Op. cit., p. 1.

such as nature and culture, mind and body, feeling and reason, emotion and rationality, private and public, beauty and ugliness, etc., the duality of the sexes is implicitly thought of. These basic dualisms can vary considerably in different cultures, but one can observe that they are simultaneously connoted with classifications of femininity and masculinity in a manner that reflect social structures exactly, so that they can be recognized immediately by a person socialized in that specific culture.<sup>99</sup>

In the Pahlavi *andarz*-text, *Ayādgār ī Wuzurg-mihr* (the memorial of Wuzurg-mihr)<sup>100</sup> the two wisdoms' duty is to protect humans. The author of this Pahlavi text made the functions of these two "xrad" very clear. According to this text, the *āsn-xrad*'s function is mostly related to protecting the body from committing sins (associating the body with the female and emotionality (AW 45) while the *gōšōsrūd-xrad* is more involved with morality of the mind (associating the mind with the male and rationality (AW 46) and to enabling one to know the righteous path:

(AW 43):

*Dādār ohrmazd pad abāz dāštan ī ān and druz ayārīh ī mardōm rāy čand čiš ī nigāhdār ī mēnōg dād: āsn-xrad ud gōšōsrūd-xrad ud xēm ud ummēd ud hunsandīh ud dēn ud ham-pursagīh dānāg.*

The creator Ohrmazd in order to keep away these several demons and to help people created several things to take care of the spirit (*mēnōg*): inborn wisdom (*āsn-xrad*) and

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<sup>99</sup> Macuch 2009, p. 144.

<sup>100</sup> Shaked 2013, p. 222.

wisdom acquired through hearing (*gōšōsrūd-xrad*), and character, and hope, and satisfaction, and religion, and consultation of the wise.<sup>101</sup>

(AW 45):

*xwēš-kārīh ī āsn-xrad tan az bīm kunišnīh wināh nigerišnīg ī ud ranj abē-barīh pādan ud frasāwandīh ī xīr gētīg, frazām tan pad daxšag dāštan ud az xīr fraš-girdīgīh ī xwēš nē kāstan ud pad ān wadgarīh ī xwēš nē abzūdan.*

The function of innate wisdom is to protect the body from the horror of committing intentional sins and to keep it from the useless<sup>102</sup> pain and ephemeral nature of the material world, and remembering the final end of the body (thus) do not reduce its (the body's) share of eternity (after the Restoration) and do not add to its (the body's) sin (evil-doing).<sup>103</sup>

(AW 46):

*xwēš-kārīh ī gōšōsrūd-xrad pand ud ristag ī frārōn bē šnāxtan ud padiš ēstādan, čiš ī pēš bē widerīd bē nigērīdan ud ān ī pas aziš āgāh būdan, čiš ī būdan nē šāyad nē wurrōyistan ud kār ī frazāmēnīdan nē šāyad andar nē grifan.*

The function of the wisdom acquired through hearing (*gōšōsrūd-xrad*) is to distinguish the path of goodness and (how) to follow it, and look at what has been done in the past and be

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<sup>101</sup> Oryan 1993, p. 304.

<sup>102</sup> *abē-barīh*: “being useless”; *abē*, “without”, *bar*, “produce”.

<sup>103</sup> Oryan 1993, p. 304.

aware of what (will be done) in the future. And to that which could not last should not be chosen, and the deed which could not be completed (perfectly) should not be started.<sup>104</sup>

## 10.6 Conclusions

Although mentions of Anāhitā in the post-Sasanian Pahlavi priestly texts are not particularly prominent or detailed, her appearance in a wide range of contexts connected with the Sasanian period, especially in archaeology, suggest that she remained a prominent deity during the Sāsānian period, at least for the Sasanian royal house and possibly among large parts of the Iranian population as well. Her important role as “king-maker” in certain Sāsānian rock reliefs, and the fact that the Sāsānian ruler Ardešīr sent the severed heads of defeated enemies to her temple at Eṣṭaxr, are two important facts attesting to her importance for the royal house.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, the ambivalence shown to her in the Pahlavi texts may reflect that there were some underlying tensions connected with Anāhitā’s cult, the post-Sasanian texts perhaps reflecting the unelaborated recollection of a competition over religious authority at court and/or a refusal on the part of some Iranians to completely follow the directives of the court priests (as the proclamations of Kirdir obliquely show).

The portrayal of Anāhitā in the Pahlavi texts is a complex phenomenon and indeed not easily deciphered. She ultimately appears there as two separate deities, with both positive and negative portrayals: *Ardwī-sūr*, as the river, and *Anāhīd*, identified with the planet Venus. Moreover, as discussed above, *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd* is said to be both the mother and the father of the waters. The fact that she is sometimes transformed into a goddess with the features of both genders (like a hermaphroditic deity) may arise from this fact. Interestingly, the concept of “wisdom” in the Pahlavi texts was divided according to the two genders (like *Ardwī-sūr Anāhīd*

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<sup>104</sup> Oryan 1993, p. 304.

<sup>105</sup> Al-Ṭabarī (224–310 AH; 839–923 AD) 1999, p. 15; also Nöldeke 1973, p. 17.

herself). The *āsn-xrad* “innate wisdom” is connoted with the female wisdom, and its function seems to be related to the body, nature, and natural cycles.

The aspects which are portrayed negatively by the Pahlavi authors seem to be mainly those which can be associated with the Mesopotamian elements of her evolving character, notably the goddess Inanna/Ištar. The Mesopotamian goddess, like the Pahlavi Anāhīd, was linked to the planet Venus, whose dual appearances as both morning and evening star mythologically symbolize her hermaphroditism.<sup>106</sup> Thus Anāhīd’s ambivalent treatment in the Pahlavi texts may be connected with the (foreign) influence of Mesopotamian astrology into the historical evolution of her character, dividing the deity into two different identities opposed to each other. These divisions included the important deities as well, even the Creator god Ohrmazd.

The case of Anāhitā would seem to be an example of the kind of influence Mesopotamian culture and ritual, including astronomy, had on Iranians and their pantheon. More specifically, this Mesopotamian influence provided Anāhitā with two opposing identities, both genders, along with their respective functions. Existing in two distinct versions, *Ardwī-sūr/Anāhīd* came to be divided in the Pahlavi texts into two different identities: one who was related to the waters—Anāhitā’s original, positive identity—and another more linked to the planet Venus, *Anāhīd ī abāxtari*, a negative spirit. Even so, the original “water origin” of both *Ardwī-sūr* and *Anāhīd* was never lost.

As has been discussed in previous chapters, there are several distinct functions and concepts to be found among the various Indo-European water goddesses, one of which is their connection with wisdom and knowledge. Sārasvatī,<sup>107</sup> Dānu and Brigantia are merely the best-known examples of this. The Armenian Anahit also was known for her knowledge, even being described as “the mother of all knowledge.”<sup>108</sup> Similarly, the Avestan *Ābān Yašt* contains a prayer offered to *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* for her insight and her knowledge (5.86). Wisdom and knowledge would

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<sup>106</sup> Koch-Westenholz 1995, pp. 125-126.

<sup>107</sup> In India Sārasvatī protects the study of the Vedas (Boyce 1986).

<sup>108</sup> Agat’angeghos 1976, section 22.

thus appear to be connected to the healing function of water goddesses. This could be due to women's knowledge of medicinal plants, which on more than one occasion in history resulted in their being accused of witchcraft.

In the Scandinavian tradition and belief system as well, “the sacred water of the goddesses brought inspiration and knowledge to those who drank from it. It was said that Odin cast one of his eyes at a spring as an offering to gain a “drink” which would give him the knowledge and more specifically the reveal of the future.”<sup>109</sup> Scandinavian mythology speaks of “the sacred water [which] brought inspiration and knowledge to those who drank from it”; Odin is said to have gained knowledge of the future by drinking sacred water.<sup>110</sup> Similarly, in chapter seven of the Zoroastrian apocalyptic work *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, when Zaratustra drinks the “wisdom of all knowledge”—which, significantly, is in the form of “water”—he goes into a visionary trance enabling him to see the future. Since the concept of “knowledge” is seen to be connected to sacred water, then it would seem that the custodian of this sacred water, who is a goddess, would by extension be connected to knowledge as well.

Myths from a number of different cultures involving water feature a sacred child who is entrusted as a water-keeper. The Hebrew Moses falls into this category, as does the Assyrian king Sargon, and, according to the *Bundahišn*, the Iranian monarch Kawād. In Iranian mythology, Zaratustra's sperm (i.e., his “children”) are entrusted to the water (a hypostasis of Anāhitā). Behind this notion would seem to be the idea that water serves as a kind of sacred womb to the world. If we accept that the earth was considered as female (Spəntā Ārmaiti), then lakes and wells could metaphorically be considered as the vagina and womb of the earth, and thus sacred. The idea of sacred lakes devoted to female deities has been discussed in a previous chapter. The fact that almost all of the water-connected goddesses have childbirth/fertility/healing functions is

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<sup>109</sup> Davidson 1988, p. 26.

<sup>110</sup> Davidson 1988, p. 26.

reflected in myths about the water-keeping child. Certain deities connected with elements of nature exist in all archaic human cultures. Among these the sky, the earth, and water are the most common; the first is most often worshipped as a male deity, and the latter two most often as goddesses. Anāhitā, as it is mentioned before, is associated with knowledge and wisdom.

It is not surprising then, that in the renovation of the world, *Saošiant* will be rising up from the lake *kəsaōiia-* (Zamyād Yašt.19.94), with the expression “*xratəuš dōiθrābiia*”. This particular type of wisdom “*xratu*-sight” which is characteristic of *Saošiant*, connects him therefore to the lake and water and to Anāhitā.

## Chapter Eleven

### Traces of Anāhitā in Islamic Iran

This chapter surveys and identifies possible survivals of Anāhitā in the literature and rituals of Islamic Iran, focusing on the attributes of female figures in literary works such as the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*, the *Dārāb-nāmeḥ*, and other sources and their possible connection to Iranian goddesses and the Avestan *pairikās*. Although it is not possible to know with certainty whether or to what extent such continuity existed (or continues to exist) within Iranian society, these connections between the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods are intriguing and, in many cases, appear highly likely. Our approach will be to analyze—albeit with caution—a number of female literary figures and popular rituals using the frameworks of comparative mythology and gender studies.

With the progressive Islamization of Iran from the seventh century onwards, Anāhitā disappears as a distinct object of popular devotion. However, as is generally the case when any society adopts a new religion, many traces of earlier beliefs and practices remain under new guises. The goddess-worship practiced by Iranians in pre-Islamic times, within which Anāhitā was the principal figure, became subsumed under popular rituals, especially those having to do with water, or reverence for supernatural creatures such as the *pairikās*, or the survival of shrines and other sacred places, many of which belie their goddess origins by containing the words *doxtar* (“girl, daughter”), *bībī*, or *bānū* (“lady”).

In popular Iranian folklore, even some ostensibly Islamic figures, notably the prophet Muhammad’s daughter Fatima, contain some echo of Anāhitā. For example, Iranians say that Fatima’s dowry (*kābīn*, *mehriyeh*) was water. It is written in Shi‘ite religious texts that “Four rivers are Fatima’s dowry: Euphrates, Nile, Nahrawaan, and Balkh.<sup>1</sup> In some mourning

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<sup>1</sup> Majlesī (1627–1699) 1998, vol. 43, Hadīth 34.



ceremonies and grief rituals in Shi‘ite Iran during the ‘Ashura ceremonies,<sup>2</sup> the “*Rowzeh-khan*”, the person who speaks about the oppression and injustice happened to the Imam and his family before being martyred, sometimes says that the enemies didn’t let the thirsty family of the Prophet drink water from the Euphrates river although the water was the rightful dowry of the Imam’s mother, Fatima.<sup>3</sup>

There are many other elements in Iranian popular rituals that preserve a connection between women and water. Persian literature as well preserves numerous details that may reflect lost myths about divine or semi-divine female figures.

### 11.1 Traces of Goddesses in the *Šāh-nāme*

Many of the characters in the Persian national epic, the *Šāh-nāme* (“Book of Kings”) of Ferdowsī, a tenth-century epic poem which celebrates the glories of Iran’s pre-Islamic past, are also found in the Avesta and in the Rig-Veda.<sup>4</sup> Following the separation between Indo-Iranians into Iran and India during the second millennium BCE, most of their gods lost their prior mythological status, but their influence remained, with many being re-conceived as heroes. (The same is true of other Indo-European mythologies, including the Greek, Roman Germanic, etc.) In other words, these originally divine figures were re-imagined as humans, but possessing special, super-human features.

Zoroastrian symbolism is also deeply evoked in art from the Islamic period, such as the painting known as “The Court of Gayumars” from the illustrated *Šāh-nāme* commissioned by

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<sup>2</sup> Widely performed in Iran in honor and remembrance of the death of the Prophet’s grandson, Husayn, who was martyred at Karbala in 680 CE.

<sup>3</sup> Dana News 2016: “Why water is Fatima’s dowry”

<http://www.dana.ir/news/1036039.html> چرا آب-مهریه-حضرت-زهراس-است

<sup>4</sup> For example, Yama in the Vedas, Yima in the Avesta, and Jam or Jam-šīd in the *Šāh-nāme* all derive from the same original character. In Iranian and Indian mythology both Yama and Jam-šīd are presented as having been rejected by the gods.

*Šāh* Tahmasp in the early 1620s.<sup>5</sup> Gayumars or Kiyumars (Av. *gayō marətan*), described in Yašt 13 of the Avesta as the “Primal Man,” was created along with water, soil, the first plant and the first cow. The seventeenth-century Muslim painter Sultan Muhammad’s depiction of “The Court of Gayumars” shows a garden scene of inter-species harmony and primordial bliss prior to its disruption by the evil deity Ahriman, a well-known image from Zoroastrian mythology.

In fact, while various *Šāh-nāmehs* were the most commonly commissioned book by all the Muslim dynasties who ruled Iran, Ferdowsi’s epic work is an unparalleled celebration of pre-Islamic Iranian culture, championing recognizably ancient proto-Indo-European patriarchal and militaristic values, throughout which Mazdaism is the (hidden) formal religious framework. Many of the “heroes” in the *Šāh-nāmeh* are originally Indo-European or other deities. As such, Zoroastrian as well as common Indo-European mythological motifs and symbols are predominant, though Mesopotamian, Byzantine, Indian, and other influences are present as well. Another example is *Žaḥḥāk*, portrayed as a man-dragon in both the Avesta and the Vedas, who in the *Šāh-nāmeh* is transformed into a tyrannical king with snakes coming out of his shoulders. *Žaḥḥāk* is depicted in this way in virtually every illustrated manuscript of the *Šāh-nāmeh*.<sup>6</sup>

Although the *Šāh-nāmeh* was written during the Islamic period, its female characters are very strong-minded and behave with a self-determination that might seem inappropriate in the patriarchal context of tenth-century Muslim society. A number of these women actively try to meet their beloved and even “promise” to offer themselves to their lovers. They send messages in order to arrange secret meetings, and even go to their beloved’s bed during the night. Sometimes, notably in the case of Gord Āfarīd, they take on the role of a mighty warrior. Even so, these assertive women can be strangely obedient to their male masters, which sends us some mixed

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<sup>5</sup> A good colour reproduction of this painting, which is now in the collection of the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, can be found in Dickson and Welch 1981.

