



ANĀHĪD III. ANAITIS

Anaitis is the Greek rendering of what appears to have been the name of the goddess of the planet Venus, who seems to have been worshiped by the Medes and Persians before they adopted Zoroastrianism. Her cult was apparently much influenced by that of Mesopotamian Ishtar, an enormously powerful divinity in the first millennium B.C., whose worship had by then been adopted in a number of pantheons (including that of the Elamites) outside the Semitic world. Ishtar was venerated as goddess both of love and war, and this is thought to be because in earlier times the morning and evening appearances of the planet Venus (with whom she was linked) had been regarded as those of two different though related stars, with the divinity of the evening star being held to be female, that of the morning star male. By the first millennium the identity of the planet as seen at dawn and twilight had come to be accepted by Babylonian astronomers. It cannot be supposed that this identity had been perceived earlier by the Iranians; but it appears probable that they had long been accustomed to venerate the brilliant planet, either at its morning or its evening appearance, as the goddess *Anāhiti, the “Pure One.” This name is represented in its Old Persian form only by Greek Anaitis. The Middle and New Persian forms, Anāhīd, Nāhīd, have long internal “i”; and so it was assumed that Greek Anaitis was written by itacism for *Anaeitis, with ei for OP ī, as elsewhere. It now seems more probable, however, that OP had an internal short “i” which became lengthened, regularly, in Mid. Pers. after the loss of the final syllable (cf. M. Back, *Die sassanidischen Staatsinschriften*, Acta Iranica 18, Leiden, 1978, p. 70). *Anāhiti can thus be understood as a regular feminine bahurvihi “having no stain, immaculate” (cf. AirWb. col. 125; Lommel, *Die*



Yāšt's des Awesta, Göttingen, 1927, p. 29).

Presumably the ancient Persians, having settled in the land of the Elamites, there learned to worship their goddess *Anāhiti in connection with both appearances of the planet Venus, and to associate her with the powerful Ishtar, called “the Lady.” (“Lady” is a characteristic Mesopotamian invocation of a goddess.) Her cult gained accordingly in popularity, and evidently presented a problem for Zoroastrian orthodoxy, once the western Iranians had embraced the eastern faith. The difficulty of how to incorporate the cult of *Anāhiti into Zoroastrian worship was probably not solved until the reign of Darius II, whose son Artaxerxes II publicly invoked “Anāhit(a)” in his inscriptions (A2Sa, A2Sd, A2Ha). Further, the Babylonian scholar-priest, Berossos (Book III, fragment 65) states that this king “was the first to set up statues of Aphrodite Anaitis, at Babylon, Susa, Ecbatana, Persepolis, Bactra, Damascus, and Sardis, thus suggesting to those communities the duty of worshipping them.” The way in which it was made doctrinally possible for a Zoroastrian king thus to impose the veneration of a partly alien divinity on the community at large was through assimilating her cult to that of the Zoroastrian Yazatā Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā. Thereafter “the Lady” of the planet Venus was still popularly worshiped as Anāhīd ī Bānū, but was venerated in the Zoroastrian liturgies with the Avestan invocations proper to the river-yazatā. On the fusion, only imperfect, of the conception of the two divinities see further under Ardwīsūr Anāhīd and Ābān Yašt.

For a parallel instance of the influence of a Babylonian planetary cult on Iranian worship, see Tīr(i); and for the assimilation thereafter of Tīr(i)'s cult into Zoroastrianism see under Tištrya. A further complexity in the cult of “Anāhita” is the veneration also of the Mesopotamian goddess Nanā' (q.v.), which seems to have entered Zoroastrian worship in association with that of Ishtar-Anāhiti.

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For further literature see the bibliography to [Ardwīsūr Anāhīd](#).