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ANĀHĪD IV. ANĀHITĀ IN THE ARTS

Anāhitā's representation and identification pose one of the most complex iconographic problems in the study of architecture and the visual arts of Iran. In literature she is mentioned by name, but her identification in art remains tentative since it rests primarily on her form, attributes, and activities. Moreover speculative discussions have attempted to connect her visual representation in the arts of Parthian, Sasanian, and early Islamic Iran to verbal descriptions in classical and Iranian historical and religious texts.

Greek and Roman historians mention sanctuaries and statues connected with the cult and worship of Anaïtis in Anatolia and the Levant. According to his inscriptions (A^2Sa, A^2Sd, A^2Ha), Artaxerxes II (404-359 B.C.) invoked Anāhitā, along with Mithra, and he encouraged her worship through images, which he had distributed throughout his empire. Anāhitā also figures prominently in Zoroastrian literature and was quite clearly venerated at various times in connection with both water and fire (see Ābān Yašt). From historical sources we know that several Sasanian kings performed as high priests in her cult, the main temple for which was located at Eṣṭaḵr. But 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 images and sanctuaries rests upon firm ground. What does seem fairly certain is her absence from the figural repertory of Islamic art, except for the earliest materials, which may be considered continuations of Sasanian style and

iconography. But even this material, much of it yet problematic in its classification, is not clearly representative of Anāhitā, nor necessarily related to the practice of her cult. (For a rare and unusual allusion to Anāhitā in Persian literature, see W. Hanaway, Jr., "Anahita and Alexander," *JAOS* 102, 1982, pp. 285-95; for the transformation of imagery of Anāhitā to that of Šīrīn in Islamic legend, see P. P. Soucek, "Farhād and Tāq-i Bustān: The Growth of a Legend," in *Studies in Art and Literature of the Near East in Honor af Richard Ettinghausen*, 1974, pp. 27-52.)

For the period prior to the establishment of the Sasanian dynasty, mention of sanctuaries of Anāhitā suggests a widespread practice of her cult not only in Iran but as far west as Armenia and Babylon. Although archeological exploration has been relatively extensive in these areas, no temples to the cult of Anāhitā have been located with any degree of certainty outside of Iran. Within Iran today, tentative identification of her temple has been suggested for architectural remains excavated at Bard-e Nešānda (R. Ghirshman, "Les Terrasses sacrées de Bard-è Néchandeh et de Masjid-i Solaiman," *MDAFI*, Paris, 1976). From additional references it may be surmised that temples of Parthian times or earlier were also constructed at Hamadān, Susa, and Persepolis.

Increased archeological excavation of Sasanian sites since World War II has contributed to the definition of many architectural monuments in Iran of both religious and secular nature, but without significantly clarifying either the form or function of sanctuaries to the goddess Anāhitā. In spite of numerous textual references to her temples, not a single Sasanian building can be attributed to her cult with certainty. Even the main sanctuary at Eṣṭaḵr, mentioned in local sources and known to have been revered by the many kings of the Sasanian dynasty who served there as high priests, has not been located in spite of both survey and excavation of the site. But the chance find of an architectural block carved in relief with the fragmentary remains of a female figure (pl. XXXVII) has led L. Bier to reconstruct an otherwise unique monumental investiture by Anāhitā ("A Sculpted Building Block from Istakhr," *AMI*, 1983, forthcoming). Relying upon stylistic details in relation to images of Anāhitā on coins, Bier dates the sculpture to the reign of Bahrām II, whose concern for Anāhitā is well known. From the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt inscription, Bier proposes that the architectural relief once served to ornament the sanctuary itself; such an interpretation corresponds well with the eclectic series of rock reliefs commissioned by Bahrām II elsewhere (see G. Herrmann, "The

Sculptures of Bahram II," *JRAS*, 1970, pp. 165-71).

