

ANĀHITĀ AND ALEXANDER

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The twelfth century Persian prose romance *Dārāb Nāma* by Abu Tāher Mohammad al-Tarsusi includes a version of the Iranian Alexander Romance. In this romance, Burān Dokht, daughter of Darius III, fights against Alexander after her father's death. Later she marries Alexander and helps him in his campaigns in India. At important moments in her career she is assisted by, or closely associated with, water. In a dream she is associated with a bird of prey. One of her adventures is similar to the foundation legends of certain Zoroastrian and Muslim shrines to women. On the basis of this and other evidence, it is argued that Burān Dokht is a popular representation of the Iranian goddess Anāhitā.

INTRODUCTION¹

THE TRADITIONAL PERSIAN PROSE ROMANCES originating before the twentieth century form a generically unified body of texts to which students of Persian literature have paid little scholarly attention. These traditional prose romances are long and complicated tales about figures from Iranian legend and myth, with a considerable accretion of folklore and the inventions of storytellers. This combination should not be surprising if the romances, as we have them today, are recognized as written versions of orally transmitted tales. Some of the stories and themes appearing in the romances have their roots in pre-Islamic Iran, although the oldest extant manuscripts of the romances are no older than the early fourteenth century A.D.

The romances draw their story material from the pre-Islamic religious tradition, from the Islamic Iranian epic tradition, from historical sources, and from popular lore. The way in which the various thematic elements are organized, the presence of an appreciable amount of didactic material, and the social and moral values implicit in the stories all indicate that the social function of the romances was edification as well as entertainment. These functions, coupled with a fast-paced, episodic style, made the romances popular in the courts as well as in gathering places where common people would listen to a storyteller. The language of the romances is by and large simple, unarabized, and

informal, with rather incongruous sections in a flowery, literary style added on, like miniature paintings in a text, to appeal to the more refined taste of the educated elite.

This study will focus on a character in one of these romances, the *Dārāb Nāma* of Abu Tāher Mohammad ibn Hasan ibn Hasan ibn ʿAli ibn Musā al-Tarsusi.² *Dārāb Nāma* (hereafter *DN*) is the story of Dārāb, his son Dārāb (representing the historical Darius III), the latter's daughter Burān Dokht, and Alexander the Great. Approximately the first half of *DN* relates the adventures of the two Dārābs, while the second half tells of Alexander's conquest of Iran, his battles against, and later alongside, Burān Dokht, his adventures in India and elsewhere, his quest for the Water of Life, and his ultimate death. In structure, *DN* is actually two romances. The Dārāb romance and the Alexander romance could each have existed independently, but here they have been skillfully woven together with links that penetrate deeply into each story to form a unified, if unwieldy, whole.

The story of Alexander in *DN* is a version of the Iranian variant of the Pseudo-Callisthenes Alexander Romance. In brief, the history of this romance is as follows: the Romance seems to have originated sometime prior to the third century A.D., probably in Alexandria, as a collection of oral legends plus other material which was cast into written form by a writer referred to as Pseudo-Callisthenes. The Romance

¹ I wish to acknowledge gratefully the generous assistance given me by many colleagues in the preparation of this article, and especially that of Professors Richard N. Frye, Mark J. Dresden, and Hamid Mahamedi.

² *Dārāb Nāma-e Tarsusi*, ed. Zabihollāh Safā, 2 vols. (Tehran: Bongāh-e Tarjoma va Nashr-e Ketāb, 1344/1965–1346/1968). Hereafter cited as *DN*. The earliest manuscript known to the editor is dated 992/1584.

entered the Iranian tradition no later than the Sasanian era, was transmitted orally and in writing, and presents itself to us in *DN* as a written version of an oral version. An important agent in the development of the Iranian Alexander Romance was undoubtedly the interplay of the oral and written versions over the years of its existence. Thematically the version in *DN* has many accretions from folklore and, more important, from the Iranian religious tradition.³

Dārāb Nāma displays certain characteristics of Persian orally narrated stories, such as an open-ended, linear structure, a strong emphasis on action, and the repetition of conventional elements. These conventional elements may be standard phrases, stock character types, familiar motifs, stereotyped descriptions of events, or larger structural units such as battles or single combats, which are common to all the prose romances. A character type familiar among the romances and known also to the epic tradition is the warlike woman, and she is of particular interest to us here.

The most famous of the warlike women in the Persian epic tradition is Gordāfrid, from the story of Sohrāb in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāma*. Others in *Shāhnāma* are Jarira, the Turanian wife of Siyāvush, and Gordiya, sister of Bahrām Chobin. Bānu Goshasp, the warlike daughter of Rostam, is the heroine of a short post-*Shāhnāma* epic poem called *Bānu Goshasp Nāma*.⁴ Warlike women also figure prominently in the prose romances, notably *Samak-e Ayyār* and *Firuz Shāh Nāma*.

The usual warlike woman in the romances is actually a conventional upper class woman who is occasionally inclined to rash acts. She does not make a career out of fighting or even continue in this activity for long periods. In fact women are not thought of by the storytellers or by the other characters in the romances as being warlike creatures. Aggressiveness and physical violence were not qualities cultivated or admired in the

women inhabiting the world of the romances, except when required by extremes of passion or danger. The occasionally warlike woman is a stock type in traditional Persian popular literature, but the full-fledged Amazon is unusual, the more so when she is a leading character as is Burān Dokht in *DN*.

THE STORY OF BURĀN DOKHT IN DĀRĀB NĀMA

What follows will be a summary of Burān Dokht's adventures with the focus on aspects relevant to the argument.