<sup>6</sup> Welch 1976, p. 45.

signals. Can “good” women be bold as well as obedient? Why are these characters sometimes able to freely choose their lovers, while at other times they appear to have little or no autonomy at all?

Seeking the mythological roots of these female behaviors would seem to point us back to a goddess-centered belief system (possibly with Mesopotamian roots), distinct from Indo-European mythology of which Indo-Iranian is a branch. The Indo-European pantheon, while it contains many goddesses, nevertheless accords the most important roles to male deities.

While a detailed analysis of women in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* is beyond the scope of this dissertation,<sup>7</sup> it will be helpful to highlight some examples of its relevance to our discussion. In terms of the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*'s numerous heroic female figures, one may draw a parallel with the fact that such characters are common in the myths of Sakas and other pastoral nomadic peoples of Central Asia as well, including the Mongols and the pre-Islamic Turks. It also may be noted in this regard that the epic is made up largely of stories and legends from Eastern Iran, where a number of Saka tribes had settled (e.g., Sistan/Sakastan). Since many characters in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* can be interpreted as mythological figures who became transformed into human heroes (examples: Av. Yima/Jam or Jam-šīd, Av. *gayō marətan*/ Gayumars), it should not surprise us to find strong, self-assertive women in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*.

### 11.1.1 The Connection to Mesopotamian Myth

Before evaluating the example two female figures in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*, we will begin by considering the possible origin of their stories in Mesopotamian mythology. The Sumerian version of the martyr/regeneration myth, referred to as “The Descent of Inanna,” is the most detailed, and shows clearly that the vegetation god Dumuzi regularly died and rose again, ensuring seasonal fertility. The basic theme bears a striking similarity to the Greek myth of Persephone, daughter of

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<sup>7</sup> Khaleghi-Motlagh 2012.

the goddess Demeter, which may in part be derived from it.<sup>8</sup> A similar and possibly related Sumerian myth is that of the goddess Ninlil (who was identified by Mylitta)<sup>9</sup>, who was later identified with the Mesopotamian Ištar (who in turn came to be identified with Anāhitā). Her original name was “Sud” before being married to the god Enlil, and it is he who changes her name to “Ninlil”. The story begins with advice from a wise old woman to the young Ninlil:

Ninlil was advised by Nun-bar-ce-gunu: “The river is holy, woman! The river is holy – do not bathe in it!... The Great Mountain, Father Enlil – his eye is bright, he will look at you!... his eye is bright; he will look at you! Straight away he will want to have intercourse, he will want to kiss! He will be happy to pour lusty semen into the womb, and then he will leave you to it!”<sup>10</sup>

But of course, Sud (Ninlil) does not accept the advice, and bathes in the holy river. Seeing the beautiful young Sud (Ninlil) bathing naked, Enlil desires her and then rapes her. This sinful act angers the entire Sumerian pantheon (fifty great gods and seven lesser gods), who banish Enlil to the underworld. Afterward, however, Sud (Ninlil) follows him there voluntarily. She gives birth to several children, including Suen or Sin, the deity of the moon (with whom Ninlil became pregnant when first raped by Enlil) and Nergal, the deity of the death (to whom Ninlil gives birth in underworld). Sin and Nergal became two of the most important deities in the Mesopotamian pantheon. The myth is significant for our discussion in that it connects Sud/Ninlil (who also was identified by Ištar) to water, specifically the sacred river—this, as we shall see, provides a natural link to the river goddess of the Indo-Europeans which may have resonated with early Iranian migrants into Mesopotamia.

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<sup>8</sup> Dalley 2008, p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> Dalley 1979, pp. 177-78.

<sup>10</sup> *Enlil and Sud*, 2006. Version A, Segment A, 13-21.

The Mesopotamian myth of Ištar and Dumuzi emphasizes the sexual aspect of the story, stating that all sexual activity on the earth—animal and human—came to a halt when Ištar descended to the underworld:

As soon as Ištar went down to kurnugi (underworld),  
No bull mounted a cow, no donkey impregnated a jenny,  
No young man impregnated a girl in the street,  
The young man slept in his private room,  
The girl slept in the company of her friends.<sup>11</sup>

One may note that it is by allowing “the lover of her youth, Dumuzi to become a prisoner during a part of the year that Ištar obtains her own freedom from the underworld; in this sense, the goddess would seem to take precedence over the god. In this myth, Ištar is captured underground, and obtains her freedom by allowing Dumuzi” to become a prisoner during a part of the year and come back to earth annually. When the goddess goes down to the underworld, all of the sexual activities in the world stop.

Following the death of the vegetation god, life activities are seen to cease: in other words, the sexual frustration of the goddess results in an end to fertility in the world. The appropriate human response to this life-threatening disaster was to engage in a massive mourning ceremony for the martyred god. The spilling of their tears was to have had a dual effect, both commiserating with the bereaved goddess and, through a kind of sympathetic magic, to get the “sky to cry” as well, thereby bringing the dormant crops back to life. In fact, this annual mourning ritual appears to have been the single most important collective religious event in the agriculturally dependent Mesopotamian society, following the repeating cycles of nature.

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<sup>11</sup> Dalley 2008, p. 158.

It may be summarized that in the Sumerian/Mesopotamian myth of martyrdom and regeneration—upon which the later Iranian story of Siāvaš is presumably based—the central conflict is between a goddess and a vegetation god who dies or is killed and is then reborn each year, symbolizing the annual regeneration of plant life so important in an agricultural society. The story culminates in the sacrificial death of the latter, symbolizing the end of the rain and the withering of plants with the onset of the Mesopotamian winter. We may recall that such myths in fact represent an interpretation of the annual cycle of nature and its affect on human societies. We will see reflections of this in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*, discussed in the following section.

#### 11.1.2 Sūdābeh and Rūdābeh: Two Sides of Female Power

Many female characters in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* are striking for their extraordinary independence and self-assertion, qualities not typically associated with women in the medieval Islamic society in which Ferdowsī lived (like Sūdābeh, Rūdābeh, Manīžeh, Tahmīneh, and Katāyun) and/or are considered possibly as *pairikās* or goddesses.<sup>12</sup> This may be an indication that such female figures have superhuman roots, possessing features that may be derived from those attributed to goddesses in ancient mythology. The characters of Sūdābeh and Rūdābeh, who can be seen as representing opposing archetypes of feminine power, are analyzed in terms of their possible derivations from female divinities in Iranian and Mesopotamian mythology. We will focus here on these two female figures in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* whose features show possible extensive surviving goddess descriptions and therefore possibly constitute reflections of the ancient goddesses who some of them became part of Anāhitā's features.

At first glance, Sūdābeh and Rūdābeh appear to have two very different personalities and roles, one positive and the other negative, but they also show some similarities, like two sides of the same coin. They both have foreign roots, in that their fathers are characterized by Ferdowsī as

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<sup>12</sup> Khaleghi-Motlagh 2012, p. 12.

not “Iranian”. In Rūdābeh’s case, she is descendant of Žahhāk, the ancient man-dragon whom we discussed before. Ferdowsī actually describes Rūdābeh as demon-born (*dēw-zād*).

Rūdābeh’s father, Mehrāb, despite his Iranian name, is king of Kabūl, which, according to Ferdowsī lies beyond the pale of Iranian lands. Mehrāb’s name derives in fact from two words: the god Mehr or Miθra and *āb* (water); it thus embodies a pairing that we have noted throughout our study. Moreover, the name is clearly connected to the term “Mehrāb/Mehrābe” which refers to a Miθraic temple.

Ferdowsī does not consider Sūdābeh’s father as Iranian either; although he is from Hāmāvarān (understood to be Yemen, or possibly Egypt), where he is also a king. Some sources, on the other hand, propose the possibility of another origin for Sūdābeh’s father. According to Tabari and Ibn-Balkhi, Sūdābeh’s father is Afrāsīāb (Av. Fraṅrasyan, MP Frāsiyāv), the king of Turān, based in Samarkand.<sup>13</sup> It is striking that the term *āb*, “water,” occurs as an element in all four elements of these father-daughter pairs: Sūdābeh- Afrāsīāb and Rūdābeh-Mehrāb. Unfortunately, the origins of all these names are unclear and we can only speculate about their symbolic meanings and their relationship to each other, though their mutual connection to water cannot be accidental.

Both fathers share a reluctance to give their daughters to the Iranian king. Wary of Iranian power, they resort to ruse to prevent this happening. The daughters, for their part, both have very strong personalities, and once they are in love, they know what they want and fight for it.

Sūdābeh and Rūdābeh are both attributed with superhuman lifespans, like numerous other characters in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* who have divine or mythic roots. They are connected as well by sorcery, being referred to as *jadū-zan* (“witch”). Both are said to be possessed of extraordinary beauty. All these features suggest an echo of surviving goddess myths and their attendant rituals.

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<sup>13</sup> Al-Ṭabarī (224–310 AH; 839–923 AD) 1999, v. 1, pp. 598f.; Khaleghi-Motlagh 1999.

The extraordinary beauty of these two women, moreover, is described in nearly identical terms, which are exactly those applied to other beautiful women in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* as well: They are elegant and splendid, tall and beautiful, with dark long hair and black eyes. Does this description represent the ideal of feminine beauty for the Iranians of Ferdowsī's time, or does it harken back to an earlier period? In fact, while the physical characteristics of Iranian women in the tenth century are somewhat difficult to reconcile with this model, in many details it closely resembles descriptions of goddesses in the Avesta.

In terms of personality, both Sūdābeh and Rūdābeh are determined and resolved. They both will stop at nothing to obtain the person whom they love. Ethically, however, the two women are polar opposites, representing opposing female models. Rūdābeh's love, being ethically sound, brings a positive result: She marries her beloved and gives birth to Rostam, the most important hero in the whole of the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*. Rūdābeh thus initiates a blessed family line. Although she is described as a demon-born witch, her life-giving role is nevertheless connected in a positive way with fertility. Sūdābeh, by contrast, through her unethical lust for her stepson, generates bad luck for her beloved; this ultimately results in her own death and his as well. She thus represents the opposing, negative aspect of the goddess, a bringer of death.

The myth of paired goddesses with opposing functions is frequently found in other Indo-European myths. The Vedic Aditi and Diti and the Scandinavian Freyja and Frigg are but two examples. Freyja and Frigg would seem at first glance to have little in common: Frigg is the one with positive features as a good wife with clear maternal role, while the other, known as Freyja and under other names as well, is a negative character, free in her sexual behavior, lustful in love, and yet, paradoxically, also related to childbirth.<sup>14</sup> In keeping with her overall negative character Freyja was also associated with war and death, involved with magic and possibly male sacrifice.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Näsström 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Näsström 1999.



At the same time, like their Iranian counterparts Sūdābeh and Rūdābeh, Freyja and Frigg share certain characteristics – even their names may stem from a common root. Their identities continue to be a matter of debate among scholars: were they once a single goddess who came to be divided into two opposing aspects, or were they always distinct?<sup>16</sup>

#### 11.1.2.1 Sūdābeh

Etymologically, Sūdābeh’s name could mean “owner of illuminating or beneficial (from *sū-*) - water”.<sup>17</sup> Kellens draws attention to  $\sqrt{sū-}$  (Vedic *śū-*) as the root of the word *Saošiiant-* which means “to strengthen,”<sup>18</sup> but there is no evidence showing the connection between this and the beginning of Sūdābeh’s name. One may note as well that in Sanskrit, *su-* means “good”; there is a Vedic goddess named Su-danu (river). Contrary to this association, Justi presumes that Sūdābeh’s name was Arabic and was modified to accord with Rūdābeh, but this hypothesis raises more questions than it answers.<sup>19</sup> It has suggested that she may herself have originally been connected to a water goddess.<sup>20</sup> It seems more likely that the name is a recent invention, built to correspond with Rūdābeh, which is explicitly constructed with the words “river” and “water” This would suggest and support that she could be originally rooted to a water-goddess. Whatever the origin of her name, Sūdābeh’s story bears considerable similarity to the Mesopotamian and Sumerian Inanna-Ištar myths, and is thus most likely extra-Iranian in origin.

Returning to the *Šāh-nāme* version, Sūdābeh is the beautiful wife of king Kay-Kāvus, a character who (as Kauui-Ušan) is mentioned in the Avesta among those who perform sacrifices to Arduuī Sūrā Anāhitā (Yt 5.45). Sūdābeh also is step-mother of Siāvaš (Kay-Kāvus’s son), or

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<sup>16</sup> Grundy 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Several meanings and roots for her name have been suggested, including the Avestan root *Suta.wanhu*, which means “for a good purpose” (Khaleghi-Motlagh 2012, p. 34).

<sup>18</sup> Kellens 1974b.

<sup>19</sup> Justi 1963, p. 312.

<sup>20</sup> Bahār 1997, p. 387.

perhaps originally his mother. In Khaleghi-Motlagh's opinion, in the original version of the myth she was the mother who fell in love with her own son (which would have been unsurprising according to Zoroastrian custom), but since an incestuous alliance was no longer considered socially acceptable in the Islamic society of Ferdowsi's time the mother figure was transformed into a stepmother.<sup>21</sup>

In any event, Sūdābeh desires Siāvaš and attempts to seduce him, but he refuses her advances and avoids betraying his father. After a long narrative during which Siāvaš strives to prove he is innocent in the face of Sūdābeh's lies, he is finally exiled to Turan, where he is unjustly murdered by order of the Turanian king, Afrāsīāb,<sup>22</sup> Iran's most notorious enemy in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*. After his murder a plant (referred to as *xun-e Siāvošān*, or later, *par-Siāvošān*) grows up through the nourishment of his blood, demonstrating his origin as a deity of vegetation. The martyr Siāvaš is later avenged by own his son, who subsequently returns to Iran.

Sūdābeh's love story with Siāvaš is reminiscent of the Inanna/Ištar story of a goddess's tragic love for Dumuzi, which leads to his death and subsequent re-birth. Siāvaš is identified with Dumuzi, and in Central Asia where his cult thrived, there are, as Skjærvø notes, "traditions and archaeological and literary evidence for his origin as a vegetation deity".<sup>23</sup>

Sūdābeh's lustful behaviour towards Siāvaš also bears many similarities with another Mesopotamian story of Ištar, this time with the man-hero, Gilgameš. Back to her story in *Šāh-nāmeḥ* when Sūdābeh first sees Siāvaš, she desires him and "her heart beat faster." After a series of events, she manages to see him in private. She tells him he could be the king after his father

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<sup>21</sup> Khaleghi-Motlagh 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Afrāsīāb has some connection with water and drought. In two Pahlavi texts the *Mēnog ī xrad* and the *Bundahišn*, Afrāsīāb is said to have dried up all the water from thousands of springs whose currents flowed toward Lake Kayānsē (MX 26.44; Bd XI A.11a.32). Afrāsīāb's name also, which contains the element *āb*, relates him to water-drought.

