

## **The Lady Represented in Narseh's Relief: Shapurdokhtak or Anahita?**

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Received: 22/12/2008

Accepted: 22/6/2009

### **Abstract**

Among the various of Sasanian kings, Narseh (293-302 A.D.) is the one whose important and striking rock relief remained at Naqsh-e Rostam in Iran's Fars province. This relief records investiture ceremony from Anahita (known as Goddess of fertility and protector of water).

Until now, various views and interpretations have been put forwarded about the real identity and historical theme of this relief. But the attribution of a lady to Shapurdokhtak II (Narseh's wife) is the latest and most controversial view given by Alireza Shapur Shahbazi, who has conducted excavations and archaeological studies at Takht-e Jamshid for several years.

In fact, this attribution has also provoked the authors of the present article hence; he has tried to highlight the depiction through opinions of various researches. The present study supports the accuracy and validity of the attributed lady to water goddess Anahita and refuses other theories.

**Keywords:** Narseh, Anahita, Shapurdokhtak, Naqsh-e Rostam, Sasanian rock reliefs.

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## Introduction

The article "A Study of Sasanian Sculpture Art: Narseh's Relief at Naqsh-e Rostam in Fars" (Shapur Shahbazi, 1983: 255-268) attempts to attribute the identity of the lady in the scene to Shapurdokhtak<sup>1</sup>, the wife of the Sassanian king, however most of the contemporary researchers and orientalist believe that she is the water goddess Anahita that handing over the Narseh the ring of kingship.

Totally, the contents of the said article contain three sections: At the first part, the scene of relief is described briefly and also geographical position and geometric dimension is indicated (Ibid: 255-257). At the second part, the author expresses the views and opinions of various researchers about the relief like R. Kerporter, G.C. Rawlinson, C.H. Texier, F. Sarre, A.D. Mordtman, F. Justi, G.N. Curzon and criticizes each of them and almost cross out all their views (Ibid.: 257, 265). At the third part, he expresses his personal opinion and indicates that the represented lady in this relief is Narseh's wife, Shapurdokhtak II, not the great yazata, Anahita (Ibid.: 257, 268).

In the present article, the authors not only following the researchers and orientalist theory that believe this lady as Anahita, but also, attempt to criticize and refuse logically the propounded theory. But first of all, it is necessary to render a

brief description of this relief and its details for more awareness.

## Narseh's Investiture Relief at Naqsh-e Rostam in Fars

The only Sasanian rock relief that represents a divine matter in which investiture ceremony is done from Anahita, is located at the right of the tomb of Darius the Great at Naqsh-e Rostam in Fars (Figure 1). It is 5/70 meters long and 3/70 meters wide (Ibid.: 256)

We know king Narseh well from his crown is carved at the center of scene. He has a twisted mustache and long beard with tip pulled through a ring and has a bushy hair that falls around his neck. He is represented in a frontal view with the profile turning of the head to Anahita that stands opposite to him. His right hand is stretched towards Anahita to receive the diadem of kingship and his left hand grips the hilt of sword, hanging from his left side. King wears necklace, earrings and a close fitting tunic that its wrinkles reach over the knees. He has a cloak over the tunic that ends joining together on the chest by two buttons and its trail is shown as a broad garment with intensive folds at the back. His wrinkled and loose trousers is carved masterly. He also wears shoes that its rippling ribbons spilled on the ground. King's crown in this relief embodies fluted loops where a big globe installed upon it. This crown exactly resembles the coins<sup>2</sup> of sort 1 from him (compare Figure 1 with Table 1).

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1. According to the list of Ka'ba-i Zardusht inscription, the name of the two famous ladies have been mentioned. One of them is daughter of Shapur Meshan king, and his wife Denak who is grandchild of Shapur I and the other one is daughter of Shapur I that a title of Shahbano-i Sakayan in 262 A.D. and married with his brother Narseh, king of Turestan, Sakestan, India to seacoasts (Lukonin, 1992: 174)







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2. From the reign of Narseh, various coins have been found that categorized in to I, II with regard to differences in king's crown. For more on Narseh's coins see: Lukonin, 1992: 296-301, Table. XIX.



**Figure 1** Naqsh-i Rostam: Investiture Scene of Narseh from Water Goddess, Anahita

**Table 1** Different Sorts of Narseh Coins

I	II	IIIa
		
		
1	2	3

In front of the king, Anahita is carved in a proper figure and sober shape. She has a crenelated crown that knotted curly hair emerging from the top and with braids falling on her neck and shoulders. She has a necklace

and earrings like king and offering a diadem of kingship to him in a standing position. There is a child between the king and goddess, wearing royal rob. Two of courtiers and nobilities are standing behind the king where figure of the

second person damaged by lapse of time and its details disappeared completely. But, the first person with a tall hat (kolah or headgear) in the form of horse head raise his hand towards his face as a sign of salutation. His cloth is similar to the king's cloth with a little difference, but he has a torque (gorget) probably from gold instead of pearl necklace.