A. A. Sarfarāz has argued for a reappellation of the fire temple at Bīšāpūr, excavated by R. Ghirshman just prior to World War II, as a water temple dedicated to Anāhitā; its topographic placement and unique drainage facilities would have allowed for and encouraged the circulation of water within its structure ("Anāhitā, the great temple at Bīšāpūr," in *Proceedings of the IIIrd Annual Symposium on Archaeological Research in Iran, 2nd-7th November, 1974*, Tehran, 1975, pp. 91-110 [in Persian]). A critique of views concerning the monumental columnar architectural remains at Kangāvar is presented by M. Azarnush ("Excavations at Kangavar," *AMI* 14, 1981, pp. 69-94). Previously considered a Temple of Anāhitā of Parthian date, based upon reference in Isidore of Charax to a Temple of Artemis there, the ruins at Kangāvar are presently viewed by Azarnush and others as a palace from the time of Ḵosrow II; confirmation for the later dating is found in epigraphic details of certain masons' marks. For earlier discussion of columnar sanctuaries associated with water that may have been dedicated to Anāhitā, see C. Trever, "À propos des temples de la déesse Anahita en Iran sassanide," *Iranica Antiqua* 7, 1967, pp. 121-32, and E. Keall, "Archaeology and the Fire Temple," in *Iranian Civilization and Culture*, Montreal, 1972, pp. 15-22. See also M. L. Chaumont, "Le culte de la déesse Anāhitā (Anahit) dans la religion des monarques d'Iran et d'Armenie au Ier siècle de notre ère," *JA* 253, 1965, pp. 167-81, and "Le culte de Anāhitā à Stakhr et les premiers Sassanides," *RHR* 153, 1958, pp. 154-75. For further earlier discussion of the architectural form of Anāhitā's sanctuaries, see L. I. Ringbom, "Zur Ikonographie der Göttin Ardvi Sura Anahita," *Acta Academiae Aboensis Humaniora* 23, 1957, and *Paradisus terrestris*, Acta Societatis Scientiarum Fennicae, N.S., 1958, the assumptions and conclusions of which are critically questioned by O. Grabar in his review, *Ars Orientalis* 5, 1963, pp. 286-89, but pursued by Ringbom subsequently in "Three Sasanian Bronze Salvers with Paridaeza Motifs," in *Survey of Persian Art* XIV, 1967, pp. 3029-41, where he continues to argue for seminal Sasanian influence in the development of Western forms, such as baptismal fonts, associated with both water and symbols of paradise. Like Trever, he sees an Iranian origin for Roman nymphaia, as derived from hypothetical architectural forms of the cult of Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā, but there is no archeological support for his view.

It is in the arts of Sasanian Iran, and in particular the royal arts, that we find the strongest evidence for the representation of Anāhitā, but even here, confirmation is lacking. There seems to be general agreement that the female