<sup>23</sup> Skjærvø 2013c.

dies and that he could possess her. Then, in an attempt to seduce him, she removes her veil and invites him to be her lover, but she will be refused by Siāvaš later on:

(ŠN, stanza 275)

*ze man har če xāhī hame kām-e to*  
*bar āyad, na pīčam<sup>24</sup> sar az dām-e to*  
*saraš tang begrēft va yek būse čāk*  
*be dād-o nābud agah az šarm-o bāk<sup>25</sup>*

Take any thing you want from me

I will do it. I will not disobey you

(Then she) got his head firmly (with enthusiasm) and kissed him

And did not remember any of shame and fear.

And tries to tempt him:

(ŠN, stanza 315)

*fozūn zānke dādat jahāndār šāh*  
*biyārāyamat yāre va tāj-ō gāh*

More than what the great king granted you

I shall adorn you with the crown and thrown of kingdom.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *na pīčam sar*: the negation *sar-pīčī* means to “disobey”.

<sup>25</sup> Ferdowsī 1990, v. 2, p. 221.

<sup>26</sup> Ferdowsī 1990, v. 2, p. 223.

An incident from the Epic of Gilgameš is strikingly similar:

And Ištar the princess raised her eyes to the beauty of Gilgameš.

“Come to me, Gilgameš, and be my lover!”

She tries to tempt him:

“When you enter our house

The wonderfully-wrought threshold shall kiss your feet!

Kings, nobles, princes shall bow beneath you.”<sup>27</sup>

But Gilgameš (like Siāvaš) refuses Ištar’s advances, reminding her of the fate of her previous lovers, including the vegetation god Dumuzi:

For the Dumuzi the lover of your youth

you decreed that he should keep weeping year after year.

Thus, in both myths, the male heroes Gilgameš and Siāvaš refuse the advances of aggressive women. Ištar, like Sūdābeh, is a lustful woman more interested in sex than love. It seems that Sūdābeh represents just one aspect of the original goddess from which she is derived: an assertive personality with a strong sexual desire, vengeful, and not faithful to her husband. Her passion for Siāvaš being illicit, is devoid of fertility. Instead, it brings only bad luck and death.

Siāvaš (Av. Siiāuaršan-, MP Siyāwaxš) is mentioned in the Avesta in Yt 13.132 and Yt 19.71 as a *kauii*- whose name contains *aršan*-, “male.” In the *Šāh-nāme*h version of the legend of Siāvaš, the Mesopotamian goddess Ištar appears to have been replaced by a negative female figure, a woman of sorceress roots Sūdābeh, whose improper behaviour and morals echo Ištar’s.

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<sup>27</sup> Dalley 2008, p. 77.

The *Šāh-nāmeḥ*'s Siāvaš is the son of the Iranian king, Kay Kāvus, whose Avestan name is *Kauii-Ušan-*, perhaps originally denoting a priest associated with a spring or well. Kay Kāvus's ancestor is Kawād), whose birth myth also connects him to water; according to the *Bundahišn*, Kawād was found in a chest (*kēwūd*) floating Moses-like in a river:

(GBd XXXV.28)

*Kawād aburnāy andar kēwūd-ē(w) būd u-šān pad rōd be hišt pad kabāragān be afsard.  
Uzaw be dīd ud stad ud be parward ud frazand ī windidag nām nihād.*

The infant Kawād was left behind chest in a river, (he) was extinguished (from cold) in the vessel. Zāb saw (him), and got (him), and raised (him) and called (him) the “found” child.<sup>28</sup>

This passage recalls the birth myth of Sargon II (who, incidentally, claimed that Ištār was his lover), according to which the future king was given to the river by his druid mother.<sup>29</sup>

As noted above, the Sūdābeh/Siāvaš story is strongly reminiscent of the Ištār/Dumuzi myth. It is significant that in all the various versions of this myth from the Mediterranean to Central Asia, the vegetation god is not a warrior but rather a martyr, a symbol of innocence. An explanation for this could be that when the warlike Indo-Iranian raiders first began their incursions into southern Central Asia during the second millennium BCE rituals and beliefs associated with a water-river goddess and her son/lover vegetation deity were already widely spread among the people, most likely reaching the region through trade with Mesopotamia. Over time the Iranian settlers absorbed and combined these local figures with their own deities, notably Anāhitā.

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<sup>28</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 397.

<sup>29</sup> “The Legend of Sargon, King of Agade,” in King 1907, pp. 88-89.

One of the main components of the annual ritual cycle connected with this myth was mourning and lamentations over the death of this divine lover/son, who was considered a martyr. Women were prominent in these mourning ceremonies, screaming and beating themselves in grief in imitation of the goddess herself who has been deprived of her son.<sup>30</sup>

In particular, women's tears, being symbolic of water, were important. In ritual terms the role of women in re-enacting the goddess's grief also helped her divine son to return, their tears symbolizing the rain needed to bring the soil back to life. Groups of villagers with blackened faces, representing the martyred god, would appear to herald his return. In some cases the villagers would wrap up a tree in a shroud, then raise it up and recite prayers and invocations.

These grief rituals, dramatic as they were, at the same time served as a kind of ushering in of the martyred god's subsequent rebirth.<sup>31</sup> At least some of the Iranian tribes who came into contact with Mesopotamian peoples by the end of the second millennium BCE adopted these mourning ceremonies, which is strange since mourning is frowned upon in Zoroastrianism. The vegetation god embodied by Dumuzi in the Mesopotamian myth survived in Iran and Central Asia under the name of Siāvaš, especially in Bukhara where his cult was prominent. In Xwarazm and Sogdiana, where people worshipped Inanna under the name of Nanai, the important role of the martyred vegetation deity Siāvaš is not surprising. What seems likely in the case of Siāvaš and the mourning rituals associated with him, is that this encounter and influence from Mesopotamia had already entered Iranian culture (presumably via the trade routes) by the time of the composition of the Avesta.

In eastern Iran the martyred vegetation god gradually evolved into Siāvaš, who is known to have been the focus of an important cult in pre-Islamic Bukhara. People there sacrificed a rooster

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<sup>30</sup> Grenet 1984.

<sup>31</sup> Saadi-nejad 2009.

to him before dawn on the annual occasion of *Nōwrūz*, the Iranian New Year.<sup>32</sup> The rooster is a sacred animal in Zoroastrian tradition, and it would seem that like the martyrdom of Siāvaš/Dumuzi, its sacrifice was considered necessary for the re-birth of nature and for fertility in the new year.

Siāvaš was an important figure among the Sakas and Sogdians, and came to be celebrated in some Iranian texts, most famously through his story in the Iranian national epic, the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*. In Bukhara especially, annual mourning rituals in honour of Siāvaš (or Dumuzi, as in the well-known mourning scene depicted on a wall painting from Pendjikent)<sup>33</sup> had a major importance right into Islamic times. Even in present-day Iran there are some mourning ceremonies for Siāvaš (*Sāvūšūn*), which can be traced to him.<sup>34</sup>

Parallels among the different versions abound. In the mourning ceremony for the Greek god Adonis devotees carried a tree, symbolizing and connecting Adonis to the vegetation deity. Similarly, in the story of Siāvaš, following his murder his blood pours into the soil, from which a plant later grows. Moreover, according to the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*, “water” actively mourns Siāvaš’s death:

(ŠN stanza 2255)

*be kīn-e Siāvaš sīah pūšad āb*

*konad zār nefrīn bar Afrāsīāb.*<sup>35</sup>

Due to hatred regarding Siāvaš the water wears black

(And) in agony curses Afrāsīāb.

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<sup>32</sup> Mazdāpūr 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Rasuly-Paleczek and Katschnig 2005, v. 2, pp. 33-37.

<sup>34</sup> Daneshvar 1990.

<sup>35</sup> Ferdowsī 1990, v. 2, p. 355.

And when he is martyred, a plant grows up from his blood, which in Ferdowsī is still growing:

(ŠN stanza 2255)

*be saat gīyāī bar āmad čo (ze) xūn*

*az ānjā ke kardand ān xūn negūn*

*gīyā rā daham man konūnat nešān*

*ke xāni hamī xūn asyāvašān.*<sup>36</sup>

A plant grew from his blood simultaneous

From the place that the blood poured down

I can show you the plant now

Whose name is the “blood of Siāvaš.”

The stories of Adonis and Atis in Greece and Isis and Osiris in Egypt, along with their annual ceremonies, are but two examples having the same basic concept. As noted in Chapter 4, there is also an earlier Sumerian myth about the descent of a goddess, Sud, into the underworld before being married to the god Enlil – recall that Enlil afterwards changes the goddess’s name to Ninlil. She was sometimes identified with Ištar, and her original name, Sud, could be connected to Sūdābeh. It has even been suggested that there is some connection between an old Chinese legend (presumably transmitted by the nomadic Sakas) and the story of Sūdābeh.<sup>37</sup>

In another parallel, during the Greek rituals in honour of Adonis people grew sprouts, a form of sympathetic magic intended to revive the vegetation god. After completing the ritual they

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<sup>36</sup> Ferdowsī 1990, v. 2, p. 358, n. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Kuyaji 1974, pp. 110-111.



threw the sprouts to the water, which would take the vegetation deity back to his lover. An echo of this ritual can be seen today during the Iranian *Nōrūz* ceremonies, which include growing sprouts that are eventually cast into flowing water on *Sīzdah be-dar* thirteen days after the New Year itself which falls at the vernal equinox.

The ritual mourning commemorating the death of a young, beautiful, virtuous man continues in Shi'ite Iran and Iraq during the 'Ashura ceremonies remembering the death of the prophet's grandson, martyred at Karbala in 680 CE. In some parts of Iran mourners carry the figure of a tree, just as ancient Greeks did for Adonis. Across nearly all of Iran, during this annual mourning period, mourners have a ritual in called *naxl-gardani*" ("palm-handling"), in which they carry a metal or wooden symbol of the palm almost as large as an actual tree itself. This "palm" is sometimes covered in black fabric.

Although in each of these myths the god's death is due to his goddess-lover, ironically enough they are reunited following his rebirth. Modern thinking perhaps finds it difficult to accommodate the ambivalence in this divine love relationship, but we may assume that those who believed in these myths seem to have accepted the inevitable connection between death and regeneration observed in nature. By the Islamic period thus, the negative portrayal of Sūdābeh never got Siāvaš back; instead Siāvaš's son returned to Iran, and she paid the ultimate price for her uncontrolled lust when Rostam killed her in revenge.

Certain texts from the Islamic period, including the *Fārs-nāme* of Ibn Balkhi and the *Tārīx-e Tabarī*, describe Sūdābeh as a witch who uses magic.<sup>38</sup> She is similar in this way to the Indo-Aryan goddess Diti, who also used magic. Diti's uncontrolled lust for Kašyapa is strikingly similar to that of Sūdābeh's for Siāvaš.

The Pahlavi Book of *Ardā Wirāz* (Righteous Wiraz) describes in vivid detail the horrible punishment accorded to *jādūgān* "witches" in the afterlife, demonstrating that in Sasanian times

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<sup>38</sup> Kia 1992, p. 144.

certain women were accused of using magic (*jādūgīh*) and that this was considered a serious sin (AWN 5.8/35.4/76.5/81.5). While we cannot be sure exactly what was meant in those times by “using magic”, it may well have referred to a knowledge of the properties of medicinal plants—a knowledge that was largely the province of women. The situation in Sasanian Iran may have been similar to that which Carolyn Merchant has described for medieval Europe, whereby women’s knowledge of herbal medicine—and its associations with goddess-based rituals and religious beliefs—became a target of severe persecution by male elites seeking to arrogate both medical and religious authority to themselves.<sup>39</sup>

According to the Zoroastrian texts, sorcery was considered as a demonic power created by Ahriman, and its use as one of the greatest of all sins.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, in popular Iranian myths and folklore, sorcery was associated largely with women, just as in many other regions of the world. Even the birth-story of Zoroāstra in the Pahlavi *Dēnkard* describes the prophet’s mother as a witch, implying that the designation was not always necessarily negative but may simply have referred to a particular kind of knowledge (Dk 7.2.6). Again, the association could be due to women’s knowledge of medicinal plants, which connected them with the healing function, one of the most common functions among the goddesses we have been discussing.

It is surely no accident that the *Dēnkard* frequently pairs its use of the word *jādūg*, “magician” with *dēw-yazag*, “demon-worshiper”, an invective used by the Zoroastrian priests against people who had retained their ancient deities and associated rituals despite official attempts to impose Zoroastrian orthodoxy (Dk 5.2.4).<sup>41</sup> The following passage provides an example:

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<sup>39</sup> Merchant 1980.

<sup>40</sup> *Vidēvdād* 1.14.

<sup>41</sup> Amouzgar and Tafazzoli 2000, p. 26.

(Dk 5.9.9)

*Dēw-yazagīh ud ahlaw-ganīh ud ahlamōgīh ud kūn-marz ud jādūgīh...*

Demon-Worshipping, killing the righteous, innovation (in religion), sodomy  
(homosexuality), performing magic...

If we accept that there are some connections between Sūdābeh and any reflection of ancient goddesses (Ištar/Inanna, and possibly Anahitā), the question arises, did people fear that if their sacrifices to the goddess did not satisfy her, she might be offended and deny them the water their plants needed to survive? Was it this they feared, the destructive aspect of the goddess that came to be expressed in the negative portrayal of many water goddesses (and possibly transferred to Sūdābeh)? Or perhaps an even deeper ambivalence towards water itself, which nourished life but could also wash it away in a flood? Or, simply, is it that the freely-expressed sexual desire of the ancient goddess was no longer accepted within the emerging Islamic morality?

#### 11.1.2.2 Rūdābeh

Rūdābeh's association with water is attested by her name itself: "she of the river water,"<sup>42</sup> one thinks immediately of the Pahlavi word for river, *rōd*, + *āb*. Her parents' names may connect them to water as well. It may be possible to find her mother's name, Sindokht, connected to Sin = Sind, a sacred river + *dokht* = girl. Her father, Mehr (Miθra) + *āb* (water), a "non-Iranian" king, is descended from Aži-Dahhāk, a demonic dragon who *guards* the water. Rūdābeh thus belongs to the demonic world, and is referred to as "demon-born" (*dēw-zād*), "witch" (*jadū-zan*); and yet, she is simultaneously described as the most beautiful woman in all the *Šāh-nāme*.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Skjærvø 1998, p. 163.

<sup>43</sup> Khalegi-Motlagh suggests that she is a *pairikā* (2012, p. 33).