Dārāb returns to Iran from a lengthy series of adventures abroad, and is crowned king by his mother Homāy. He attacks the Caesar of Rum (probably the Byzantine emperor) and compels him to surrender, but sets him free when Homāy points out that they are related.⁵ The Caesar soon dies and his brother Feylaqus becomes emperor of Rum. Dārāb and Feylaqus battle each other and Feylaqus is defeated. The only tribute demanded by Dārāb is Feylaqus' daughter Nāhid. She and Dārāb are married, but Dārāb soon sends her back to her father because of her incurable bad breath (*DN*, I, 389–390). She is pregnant however, and gives birth in secret to Alexander (I, 391).⁶

Dārāb has a son Dārāb by another wife. Dārāb *films* and his half-brother Alexander eventually meet on the battlefield as Dārāb lies mortally wounded by the daggers of two traitorous officers. One of Dārāb's dying requests is that Alexander marry his daughter, and the conqueror agrees (I, 462–463). The text of *DN* then says: "They say that he [i.e., Dārāb *films*] had a beautiful and accomplished daughter, who had no peer in her time. At eighteen years of age she had the figure of Siyāvakhsh and the *farr*⁷ of Hoshang, and in strength and bravery she resembled Esfandiyyār. She had, however, a light moustache such that whoever

³ For a general account of the Alexander Romance, see Armand Abel, *Le Roman d'Alexandre* (Brussels: Office de Publicité, 1955), esp. pp. 55–89. For the Persian Alexander Romances, see: Armand Abel, "La Figure d'Alexandre en Iran," in *Convegno sul Tema: La Persia e il Mondo Greco-Romano* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1966), pp. 119–136; Mino S. Southgate, "Portrait of Alexander in Persian Alexander-Romances of the Islamic Era," *JAOS*, 97 (1977), 278–284, and *Iskandarnamah: A Persian Medieval Alexander-Romance*, trans. by Mino S. Southgate (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), esp. pp. 167–185.

⁴ Lithographed Bombay, 1324/1906.

⁵ *DN* I:350: "Homāy said [to the Caesar] . . . 'we have forgiven . . . you because you are from the stock of Feridun and he (Dārāb) is descended from Key Qobād. On the Day of Judgment there should be no enmity between Feridun and Key Qobād.'"

⁶ Hence in this version Alexander is related to the Persian royal house through both his father and his mother, the latter's father being Feylaqus of the stock of Feridun. That Alexander is a half-brother of Darius III is a distinguishing characteristic of the Iranian variant of the Pseudo-Callisthenes Alexander Romance. Burān Dokht is thus Alexander's niece. This fact, and Alexander's bilateral descent from Iranian royalty appear to be unique to *DN*.

⁷ Avestan *x³arənah-*, the (royal) glory or splendor.

saw her thought that she was a man. She wielded a club weighing 250 *mans*. Dārāb loved his daughter very much and had taught her all the arts which befitted a prince. This girl was called Burān Dokht, and according to another story was called Roshanak. They called her Burān Dokht because she had a moustache. And she feared no man" (I,467).

When Burān Dokht learns of her father's death, she swears vengeance on Alexander because she believes, rightly, that he paid the assassins. She gains support of the Persian nobles, raises an army, marches on Alexander, and is decisively defeated. Fleeing the field, she takes refuge in a walled enclosure by a spring (I,471). She regroups her force, defeats Alexander in a battle near Baghdad, and decides to move westward in the direction of Aleppo. The Euphrates presents a difficult obstacle, but she prays at the water's edge and rides her horse into the river. She and those loyal to her cross safely while the traitors, spies and enemies in her army drown (I,482).

After more fighting, the scene of the action moves to the area of Istakhr in southwestern Iran where Burān Dokht's mother, Ābān Dukht, resides. The armies again clash and Alexander captures Burān Dokht. Because of Dārāb's last request and because Alexander would put an end to the fighting, he asks Burān Dokht to marry him. She stoutly refuses. "Has the hawk ever made peace with the owl?" she asks. "It would be better to cut me into pieces. I am descended from seven generations of kings and princes. How could I marry a fatherless Rumi?" (I,497–498). She escapes and returns to Aleppo, there to continue her fight against Alexander's army. Once, while fighting alone, she is forced back toward the fortress. Reaching the edge of the moat, she is able to cross it while the enemy soldiers can not (I,516). Later the fighting turns against her and she flees toward Baghdad, stopping to wash and pray at the edge of a river before crossing (I,518,520).

Returning to Istakhr, she quarrels with her mother and kills her (I,527), proclaiming herself queen of Iran. She dares to venture out of Istakhr, and Alexander sets upon her with his army. She flees to a mountain where she rests, prays and washes by a spring (I,533).⁸ After more fighting she retires to a cave. Alexander and his companions pursue her there but she disappears behind a locked door which Alexander is unable to open (I,545). From here she enters an enchanted palace

through which a stream of water flows. As she follows the stream it leads her to a way of escape (I,554).

Determined to break Alexander's hold on Aleppo. Burān Dokht again sets off for the West. In Baghdad Alexander recognizes her and she is forced to hide. Disguising herself as one Bahman, a Persian soldier loyal to Alexander, she enters his service. To prove her worth she offers Alexander her club to hold but he is unable to lift it (II,5). They return together to Aleppo and en route she has a prophetic dream of crossing water (II,18). Later, throwing off her disguise, she defeats Alexander and pursues him to Istakhr. During a quiet interval she goes alone to the nearby hills searching for a female companion who has fought by her side. Burān Dokht finds her and brings her food. Here the text says: "'Queen,' said [the friend], 'there is flowing water on this mountain. Let's go there and eat our food. . . .'" They went to the bank of the stream and ate. Then [the friend] said, 'Queen, let's go in the water and bathe, and then return to the castle.' They removed their clothes and went into the water. Alexander arrived suddenly and saw them both naked. 'I have found you!' he shouted. The girls quickly dressed, and Burān Dokht said, 'Alexander, since you have seen me naked from head to toe, I will no longer fight you.' The two returned with Alexander to the army camp, where Burān Dokht took Alexander's hand, seated him on the throne, and hailed him as king. . . . Later they returned to Istakhr in Pārs and sent letters and messengers to all the provinces of Iran and Rum saying that Burān Dokht and Alexander were engaged to be married. . . ." (II,92).