figure who appears on the reverse of coins struck by several Sasanian kings is Anāhitā (see especially R. Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics*, Brunswick, 1971). Göbl has argued persuasively that Anāhitā's presence is related specifically to her role in the investiture of these kings ("Investitur im sasanidischen Iran und ihre numismatische Bezeugung," *WZKM* 56, 1960, pp. 36-51). For eagle symbolism and its use on royal crowns to signify Anāhitā, possibly connoting investiture, see Göbl, op. cit., and L. Trümpelmann, "Šāpūr mit der Adlerkopfkappe," *AMI*, N.S. 4, 1971, pp. 173-85. There is also consensus concerning the image of Anāhitā in the monumental rock carving of the investiture of Narseh at Naqš-e Rostam, similarly in the investiture of Ḵosrow II (?) at Ṭāq-e Bostān, and in the repeated image of an investing goddess on rock-carved capitals (pls. XXXIII-XL), now at Ṭāq-e Bostān (H. Luschey, "Zur Datierung der sasanidischen Kapitelle aus Bisutun und des Monuments von Taq-i-Bostan," *AMI*, N.S. 1, 1968, pp. 129-42). But there is considerable lack of agreement with regard to the identification of female personages in other Sasanian rock reliefs (Sar Mašhad; the relief of Ardašīr I at Naqš-e Raǰab; Barm-e Delak; Tanq-e Qandīl). Harper argues against the identification of Anāhitā in such instances, citing the royal garb of the females represented (P. O. Harper, *Sasanian Silver Vessels. Part One: Royal Imagery*, MMA, 1981, pp. 34f., 38). But a similar argument is used by others to recognize Anāhitā by analogy with the image of Ohrmazd dressed in royal garb (V. G. Loukonin, "Monnaie d'Ardachir I et l'art officiel sassanide," *Iranica Antiqua* 8, 1968 pp. 106-17). L. Vanden Berghe has offered an additional criterium of distinction, based upon his discovery of a much damaged fragmentary relief beneath the monumental rock relief of Ardašīr I (or Šāpūr I) at Dārabgerd ("La découverte d'une sculpture rupestre à Darabgird," *Iranica Antiqua* 13, 1978, pp. 135-48). He identifies the female as Anāhitā depicted in profile with long wavy strands of hair and a mural crown with stepped crenellations. Through an analysis of the historical development of mural crowns, Vanden Berghe suggests that such crowns were reserved for use by goddesses and were not worn by women of the royal family. Whereas Anāhitā in the relief at Naqš-e Rostam wears a similar crown with stepped crenellations, the women who appear in the reliefs at Sar Mašhad, Naqš-e Raǰab, Barm-e Delak and Tang-e Qandīl do not. As for a date, he is circumspect, citing the reigns of Ardašīr I, Narseh, Hormizd II, or Šāpūr II as most likely, in view of these kings' particular interest in and support of her cult.

With Sasanian silver, the attribution of images to Anāhitā is even more problematic. Numerous vessels thought to have been produced in Sasanian

Iran bear representations of naked or scantily clad women in a variety of poses suggestive of dance. They are associated with many different attributes, such as birds, children, animals, flowers, bunches of grapes, branches of vine, vessels, etc.; sometimes they appear within an architectural setting of arcades and columns. D. Shepherd regards these all as hypostases of Anāhitā ("The Iconography of Anahita: Part 1," *Berytus* 28, 1980, pp. 47-86), but her assertions have not met with unanimous approval. J. Duchesne-Guillemin, for example, accepts the identification of Anāhitā in the reliefs at Naqš-e Rostam and Ṭāq-e Bostān, and on the coins of Bahrām II, but he advises more caution with the representations on the silver, which are less certain. He suggests that in these instances it may no longer be the goddess herself shown in multiples, but rather her priestesses ("Art et religion sous les sassanides," in *La Persia nel Medioevo*, Rome, 1971, pp. 377-88). Ettinghausen also objected to the identification of Anāhitā on the silver, because of repeated images on individual vessels; in his view, these dancers may be considered part of a syncretism in the cults of Anāhitā and Dionysos ("A Persian Treasure," *Arts in Virginia* 8, 1967-68, pp. 28-41; idem, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World*, Leiden, 1972, pp. 3-10).

If any of the identifications referred to above are correct, several conclusions might be drawn. It would seem that artists and builders made no attempt to correlate visual imagery with verbal traditions. Either they were unaware of textual descriptions in religious books, myth and legend, or such descriptions were not canonized; perhaps such correlation was irrelevant to their practical needs and concerns. Scholars have generally attempted to explain the notable discrepancies between art and text by hypothetically reconstructing a popular cult, written evidence for which, it is argued, has simply not survived; but this is fraught with difficulties and the status of research on Anāhitā in the visual arts reflects the risks involved. The topic requires critical reevaluation and increased caution in reaching speculative conclusions with regard to Anāhitā's form, presence, nature, and roles as understood from visual sources.

Given in the text.

See also G. Azarpay, "The allegory of *dēn* in Persian art," *Artibus Asiae* 38/1, 1976, p. 41 with ref., especially n. 34.

(C. Bier)

Plate XLI. Silver dirham. Bahrām II (276-293 A.D.) American Numismatic

Society N.Y., 1944-100.30175