In the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* Rūdābeh is the lover of Zāl and the mother of the hero Rostam. She is a brave, beautiful woman who lives a long life, as is typical for demi-gods. She is not shy to talk about her love to her parents; she fights to obtain her beloved, Zāl, and in the end she is successful. Hers is a beautiful love story, which is Islamized by Ferdowsī. It contains highly romantic scenes, such as when she lets down her hair Rapunzel-like so that Zāl may ascend it as a rope. Her pregnancy with Rostam is extraordinary as well: as a fetus Rostam grows too big to be born in the normal way, so a mythological bird, the Sīmorgh, enables a Caesarean section.

Having a superhumanly long life, a descendant of the demonic world and a foreign royal dynasty, Rūdābeh's functions are related to love and beauty, strong will, and fertility. All of these aspects enable us to perceive her as a survival of certain goddess myths and rituals that existed in ancient Iran.

Another woman in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* (found as well in many other sources<sup>44</sup>), Katāyun, is apparently a reflex of Anāhitā. She is actually named in one passage as Nāhid (as her original foreign name), and Katāyun being the name bestowed on her by her lover/husband Goštasp (a dragon-slayer hero).

(ŠN stanza 30)

*pas ān doxtar-e nāmvar gheysarā*

*ke Nāhīd bod nām ān doxtarā*

*Katayūn-aš xāndī gerān-māye šāh*

*do farzand-aš āmad čo tābande māh.*<sup>45</sup>

Then, the great emperor of Rum's daughter

<sup>44</sup> These include the *Bundahišn*, the *Bahman-nāmeḥ*, Ṭa'ālebi's *Ġorar axbār moluk al-Fārs wa siyarihīm*, and Mirxānd's *Rawzat al-ṣafā*, among others.

<sup>45</sup> Ferdowsī 1990, v. 5, p. 78.

Whose name was Nāhīd

Was re-named as Katayūn by the great king (of Iran)

And (he) received two children (who) looked like the radiant moon.

Again, she is daughter of non-Iranian king, emperor of Rum and is thus a foreigner. Her story resembles that of an older tale from Media, the romance of Scythian Zariadres and the princess Odatise, from which it may ultimately be derived. This tale, as told by Chares of Mytilene, features Hystaspes (Vištāspa) and Zariadres, presented as brothers who are the children of Aphrodite and Adonis.<sup>46</sup>

The story shows some similarities with the later Persian stories about Zarir and Goštāsp (Zairiuuairi and Vištāspa). The Avestan *Auruuat-aspā* (Zairiuuairi and Vištāspa's father) is an epithet for the sun (*tīz-asp*, "he who has a rapid horse") and that the brothers might therefore originally have been solar figures.<sup>47</sup> Boyce has suggested that this myth may have been originally connected with a love goddess such as Anāhitā.<sup>48</sup> The princess Odatise's home is said to be on the other side of the Tanais River, which could possibly be the river Don; the tale might thus belong to the land of Scythians.<sup>49</sup>

All of these connections are of course speculative, but taken as a whole they suggest a compelling pattern. In Iran's tenth-century society that had become patriarchal and monotheist, popular culture retained and preserved echoes of earlier goddess-centered worship connected with water. In this case and in the story of Katāyun, the name Nāhid seems more likely to be symbolic of some feminine quality than to refer to the goddess as such. In light of our discussion in

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<sup>46</sup> Skjærvø 2013c.

<sup>47</sup> Skjærvø 2013c.

<sup>48</sup> Boyce 1955.

<sup>49</sup> Khaleghi-Motlagh 2012, p. 57.

chapter 6 regarding Anāhitā and dragons, it is interesting to note the relationship in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* between Katāyun (with her possible Anāhitā connection) and the hero Goštāsp who is a dragon slayer (in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*), described as having a “dragon-shaped body”.<sup>50</sup>

The foreign-ness, lifestyle and assertive character of these various *Šāh-nāmeḥ* women all raise some interesting questions about their origins, especially in regard to the patriarchal, Islamic society of the tenth century in which Ferdowsī lived. Although these women’s names are invariably Iranian, they are emphatically described as foreigners, usually as the daughters of kings outside of Iran (although in fact their fathers have Iranian names). Rūdābeh is from Kabul to the east of Iran. She is the daughter of Mehrāb, who is said to be a descendant of the dragon-king Žaḥḥāk, who is somewhat inconsistently associated with Arabs to the west. Sūdābeh is from Hāmāvarān, associated with the western non-Iranian lands as well. Meanwhile Tahmineh, Rostam’s wife, is the daughter of the king of Samangān in Central Asia.

Why is the foreign-ness of these women emphasized? Is it because it was traditional for Iranians take their women from abroad? This is an anthropological question not directly related to our discussion, but we may ponder whether in the context of the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* this foreign-ness and their free and assertive lifestyles could be connected to ancient goddess-centered beliefs and rituals which had been increasingly suppressed by the Iranian religious elites, along with the kind of independent and assertive female personalities they represent. The Islamizing society of Ferdowsī’s time presumably found these strong female characters inappropriate, making it preferable to label them as non-Iranians. Ferdowsī’s audience would surely have had little appreciation for the notion that these characters actually represented survivals of ancient goddesses and their characteristics, who had perhaps served as role models for women in pre-Islamic times.

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<sup>50</sup> Ferdowsī 1990, v. 5, p. 25, stanza 310.

## 11.2 Female Beauty in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*: Divine or Human?

Descriptions of women in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* usually emphasize their tallness: they are said to be “as tall as a cypress tree,” with long dark hair and gazelle eyes. Where do these measurements come from?

Kia believes that this measure of beauty comes from an old tradition in eastern Iran, before the coming of the Turks. In support of her argument, Kia cites the Panjikent paintings mentioned above, which date to before the seventh century. She points out that in both paintings the female figures are exceptionally tall, have dark long hair and “gazelle” eyes, not Mongolian eyes as is the convention in later Persian paintings. The goddess depicted in the Temple 2 painting wears a crown decorated with flowers known as *nenuphar*, literally “water flower”. She also wears a belt. Kia therefore believes that this goddess is Anāhitā, reflecting standards of beauty of the time which served as a literary model for women in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*, as opposed to the Chinese-Buddhist ideal of feminine beauty seen in later Persian paintings.<sup>51</sup>

This theory seems plausible, especially when we consider the influence of a society’s cultural symbols and reference points on local artistic representation. Artists, like anyone else, are affected by and imbued with the myths and symbols of the culture in which they grow up. Often, whether knowingly or unknowingly, they use mythological elements in their artistic production. The various art forms of Iran, past and present, offer ample evidence of this influence. The Persian miniature painting tradition is rich with reconstructed scenes from ancient Iranian myths. Often a divine figure from pre-historic times is re-imagined as a hero or a mythical king, with the myth associated with that particular deity being transposed to a greater or lesser extent onto the hero.<sup>52</sup> Yet, the characteristics typically seen in portrayals of legendary figures in Persian paintings depict ideals of beauty based on several traditions including their myths.

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<sup>51</sup> Kia 1992, p. 212.

<sup>52</sup> Saadi-nejad 2009, p. 232.

The depiction of Anāhitā detailed by the writer or writers of the *Ābān Yašt* represents an ideal of female beauty, which persisted over the centuries within the collective memory of Iranian society. Khaleghi-Moghadam considers that based on the *Ābān Yašt* and later in Persian literature such as *Vīs and Rāmīn*, wearing clothing made from animal skin must have been very popular in ancient Iran.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, certain female characters in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* who behave in ways not typical for actual Iranian women of the time are in some ways perhaps reflections of goddesses, and their visual representations could therefore contain elements of a distant memory of divine beauty. Such characters are invariably described as tall, despite the fact that the popular taste in pre-Islamic Iran appears to have been for women of “middle height” with “small feet” and the “almond eyes”, an ideal expressed in the Middle Persian text *Husraw ī Kawādān ud Rēdag-ē* (Xosrau and the Page):

(HR 96)

*gōwēd rēdag kū anōšag bawēd, zan-ē ān weh ī pad-manišn, mard dōst, u-š abzōnīh nē, bālāy mayānjīg, u-š war pahn, sar, kūn, garden hambast u-š pāy kōtah u-š mayān bārīk ud azēr pāy wišādag, angustān dagrand, u-š handām narm ud saxt-āgand, ud bēh pistān ud u-š nāxun wafrēn, u-š gōnag anārgōn u-š čašm wādām ēwēn ud lab wassadēn ud brūg tāgdēs, <dandān> spēd, tarr, ud hōšāb ud gēsū syā ud rōšn, drāz ud pad wistarag ī mardān saxwan nē a-šarmīhā gōwēd.<sup>54</sup>*

Rēdag says (to Husraw) “live long”; a woman best be thoughtful, like her man (husband), and not be overweight, be of middle height, broad-chested, with a well-shaped head,

<sup>53</sup> Khaleghi-Moghadam 1996.

<sup>54</sup> My own translation, based on the transcription from <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/iran/miran/mpers/jamasp/jamas.htm>; also Monchi-Zadeh 1982 and Azarnoche 2013, pp. 41-69.



buttocks, (and) neck, with short legs, a thin-waist, arched feet, long fingers, soft and firm body, snowy (white) well-shaped breasts and nails, pomegranate-color (red) cheeks, almond-shaped eyes, coralline lips, arched eyebrows, white (teeth), clean and fresh, with long, bright, black hair, who does not speak shamelessly while in bed with men.

### 11.3 The *Pairikās/Parīs*

Since in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* we often encounter the word “*parī*” in connection with a female figure’s name or characteristics, it is appropriate to consider this term more carefully.

The *Pairikās* (Phl. *Parīg*), as they are called in the Avesta, are mysterious supernatural creatures said to be created by Ahriman (Aṅra-Mainyu), Ahura Mazdā’s evil adversary.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, the *Pairikās* are mentioned in the Avesta as demonic creatures,<sup>56</sup> but the term is also used as an adjective, as in *aš.pairikā-*, “accompanied by great, mighty sorceress,”<sup>57</sup> and *pairikauuant-*, “accompanied by witches.”<sup>58</sup> In certain Pahlavi texts *parīg* are mentioned among the negative creatures, usually in the company of *dēws* (demons) and *jādūg* (witches).<sup>59</sup>

In the Avesta and the Pahlavi texts the *pairikās* cause demonic harm to human beings and the other members of Ahura Mazdā’s Good Creation. The *pairikās* are connected to the sun, the moon and the stars, and also probably correspond to meteorites.<sup>60</sup> It has been suggested that one of them, the *mūš.pairikā-*, is responsible for the eclipse of the sun.<sup>61</sup> The Pahlavi *mūš-parīg* is connected to the sun and to the moon, according to the *Bundahišn* (GBd V 5. 4-5) as noted in

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<sup>55</sup> PIE *\*parikeh<sub>a</sub>-*, OPers. *\*parikā-*, MPers. *parīg*, Sogh. *pr’ykh*, Manich. MP *parīg*, Khot. *palikā-*, NP *parī*, Pashto *pēraī*, Nuristanī *pari/bari/barai*, Arm. *Parik* (Adhami 2010).

<sup>56</sup> Yt 1.6.10; Yt 5.13.22.26.

<sup>57</sup> Yt 19.41.

<sup>58</sup> HN 6.

<sup>59</sup> Dk 7.0.19 is a notable example.

<sup>60</sup> Panaino 1990.

<sup>61</sup> Adhami 2010.

Chapter Ten. Skjaervø suggests, “*Mūš-parīg* may originally have been considered the demon who causes the eclipses of the moon, as is indicated by its name *Mūš* meaning “mouse” but originally also probably “thief,” cf. OInd. *muṣ* “to steal”.<sup>62</sup>

The insistent emphasis against the *pairikās* as demonic creatures in the Zoroastrian texts raises the suspicion that they may have once held the opposite status, beings seen as positive forces. Sarkarati states that the word *pairikā-* means “fertile” (*\*paīrkā* from PIE *\*per-* to give birth) and they were originally fertility goddesses related to sexual desire and fertility.<sup>63</sup> Mazdāpūr as well contends that *pairikā-* once referred to an ancient mother-goddess. Her transformation can be explained by an emerging Zoroastrian morality that could not accept her, and thus demoted the *pairikās* to the status of demonic creatures. It seems that the Mazdaean priests did not accept those who insisted on keeping the old goddess-worshipping rituals. At the same time, however, the *pairikās*’ positive aspects, connected to fertility, were transferred to Anāhitā.<sup>64</sup> This division of aspects could account for the *pairikās*’ ambivalent nature, in the texts as well as in Iranian folklore: they were beautiful women, but who could sometimes be harmful. According to certain stories in the Iranian folkloric tradition, traveling alone beside the springs or lakes where they live, one risks becoming entrapped in their enchantments (i.e., become *parī-zadeh*).<sup>65</sup>

Sharifian and Atuni have suggested that the Zoroastrians’ enmity against the *pairikās* may have been due to their connection with a ritual orgy, which ran counter to Zoroastrian morality.<sup>66</sup> In Iranian folklore the *pairikās* are described as sensual creatures, emphasizing their desire to copulate with their lovers who are usually heroes. “Witches” (*jādū-zanān*) are often portrayed in

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<sup>62</sup> Skjaervø 1987.

<sup>63</sup> Sarkarati 1971.

<sup>64</sup> Mazdāpūr 2002, p. 294.

<sup>65</sup> Mazdāpūr 2002, p. 342.

<sup>66</sup> Sharifian and Atuni 2008.

the same way.<sup>67</sup> These considerations can help explain why Sūdābeh was referred to as a *jādū-zan* and a *parī*.

The connection between the *pairikās* and the *jādū-zanān* are very close, and thus they have sometimes been considered to be from the same origin.<sup>68</sup> The *jādū-zanān*, however, are usually not portrayed as having the beautiful face the *parīs* have. In her archetypical shape, the *jādū-zan* is an old ugly hag with a disgusting smell; the best-known evocation of this is the *daēnā*-encountered by evil-doers when crossing the Činuat Bridge.

According to the *Tīr Yašt*, the rain god Tištriia battles against bad years, drought, and malaise, all of which are connected to the *pairikās* whose efforts he defeats (Yt 8.10.39-40). In fact, alongside the struggle between Tištriia and the drought demon Apaoša, *Tīr Yašt* is notable for the enmity between Tištriia and the *pairikās*. Ahura Mazdā is said to have created Tištriia specifically for this purpose, to overcome the drought and *dūžiiāiriia* (“bad year” or “bad harvest”) brought about by the *pairikā*- (Yt 8.8.51-8.53).<sup>69</sup> At the same time, ribald and profane people (*dūž-vačah*) say that the *pairikā*- bring good years (*hūiiāriiā*- “good year, good harvest”) for them. In the following paragraph it is clear that the same *pairikā*- who is said to bring the bad year is also referred to as bringing the good year:

(Yt 8.51)

*+auuaḡhāi pairikaiiāi*

*paitištātaiiāēca paitiscaptaiiāēca*

*paititarətaiiāēca paitiiaogəṭ.ṭbaēšaxiiāica*

*yā dužiiāiriia yqm*

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<sup>67</sup> Examples can be found in the *Šahriyar-nāmeḥ/Dārāb-nāmeḥ*, specifically the story of Amīr-Arsalān.