V.G.Lukonin identifies him as Hormuzd II, Narseh's son and successor (Lukonin, 1992: 321). This identification is acceptable because:

1. The mentioned kolah is one of the signs and emblems of king's successor during the Sasanian period and a distinct example is shown in Bahram II (276-293 A.D.) rock relief at Naqsh-e Rostam. In this rock relief, Bahram III is carved as a son and king's successor with the same kolah. Furthermore, a close observation of sorts IVC, IVd, VIIa, VIIb of Bahram II coins<sup>1</sup>, king's successor is appeared with this kolah (compare Figure 1 with Table 2).

2. The general scene of this rock relief is similar to Ardashir's investiture relief at Naqsh-e Rostam (Figure 2). The theme of both relief is investiture ceremony and both represent, a child with royal cloth carved between the king and yazata. In both reliefs, there is a figure standing

behind the king and raising his right hand as a sign of salutation. This figure is Shapur I (244-272 A. D.) in Ardashir's investiture at Naqsh-e Rostam who was his successor at that time. So, it is logical to identify the mentioned figure in this relief, comparing the same to Shapur I at Naqsh-e Rostam.

3. The similarity between royal cloth, implies high status in royal dynasty. It is obvious that merely successor and future replacement could appear with the cloth as the king. This exposition is seen not only in this rock relief, but also in Ardashir's investiture ceremony (224- 242 A. D.) at Naqsh-e Rostam (Figure 2) and Firuzabad. In these scenes, Shapur I, the older son and successor of Ardashir shown with the cloth as that of king<sup>2</sup>.

Some researchers like A. Christensen suggest that, the child between king and yazata, is Hormuz II (302- 309 A. D.) (Christensen, 1988: 259). However, this theory has been rejected by above researchers. The authors like many other researchers believe that the child in the scene is Narseh's grandchild Azar Narseh. Various interpretations have been expressed about this relief:

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1. From Bahram II, 10 different sorts of coins with different crowns found some of them Sasanian king depicted with his wife, Shapurdokhtak I and his son (Bahram III). For more awareness study coins Bahram II see: Ibid.: 283-296, Table. XVIII.

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2. Comparison of artistic details in mentioned rock relief with other reliefs of that period is one of the best and useful methods in scientific studies and real identification of unknown rock reliefs. For more awareness of this method see: Hermann, 1969, 6. Mousavi Haji, 1996: 52-64



**Figure 2** Naqsh-i Rajab: Ardashir Investiture from Superior God, Ahura Mazda

**Table 2** Different sorts of Bahram II Coins

IIIb	IVa	IVb	IVc	IVd	Va	Vb
VIa	VIb	VIIa	VIIb	VIIIa	IX	X
1		2		3		4

### *The Lady Represented in Narseh's Relief: Shapurdokhtak or Anahita?*

J. N. Curzon believes that there is no female figure in Sasanian rock relief. He identifies figures with braid hair, female muscles and smooth face, eunuchs of court!? (Curzon, 1983: 156). So he refuses to identify the represented lady in this relief and records: "So I don't waste my time to identify these figures" (Ibid.:154).

R. Kerporter believes that this relief depicts Bahram V (421- 438 A. D.) marriage with Indian princess (Kerporter, 1821-1822: 533- 534) and C. Texier identifies him as Khusraw Parviz (590-628 A.D.) and his wife Shirin (Texier, 1842: 228). H. Rawlinson and A.D. Mordtman suggest that this relief expose investiture scene of Bahram III (293 A.D.) from his mother (Shapur Shahbazi, 1983: 2). As mentioned before, the king's crown in this scene is exactly similar to Narseh's crown in his coins. Thus, the above reason can easily be rejected.

Today, researchers do not discuss identification and recognition of the king but the lady in this scene. Most of the scholars and orientalist believe that, the lady is water goddess, Anahita<sup>1</sup>. But, Alireza Shapur Shahbazi believes that the rock relief represents Narseh's investiture from princess Shapurdokhtak II. He gives a reason that lady's left hand is hidden in her sleeve. So she must be

obedient and submissive to the king, not the yazata who is in higher status than the king (Ibid.: 263).

To criticize his theory, first of all, the long sleeve is related to the manner of dress sewing. As the size of trousers is also long and his toes hidden<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1). Secondly, the lady, bends tip of her fingers for raising trousers, therefore, the fingers are hidden in the sleeve. Finally, if this rock relief represents reign between the king and queen, why there is no such reference in historical texts? And if so, why there is no allusion to this matter in Paikuli inscription that established by Narseh, commemorate his victories?

