

LETTER TO EDITOR

Anahita Arədvī Sūra: The Goddess of Health

Dear Editor,

In reviewing the medical history of Iran, the myths of medicine should be primarily addressed. Therefore, the first sparks of medicine were the goddesses responsible for treating diseases and appealing to them could lead to recovery. The goddesses and worshipping them are among the first inclusive forms of treatment. The author's review of the available literature for finding the goddess of healing and god of medicine in Persian myths interestingly pointed to Anahita (Figure1) who played a very special exclusive role in the mythology in line with Mazd Yasna. Our major body of information on this very goddess is extracted from ĀBĀN YAŠT (ĀBĀN YAŠT is the fifth part of YAŠTs which is in praise of Anahita. Avesta is the religious book of Zoroastrians and consists of several different sections such as Gathas, Yasna and YAŠTs)¹. In the beginning, an introductory sentence indicates the relationship between Anahita and medicine: "Offer up a sacrifice, O Spitama Zarathustra!² Arđvi Sura Anahita³, the wide-expanding and health-giving,

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1- Pourdavoud, 1998.

2- The Persian prophet.

3- The name of an ancient Persian goddess.

who hates the Daevas⁴ and obeys the laws of Ahura⁵”⁶. However, seeking an understanding and description of the health-giving character mentioned in the previous sentence shows the exclusive qualities of the goddess. Anahita is the goddess and guardian of water and thus has a close relationship with fertility. “Ardivisur Anahita purifies the semen in males, the wombs of women, helps pregnant women in parturition and safe delivery of children and fills their breasts with the requisite quantities of milk for the nourishment of their offspring”⁷ and as Mazda says “She purified water for me, semen in males, the wombs of women, and milk in women’s breasts”⁸. Hence, health-giving is a kind of continued purification (health) of everything associated with fruitfulness: both water and fertility.

4- In Avestan literature, Daeva is a supernatural creature with horrible and unpleasant individuality.

5- Ahura Mazda: The name of God and uncreated entity in Gathas.

6- Pourdavoud, 1998.

7- Bahar, 2002.

8- Pourdavoud, 1998.



Figure 1. Anahita Arədvī Sūra in Naqsh-e-Rostam sculpture, Naqsh-e-Rostam, Fars, Iran. (Photograph provided by Abdorreza Naser Moghadasi)



In order to better understand the point in question, the manner of disease development and concept of purity in Mazd Yasna ritual need to be discussed. According to Vandidad, disease originates from Ahriman^{9,10}. Ahriman creates diseases to annihilate the human race. Thus, whoever becomes sick is contaminated by Ahriman and its forces. In the world of Mazda, there is no disease and all live with health and immortality. Ardivisur Anahita is responsible for preservation and permanence of health. For this, unhealthy sick people are not supported by Ardivisur Anahita for they are contaminated by Ahriman forces¹¹. In other words, treatment/healing has no place in Anahita's system and preserving Ahura Mazda territory with its divine forces is important. Anahita is the guardian for women's fertility because in this manner, human species continues to live as one of the major supporters of Mazda. It seems that the concept of treatment meaning eliminating the problem, as mentioned in Vandidad and attributed to a physician called Thritha¹², is more recent.

Now that we have studied the goddess of health, we should find an answer to "How would it be possible to acquire continued health as well as the support of Ardivisur Anahita"?

The question is answered in two ways in ĀBĀN YAŠT. One way is redemptions made to the presence of Anahita including hundreds of cows, sheep and horses. However, the other way that might be the more recent form of prayer and the result of human cognitive evolution is praising with "Haoma¹³ mixed with milk and Barsam¹⁴, the language of wisdom, thoughts, and deeds, force and eloquent words"¹⁵. The change from dedicating redemptions and sacrifices to pure words in the prayer might be the result of Zoroastrian religious revolution. Haoma is a drink that does not cause drunkenness but is exhilarating and is also referred to as bearing an immortalizing quality¹⁶ that is in line with Mazd Yasna's insight, believing that death is caused by Ahriman forces.

All the above-mentioned in addition to the introduction of Anahita as the goddess of health is the result of studying ĀBĀN YAŠT as the most important written source on the issue; however, we know that worshiping Anahita had a strong background in the Iranian culture and several temples are allotted to Anahita, the remains of which can be found in different parts of the country. More specific examination of the claim would materialize through archeological investigations and studying carvings picturing Anahita. Is it possible that pregnant women were taken to the temples for deliver-

9- Ahriman: The higher destructive creature in Zoroastrian literature.

10- Darmesteter, 2003

11- Pourdavoud, 1998.

12- Darmesteter, 2003

13- A religious plant in Avesta (probably Ephedra distachya L.) and a holy drink made from it (namely Prahoma).

14- A kind of religious plant.

15- Pourdavoud, 1998.

16- Bahar, 2002.



ing their baby? Did the human body purify in these temples for accomplishing permanence in health? Re-investigation of archeological findings with a new perspective could be of further assistance in this regard.

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