

Anahita

Iranian goddess. The significance of the goddess A. for Western Aryans is demonstrated by the fact that a whole Yašt (no. 5) in the Avesta is devoted to her. In Achaemenid royal inscriptions A. is first named in the reign of Artaxerxes II (404-359; KENT 1950: 154f A²Sa 4; A²Sd 3f; A²Ha 5).

Scholars have often assumed radical changes in religious politics when accounting for the apparent privileging of A. and →Mithra by Artaxerxes II. They have hypothesized either a cultic re-orientation initiated by the king within the Achaemenid royal house (BOYCE 1982a: 1004) or a “pagan counter-revolution,” rooted in pre-Zoroastrian concepts, against the monotheistic tendencies of Zoroastrianism (thus, e.g., HINZ 1961: 160f; cf. GERSHEVITCH 1959: 19f; MALANDRA 1983: 4, 24f). Crucial support for the latter interpretation is a note of Clemens Alexandrinus (*Protrepticus* V, 65, 3), based on the authority of Berossus, that Artaxerxes II placed cult statues of Aphrodite Anaitis in various cities and provinces of the empire. This Aphrodite has been equated with A. (but see BROSIUS 1998 on the problem of associations of this kind). Scholars have hypothesized that not only was there a shift of emphasis within the pantheon with gods other than →Auramazda playing a more prominent role, but also a shift away from a traditional, aniconic conception of the gods. PANAINO (2000: 36f) attributed this transformation to increasing Mesopotamian influence marked by syncretistic tendencies at the time of Artaxerxes II (but cf. KELLENS 2002-2003).

With one provision (see below), there is no reason to doubt that Artaxerxes II caused cult statues to be erected. However, the assumption that idolatry was first introduced during his reign is supported only by a gloss of Clemens Alexandrinus on the statement of Berossus mentioned above. Clemens seems to have been aware of Herodotus’s well-known statement that the Persians did not have cult statues (*agalmata*) and did not conceive of their gods in human form (*anthrôpoeidês*, *Historiae* 1.131). BOYCE (1982: 179) has long demonstrated that this assertion is unfounded, and therefore Clemens’s remark that people in Persia had converted to idolatry “after a long time” is equally unreliable (JACOBS 2001: 84-86). The naming of A. in inscriptions and the dedication of statues to her, provided this latter tradition holds true, merely indicate

that Artaxerxes II had a special preference for this goddess. This preference could be tied to the fact that she was the patron goddess of his kingship, an assumption based on a report in Plutarch (*Vita Artaxerxis* 3, 2), who stresses that at his coronation Artaxerxes went to a temple in Pasargadae of a warrior goddess similar to Athena (cf. LECOQ 1997: 159). One cannot conclude from this that A. had not been worshipped earlier in Persia, nor even exclude the possibility that she was recognized as an important goddess by earlier Achaemenids. While the latter alternative cannot presently be proven by the sources, MOOREY has thoroughly demonstrated in his study of Persian glyptic that “a more polytheistic attitude (echoing Darius at Behistun: ‘with the help of Ahuramazda and all the gods’)” (1979: 225) pervaded during the entire Achaemenid period (cf. KOCH 1977: 80-119).

Nothing remains today of the cult statues mentioned by Clemens (i.e., Berossus). Also, the famous passage in Yašt 5, 126-129 cannot be a description of one of those cult statues, and is even less likely to be of the one supposedly set up in Bactra (in this sense cf. WINDISCHMANN 1858: 118f; HÜSING 1935: 55-67 [with deep encroachment into the transmitted text]; WIKANDER 1946: 63; MALANDRA 1983: 119; SCHMEJA 1986: 213f; PANAINO 2000: 36-38; to a certain extent also REDING-HOURCADE 1984: 203f; contra UNVALA 1930: 503). The description of the goddess’s appearance goes far beyond the representational capacity of that time, not to mention that large-scale figural art was probably eschewed altogether in the area beyond the Dasht-i Kavir (JACOBS 2001: 84 n. 4).

There have been various attempts in interpreting images of women in glyptic art as representations of A. (RINGBOM 1957: 6f; MOOREY 1979: 223-225, particularly on a seal in the De Clercq collection [DE CLERCQ/MENANT 1888: 211f, no. 385; pl. 34]; note, however, that the divine status of the woman sitting on the left is anything but certain), but these identifications are at best hypothetical (BIER 1982: 1009; BROSIUS 1998: 231, 238).

A 4th cent. cylinder seal found in the Nereid coffin from Gorgippa, ancient Anapa (FURTWÄNGLER 1900: 120 fig. 81; MINNS 1913: 324-328, 410-411; BOARDMAN 1970: no. 878), showing a female statue standing on a →lion (→**Khvarnah 1***), may come closer to the mark. The fact that the figure stands on an animal proves that she is a goddess. However, this is simply another instance of the standard Western Asiatic

association of goddess and lion (→Ishtar, →Kubaba, →Mullissu, etc.). The identification is therefore tentative and cannot be proven.

Selected Bibliography

RINGBOM 1957 • BIER 1982 • SCHMEJA 1986 • JACOBS 2001

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