After the wedding Alexander sets off, resolved to travel around the world, converse with sages and seek the Water of Life. He installs Burān Dokht as queen of Iran and marches toward India with the purpose of smashing all the idol-temples and converting the people to "the way of God." Enroute he encounters Kaydāvar, king of India, to whom Alexander writes that he has come to India not for treasure but only for the religion of Islam (II,100). Alexander and the Indian king fight and Alexander is forced to send to Burān Dokht for reinforcements, as he can not hold out against the superior Indian forces. Burān Dokht arrives in India, enters a battle and captures the Indian king and his daughter (II,150–151). The fighting continues briskly and Burān Dokht is the main support of the Persian army. In a particularly fierce battle when the enemy uses wizardry, Burān Dokht is divinely protected from fire, water and wind (II,160). Her aid to Alexander is not entirely military however, for once when some important Indian captives refuse to identify themselves,

⁸ Burān Dokht's ritual washing in flowing water, which brings her renewed strength, is stressed throughout the romance.

she devises an elaborate test for them. Part of it consists in asking them to interpret a dream in which a white hawk has come to her (II,165).

The campaign drags on, and one day Burān Dokht finds herself on the opposite side of a river from her army when she learns of enemy plans for a night attack on Alexander. She is able miraculously to cross the water and warn her army (II,187). After more fighting she is captured by an Indian warrior named Jomhur, who has the unusual faculty of being able to remain alive under water for twenty-four hours (II,206). He releases her but she is recaptured and forced into domestic servitude (II,210). She must carry a water pitcher to an Indian prince and his warlike female companion for them to wash their hands. Seizing an opportunity, Burān Dokht uses the water pitcher to kill the woman, then fights her way out of the palace (II,211). The guards wound her but she manages to reach the river's edge and throw herself in. The river carries her underwater for some distance and casts her up in a meadow, there to recover from her wounds in safety (II,213).

Shortly after Burān Dokht's deliverance by the mysterious action of the river, this phase of Alexander's Indian campaign ends, and he and Burān Dokht set off for adventures in other parts of India. On one occasion they reach a mountain surrounded by water. The water is unusual because of its extreme clarity and because it is filled with fish which are there to assist anyone possessed of the *farr*. Alexander gazes into the water and the fish are attracted to him because of his *farr*, but when Burān Dokht looks in, the fish desert Alexander and flock to her, so much more dominant is her *farr* (II,240–241). The mountain is the abode of wizards who send a torrential rainstorm down upon Alexander's army. Burān Dokht however, is able to defeat them and halt the rain (II,245).

The Indian campaign ends and Alexander sails for the Arabian Peninsula, then passes through Mecca and Egypt. He and Burān Dokht part in Egypt, never to meet again, as he sets out in search of the Water of Life and she returns to Iran. The tale ends as Alexander dies in Jerusalem and Burān Dokht dies shortly thereafter in Iran.

ANALYSIS

In this brief sketch of Burān Dokht's adventures, much irrelevant and repetitious detail was omitted and certain elements were placed in relief. Three aspects of the tale of Burān Dokht deserve attention. These concern the nature of the story itself, the association of

Burān Dokht with water, and the relation of Burān Dokht to Alexander. In brief, they are as follows:

An Iranian princess is introduced into an Iranian version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes Alexander Romance; she fights *against* Alexander the Great, and achieves a measure of success. Later she marries him and goes on to fight *with* him in such a militant fashion that her prowess on the battlefield overshadows his and casts Alexander in a most unusual light. In addition to being a warrior, she is Alexander's advisor and organizer as well.

The oral romance tradition in Persian is conservative in many ways. One comes to expect the thematic framework of love and war to support a varied array of plots with handsome Persian (or Persianized) heroes, beautiful (and occasionally warlike) heroines, wise vizirs, old kings, timorous merchants, clever *ʿayyārs*, evil wizards, and a host of minor characters. Just as the characters are largely conventional, so are the events in which they are involved. The present story, with respect to its major characters and events, is, to my knowledge, unique in the Persian romance tradition.

While warlike women appear frequently in many varieties of Iranian stories, they rarely play a leading role as does Burān Dokht. The *paris* of Persian folktales and romances, while often warlike, are supernatural beings and should not be considered equivalent to the warlike women in question, since the latter, including Burān Dokht, are regarded as actual human beings in the world of the story.

The second remarkable aspect of this story is the association of Burān Dokht with water. This association is frequent and for that reason the more unusual. It is definitely not the rule in Islamic Persian literature for a human character to be closely associated with a natural element. The exceptions are figures from popular religion and legend, such as Loqmān and Khezr. Loqmān appears from time to time walking on water. Khezr is often associated with water, as indeed he is in the Iranian Alexander Romance and, true to form, he appears toward the end of *DN* to guide Alexander in the darkness as they search for the Water of Life. Khezr and Loqmān are familiar folk figures throughout the Middle East however, appearing in many tales as minor characters and performing specific roles for which they are well known. Burān Dokht in *DN* is of an entirely different order.

Let us recapitulate Burān Dokht's association with water. Early in the story we find her taking refuge in a walled enclosure by a spring. Later she safely crosses the Euphrates while all those disloyal to her drown. Her mother's name is Ābān Dokht (i.e., Daughter of

the Waters), and she resides in Istakhr. While retreating from Alexander's attack at Aleppo, Burān Dokht is able to cross the castle moat while none of the enemy can do so. Fleeing from Aleppo, she stops to pray and wash by a river. Again, outside Istakhr, she prays and washes by a spring as Alexander's army pursues her in the mountains. Taking refuge in a cave, she is led to a magic palace where a stream of water provides her means of escape. She has a prophetic dream of crossing water while she is traveling in disguise with Alexander. There soon follows the climactic scene where Alexander sees her bathing nude in a stream, and she ceases to oppose him.

During the Indian campaign she is divinely protected from fire, water and wind in a battle against an enemy who employs sorcery. Once she miraculously crosses a river to warn her army of an impending attack. Later she is captured, then released, by an Indian warrior who has the ability to remain alive underwater for twenty-four hours. She is captured again by some Indian nobles and kills her militant female captor with a water pitcher which she has been forced to carry. Fighting her way out of the palace, she jumps into a river which carries her underwater to a meadow where it casts her up to recover from her wounds. The fish in the crystal-like water surrounding the wizards' mountain desert Alexander when Burān Dokht approaches with her superior *farr*. In battling the wizards, Burān Dokht is able to halt a torrential rainstorm sent against Alexander's troops.