Although, Shapur Shahbazi gives an account that Shapurdokhtak II- Narseh's wife- was Shapur I daughter, so after the death of Bahram II, he was supported by magnates of Sasanian court that named in Paikuli<sup>3</sup> inscription because of his wife influence and written: Shapurdokhtak II status, justify Narseh's decision to capture monarchy. So, it is reasonable to identify the represented lady as Shapurdokhtak II who share the reign with Narseh (Ibid.: 268).

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1. For more awareness see: Sarre and Hertzfeld, 1910: 84-88. Flandin and Cost, 1851-1854: Pl.186. Ghirshman, 1991: 176. Vavden Berghe, 1969: 26. Sami, 1965: 140. Mostafavi, 1964: 30. Lukonin, 1992: 321

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2 . The writers don't deny hiding fingers in the sleeve, is one of the symbol of respect to superior (king or yazata) during Sasanian reign, but with respect to reasons that will come it can't interpret in the manner Shapur Shahbazi has in mind.

3. Paikuli is a place in Kordestan province in Iraq. There is an important inscription on the body of stone tower in this place. For more awareness of this inscription and its theme see: Hertzfeld, 1924.

In response to this view, first: Narseh had apurpose to become the king from the reign of Bahram I (276- 273 A. D.) who was introduced in Paikuli inscription “usurper of throne.” For what reason, he didn’t attain his intention is a discussion that needs another discussion. secondly, Narseh’s status is perfectly superior to his wife and sister ie Shapurdokhtak II, but also from other Shapur’s sons. Because during his predecessor, he was entitled as “Great Aryan Mazdaism” that distinguished him from the other Shapur’s sons. And maybe because of this distinction, he undertook sovereignty of large territories from Sakestan, Turestan and India to seacoasts, it means all the east possessions. So, it is unlikely that magnates of Sasanian court could, protect his kingdom because of Shapurdokhtak II.

With regard to the real identity of this lady, the writers are sympathetic to the first group (that she is Anahita). It means the views refute Shapur Shahbazi theory with following reasons:

1. The lady in this scene has a crenelated crown that knotted curly hair emerging from the top (Figure 1). This kind of crown belongs to yazata and in all the rock reliefs of that period (except the investiture relief of Piruz I at Tagh-i Bustan<sup>1</sup> in Kermanshah in which Ahura Mazda

appears in formal cloth), the supreme god Ahura Mazda wears this crown. So, there is no doubt that she would be from yazata.

2. Narseh, himself, in his inscriptions declares that he gained the sovereignty of Persia under the protection of Ahura Mazda and all the yazata and Anahita goddess (Lukonin, 1992: 194). How this would be explained that the king introduce himself as Mazdaism Bagh in inscriptions and claims to have gained the sovereignty by Ahura Mazda and Anahita but in investiture scene, the symbol of kingdom given from his wife ?!

3. In all the Sasanian rock reliefs, the king didn’t get the royalty diadem from the mortal human directly. The most evident characteristic of this diadem is a ribbon hanging from it. Afterwards, this ribbon seen in Sasanian king’s cloth too and recognized as one of the most important emblems of royalty that shown as two long and flying ribbons especially the trail of king’s cown (Figures 1-3). (Sarfraz, 1993: 41).

However, in some rock reliefs, there are figures offering a diadem of kingship to king<sup>2</sup>, but first of all, in all of the reliefs, Sasanian kings not get the ring in their hand. Secondly,

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Hagi) attributed this relief to Piruz I (459-484 A.D.). For more awareness see : Mousavi Haji, 2008.

2. Giving human symbolization to gods in Sasanian rock reliefs is only a mere fancy. But this mere fancy is a depiction of a religious fact that must search in beliefs and opinions of people in that period.

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1 Against the idea of most of the researchers and archaeologists who believe king in Taq-i Bustan rock reliefs is Khusraw Parviz, one of the writers (Mousavi

the mentioned rings lack the royal ribbons. In another word, in all the relics that remain from the Sasanian period like rock reliefs, silvers, coins, seals... the Sasanian king get the diadem of kingship in his hand directly just in one circumstance that another figure gives the ring, being yazata. Otherwise, it is impossible that the king get the ring from the mortal figure. And if it is so, the writers believe that the ring lack the long and flying ribbons, the important emblem of royal rings.

Given the royal ring from a human being to Sasanian king was inconsistent with religious tenets. In ancient Iranian relief (of course not all the Iranians, but most of the ancient rulers) the king was considered to be a symbol of power and people volition and he was the only person that after great yazata, deserved to be worshiped on earth. He was the omnipotent ruler who had control over the people (Mashkor, 1966: 1). They believed that the king status was a divine donation from the yazata to king. Obedience of king had divine blessing. God was the master of two worlds and the king was his representative on the earth. There are many documents and evidences about the false seeking of Sasanian kings in claiming divinity for their royalties like the response of Ardashir Babakan to the letter of Ardavan V (216- 224 A. D.) were he explains his military operations against Parthians:

"The crown I have, is given from God and he enthroned me over the lands I captured. He helped me in killing rulers and kings" (Mousavi Haji, 1996: 7). So it is impossible that the diadem of kingship, which is the symbol of xwarrah of god and the god deputy on the earth, given from a mortal person to the Sasanian king.