<sup>68</sup> Sharifian and Atuni 2008.

<sup>69</sup> Panaino 1996.

*mašiiāka auui dužuuacaṅhō*

*hūiiāriiāṃ nāma aojaite.*

(...) in order to withstand,  
crush, overcome  
and return hatred to,  
that Pairikā Dužyāiryā (the bad-year witch),  
whom contrarily evil-speaking men  
call by name Huyāiryā (good-year).<sup>70</sup>

Here, the ambivalent nature of the *pairikās* is clear. This tension may arise from the divergent views of the Avestan priests, who considered the *pairikās* to be demonic, and the general population, who venerated them for their fertility functions. The *Tīr Yašt* also applies the adjective *hūiiāriiā* to the *pairikās*, further connecting them to fertility (Yt 8.50-51). Panaino further observes that the *Tīr Yašt* contains a battle between the fixed (i.e., stable) stars, led by Tištriia/Sirius, and the shooting (i.e., unstable) stars, which are led by the *pairikā dūžiiāiriia*- who bring drought and are opposed to the cosmic order and fertility.<sup>71</sup>

The passage above could also show that the *pairikās* were connected to water and rain (good year/fertility=water); perhaps this is why later it was said that they live in watery places. This gives rise to certain questions: Who exactly are these supernatural creatures believed by the general population to be responsible for bringing a good harvest year? Might they be survivals of ancient fertility goddesses, who continued to exist within popular culture despite efforts by the priestly class to exterminate them?

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<sup>70</sup> Panaino 1990, part I, p. 75.

<sup>71</sup> Panaino 1996.

Reading between the lines in the Pahlavi texts can provide some clues. The *pairikās* are usually mentioned along with *yātus*, who are also female demons.<sup>72</sup> There is a story in the *Bundahišn* where *dēvs* copulated with Yima (Jam) and his sister and thereafter gave birth to the various wild harmful creatures.<sup>73</sup>

In the *Dēnkard*, a female *dēv* appears to Zaratuštra as a beautiful woman and pretends to be Spandārmad (Dk 7.57-58), reminding of the *pairikās* since they can change their shapes. The *pairikās* are shape-shifters, as we can see in later texts and stories where *parīs* have the ability to appear as humans, animals, and even pomegranates! In the *Dēnkard* passage, despite her deceptive frontal beauty the *pairikā*'s back is crawling with snakes and other demonic creatures.

The *pairikās* of the Avesta have been identified with *apsaras* in Vedic mythology. *Apsaras* are said to have been born from water prior to the *Asuras* and the *Devas*, and are connected to fertility, love and sexual desire.<sup>74</sup> All these features may be compared with those of nymphs in Greek mythology, suggesting that certain aspects at least of nymphs/*pairikās* may go back to the proto-Indo-European period.

During the Achaemenid period and later some tribes living in Iran were referred to by Herodotus as the Parikani. They are twice mentioned as paying tribute to the Achaemenids; Herodotus places them in Media and in southwestern Iran as well. He states that they played a role in Xerxes' invasion of Greece.<sup>75</sup> We do not know for sure that whether there is a connection between these people and devotees of the *pairikās*. Bivar believes that the stories relating to *pairikās* all trace back to the Iranian tribe(s) called Parikani, who, according to archeological

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<sup>72</sup> Pākzād 2005, p.73

<sup>73</sup> Pākzād 2005, p. 196.

<sup>74</sup> Keith 1925; Williams 2003, p. 57.

<sup>75</sup> Herodotus Book 7.68.

evidence from Persepolis, lived in Central Iran near Pariz (the name of which may be derived from them), Kerman and Jiroft.<sup>76</sup> In Bivar's view, the Zoroastrian Magi despised these tribes as infidels.

Malekzadeh, meanwhile, states that the Parikani people lived not only in central Iran around Kerman but also in Media during the Median period. He locates these tribes throughout Iran, from Greater Xorāsān and Xwārazm in central Asia to central Iran in Kermān and Media in the north and northwest, even to the south in Balučestān. Malekzadeh suggests that like the place-name Pāriz, Forḏanē in Xwārazm was also an echo of the Parikani's name.<sup>77</sup> He considers that the Parikani tribes were likely Iranian but did not follow Zoroastrian rituals.

By the early Islamic period it would appear that the demonic nature attributed to the *pairikās* by the Zoroastrian priests begins to fade, with beautiful, magical *parī* figures stubbornly persisting in popular beliefs in folk stories, legends and fairy tales, where they are often said to bring bad luck to their lovers or to people whom they love. In the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*, *parīs* are often equated with beautiful foreign women trying to seduce people.<sup>78</sup> There are several well-known stories about such figures who make love with Iranian heroes and sometimes bear them children. Occasionally they stand as an obstacle in the hero's path, or secretly steal his horse as a means of getting him to make love.

In many of these folktales that have entered the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*, *parīs* are portrayed as actual human women—in the story of Tahmīneh and Rostam for example—but their supernatural precedents are not hard to detect.<sup>79</sup> Often the term *parī* is applied to them as a way of emphasizing their extraordinary beauty. Rūdabeh, for example, is described as *parī-ruy* (“*parī*-faced”); similarly, Tahmīneh and Katayūn are called *parī-čehreh*, with essentially the same meaning. For

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<sup>76</sup> Bivar 1985. Other scholars have also mentioned the possible connection between the Parikani and “Pari” worshippers (Olmstead 1948, p. 397).

<sup>77</sup> Malekzādeh 2002.

<sup>78</sup> Khaleghi-Motlagh 2012, pp. 10-13.

<sup>79</sup> Sarkarati 1971.

Ferdowsī, a *parī* is “always a charming and pleasant figure.”<sup>80</sup> Throughout Iranian folklore one striking feature of the *parīs* is that they are so numerous, like the nymphs in Greek mythology. This may be due to beliefs about the water-based goddesses being so widespread, with every tiny locality having their own particular expressions of her.

The *pairikās*' connection to water is significant. Even up to modern times, Iranian popular beliefs located *parīs* within waterfalls, springs and rivers, where they were believed to swim, as well as in wells, *qanats*, and even beneath the stairs going down to the watertanks (*āb-anbār*) in private homes.<sup>81</sup> In the northern Iranian provinces of Gilan and Mazadaran even today several locales bear the name *Āb-parī*, which according to local belief are swimming places for *parīs*; the waterfalls are said to be their long hair.<sup>82</sup>

All this evidence would seem to indicate that *parīs/pairikās* were originally either directly connected to a water-goddess, or, possibly the memory of the water-goddess cult (*Anāhitā*) was so strong that it remained in the collective Iranian historical memory, mixing elements with others derived from ancient *pairikā*- worship.

Folkloric tales about beautiful *parīs* are one form of evidence for these survivals; place names are another. Throughout Iran one can find sacred places whose names contain *doxtar* (“girl, daughter”), *Bībī*, or *Bānū* (“lady”), and these are usually sites associated with water. Ironically, given the Zoroastrian antagonism towards *parīs*, there would seem to be an etymological connection between the terms *parī* and *Pīr*, applied to Zoroastrian sacred sites such as *Pīr-e sabz* and *Pīr-e harišt*, both near Yazd.<sup>83</sup> Significantly, both these well-known sites are connected with legends of a royal princess who disappeared into an arid mountainside from which emerges a stream, as if miraculously. It would appear that even these important Zoroastrian shrines, which

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<sup>80</sup> Adhami 2010.

<sup>81</sup> Mazdāpūr 2002, p. 291.

<sup>82</sup> Malekzadeh 2002.

<sup>83</sup> Bahār 1997, p. 261.

are still the object of pilgrimages today, preserve some traces of the *pairikā*-cult condemned in the Zoroastrian texts. To cite just one such possible survival, Zoroastrians in Iran (and the “Irani” Zoroastrians living in India as well) seeking the fulfillment of a wish often perform a special ritual called *jašn* or *sofre-ye doxtar-e šāh-e pariyān*—the “feast of the daughter of the *parī* king”—in which they spread a tablecloth over an area of green grass, the ritual that is not generally done by men. In cases such as this popular beliefs and practices would seem to have outlasted the diatribes of the Zoroastrian priests.

The many similarities between Iranian belief and practices connected with *parīs* and those connected with a wide range of Indo-European water goddesses support the likelihood that many of them have pre-Zoroastrian roots.<sup>84</sup> The ambivalent characteristics attributed to *parīs/pairikās* in Iranian tradition suggest the presence of two layers, perhaps an older water/fertility/healing cult overlaid by a later priestly attempt, seen in the Avestan and Pahlavi texts, to demote it.

Were the *pairikās*, as Bahar questions, originally goddesses related to water, vegetation, trees and fertility in pre-Zoroastrian times?<sup>85</sup> Were they perhaps a reflex of the principal goddess among the native inhabitants of Iran before the arrival of the Iranian tribes, later partially absorbed into an emerging Mazda-cult which attempted to adapt and subordinate her into its own worldview?

It is admittedly difficult to draw a clear and absolute connection between the *pairikās* and Anāhitā. The evidence is somewhat circumstantial, but it is strong: the *pairikās* were originally connected to the cult of an ancient, multi-functional goddess(s) of desire and fertility who was worshipped widely and under different names during the pre-historic period in the lands Iranians

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<sup>84</sup> This is the view espoused by Sarkarati (1971).

<sup>85</sup> Bahār 1997, pp. 261-93.



came to occupy. The goddess (or goddesses) in question devolved certain functions to the *pairikās*, with some eventually accruing to the Avestan Anāhitā.

Anāhitā and the *pairikās* thus show some similarities with the other goddesses in the region and with each other as well. The ancient goddess rituals, which probably included sacred sexual rites, were transferred to the *pairikās*. Mythological stories connected with the *pairikās*, emphasizing their beauty, their desire and their free sexual behaviour, were rejected according to the morality of Zoroastrianism. The *pairikās* thus possibly transferred some of their functions (and their popularity as well) to Anāhitā, who took over their role in the popular religious life of some Iranian peoples. Over time and due to the antagonism of the Zoroastrian priesthood, the *pairikās* were demoted in myth and legend, even as their functions and attributes survived, whether in the cult of Anāhitā or through local rituals and beliefs. The very intensity of the Zoroastrian texts' antipathy towards the *pairikās* bears witness to the strength and endurance among the general population. Schwartz states that "The transformation seen for the *parī* in Islamic Iran to a mere beautiful, and generally benign, fairy, may be understood from the marginalization of Zoroastrian lore and tradition, whereby the older topos of the *parī(g)* as a demoness capable of assuming seductive forms yielded the fairy figure."<sup>86</sup> However, the popularity of the *parī(g)*s even among Zoroastrians and their connection to water seems to support the likelihood that they might have originated as fertility goddesses, as has been previously suggested.

One may note in closing that in Iran today, Parī is a popular women's name, evoking supernatural beauty. Several other common names are derived from it, including Parī-čehr, meaning "she who has the face of a *parī*".<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Schwartz 2008, p. 99.

<sup>87</sup> More such names are Parī-zād, Parī-nāz, Parī-vaš, Parī-ru, Parī-rokh, Parīā, and simply Parī (all are female names).

#### 11.4 The *Dārāb-nāma*

From the Ghaznavid period there is a lengthy tale<sup>88</sup> about Dārāb, a mythical Iranian king, which includes a version of the Iranian Alexander romance. Dārāb was the son of Bahman, and his story has been narrated in some books such as the *Tārīx-e Tabarī*, *Mojmal-al tavārīx v'al-qasas*, and the *Šāh-nāme*.

The Dārāb story has ancient roots in pre-Islamic Iran. Like Moses and Qobād, Dārāb was abandoned in a river at birth. More significant to our study, it features three women who are related to Anāhitā. Dārāb's wife, Nāhīd, is daughter of Philip of Macedon and mother of Alexander. The name of the second woman is Ābān-doxt, (“daughter of the waters”) and the third is her daughter, Būrān-doxt. In the *Dārāb-nāma* Būrān-doxt is associated with water and shows a number of Anāhitā's iconographic characteristics.<sup>89</sup>

Hanaway believes the character of Būrān-doxt in *Dārāb-nāma* “is a popular representation” of Anāhitā, noting that it is unusual in Iranian epics for a heroic character to be as closely identified with a natural element as Būrān-doxt is with water. Her mother, Ābān-doxt, resides at Estakhr. It is Būrān-doxt who proclaims Alexander King of Persia (similar to Anāhitā's investiture of Narseh), and his seeing her bathing naked in the river can be interpreted as “a symbolic visit of Alexander to the great Anāhitā shrine at Estakhr, and his being granted a boon by the goddess.”<sup>90</sup>

Būrān-doxt is associated with doves, hawks, and fish (possibly like Anāhitā). And like Bibi Šahrbānū, she flees foreign invaders by taking refuge in a mountain cave which miraculously opens to her. Moreover, the first component of her name, Būrān, may be related to one of

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<sup>88</sup> Ṭārsūsī (twelfth century) 2011.

<sup>89</sup> Hanaway 1982a.

<sup>90</sup> Hanaway 1982b, p. 292.

Anāhitā's horses. All of these three related women and their characters together suggest a memory or survival of an Anāhitā cult in eastern Iran.<sup>91</sup>

### 11.5 Echoes of the Water Goddess and Water Rituals in Islamic Iran

As a general rule, water rituals are related to the magical practices found in myths for the control of water. Such rituals were often meant to encourage the rain to begin and turn into rivers, which should be overflowing with water. Ancient people believed that if they wanted nature to do an action, it should be encouraged through the performance of a sacred ritual. Thus, the infusion and sprinkling of water would have encouraged nature to repeat the action in its own way: that is, by raining.

In a dry country where water had always been a problem, it is not difficult to find rituals connected with it. Iranians have long been famous for their “paradise” gardens, artificially constructed oases of green in an almost dry country, kept alive by the channeling of mountain snowmelt through underground channels (*qanāts*). Iranian arts and handicrafts, moreover, feature vegetation designs which fill every empty space. All over the arid plateau of central Iran, even poor families have always had a rug in their house, thereby bringing a small reflection of paradise into their home. The need to symbolize the garden is profound, a way of coping with life in a land where water is scarce.

A number of water rituals that continued to be practiced in Iran in Islamic times are attested in historical sources. Some are still seen in Iran today, while others appear to have disappeared. As it was mentioned in chapter 9, an interesting discovery was made in 2001-2005, in two copper mines (Čale Ğār 1 and 2) in the region of Vešnave in the Iranian Western Central Plateau. Archaeologists detected a sacred cave with a small lake inside, showing indications that water rituals had been practiced there over a long period of time from around 800 BCE until the

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<sup>91</sup> Hanaway 1982a.