These associations of Burān Dokht with water seem too consistent and complex to be mere accidents of storytelling. Within the conventions of traditional Persian narrative, characters behave in a relatively predictable fashion according to their social status, their relations with the other characters, and their role in any particular sort of story. If they are divinely assisted, their aid comes as a dream or as direct help. Divine intervention is normally not expressed through the continual interaction of a character with nature.

The third striking aspect of the story could not be brought out easily in the summary. It has to do with the nature and spirit of Burān Dokht's support for Alexander and the latter's ambivalent conception of his mission in India and elsewhere. In brief, Alexander conceives of himself in *DN* alternately as a world conqueror and an Islamic crusader. While he is fighting as a world conqueror, Burān Dokht is his greatest support. She fearlessly attacks when Alexander would prefer to avoid a fight. She commands his army in major campaigns, fights in single combat against enemy heroes, and undertakes independent military activity

without the knowledge or consent of Alexander. When there is a lull in the fighting she acts as his advisor. On the other hand, when the Conqueror becomes the Crusader, with the express intent to destroy temples, smash idols, uproot paganism and bring the people back to the straight path of monotheism, Burān Dokht seems to withdraw her support and reduce her participation to a bare minimum.

These three aspects of the story, i.e., its unusual nature within the Iranian literary tradition because a warlike female is a main character, the association of this female with water, and her disassociation from Alexander when he is playing his role of Islamic crusader, strongly suggest that Burān Dokht is a popular representation of an Iranian deity. If this hypothesis is valid, the logical ancestor of Burān Dokht within the Iranian pantheon would be the ancient goddess Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā.

ANĀHITĀ

Let us examine some aspects of the goddess Anāhitā within the Iranian religious tradition. Yasht V of the Avesta is dedicated to this goddess. Her physical description is given vividly in (64): "Then Arədvī Sūrā Anāhita approached in the form of a beautiful maiden, very powerful, beautifully formed, who is high-girded, tall of stature (?), of noble descent, exalted, whose feet are shod with shining gold-laced shoes."⁹ Much this same description is repeated in V.79 and V.126, and reminds one in a general way of the description of Burān Dokht from *DN* above.

Anāhitā is well-known as a goddess of water and a fertility goddess.¹⁰ In the same Yasht the supreme god Ahura Mazda says (1): "Worship for me, O Spitāma Zarathuštra, the heroic, pure Arədvī (Arədvī Sūrā Anāhita), who extends herself widely, who is health-giving . . . holy, who furthers water channels, the holy, who furthers herds, the holy, who furthers fields, the

⁹ Herman Lommel, *Die Yāst's des Awesta, übersetzt und eingeleitet* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), pp. 37–38: (64) "Da kam herzu Urdvī Sūrā Anāhita in Gestalt eines schönen Mädchens, eines sehr kräftigen, schöngewachsenen, das hochgegürtet, hoch von Wuchs (?), vornehmer Herkunft, edel ist, die Füße mit goldgeschnürten glänzenden Schuhen bekleidet."

¹⁰ Lommel, p. 26: "Bezüglich der Göttin arədvī als einer mythischen Verkörperung von Urgewässern himmlischen Ursprungs ist die Beziehung zu dem heiligen Element Wasser ja klar genug . . ."

holy, who furthers possessions, the holy, who furthers the land. (2): Who prepares (purifies) the seed of all males, who makes ready for birth the offspring of all females, (who) makes all females deliver easily, who provides milk for all female beings at the proper time. (3): The great, far-famed, who is of the magnitude of all the waters that flow here on the earth. . . . (5): And the flow from this one Water distributes itself for me over all the seven climes, and this one Water flows for me equally in summer and winter. She (Arədvī) purifies for me the waters, the seed of (all) males, the offspring of (all) females, the milk of females."¹¹

In this Yasht Anāhitā has another aspect as well. (7) reads: "O Zarathuštra, Arədvī Sūrā Anāhita came forth from the creator, the wise; beautiful were (her) white arms, as strong as horses; . . . who flows (?hastens) with very strong arms . . ."¹²

Anāhitā is she (11): "who drives the chariot ahead, holding the reins of the chariot as she travels on this chariot. . . . (13): who has four steeds to draw (her), all uniformly white, equally fast and tall, who vanquish the hostility of all enemies, of the devil and of men, of sorcerers and witches, of tyrants, of obdurate princes and priests. . ."¹³

¹¹ Ibid., p. 32: (1) ". . . verehere sie mir, o Spitāma Zarathuštra, die heldenhafte reine Urdvi (Ardvī sūrā anāhita), die weit sich ausbreitet, heilkräftig . . . die fromme, die die Wassergräben fördert, die fromme, die die Herden fördert, die fromme, die die Äcker fördert, die fromme, die den Besitz fördert, die fromme, die das Land fördert. (2) Die den Samen von allem Männlichen bereitet (läutert), die die Leibesfrucht von allem Weiblichen zur Geburt bereitet, (die) alles Weibliche leicht gebären macht, die allen weiblichen Wesen zur gehörigen rechten Zeit Milch schafft. (3) Die grosse weitberühmte, die von solcher Grösse ist wie alle Gewässer, die hier auf Erden fließen. . . . (5) Und der Abfluss von diesem einen Wasser verteilt sich (mir) über alle die 7 Erdteile, und von diesem einen Wasser strömt es (mir) gleichmässig herab im Sommer und im Winter. Sie (Urdvī) läutert mir [i.e., Ahura Mazda] die Gewässer, sie die Samen von (allem) Männlichen, sie die Leibesfrucht der Weiber, sie die Milch der Weiber."