4. We are completely familiar with Sasanian queen depictions and the style of their decorations and especially ornaments of their clothes in six rock reliefs<sup>1</sup>. In all of these reliefs, the ladies lack crenelated crown. Some worn hat<sup>2</sup> (kolah) and some of them depicted without hat (kolah) and their hair decorated upon the head as a little globe<sup>3</sup>. In all of these reliefs, the lady's clothes (dress and trousers) lack abundant pleats and ripples. This dress is like a boiling matter that pouring on the ground and reminding shaking waves and duty of water goddess, Anahita (Ghirshman, 1991: 176).

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1. This reliefs are: Ardashir I rock relief at Naqsh-e Rostam. Shapur I rock reliefs at Tang-e Qandil and Naqsh-e Rostam. Bahram II rock reliefs at Barm-e Dilak, Naqsh-e Rostam and Sarmashad in Fars. For pictures of these reliefs see: Mousavi Haji, 1995: Figs. 32,36,41. Designs. 1,5,13

2. For example see: Bahram II rock relief at Sarmashad in Fars.

3. For example see: Shapur I rock relief at Tang-e Qandil in Fars. This rock relief is discovered by Ali Akbar Sarfaraz for the first time and its report is published in two detailed essays: Sarfaraz, 1971: 67-86. Id.: 1973, 5-17



As noted on Paikuli inscription, Kartir<sup>1</sup>- the high priest of the Zoroastrians -was one of the biggest enemies and opponents of Narseh in gaining monarchy (Herrmann, 1994: 109). V.G. Lukonin, by regarding this fact, believes that Narseh take the diadem of kingship from Anahita in this relief in order to declare that the undivided influence and power of Mobad Ahura Mazda is finished (Kartir) in all of the government affairs and thenceforth he would control over monarchy and government affairs himself.

### Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, one can easily confront the opinion of Shapur Shahbazi- with regard the lady in this rock relief Shapurdokhtak II. Undoubtedly this lady is water goddess, Anahita.

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1. Kartir was one of the famous characters of sasanian history. He began his duty during reign of Ardashir I and also during the reign of Shapur I continue to promote zoroastrian religion against many innovation. During the reign of Bahrams, he found an opportunity and imprisoned and killed Many (Herrmann, 1994: 109).

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## بانوی حاضر در نقش برجسته نرسی: آناهیتاست یا شاپور دختک؟

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تاریخ دریافت: ۱۳۸۷/۱۰/۲

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۳۸۸/۴/۱

در میان پادشاهان متعدد دوره ساسانی، نرسی (۲۹۳ - ۳۰۲ م) تنها پادشاهی است که از او نقش برجسته بسیار مهم و جالب توجه‌ای در محل نقش رستم فارس به یادگار مانده است که در آن مراسم اعطای حلقه سلطنتی از جانب آناهیتا (الهه حاصلخیزی، باروری و ربه‌النوع پاسدار آب) به نمایش در آمده است. این در حالی است که در سایر نقوش برجسته این دوره، حلقه سلطنتی که از دیدگاه پادشاهان ساسانی نماد نمایندگی خدا بر روی زمین است، از سوی خدای بزرگ «اهورامزدا» تفویض می‌شود.

درباره هویت واقعی و محتوی تاریخی این نقش برجسته تاکنون تعبیر و تفاسیر متعددی شده است لیکن انتساب بانوی حاضر در این نقش برجسته به «شاپور دختک دوم» همسر نرسی - آخرین و پر بحث‌ترین نظریه‌ای است که از سوی دکتر علیرضا شاپور شهبازی که چندین سال سرپرستی حفاریات و مطالعات باستان شناسی تخت جمشید را بر عهده داشت، در یک نشریه آلمانی مطرح شده و به چاپ رسیده است. این انتساب در حقیقت بهانه‌ای است که نگارندگان این سطور را بر آن داشت تا ضمن بر شمردن عقاید و نظرات محققان مختلف پیرامون نقش برجسته مورد بحث، به نقد و بررسی هر یک از آنها پرداخته و با ارائه دلایل مستند و کاملاً باستان شناسانه از صحت و صدق انتساب بانوی مذکور به الهه آب «آناهیتا» و سقم تمامی فرضیات دیگر، دفاع نماید.

**واژگان کلیدی:** نرسه، آناهیتا، شاپوردختک، نقش رستم، نقش برجسته‌های ساسانی

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