8<sup>th</sup> century CE. These archaeologists found thousands of ceramics, jewellery and other objects, which had all been deposited purposefully into the water. These objects also included a single bronze two-winged arrowhead.<sup>92</sup> The fact that this cave with its subterranean lake clearly served as an underground shrine where water-based rituals were carried out offers proof that these ceremonies did in fact happen in Iran. The objects found in the water were almost certainly offerings made to a water deity who, in this Iranian context, was presumably Anāhitā, and the situation resembles that of sites associated with water goddesses found all across Europe as discussed in Chapter Five.

The description of the *Čahār-šanbeh sūrī* ritual found in the seventeenth-century travelogue of Adam Olearius differs considerably from what one sees in Iran today. According to what he saw in the villages of Šamāxī and Darband, Iranians believed it to be a day of a bad luck. In order to avoid this bad luck, the villagers carried water from springs and sprayed it on their houses and on themselves; they believed that this water would wash away the bad luck of the day and change it to good luck. They tried to do this before sunrise or before noon.<sup>93</sup>

Olearius also mentions some ancient ruins connected to the sacred water (and thus possibly to Anāhitā), consisting of some tall but crumbling walls which remained at the top of a tall mountain, Mt. Barmakh-Angosht in Šamāxī which he personally visited. Olearius believed that in the past there must have been a large building there. Inside the walls he saw a spring with walls around it, apparently a temple.<sup>94</sup>

Iranian Shi‘i folklore contains echoes of water rituals that may have been connected to Anāhitā in the past. For example, since water was said to have been the dowry of the prophet Muhammad’s daughter Fatima (who in this case possibly replaced Anāhitā in the popular

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<sup>92</sup> Bagherpour and Stöllner 2011, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> Brancaforte 2004, p. 78.

<sup>94</sup> Brancaforte 2004, p. 78.

imagination), it should not be defiled. In Islamic tradition, it has been mentioned that the angels will sift the waters, and if they see any pollution they will curse the person who has caused it.<sup>95</sup>

In Tajikistan today at the eastern edge of the Iranian world, numerous survivals of ancient rituals are still practiced in connection with the water goddess in her Islamicized form as Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet. At a site known as Chehel Chashmeh near the town of Shahr-e Tuz in the southwestern part of the country, where Fatima's husband Ali (the Prophet's cousin) is believed to have passed, women bring large containers to collect water they believe to ensure pregnancy and health. Still further east, in the Wakhan corridor along the Tajik-Afghan border is a site called Bibi Fatima Hot Springs, situated in a cave on the mountainside near the village of Yamchun. Women must enter the cave completely naked and immerse themselves in the water, then touch the walls of the cave with their hands; when they emerge, they must not dry themselves with towels but rather allow the air to dry their bodies. They believe that in this way they can be assured of getting pregnant,<sup>96</sup> clearly an Islamicized form of an older practice associated with a water goddess.

This ritual also seems possibly related to the Zoroastrian myth according to which a young girl will bathe in the lake, which has preserved the seeds of Zaratuštra kept by Anāhitā, and thereafter give birth to his second son and second savior (discussed in Chapter 10). Moreover, it reminds us of the Celtic goddess “Sulis” and her sacred spring in Bath in England with its hot mineral water, *Aquae Sulis*, which remains a popular tourist site to this day, appears to have served as the principal connection with the goddess, where her devotees requested her support (as discussed in Chapter Five).

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<sup>95</sup> Khosravi 2000.

<sup>96</sup> Richard Foltz, personal report, 9 May 2018.

Other locally surviving rituals would seem to have little connection with Shi‘ism, but they are invariably connected to women. In the Sabzevar region of Khorasan, there is a ritual where women sprinkle water onto children from the rooftops. The fact that they sprinkle water from heights is surely significant, since it recalls Anāhitā flowing down from the celestial mountain as described in the *Ābān Yašt*.

In the traditional belief of people in small towns and villages, the waters and rivers have gender. If a river is roaring and clamorous, then people believe it is a male river; if calm, it is female. Kamreh near Khomein in Isfahan, Abadeh in Fars, and some places in the provinces of Čahār Mahal and Baxtīārī and Lorestan and are examples.<sup>97</sup>

Some *qanāts* (underground channels for irrigation) and wells have traditionally been considered sacred, and people believed their water to have healing properties.<sup>98</sup> Like rivers, some *qanāts* in Iran have been recorded as having a gender. This is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that in some Pahlavi texts Anāhitā possesses both genders.<sup>99</sup> Local people recognized the gender of *qanāts* in different ways. In some locations, such as villages around Arak in central Iran, if the person who drilled the ground had soft-skinned hands then the *qanāt* was considered female; if his hands were rough, then the water was male. Other determinations included the amount of minerals in the water, or even the water’s level. In some villages people believed that if the flow of a *qanāt* was variable, then it was male; otherwise it was female. This latter point brings to mind the fact that in the *Ābān Yašt*, Anāhitā’s flow is said to be invariable, or constant. In practical terms, a variable “male” *qanāt* could cause problems; thus, the water needed to “marry to a woman” in order to become reliable.

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<sup>97</sup> Sedaghat-Kish 2003.

<sup>98</sup> Sedaghat-Kish 2003.

<sup>99</sup> See Chapter Ten.

Even today in Iran one can find “*qanāt* weddings”.<sup>100</sup> An Iranian historian of the Qajar period, E’temad al-Saltaneh (1843-1896), mentioned this ritual as well. According to him, if a male *qanāt* does not have a wife it will go dry. People should therefore marry the *qanāt* to a woman (sometimes an old woman), and this woman should bathe naked in the water at least once per month.<sup>101</sup> Villagers celebrated this ritual exactly like a wedding, and at least one Qajar-era photograph exists of one of the “brides”.<sup>102</sup> The main point of the ritual appears to have been for a woman to bathe in the *qanāt* (or natural stream), and for the villagers to offer food as a sacrifice to water, following an old tradition. It is possible that the idea of marrying the “male” *qanāt* was a later addition to the older ritual; it is also possible that at an earlier time the “bride” was a young girl, and only in later times replaced by a widow or old woman. On the other hand, in some villages around Yazd, a young man was married to a “female” *qanāt*.

In Sistan, another ritual existed whereby a woman was presented as a bride to Lake Hamun, in which she would bathe. This ritual, in which the bride is referred to as “Ušēdar”, is clearly related to the Zoroastrian myth according to which a young girl will bathe in the lake, which has preserved the seed of Zoroāstra, and thereafter give birth to his second son and second savior, referred to in the texts as Ušēdar.<sup>103</sup>

In several places in Iran on the occasion of the Islamic feast of sacrifice (*Eid-e qurbān*) people perform the prescribed sacrifice of a lamb on the bank of a river or stream. They believe that this ceremony will give them blessing by bringing more water in the year to come. Thus we see the Islamization of an ancient practice, whereby sacrifices were performed beside riverbanks to Anāhitā.

Another interesting ritual connected to water, *Čak-o-dūleh*, still exists among Zoroastrians

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<sup>100</sup> Sedaghat-Kish 2003, pp. 34-42.

<sup>101</sup> E’temad al-Saltaneh (1843-1896)1988.

<sup>102</sup> Sedaghat-Kish 2003, pp. 34-42.

<sup>103</sup> Sedaghat-Kish 2003.

in Iran.<sup>104</sup> Performed by a woman, this ritual is believed to bring good fortune and well-being to those who perform it. A small personal object (such as a bracelet or ring) is placed into a ceramic jar or a large pot full of water. The jar or pot then is covered by a cloth and placed under a myrtle or a pomegranate tree for the night where “it cannot see the sky/sun”. The following afternoon a young virgin girl retrieves the objects from the water and returns each to its owner, while the other women recite poetry.

One may observe that placing the objects into jars symbolizes creating a cave-like or womb-like situation for the water, while the presence of women and a tree connects the ritual to the water to the notion of fertility. The personal objects are like the offerings made to the water, but in this case they are returned and blessed.

It is also interesting that the ritual is performed at night, reminding us of stanzas 94 -95 in the *Ābān Yašt* where *Zaraθuštra* asks *Anāhitā* that what would happen if her worship ceremony were to be performed by *daēuua*-worshippers after sunset. This surviving ritual would seem to be an example of Iranians preserving their ancient beliefs and practices, including a nocturnal sacrifice to the waters. In this respect the *Čak-o-dūleh* ritual could be a sublimated continuation of the kinds of water/cave sacrifices discussed in chapters 3 and 6.

As in many cultures, in Iran bringing water from the local spring has traditionally been a woman’s duty. Villagers in Xor and Biābanak in central Iran also perform a ritual of sprinkling with water, where the women go to the spring and the men spray water on each other. It is surely not accidental that so many springs around Iran have names that include the component *doxtar* (“daughter,” or “girl”).

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<sup>104</sup> Rose 2011, p. 153.



Likewise up to the present day, certain folkloric tales of the islands of the Persian Gulf speak of “sea-*parīs*” (*parī-daryā ī*), who bring good luck and calm weather.<sup>105</sup> To cite other possible survivals, we may recall that the tradition of “laying the *sofreh* (spread)” in Iran where traces of the ancient water-goddess rituals can often be detected. Zoroastrians in Iran (as well as the “Irani Zoroastrians” who migrated to India in 19<sup>th</sup> century) seeking the fulfillment of a wish often perform a special ritual called “*sofre-ye doxtar-e šāh-e pariyān*”—the “Feast of the Daughter of the King of the *Parīs*”—in which they spread a tablecloth over a specific area. This ritual cannot be performed by men.

The Parsi writer Firoza Punthakey-Mistree mentions an Indian version of this ceremony called “*sofre-ye šāh pariyā*” and another ritual with the same concept called “*sofra naxod-e mošgel gošāy Vahram Izad*” (“the spread of the problem-solving nuts”) among the Zoroastrians in India.<sup>106</sup> Surprisingly, in the Indian name of the “*sofre-ye šāh pariyā*” the “daughter” is removed; nevertheless, traces of the water goddess are still noticeable. On the tablecloth, which is spread over the ground, there are many items including the sacred fire (“referred to as *pādšāh sāhebs-King/Sire*, and are believed by some to have the ability to communicate and grant wishes”<sup>107</sup>) and various foods (some of which are clearly related to fertility, fried eggs for example).

The ceremony is performed by women at home, and foods are cooked for an unspecified deity. After completing the ritual the people pass a hand-held mirror among the participants. They each look into the mirror, and one by one they make a wish. Then they put their hand in a bowl of water and put their wet fingers to their faces. Looking in the mirror and then touching the water and putting it to the face would seem to be an imitation of some older rituals which one presumes were performed beside rivers, lakes and springs, where one could have seen the reflection of his or her own face. Moreover, some of the food items used in this ceremony are afterwards thrown into

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<sup>105</sup> Cultural Heritage News Agency 2016.

<sup>106</sup> Punthakey-Mistree 2013.

<sup>107</sup> Punthakey-Mistree 2013, p. 195.

the sea. Punthakey-Mistree observes that although specifically Zoroastrian women of Iranian origin do these rituals, some Pārsi women have also adopted them during the last fifty years.<sup>108</sup>

In Islamic Iran, laying a *sofreh* and making a vow is very popular, mostly among women. The “*sofre-ye Bībī Se-šanbe*,” the “*sofre-ye Hazrat Roghīeh*,” and the “*sofre-ye Bībī Hūr*” are examples. Mirrors, fire (candles or lamps, etc.), water, and salt are common items in these rituals. In the “*sofre-ye Bībī Se-šanbe*—“the setting of Lady Tuesday”—after performing the ritual the dishes should be washed with water and this water should be thrown into running water. During the ceremony, the ritual’s special story is told. No man is allowed to be present or to eat anything from the food. Even pregnant women are not allowed, in case their unborn baby is a son. One might even speculate that the storytelling component of the “*sofre-ye Bībī Se-šanbe*” could be a memory of the reciting of prayers. In any case it is significant that ostensibly Islamic *sofrehs* in Iran also usually have something related to water.

Numerous water-sprinkling ceremonies existed throughout Iran, mostly in connection with the summer festival of Tīrgān, and in some places the practice continues even today. These ceremonies tended to be connected to Tištar/Tīr, the god of rain. In Mazandaran province in the north of Iran, a water-sprinkling ceremony related to Tīrgān continues to be practiced in some villages. This ritual is called *Tir-mā-sīzzeh-šu* in the Mazandarani language; however, while the month of Tīr falls in June according to the Iranian calendar, the Mazandarani ritual takes place in November. Abū Rayhān Birūnī, writing in the eleventh century, noted that Iranians also sprinkled water on each other during the New Year’s ceremonies at Nōrūz. Perhaps the sprinkling of rosewater one sees at Nōrūz today has remained from that practice.

In general water was considered female, and thus typically all of the ceremonies related to it, such as “asking for the rain”, were performed by women, and sometimes men were not even allowed to be present. Even in rural parts of Iran today women make female dolls for use in these

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<sup>108</sup> Punthakey-Mistree 2013, pp. 195, 203.

rain-inducing ceremonies. The practice cuts across religious boundaries, being found among Shi'ites, Sunnis, and Armenian Christians. The doll is called the “water-bride”; it is sometimes accompanied by a male doll, used in the ceremony by young boys.<sup>109</sup>

In another echo of the ancient riverside sacrifice, at the end of Zoroastrian *gāhānbār* ceremonies a portion of the sacrificial food is set aside for consumption by a dog (*qazā-ye sag*, “the dog’s portion”); it is then dispersed into running water, and thus into nature. One Iranian Zoroastrian told us that when he was a child he volunteered to take some food and threw it down to the well for the water spirit.<sup>110</sup>

Moreover, there is a ritual connect to the Iranian New Year—Nōrūz—which occurs at the vernal equinox on or about the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, is the most important celebration of the year for all of Iranian. In every household a table called haft-sin is laid out, with seven items beginning with the letter “*sīn*” (“s”). Each element in the rituals associated with Nowrūz has some symbolic functions and meaning. Sprouts are planted, which will be symbolically tossed into running water on the thirteenth day after Nōrūz, called “*Sīzdah be-dar*” (“The Thirteenth Outside”). All Iranians perform this ritual, which raises an interesting question: does this symbolic action have anything to do with the ancient water offering?

Recently there have been reports in the Iranian media of some gatherings between young people in the municipal parks of a number of Iranian cities, organized mostly on Facebook, during which participants sprinkle each other with water. Perhaps these events are just meant to be fun, or perhaps they contain some ancient memory. Either way, the government authorities have found these gatherings threatening and have broken them up, making a number of arrests.

Some Iranian families maintain a ritual of running water on the occasion of Nowrūz: just before the moment of the changing of the year—calculated with astronomic precision and awaited

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<sup>109</sup> Abbasi 2007.

<sup>110</sup> Bahman Moradian, personal communication, 18 July 2014.

with excitement by Iranians around the world—all the water taps in the house are turned on and left running and all the lights turned on. The New Year is ushered in with hugs, kisses and cheers, sweets are passed around, and only then are the water taps finally turned off.