¹² Ibid., p. 33: (7) *Da ging hervor, o Zarathuštra, die Urdvī Sūrā Anāhita von (= aus) dem Schöpfer, dem Weisen; schön waren (ihre) weissen Arme, pferdestark; . . . die strömende (?eilende) mit sehr starken Armen . . .*

¹³ Loc cit.: (11) *"Die vorn den Wagen lenkt, die Zügel des Wagens haltend, während sie auf diesem Wagen fährt. . . . (13) Die vier Zugpferde hat, alle einfarbig weiss, gleich schnell und erhaben, die die Feindschaft aller Feinde überwinden, der*

It is she who grants boons to the Iranian heroes that they may smite the *daēvas* and their mortal enemies. Haošyanha Paradāta, Yima, θraētaona, Kərəsāspa, Kavi Usa, Haosravah, and Tusa are some of the heroes who sacrificed to her in Yasht V, and to whom she granted boons. When Dahāka and Fraŋrasyan sacrificed to her to gain the power to pursue their evil designs, she denied the boons. Ahura Mazda says to her (86): "The valiant men must entreat you for speed for their horses and the superior power of the Royal Glory. . ."¹⁴ Again, in (53): "The powerful warrior Tusa worshipped her on the backs of horses, asking strength for the teams, health for himself and his people, that they detect the enemies before they detect them, to drive back the foes and all at once to defeat the hostile, antagonistic opponents."¹⁵

Thus we see in the Yasht dedicated to her that she is worshipped both as a fertility and water goddess, and as a war goddess. She is cast as a protectress who assures victory to the Iranian heroes who worship her, and denies it to their enemies. There is, however, a considerable difference between the Anāhitā of Yasht V and the Burān Dokht of *DN*, and we must now try to discover what connection there may be between the two.

We have records of the Anāhitā cult in Iran from Achaemenian times to the present day.¹⁶ The fact of this continuity is remarkable in itself, and important for our purpose here. It is recorded that Artaxerxes II (404–359 B.C.) caused the cult of Anāhitā, along with other cults, to flourish.¹⁷ From various sources we

Teufel und Menschen, der Zauberer und Hexen, der Tyrannen, verstockten Fürsten und Pfaffen . . ."

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 39: (86) *"dich sollen die tapferen Männer um Schnelligkeit der Rosse und Überlegenheit des Glückglanzes bitten. . . ."* where *Glückglanz* = *farr*.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 36: (53) *"Sie verehrte der starke Krieger Tusa auf den Rücken der Pferde, Kraft erbittend für die Gespanne, Gesundheit für sich und die Seinen, im Erspähen der Feinde diesen zuvorkommen, die Gegner zurückzuschlagen und mit einem Mal zu besiegen die feindseligen gegnerischen Wiedersacher."*

¹⁶ See Mary Boyce, "Bībī Shahrbānu and the Lady of Pārs," *BSOAS*, 30 (1967), pp. 30–44.

¹⁷ A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago press, 1960), pp. 423, 471, 479. See also Old Persian Inscription A²Sa of Artaxerxes II in R. Kent, *Old Persian*, 2nd rev. ed. (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1953), p. 154: "By the favor of Ahuramazda, Anaitis, and Mithras, this palace I built. May Ahuramazda, Anaitis, and

know that this ruler established shrines to Anāhitā in Susa, Ecbatana and elsewhere, but we have only the scantiest details about the manner in which the goddess was worshipped in these temples. Once the cult was established, it spread widely beyond the borders of Iran, and took root strongly in Armenia and Asia Minor. At this time Anāhitā seems to have been worshipped both as a water and fertility goddess and as a war goddess. This is borne out by Yasht V in which we see her in both roles.¹⁸

The area of Persepolis and specifically the city of Istakhr were long known as centers of Anāhitā worship. A temple or sanctuary of Anāhitā near Persepolis has been attested since the time of Artaxerxes II.¹⁹ Tabari reports that Sasān, the grandfather of Ardashir I, was superintendent of what Tabari calls the fire temple of Anāhitā at Istakhr.²⁰ A fire temple of Anāhitā at Istakhr is mentioned in the third-century inscription of Kartīr at Naqsh-e Rostam.²¹ This old shrine city became the religious center of the Sasanian empire and remained so until the Arabic conquest. It is significant for our purposes here that Burān Dokht's mother, Ābān Dukht, resides in Istakhr, and that it is to this city that Burān Dokht often returns during her conflict with Alexander. Ābān is a synonym of Anāhitā, and the Yasht dedicated to Anāhitā is the Ābān Yasht.

As early as Achaemenian times there seems to have been an emphasis on Anāhitā's warlike qualities. Plutarch, in his biography of Artaxerxes II, reports that the new king was initiated in the sanctuary of a militant goddess, whom we can surmise to have been Anāhitā.²² Her widespread popularity during the

Parthian period is attested in a number of sources, and it has been speculated that during this time her cult became dominant over those of Ahura Mazda and Mithra, particularly in Azerbaijan and Armenia.²³

Indications of a cult of Anāhitā as a war goddess do not stop with the Parthian period. It is recorded by Tabari that Ardashir I (A.D. 226?–240), before his battle with the Parthian king Ardavān, wrote to the latter threatening to send his head and treasure to the fire temple in Ardashir-Khurrah after his victory.²⁴ After defeating Ardavān, Ardashir sent the severed heads of his enemies to an Anāhitā temple.²⁵ Shapur II (A.D. 309–379) did the same with the heads of Christians executed in Pārs.²⁶ Chaumont states that Anāhitā was the only one among the gods to whom heads were offered in the temple.²⁷ From this it is apparent that the militant aspect of Anāhitā was prominent in her cult as late as the fourth century A.D. One can surmise that such a cult continued in existence within the larger framework of Zoroastrianism after the death of Shapur II, and that memories and traces of it lingered on for a long time after the cult itself had declined in importance under the Sasanians. Thus there appears to have been ample precedent in actual cultic practice to permit the development of a literary representation of Anāhitā as a militant and warlike female.

Anāhitā was also closely connected with royalty and the legitimacy of kingship. We have already mentioned that Artaxerxes II was initiated in the sanctuary of a militant goddess, possibly Anāhitā. Yazdegird II (A.D. 632–651), the last Sasanian ruler, was proclaimed king by the nobles of Pārs in what Tabari calls the fire temple (i.e., the Anāhitā temple) of Ardashir at Istakhr.²⁸

Göbl has studied investiture scenes on Sasanian coins and has identified Anāhitā or a symbol of her on coins depicting the investiture of Ardashir I, Shapur I, Hormozd I (some question), Bahram II, Narse, Hormozd II, Shapur II (some question), and Shapur III.²⁹ It is probably Narse (A.D. 292–303), a self-

Mithras protect me from all evil, and that which I have built may they not shatter nor harm."