With the steady Islamization of Iranian societies from the seventh century up to the present day, the formal aspects of Iranians' religious life changed dramatically. Nevertheless, while Islamic norms including not just practices and laws but also symbols and ideas largely overwhelmed those of pre-Islamic Iran, they could not eliminate them altogether. Rather, many ancient Iranian myths and rituals were sublimated, sometimes to the extent that their original meaning and significance was forgotten. As is generally the case, the persistence of ancient cultural practices and beliefs tends to be stronger the further one is from centres of formal religious authority; i.e., urban settings where “official religion” is articulated and promoted. Thus, rural areas are often fertile ground for ancient survivals. Moreover, being typically less involved in the production of formal religion, women frequently preserve old rites and notions to a greater extent than men.

With this in mind it is not surprising to see how widespread one finds echoes of ancient Iranian rituals associated with the water goddess, Anāhītā, not just preserved in literature or in Islamicized forms where numerous adaptations to changing values and norms can be detected, but also throughout Iran today in the realm of popular traditions, especially among women. This process of sublimation and subtle survival represents the final stage of the transformation of Anāhītā as an Iranian goddess.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the many and varied manifestations of the ancient Iranian water goddess, who is most readily recognized as Anāhitā, or *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* as she is referred to in the Avesta. She is the most important goddess of pre-Islamic Iran, and was transformed in many ways over time.

As the most important female deity in the Iranian pantheon, Anāhitā has been the subject of a number of studies, but none as extensive or encompassing as what has been undertaken in this dissertation. Previous research on Anāhitā has tended to focus on specific aspects (such as linguistics or whether or not she is an “Iranian” deity), and has been largely limited to the periods of the three pre-Islamic Iranian empires. We, by contrast, have sought to incorporate the various questions addressed by previous scholars—alongside new ones of our own—within a cohesive narrative framework spanning four millennia up to the present age and drawing on a wide range of disciplines. In particular, reconstructing a proto-Indo-European water goddess through a comparison of Anāhitā with cognate figures from other cultures has not been hitherto attempted to the extent that has been done here, nor has the corpus of material on female literary and religious characters from the Islamic period previously been analyzed in terms of its possible connections to the Iranian goddess. In addition, we have advanced new arguments about the possible place of Anāhitā in Iranian and other Indo-European dragon-slaying myths.

Several questions and issues, outlined again below, about the goddess were raised in the Introduction. This study has proposed answers to these questions about Anāhitā’s role and her transformation over time within a unified framework informed by an interdisciplinary approach. In addition to its central theme, a number of related issues have been raised during the course of our inquiry, some of which will require further research in the future. Moreover, as we have noted, many precise details concerning Anāhitā’s historical transformations and development may never

be definitively known. Nor can we assess with any absolute certainty the extent to which her importance was due to her taking over the position of a pre-existing local goddess or goddesses.

Our first, basic question was to establish Anāhitā's roots in the distant past. Could her original identity as an Indo-European water goddess be convincingly demonstrated? And if so, what, if anything, did Anāhitā and these goddesses have in common, and to what extent?

Additional questions were raised regarding her name and/or epithets, her functions and her descriptions in both the Avestan and Pahlavi texts. Observing the differences between these sets of texts, other questions emerged. How does one account for Anāhitā's altered portrayal in the Pahlavi texts, which is markedly different from how she appears in the Avesta? Were any socio-political forces behind this transformation? Could this be taken as a reflection of gender relations in ancient Iranian societies, or was the presence of goddesses merely a projection of male ideas about femininity?

The past century has seen many scholarly debates concerning Anāhitā's origin and essential nature. Was the goddess originally Mesopotamian, or Indo-Iranian, or did her roots go even further back to proto-Indo-European water goddesses? Is it possible to demonstrate any connection between Anāhitā and proto-Indo-European river goddesses? And if so, what did she retain in common with them?

In addressing these questions we have noted the range of evidence that a goddess related to rivers, lakes, and streams existed within the pantheons of the various Indo-European peoples, which suggests that she was present even as far back as the common proto-Indo-European period some seven thousand years ago. Though the water goddesses of different Indo-European peoples were not all identical, among their most common shared functions were fertility and healing. In many of the Indo-European societies we have studied this goddess was very powerful and had a range of characteristics and functions, while in others she was simply a local goddess associated with specific bodies of water.

To better understand these common functions between the Iranian river goddess Anāhitā and other Indo-European goddesses of rivers, lakes and streams, we have analyzed them in terms of their myths, features and functions. The fact that so many similarities can be detected between Anāhitā and other Indo-European water goddesses suggests that they are unlikely to be accidental. Hence, this dissertation has argued that *Anāhitā is originally a specifically Iranian expression of a proto-Indo-European goddess of rivers, lakes, and streams*, having cognate forms in many of the cultures of pre-Christian Europe and Asia. Among these we may count the Celts, in particular, who built sanctuaries at the sources of rivers and lakes—as did the Iranians far away to the East—and sacrifices were offered on the banks of the rivers. Water in all its forms was considered as the source of the life, and the water deity followed the same concept. In most cases, including that of Anāhitā, sacrifices to these goddesses were offered at their temples as well as on the banks of rivers, streams or lakes.

Like her analogues in the Celtic and Vedic mythologies, Anāhitā is perceived as a “celestial river” pouring down from the heavens: the goddess Dānu is also mentioned in the Celtic creation story as the “heavenly water” which flows downward, a remarkable parallel with Anāhitā who is described in exactly the same way. Offerings to Dānu, like those for Anāhitā, were thrown into the water as gifts for her. Items offered included such things as swords and possessions belonging to vanquished warriors.

One of the important similarities between Anāhitā and other Indo-European water goddesses can be connected with the “cult of the head”. The severed heads of defeated enemies, believed to hold special power, were conveyed to the temples of these water goddesses to be offered as sacrifice. For example, Sequana, the goddess of the river Seine, received a considerable number of human heads, used as votive offerings, which have been found at the Seine’s source. The concept of the “cult of the head” appears to have been important among the Celts, particularly the warrior caste. This reminds us of a similar phenomenon found in ancient Iran, where the

Sāsānian king Ardešīr demonstrated his devotion to Anāhitā by sending the severed heads of defeated enemies to her temple at Eṣṭaxr (discussed in Chapter Five). The close similarity between this ritual in Europe and Iran can hardly be accidental, and must point to a common origin.

In another example, we have mentioned the similarities between Anāhitā and Brigantia, a widely-attested Celtic goddess connected to victory, water, wisdom, war, healing, fertility and prosperity. Brigantia too was specifically connected with sacred waters and wells. One of Anāhitā's epithets, *bərəzaitī*, meaning "high", "the high one," or "mountainous, tall; the high, lofty one," is cognate with the name Brigantia. Like Anāhitā, Brigantia was associated with the juxtaposition of fire and water. She was also connected with wisdom and inner sight. In the cases of both Brigantia and Anāhitā, the goddess's functions encompass all three of the major social castes: priests, warriors, and producers. Within widely separated geographical contexts, Brigantia and Anāhitā developed in ways that gave them almost universal importance across their respective ancient societies: to maintain law, to provide victory in battle, and to ensure fertility and health.

Finally, just as the sacredness of water (lakes/wells/springs/rivers) survived in Christian Europe through the association of watery sites with female saints, one finds similar survivals among female figures of Islamic Iran.

Anāhitā's functions and her visualization in the Avesta are the starting point for her analysis in a specifically Iranian context. A major question that arises when comparing representations of Anahita with those of other deities in the Avesta is why she is portrayed in such detail, when others mostly are not. We have noted that ancient Iranians conceived of their relationship to deities in less personal terms than did the Greeks and Mesopotamians, meaning their deities were more remote and had less in common with human experiences. We have suggested that the anthropomorphization of Anāhitā's various traits may have arisen as a response to popular desire for a personal, accessible deity.



But why this goddess in particular, and where and how did this shift in conceptualization occur? The most likely explanation would seem to lie in the encounter of Iranians with the settled populations of Elam and Mesopotamia during the first millennium BCE. Throughout this period Iranians were in contact—and indeed intermingled—with peoples who had a very different approach to their deities, and for whom goddesses had firmly established roles. One might further surmise that the notion of a centrally important female deity, apparently alien to proto-Iranian religion, can be traced back to the Elamites whose original supreme deity Pinikir was a goddess, through the Sumerian Inanna (Nanai) and the Babylonian Ištar to Anahita (discussed in Chapter 3).

The most significant appearance of *Arəduuī Sūrā Anāhitā* in the Zoroastrian texts is found in the fifth *Yašt* of the Avesta, the *Ābān Yašt*, which is an entire hymn devoted to her. Having an important *Yašt* in her honour is indicative of her significant role within the Zoroastrian religion. In this text the goddess is described in the first instance as a symbol of rivers, originally the heavenly river symbolized by the Milky Way. Her functions—including healing, fertility, support of warriors and childbirth—are described in detail, as is her physical appearance. These descriptions strongly evoke roots in the prehistoric river goddess(es) of the ancient proto-Indo-European peoples.

Anāhitā is described in the *Ābān Yašt* as a beautiful, powerful deity who is transformed into a waterfall-river flowing down from a high mountain range. This dissertation suggests that her description forms a significant linkage between the religious text, myth, and art, and could be analyzed as well from an artistic point of view. These transformations, from a river or waterfall to a goddess, are described in vivid visual terms, to an extent that is unparalleled in the Avesta. Anāhitā's description in the *Ābān Yašt* is rich and specific, enabling one to visualize her almost as much as through visual art. In some passages—*Yašt* 5.4, for example—the description enables one to clearly imagine the scene. If we notice the fact that these texts were composed as oral hymns

and meant not to be read but to be spoken and heard, then these symbolic elements in the text appear even more meaningful (discussed in Chapter Six).

Thus, one of the distinguishing features of Anāhitā in comparison with other Avestan deities is the very way in which she is described. No other Iranian goddess is visualized on the basis of textual descriptions to the extent Anāhitā is, specifically her shape-shifting, partly as a waterfall/river and partly as a super-sized goddess with beaver fur clothing (Yt 5.129). Since beaver pelts would not have been familiar to an Achaemenid-period observer, references to them in the *Ābān Yašt* suggest that its author is quoting a very old oral tradition, and that Anāhitā was originally conceived in lands with a cold climate, possibly the original homeland of the Iranians, *Airiiana Vaējah*.

Another point we have noted is that as a river, Anāhitā is described as flowing equally during the summer and winter (Chapter Six). Interestingly, Herodotus notes that among the Scythian rivers there was a river called the “Ister” which always flowed with equal volume in summer and winter alike. Ister is, in fact, the ancient name for the river Danube, which, as we have seen, derives from the noun *danu*<sup>1</sup>. The connection is even more remarkable when we note that Anāhitā displays a number of features found in Herodotus’ description of the Danube. Moreover, the region through which the Ister passes (according to Herodotus) is a place with cold winters, reminding us of Anāhitā’s clothing. This is not to say that the Danube was the original river of the goddess; rather, we have merely noted some connections showing that our goddess might have inherited some very old traditions connected to her Indo-European roots, which also live on among peoples of Indo-European origin in Eastern Europe.

Anāhitā is initially described as a water goddess with fertility functions, similar to many Indo-European water goddesses: she eases childbirth, assures timely lactation, and purifies men’s

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<sup>1</sup> The Indo-European root  $\sqrt{*dā-}$  and its suffixed derivative *\*dānu-* means “river” (See Chapter Six).

sperm and the woman’s womb. The *Ābān Yašt* speaks of “all the waters that Ahura Mazdā created,” specifically mentioning seven rivers flowing to seven countries. We have suggested that this indicates that Anāhitā originally conceptualized as water itself (river/lake/stream), rather than as a specific water body (*anāhitā*- specifically personifies the rushing water). Kellens’ proposal that her true name was Ap (“water”) reinforces this conclusion.

We have sought to explain Anāhitā’s assimilation of martial, fertility and other functions over time as opposed to her essential nature as a water goddess, locating many of these accretions within the *Ābān Yašt*—particularly as seen in Yt. 5.86-87—where she acquires new functions connecting her to three different groups of deities.

We have noted that not all of Anāhitā’s supplicants are righteous. Of all the Zoroastrian divinities found in the *Yašts*, only Anāhitā and Vāiiu are said to receive sacrifices from evildoers (*daēuuaiiasna*-, i.e. “those who sacrifice to *daēuuas*”). Here we have left certain questions—what this ambivalence says about these two deities, for example, and what it is that unites them in this unique category—unresolved for the present, hopefully to be taken up in the course of future research (discussed in Chapters Six and Eight).

The fact that some well-known negative characters perform sacrifices to Anāhitā asking for her support is surely significant. There are hints that some sort of post-sundown ceremony in honour of Anāhitā existed (Yt. 5.94 -95). We have argued that the text’s implied opposition to such ceremonies perhaps reflects the views of the Mazdāean priests who composed it, and suggests that at some point significant numbers of Iranians did in fact perform sacrifices to Anāhitā at night, a practice the priests were trying to abolish.

In all likelihood, the *daēuuas* were worshipped widely (but perhaps not openly) even by people(s) who had accepted the Avestan rites. Despite Zoroāstra’s attempts to ensure the primacy of Ahura Mazdā, which are usually assumed to have driven other deities including the *daēuuas*

underground, the many that reappear in the Younger Avesta may include some that were originally *daēuuas*. Thus, references to rituals performed to Anāhitā by devotees labelled as “*daēuua*-worshippers” may simply refer to people who did not follow the religious prescriptions of the Mazdāean priests but continued to maintain earlier traditions. The same may be said regarding the distinction made in the *Dēnkard* between two kinds of sacrifice to water: one by Zarduxšt (*āb ī homīgān*) and the other by people who are “*dēw*-worshippers” (*Dēnkard* 7.4.35). Here again, the implication is that the latter form may have preserved a pre-Zoroastrian tradition associated with Anāhitā (discussed in Chapter Six).

By the encounters between Iranians and the neighbours during the prehistoric period the water goddess absorbed additional features from various other local goddesses, taking on new forms in different places and times. In the largely sedentary BMAC culture of Southern Central Asia, the eminence of the goddess of waters and fertility—Nana, an imported variation of the Sumerian Inanna—strongly affected Anāhitā (and the Vedic Sārasvatī as well), giving them more prominence than the other Indo-European river goddesses. Mesopotamian civilization affected Iranian culture both directly through ongoing encounters between Iranians and Mesopotamians and indirectly through the Elamites. Like the Elamites, the ancient Mesopotamian peoples had a number of important goddesses, whose roles and functions were slowly taken over by male deities with the passage of time. The Sumerian goddess Inanna and the Babylonian Ištar, who shared many similarities in their functions and associated rituals, are two examples of goddesses who held central importance in their respective societies. Many of their functions as well as their broad popular appeal appear to have been passed on to Anāhitā. Inanna/Ištar was identified with the planet Venus, an association later inherited by Anāhitā and these aggrandizing changes started gradually.