¹⁸ Yasht V probably dates from the period of Artaxerxes II or slightly later. See I. Gershevitch, "Old Iranian Literature," in B. Spuler, ed., *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, I, IV, ii, 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1968), p. 20.

¹⁹ See M. Chaumont, "Le Culte d'Anāhitā à Staxr et les premiers Sassanides," *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 153 (1958): 154–175, for references to the relevant sources.

²⁰ Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'al-Mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901), 2:814.

²¹ M.-L. Chaumont, "L'inscription de Kartīr," *JA*, 248 (1960), pp. 343, 347 (line 8 of the text and translation).

²² Plutarch, *Lives*, tr. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 10:130–131. It is uncertain whether this statement refers to Anāhitā as worshipped at the time of Artaxerxes II, or as worshipped at the time of

Plutarch. In any case, the warlike nature of the goddess as a specific focus goes back to at least the first century A.D.

²³ R. Ghirshman, *Iran* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1961), p. 269.

²⁴ Tabari, op. cit., 2:818.

²⁵ Ibid., 2:819.

²⁶ Chaumont, "Le Culte d'Anāhitā," p. 159.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 160.

²⁸ Tabari, op. cit., 2:1067.

²⁹ R. Göbl, "Investitur im sassanidischen Iran," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 56(1960), p. 47.

proclaimed worshipper of Anāhitā,³⁰ who is represented on a relief at Naqsh-e Rostam, standing before Anāhitā who invests him with the sovereignty.³¹ The rock relief at Tāq-e Bustān represents the investiture of either Peroz (A.D. 459–484)³² or Khosrow II (A.D. 591–628)³³ by Ahura Mazda in the presence of Anāhitā, who can be recognized by the water jug which she carries in her left hand.

Investiture plays a part in a scene in *DN* which represents a crucial turning point in Alexander's relations with Burān Dokht, and thus in the course of the plot. The scene in question takes place outside Istakhr, and consists of two parts. In the first part Alexander sees Burān Dokht bathing naked, and as a result she ceases to oppose him and agrees to marry him. How can her complete capitulation at this point be explained? A clue is given in the second part of the scene when Burān Dokht takes Alexander's hand, seats him on the throne, and proclaims him king of Persia. With this in mind, it is possible to interpret the scene as a symbolic visit of Alexander to the great Anāhitā shrine at Istakhr, and his being granted a boon by the goddess. As Yasht V makes clear in several places, Anāhitā will grant boons to Iranian heroes who request them from her, boons in the form of aid against the enemies of Iran. Alexander qualifies as an Iranian in this case because of his bilateral descent from the Persian royal house. The naked bathing scene represents Anāhitā in her shrine; here, the water. Although the Anāhitā temple at Istakhr is often referred to as a fire temple, archaeological evidence suggests that both fire and water were associated in some large Sasanian sanctuaries, such as the fire temple at Bishapur and the large temple complex at Takht-e Soleyman,³⁴ Alexander seeing her in this state represents his making direct

and private contact with the goddess, as a worshipper would hope to do in a shrine. The boon that she grants is two-fold. First, she stops opposing him and begins actively to support him, as is symbolized by their marriage and borne out by her subsequent behavior. Second, she enthrones him as king of Persia. We have already seen that both aid against the enemy and investiture of kings are boons bestowed by Anāhitā on those who worship her.

Other representations of Anāhitā may be found on silver objects of the Sasanian era. Lukonin in *Persia II* illustrates six objects, five tentatively dated fifth–sixth century A.D., and one dated merely "late Sasanian."³⁵ Dorothy G. Shepherd, in a forthcoming article on the iconography of Anāhitā, discusses evidence for the representation of Anāhitā derived from rock reliefs, terracotta figurines, seals, and numerous silver vessels from the Sasanian period.³⁶ The point here is that all of these reliefs and objects demonstrate that Anāhitā was a productive source of visual representations during the entire Sasanian period.

The rock reliefs, coins, and silver objects testify to the existence of Anāhitā worship, in one form or another, until at least the seventh century and probably later. Thus there would have been sufficient opportunity for the worship of this goddess to assume various popular or non-official forms, and for it to penetrate and be penetrated by folklore and popular storytelling. In such a process the standard iconographical or symbolic elements will assume new forms as they move into new milieus and contexts. They will shed some of their characteristic features, acquire others not previously possessed, and emphasize or suppress certain of their original aspects so as to render the new forms in some measure unlike their source. A complex example of this will now be discussed.

An important element in the iconography of Anāhitā is her frequent association with a bird. She is often depicted on Sasanian vessels and trays of silver and bronze as accompanied by doves and peacocks. Ringbom illustrates a Sasanian vase which he claims depicts Anāhitā, and describes it in the following terms: "We see on the now-lost silver vase which belonged to the Stroganoff Collection, a cult statue.

³⁰ W. B. Henning, "A Farewell to the Khagan of the Aq-Aqatārān," *BSOAS*, 14(1952), p. 518. Narse says, in the Paikuli inscription, "... we set out from Armenia towards Ērān-šahr in the name of Ohrmizd, of All-the-Gods, and of Anāhit the Lady." My thanks to Dr. Christopher J. Brunner for this reference.

³¹ J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *La Religion de l'Iran ancien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1962), p. 282. Arthur U. Pope, *A Survey of Persian Art* (1938–39; rpt. in 12 vols, London: Oxford University Press, 1964–65), 7:pl. 157b.

³² K. Erdmann, "Das Datum des Tāk-i Bustān," *Ars Islamica*, 4(1937), 79–97.

³³ Duchesne-Guillemin, *op. cit.*, p. 292. Pope, *Survey*, 7:pl. 160b.

³⁴ Ghirshman, *op. cit.*, p. 315, and Edward J. Keall, "Archaeology and the Fire Temple," in Charles Adams, ed.,

Iranian Civilization and Culture (Montreal: McGill University Institute of Islamic Studies, 1972), pp. 18–19.

³⁵ V. Lukonen, *Persia II* (Cleveland: World, 1967), pls. 172, 181, 183, 184, 188, 189, 195.

³⁶ Dorothy G. Shepherd, "The Iconography of Anahita." My thanks to Dr. Shepherd for her kindness in making this article available to me.

The pedestal under the goddess's feet indicates this. She holds a dove in her hand, has peacocks in front of her, and stands under an arch of an arcade which is decorated with birds. . . .³⁷ Shepherd, on the basis of a greatly expanded repertoire, relates this figure to others bearing similar attributes including birds, and states that proof is now unequivocal that these figures are representations of Anāhitā.³⁸

In keeping with her dual nature as goddess of water and fertility, and militant goddess of victory, Anāhitā is associated not only with the peaceful dove, but also with the hawk and other birds of prey. A bird of prey accompanies her image on Sasanian coins, and it also appears on Sasanian silver vessels and plates. A striking example may be seen on a late Sasanian plate which shows Anāhitā being held by a giant bird of prey.³⁹ The small figure of the goddess is dwarfed by that of the great bird which seems, however, to shield and protect her.

It was mentioned earlier that at one point Burān Dokht compares herself with a hawk, *bāz*, when she says, "Has the hawk ever made peace with the owl?" (*DN*, I,497). Both aspects of the bird symbolism, the peaceful and the militant, appear together in an extraordinary dream of Burān Dokht's (*DN*, II,165ff.) in which these two opposing natures are united. Such a joining of opposites is a well-known dream phenomenon. Burān Dokht dreams that a white hawk, *bāz-e sapid*, comes to her and she strokes it as it sits beside her. The hawk lays an egg and immediately breaks the shell with its beak. There emerge two chicks, one a black dove and the other a white hawk. The dream is interpreted by an Indian sage in the story to mean that the white hawk represents Burān Dokht herself, and the black dove stands for an important Indian warrior whom Burān Dokht has just captured. Thus the militant bird of prey has overcome the mild-mannered dove, and on another level, at this point the militant nature of the goddess has overcome her peaceful and fertile nature.

There is an additional aspect of this iconographical complex which must be explored. Burān Dokht was mentioned earlier as being possessed of the *farr*. In Yasht 19.35, 36, 38 the *farr* is described as leaving

Yima three times, each time "in *Gestalt eines Adler-vogels*."⁴⁰ The Ger. *Adlervogel*, 'eagle,' translates the Avestan *vārəyna-*. Av. *vārəyna-* corresponds to *w'ryn'y* in Buddhist Soghdian, and *w'ryn'yk* in Khwarazmian, and this latter is glossed by al-Zamakhshari as the Arabic *zurraq*.⁴¹ Ar. *zurraq* is in turn glossed by the same writer as Persian *shāhin*, *bāz-e sapēd*, *chuzhah robāy*.⁴² Thus the *farr* is clearly associated in Khwarazmian and Persian with a white bird of prey, a hawk or falcon. It appears that the white hawk that came to Burān Dokht in her dream is none other than this same Av. *vārəyna-* which represented the *farr* as it left Yima, and in *DN* represents the *farr* coming to Burān Dokht.

This does not exhaust our discussion of the *farr* and its connection with Burān Dokht. It will be recalled that in *DN*, during Burān Dokht's adventures with Alexander in India, the two came to a mountain surrounded by a moat containing a great many fish (*DN*, II,240). There follows a strange scene during which Burān Dokht attracts the fish to herself because her *farr* is more powerful than Alexander's. The extreme clarity of the water is stressed in the text, and this reminds us of the passages in the Yashts which describe one of Anāhitā's functions as purifying the waters. This curious scene could be passed off as a storyteller's fantasy if we did not have the possibility of a link between Anāhitā and the fish motif on a piece of Sasanian metalwork.

The Staatliche Museen, Berlin, possesses a Sasanian bronze tray displaying a central circle which contains four water jugs alternating with pairs of peacocks. Surrounding this is a watercourse filled with fish. Of four succeeding concentric bands of decoration, two are arcades and two are simple vine meanders. The central portion with the water jugs and peacocks has been interpreted as a symbol of Anāhitā as a water and fertility goddess.⁴³ If the water jugs and peacocks can also be understood as symbolizing sources of water and fertility, and therefore life, this would express one of the essential aspects of Anāhitā. Then the whole central composition could stand for a place where such force is concentrated, i.e., a sanctuary of

⁴⁰ "in the form of an eagle," Lommel, op. cit., p. 179.

⁴¹ Z. V. Togan, ed., *Horezmce Tercümelî Muqaddimat al-Adab* (Istanbul: Sucuoğlu, 1951), p. 56, line 5.

⁴² al-Zamakhshari, *Pishrow-e Adab yā Muqaddamat al-Adab*, ed. Mohammad Kāzem Emām (Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1342/1963–1343/1965), I.1:468.

⁴³ L. Ringbom, "Three Sasanian Bronze Salvers with Paridaeza Motifs," Pope, *Survey*, 14:3032, and fig. 1094.

³⁷ L. Ringbom, "Zur Ikonographie der Göttin Ardvī Sura Anahita," *Acta Academiae Aboensis: Humaniora*, 23.2(1957), p. 15.

³⁸ Shepherd, op. cit., pp. 6–7.

³⁹ Lukonin, op. cit., pl. 195. Lukonin, curiously, identifies this large bird as Garuda.

Anāhitā, as well as for the goddess herself. The plausibility of this interpretation is strengthened by the presence of the surrounding watercourse and fish. It is precisely such a watercourse with fish that Burān Dokht must cross in *DN* to reach the wizards' mountain, a place where only she can go. It is a place where forces powerful enough to control meteorological phenomena are centered.

In the story, the fish help Burān Dokht cross under the water without drowning, and reach the mountain. Alexander must remain behind. The reason for crossing to the mountain is to break a spell in the form of a heavy rainstorm which the wizards have sent against Alexander's forces. Burān Dokht, because of her particular nature, is able to break the spell. In other words, she is able to control the rain, one of the natural phenomena which in the traditional romances can be controlled only by divine force or by sorcerers practicing evil magic. This again should come as no surprise if we think of Burān Dokht in the context of Anāhitā. In Yasht V.120 we read that Anāhitā is she "for whom the Wise Lord has created four stallions: the wind, the rain, the snow and the hail."⁴⁴ Here Anāhitā is shown in full control of these forces of nature, three of which are forms of water.