Evidence for the cult of Anāhitā exists across three successive Iranian empires: the Achaemenids, the Parthians, and the Sasanians. Later inscriptions from the time of Artaxerxes II

(r. ca. 404-358 BCE) at Hamedan A<sup>2</sup>Ha and A<sup>2</sup>Sa, on four columns of the Apadāna palace), specifically invoke Miθra and Anāhitā, demonstrating that these two deities were worshipped alongside Mazda. Anāhitā's cult became even more widespread during the Seleucid and the Parthian periods. Hellenized Iranian settlers in Anatolia and Mesopotamia retained many Iranian rites—in which Anāhitā's cult was especially prominent—even while blending them with local traditions.

The Sasanian family who established Iran's last great pre-Islamic dynasty (224-651 CE) were originally custodians of a major Anāhitā temple at Eṣṭaxr in Pārs province, and the goddess remained the dynasty's patron deity. The Sāsānian king Ardešīr showed his devotion to Anāhitā, to whom—paralleling a tradition found throughout ancient Europe—he offered the severed heads of his enemies. Anāhitā along with Ahura Mazdā and Miθra are the main deities who can be found on Sasanian rock reliefs.

The Pahlavi texts dating to the Sasanian and early Islamic periods demonstrate a marked shift in Iranian understandings of Anāhitā, which become distinctly ambivalent. As the patron deity of the Sasanian royal house, her cult may have posed a threat to the Magian priesthood who struggled throughout the Sasanian period to maintain their supreme position as religious authorities throughout the realm.

The Avestan *Ābān Yašt*, together with a range of other sources from the Achaemenid period into Sasanian times a millennium later, demonstrate Anāhitā's central importance in the religious life of Iranians. The Pahlavi texts, on the other hand, speak rather little of her, and when they do their mentions are often ambiguous. This dissertation has considered the possibility that her treatment in the Pahlavi texts represent some kind of reluctant, perhaps even awkward priestly concession to accommodate (but also subordinate) an overwhelmingly popular goddess figure within an increasingly patriarchal tradition (see Chapter Ten). It has further been suggested that with the passing of time, goddess-worship became less acceptable or important in Iranian society,

with male deities securing the important roles to a growing extent. In other words, anthropological and economic changes as well as the change in people's religious belief and framework may all have played a role in Anāhitā's changing status.

We have noted that by Sasanian times, if not earlier, Anāhitā was identified with the planet Venus, probably reflecting an association between Aphrodite, Venus and Ištar that developed through contact with neighboring cultures. Given the likelihood that the cult surrounding Ištar, which connected her to the planet Venus, became conflated with that of Anāhitā, it is not surprising that by the Sasanian period she was associated with this planet as well. The Pahlavi texts introduce a number of negative elements into Anāhitā's description, mostly associated with the influence of Ištar as the planet of Venus which according to the Zoroastrian tradition has a demonic nature. This ambivalence may have led to Anāhitā's divergence into two distinct entities, Anāhīd and Ardwī-sūr, and even two genders, as both the mother and the father of the waters and her role seems less prominent. In her positive aspect, however, Anāhitā continues in the Sasanian period to be widely venerated among the different classes of Iranian society, notably the Sasanian royal family.

### Remaining Questions

As has been noted throughout this dissertation, Anāhitā's portrayal in the Pahlavi texts is markedly different from how she appears in the Avesta. We have posed the question of whether this can be taken as a reflection of gender relations in ancient Iranian societies, or whether the presence of goddesses is merely a projection of male ideas about femininity. We wonder whether during Sasanian times Anāhitā maintained her role as it had been articulated centuries earlier in the Avesta, and if so, whether this can be seen in any way as reflecting the actual position of women in Iranian society. Does her apparent demotion in the priestly Pahlavi texts indicate a

corresponding diminishing of the status of women? We cannot answer these questions with any certainty. Although, it seems that there was most likely a discrepancy between the theological approach to religion (and specifically Anāhitā) in the Pahlavi texts, written or redacted by theologians and priests, on the one hand, and popular religion, on the other, in which the goddess could still have been a central figure of worship (particularly in fertility rites etc.), despite the marginal role she seems to play in these sources.

Nevertheless, we do not know for sure whether Anāhitā's importance in the religious life of Iranians over the course of three Iranian empires changed substantially, or even how large a part it played in the overall religious life of Iranians. Finally, we cannot state absolutely whether or to what degree the deities, rituals and myths of pre-Islamic Iran survived into the Islamic period or if so, in what form. In the end, what we have proposed are suppositions and possibilities, which we have sought to support with coherent arguments, in the hope that they may serve to inspire further research in the future.

We have brought our study into the Islamic period by examining what appear to be surviving echoes of the ancient water goddess amongst Iranian Muslims. These include depictions of female characters in the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* and other works of classical Persian literature, tales about nymphs, and folk rituals and superstitions involving water. We have argued that in the Islamic period the goddess-worship earlier practiced by Iranians, within which Anāhitā was the principal figure, became subsumed under popular rituals, especially those having to do with water, or reverence for supernatural creatures such as the *pairikās*, or the survival of shrines and other sacred places. Today numerous popular religious sites and sanctuaries in different parts of Iran have *doxtar*, *bībī*, or *bānū* as part of their name, suggesting a possible connection to Anāhitā. Many of the characters in the Persian national epic, the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* ("Book of Kings") of Ferdowsī, are also found in the Avesta and in the Rig-Veda. Although the *Šāh-nāmeḥ* was written during the Islamic period, its female characters show some characteristics that directly or

indirectly connect them to goddesses or *pairikās*. Iranian Shī‘ī folklore contains echoes of water rituals that may have been connected to Anāhitā in the past. For example, since water was said to have been the dowry of the prophet Muhammad’s daughter Fatima (who in this case possibly replaced Anāhitā in the popular imagination), it should not be defiled.

To sum up, in our view Anāhitā’s development can be traced as follows. Originally, she is merely an Iranian goddess of water, mostly recognized by the rivers and lakes, analogous to many Indo-European river goddesses. Later, as a result of some Iranian groups migrating southwest into Elam and Mesopotamia, she acquires not just the traits of the local goddess, Ishtar, but also her centrality and her popular cult, elevating her to a new status which is entirely at odds with the prior norms of ancient Iranian culture. Finally, with the coming of Islam she lost her formal place within the Iranian pantheon, but traces of her survived especially in rituals and popular tales.

In conclusion, this dissertation has surveyed and analyzed the many stages of transformation of the Iranian water deity, best known as Anāhitā, from prehistoric times through its absorption into Mazdaeism and ultimately, in numerous sublimated forms, up to the present day. Rituals derived from offerings to water continue to be made by contemporary Iranians, Muslims as well as Zoroastrians, even if they do not necessarily recognize them as such. The ancient Iranian water goddess has not been effaced by time, but still survives in Iran, even after fourteen centuries of Islamization.



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## Summary

As the most important female deity in the Iranian pantheon, Anāhitā has been the subject of a number of studies, but none as extensive or encompassing as what has been undertaken in this dissertation. Previous research on Anāhitā has tended to focus on specific aspects (such as linguistics or whether or not she is an “Iranian” deity), and has been largely limited to the periods of the three pre-Islamic Iranian empires. We, by contrast, have sought to incorporate the various questions addressed by previous scholars—alongside new ones of our own—within a cohesive narrative framework spanning four millennia up to the present age and drawing on a wide range of disciplines. In particular, reconstructing a proto-Indo-European water goddess through a comparison of Anāhitā with cognate figures from other cultures has not been hitherto attempted to the extent that has been done here, nor has the corpus of material on female literary and religious characters from the Islamic period previously been analyzed in terms of its possible connections to the Iranian goddess. In addition, we have advanced new arguments about the possible place of Anāhitā in Iranian and other Indo-European dragon-slaying myths.

Anāhitā emerges in history by the late the Achaemenid period as one of the three principle deities of the Iranian pantheon, alongside Ahura Mazdā and Miθra; an important Avestan hymn, the *Ābān Yašt*, is composed in honour of Anāhitā, establishing her role within the Zoroastrian religion. During the course of this process she acquires additional functions, presumably from pre-existing goddesses in the regions where Iranians came to live, from Central Asia (the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex) to the Iranian plateau and Mesopotamia (Elamite, Sumerian, Babylonian). Variations on the Iranian Anāhitā are found in the religious cultures of neighbouring lands such as Armenia, Bactria and Sogdiana. Her association with water enables us to connect her with the ancient Indo-European dragon-slaying myth as well as with the Zoroastrian saviour figure, the Avestan *Saošiiant*.

The Sasanian royal family which ruled Iran from 224-651 CE was closely connected with the cult of Anāhitā, having been the hereditary custodians of her shrine at Eṣṭaxr during the preceding Parthian period; she remained the patron deity of the royal house throughout the Sasanian period. In the post-Sasanian Pahlavi texts her importance is much less than in the Avesta. Moreover, Anāhitā comes to be referred to as two distinct deities, Ardwī-sūr and Anāhīd, possessing both genders. This division and demotion is explained in light of priestly attitudes towards women and women's roles, particularly the construction of a "female" form of wisdom. We explain the ambivalence towards Anāhitā in the Pahlavi texts in terms of evidence of her connections to the planet Venus and to nocturnal *daēva* cults that were condemned by the Mazdaean priesthood.

With the coming of Islam her cult disappears, yet numerous aspects of it survive in female figures from Persian literature and through folk tales and rituals, usually Islamicized, which are often connected with water. In one important example, it is proposed that Sūdābeh and Rūdābeh, two female figures in Ferdowsī's tenth-century Persian epic, the *Šāh-nāmeḥ*, are mythological reflections of two aspects of female power that can be connected with the ancient cult of Anāhitā. Further examples can be found in Iranian notions of female beauty and in superstitions about fairy figures (Av. *Pairikās*, NP *Parīs*), as well as in a number of popular rituals involving water which survive in Iran up to the present day.

In sum, this dissertation schematizes the many progressive variations in terms of how Anāhitā was conceptualized and worshipped over time and space, in order to trace the goddess's development as a major figure in Iranian religion and the constantly evolving mix of her roles and attributes within culturally diverse communities throughout Greater Iran.

## Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Studie untersucht, wie die wichtigste Göttin des vorislamischen Iran, Anāhitā, im Laufe der Zeit transformiert wurde. Der Ursprung und die grundlegenden Charakteristika Anāhitās sind in diversen wissenschaftlichen Studien kontrovers diskutiert worden. In der vorliegenden Dissertation wird argumentiert, dass sie ursprünglich eine Ausdrucksform einer proto-indoeuropäischen Göttin der Flüsse, Seen und Ströme war, mit verwandten Formen in vielen der Kulturen des vorchristlichen Europas und Asiens. Sie hat viele ähnliche Funktionen wie diese anderen Göttinnen, und wie ihre Gegenstücke in der keltischen und vedischen Mythologie wird sie als ein himmlischer Fluss wahrgenommen, der sich aus dem Himmel ergießt. Sie teilt auch viele mythologischen und rituellen Elemente mit slawischen, indischen und anderen indoeuropäischen Flussgöttinnen.

Anāhitā tritt in der Geschichte in der späten Achämenidenzeit als eine der drei Hauptgottheiten des iranischen Pantheons zutage, neben Ahura Mazdā und Miθra; eine wichtige awestische Hymne, das *Ābān Yašt*, wurde zu Ehren Anāhitās komponiert und etabliert ihre Rolle innerhalb der zoroastrischen Religion. Im Laufe dieses Prozesses erwarb sie zusätzliche Funktionen, mutmaßlich von zuvor bestehenden Göttinnen in den Regionen, in denen Iraner sich ansiedelten, von Zentralasien (im baktrisch-margianischen archäologischen Komplex, BMAC) zur iranischen Hochebene und Mesopotamien (aus dem elamischen, sumerischen und babylonischen Pantheon). Variationen der iranischen Anāhitā findet man in den religiösen Kulturen der angrenzenden Länder wie etwa in Armenien, Baktrien und Sogdien. Ihre Assoziation mit Wasser ermöglicht es uns, sie sowohl mit dem altertümlichen indoeuropäischen Mythos des Drachentöters als auch mit der zoroastrischen Erlösergestalt, dem awestischen *Saošiant*, in Verbindung zu bringen.

Die sassanidische Herrscherfamilie, (224-651 n. Chr.) war der dynastische Hüter ihres Schreins in Eṣṭaxr und stand in der vorangegangenen Partherzeit in enger Verbindung zum Kult der Anāhitā. Sie blieb während der sassanidischen Periode die Schutzgöttin des Königshauses. In den post-sassanidischen Pahlavi-Schriften, wird auf Anāhitā jedoch als zwei getrennte Gottheiten Ardwī-sūr und Anāhīd, die beide Geschlechter hat, beider Geschlechter Bezug genommen, und ihre Bedeutung ist weit geringer als im Avesta. Diese Aufteilung und Herabstufung wird in vorliegender Arbeit im Rahmen priesterlichen Einstellungen gegenüber Frauen und ihrer Rollen, und der Konstruktion einer „weiblichen“ Form von Weisheit, erörtert. Wir deuten die Ambivalenz gegenüber Anāhitā in den Pahlavi-Schriften im Kontext der Belege für ihre Verbindung zum Planeten Venus und zu nächtlichen *daēva*-Kulten, die von der mazdaischen Priesterschaft verurteilt wurden.

Mit der Ankunft des Islams verschwindet ihr Kult, aber zahlreiche Aspekte davon bestehen in weiblichen Figuren der neupersischen Literatur und in Märchen und Ritualen, die meistens islamisiert wurden, fort, die oft mit Wasser verknüpft sind. In einem wichtigen Beispiel wird ausgeführt, dass Sūdābeh und Rūdābeh, zwei weibliche Figuren in Ferdowsis persischem Epos *Šāh-nāmeḥ* aus dem 10. Jahrhundert, zwei signifikante Aspekte weiblicher Macht repräsentieren, die mit dem altertümlichen Kult der Anāhitā in Verbindung gebracht werden können. Weitere Beispiele finden sich in den iranischen Vorstellungen zur weiblichen Schönheit und im Aberglauben an Feengestalten (Av. *Pairikās*, NP *Parīs*) sowie in mehreren beliebten Ritualen, die Wasser beinhalten und bis heute im Iran fortbestehen.

Zusammenfassend befasst sich diese Dissertation mit den vielen fortschreitenden Variationen Anāhitās, wie sie in Begriffe gefasst und zeitlich und räumlich verehrt wurde, mit dem Ziel, die fortlaufende Entwicklung der Göttin als eine wichtige Figur der iranischen Religionsgeschichte sowie die Vermischung ihrer Rollen und Eigenschaften innerhalb kulturell diverser Gemeinschaften im großiranischen Raum nachzuzeichnen.

## Selbständigkeitserklärung

Ich versichere hiermit, dass ich die Dissertation selbständig verfasst habe und dass ich keine anderen als die in der Arbeit genannten Hilfsmittel benutzt habe.

Montréal, 28 January 2019

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