There is one additional event in the story of Burān Dokht which may bear on the argument that Burān Dokht is a popular representation of Anāhitā. The background to this discussion is set by Mary Boyce in her article "Bībī Shahrbanū and the Lady of Pārs" (see note 16). Here Dr. Boyce describes two shrines to women, one Zoroastrian and one Muslim. The shrine of Bānū-Pārs is one of the six major Zoroastrian shrines near the city of Yazd, while that of Bībī Shahrbanū is a Shia shrine on a hillside overlooking the city of Rey. Each of these shrines has a foundation legend which links it to a daughter of Yazdegird III who was fleeing for her life from the Arab invaders. As the princess in each case was about to collapse from fatigue and thus be captured, she called upon God for help. In each case the mountain opened, took her in, and closed again. There is evidence that suggests that both of these shrines existed before Islam, and may have been shrines to Anāhitā. They had been reconsecrated, as it were, during Islamic times, using a legend which connects them with the pre-Islamic era.

⁴⁴ Lommel, op. cit., p. 43 (120) "Welcher der Weise Herr vier Hengste erschaffen hat: den Wind und den Regen und den Schnee und den Hagel . . ."

At one point in her career, Burān Dokht is fleeing from Alexander and his troops in the mountains near Istakhr. She is wounded by the enemy and takes refuge in a cave. As Alexander pursues her she retreats deeper into the cave, and just as he is about to capture her she reaches an iron door which she can not open. Calling upon God for aid, she is given the power to open the door and retreat within. The door closes and Alexander is unable to open it. Burān Dokht proceeds to a magic palace and garden containing a river, while Alexander is forced to make his way back out of the cave.

Is there a connection between the two shrine foundation legends and the story of Burān Dokht and the cave? The situations are similar: in one case an Achaemenian princess flees for her life before an invading Macedonian and is received into a mountain. In the other case a Sasanian princess (or possibly two) flees for her life before an invading Arab and is received into a mountain. In each case the Persian empire has just been overthrown by a non-Persian. Two possibilities suggest themselves:

First, these tales could be part of the larger complex of myths and legends having to do with a change of dynasty in Iran. The general substance of these myths and legends has been summarized by Richard Frye:

The idea of a saviour [in the Iranian tradition], however, is not that of an earthly king who stands above men and leads them, but one who knows suffering and can understand the sorrows of common men. So in Iran this aspect is present in what one might call the myth of the founder of a dynasty, which myth has become almost a dogma in the Persian concept of kingship. The general features of this myth, which becomes then real history for the Persians, are relationship to the preceding dynasty or possessing royal blood, persecution with flight or exile, and concealment of royal origins, plus a difficult life among nomads or peasants. Finally a son, grandson or later descendant of the exile by manifest signs and qualities receives recognition and the *khvarnah* or imperial glory descends upon him so that he founds a new dynasty.⁴⁵

This interpretation stresses the legitimacy of Iranian kingship and its messianic nature. What we find in the shrine legends and the story of Burān Dokht is an

⁴⁵ Richard N. Frye, *Persia* (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 28.

aspect of the Iranian dynastic myth which stresses the purity of the royal blood line. Rather than submit to a possible marriage to a non-Iranian, one female member of the royal house is divinely "preserved." This is parallel to another part of the dynastic myth which has the male heir retire from active contact with society and live a difficult and isolated life as a shepherd or nomad. This, likewise, "preserves" at least one descendant at a time of crisis by removing him from the scene.

Secondly, and more to the point of this study, it is possible that the story of the cave, and the other adventures of Burān Dokht, are popular stories of Anāhitā which are preserved only in this text. We have almost no textual material on Anāhitā which is not in the Zoroastrian religious books or the accounts of historians such as Tabari. That is to say, we have no *popular*, as opposed to official or courtly, texts about Anāhitā. Dorothy Shepherd remarks that the iconography of the Sasanian silver vessels bearing representations of Anāhitā is not to be sought in Zoroastrian texts, but that it has its origin in the myths, the cults, and the art of the ancient Near East and the Classical World.⁴⁶ Maybe we need not look so far afield for some of this iconography, but attempt to find it in Iranian tradition itself.

CONCLUSION

We have now seen a number of parallels and congruences between the character Burān Dokht as

presented in *DN* and the goddess Anāhitā of the pre-Islamic Iranian pantheon. Burān Dokht's association with water occurs too frequently for it to be an accident of storytelling, and Anāhitā is a goddess of water and fertility. We have also seen that Anāhitā was a militant goddess who received offerings of severed heads in her temples, one of which was in Istakhr. She also bestowed victory on the Iranian heroes. Burān Dokht's warlike nature and her accomplishments on the battlefield rival, and even outshine, those of Alexander. Burān Dokht is also associated with the city of Istakhr, where she enthrones Alexander and proclaims him king of Iran after his symbolic visit to her temple. Similarly, Anāhitā is associated with the investiture of a number of Iranian kings from Artaxerxes II to Yazdegird III. Certain aspects of the iconography of Anāhitā such as doves, birds of prey, and fish appear prominently in the story of Burān Dokht. Finally, we have seen that Burān Dokht, through her being received into a mountain, can be associated with the foundation legends of two shrines to women. These foundation legends link the shrines to pre-Islamic Iran, and the shrines themselves were possibly dedicated to Anāhitā. On the basis of this evidence, it seems highly likely that the adventures of Burān Dokht have at their core a complex of popular stories about Anāhitā.

None of the other versions of the Iranian Alexander Romance known to me includes an account of Burān Dokht. It is a tale which has survived apparently only among storytellers who transmitted the oral versions of the traditional romances. It is a measure of the strength of popular religious tradition that a pre-Islamic Iranian tale such as this could survive for perhaps a half a millenium in the oral literature of Islamic Persia.

⁴⁶ Op. cit.