

**25) From Mesopotamian Nanāia to Indian Durgā** — The Mesopotamian goddess Nanāia was goddess of erotic love (Stol 1998-2001: 147). She was mentioned for the first time, probably, in Ur III. In Drehem Nanaya was mentioned in different years of Šulgi (e.g., Šulgi’s 26th year – Ozaki, Sauren 2020; Šulgi’s 35th year–BDTNS, AnOr 07 056, CDLI P101351, [http://bdtns.filol.csic.es/ficha\\_simple\\_ventana\\_lexema.php?miReferencia=34](http://bdtns.filol.csic.es/ficha_simple_ventana_lexema.php?miReferencia=34)).

We know that some offerings to Nanāia were performed during the reign of Šulgi (e.g., the 33rd or 32nd year). For example, we can find some information about this fact from the texts of Drehem (Drewnowska-Rymarz 2008: 33). Nevertheless, we know that offerings of lambs were performed in “various months, starting in the 44th regnal year of Šulgi (2094–2047) and continuing until the second year of the rule of Ibbi-Sîn (2028–2004)” (Drewnowska-Rymarz 2008: 33). There were some other types of offerings, too, e.g., kid offerings (they were mentioned for the first time in the 35th regnal year of Šulgi) (MVN XVIII 56 = AnOr 7, 56, PDT 32, 998, Drewnowska-Rymarz 2008: 34). So, in other words, until the end of Ur III. It is worth noting here that in the cities of Ur and Uruk, during the whole Ur III period, some texts describing offerings were made for the following goddesses: Inanna, Nanāia, Bēlat-tirraban, Bēlat- suhnir, Ulmašītum and Annunītum, and others (Drewnowska-Rymarz 2008: 34; Cohen 1993: 136–140). According to W.G. Lambert (1989: 324), Ulmašītum and Annunītum are Ištar of Akkad and Ištar of Babylon, respectively. Hence, Nanāia was one of the highest deities mentioned together with Inanna and Ištar (Stol 1998-2001: 147; Charpin 1994: 37), and one of her earliest main attributes was to be a ‘*mother goddess*’ (A1). Nanāia’s name occurs in OB period as <sup>d</sup>na-na-a in Weidner’s God List (Weidner 1924: 1- 18), line 12 (Weidner’s God List was most probably composed in OB period – see Johandi 2019: 15; Pomponio 1998–2001: 21; Veldhuis 2003: 628).

‘*Love (fertility)*’ (A2) as one of her additional attributes is reconstructed from analysis of the royal inscriptions since the early second millennium BC, i.e., since the Isin-Larsa period and Old Babylonian period (2000–1595 BC). This reconstruction is based on identifying Nanāia with Inanna. This identification took place at the time of Sîn-iqīšam – see (Sigrist 1984: 147; Drewnowska-Rymarz 2008: 5). For example, Būr-Sîn, the ruler of Isin, begins his inscription by mentioning Nanāia, to whom he dedicated this text as a whole:

1-7. <sup>d</sup>na-na-a nin-a-ni-ir nam-ti <sup>d</sup>bur-<sup>d</sup>EN.zu lugal-ki-en-gi-ki-uri ki-ág- <sup>d</sup>in[anna] <sup>ù</sup> <sup>d</sup>na-na-a-fšè<sup>1</sup> – “For the goddess Nanāia, her lady, for the life of Būr-Sîn, king of the land Sumer and Akkad, beloved of the goddesses In[anna] and Nanāia” (RIME 4: Būr-Sîn E4.1.7.3, lines 1-7).

It is also important to refer here to a cone inscription from Ur describing the construction of a temple devoted to the goddess Nanāia. This inscription belongs to Sūmū-El, the ruler of Larsa in the 19th cen. BC:

<sup>d</sup>na-na-a-a nin ḥi-li-a šu-du<sup>7</sup> <sup>d</sup>su-mu-<sup>èl</sup> nita-kala-ga lugal-uris.Ki-ma lugal-ki-en-gi-ki-uri – “For the goddess Nanāia, the lady with perfect voluptuousness, Sūmū-El, mighty man, king of Ur, king of the land of Sumer and Akkad” (RIME 4: Sūmū-El E4.2.7.2, lines 1-6).

The name of Nanāia also appeared in the “sacred marriage” of Rīm-Sîn I. This “sacred marriage” joined Rīm-Sîn I and Nanāia (YOS 11 24 = YBC 4643; Sigrist, Westenholz 2008: 667–704). In this context, we can reconstruct the following new attribute of Nanāia: to be a ‘*royal patron*’ (A3) granting forces and powers to kings. Nanāia has been mentioned in many inscriptions of Rīm-Sîn I, such as some inscriptions which are known from one bronze foundation canephore and three stone foundation tablets. They are devoted to the building of the temple of Nanāia by Kudur-mabuk and his son Rīm-Sîn I (RIME 4: Rīm-Sîn I E4.2.14.3, lines 1-5):

<sup>d</sup>na-na-a nin ḥi-li še-er-ka-an-dī nam-sa<sup>6</sup>-ga-ni gal diri dumu-zi-le-an-gal-la nin-a-ne-ne-er – “For the goddess Nanāia, lady adorned with voluptuousness, whose beauty is excessively great, comely daughter of great Anu, their lady”.

Innana and Nanāia are mentioned together in one inscription of this king, but separately (Rīm-Sîn I E4.2.14.3). Thus, we have another confirmation of the attribute ‘*love (fertility)*’ (A2). Besides the royal inscriptions and other text, Nanāia often also played an important role in cultic texts (hymns). For instance, there is the *Hymn to Nanaya* (Foster 1996: 72) which ends in a conclusion consisting of a blessing for the king. It is important to note that the structure, vocabulary and content are quite similar to the Hymn to Ištar. Thus, in this hymn we see the three attributes of Nanāia simultaneously: ‘*mother goddess*’ (A1), ‘*love (fertility)*’ (A2), ‘*royal patron*’ (A3).

It is notable that Nanāia was also mentioned in the NA list from Sultantepe (STT, 376–386) and that the name of Nanāia appears after the Dumuzi-Innana deity group (Drewnowska-Rymarz 2008: 24). There is also other evidence, but we mention only some to show the link between Nanāia and the Dumuzi-Ištar- (Innana) group. Hence, in the Neo-Assyrian (see also about warlike Ištar – Stol 1998-2001:148, Nanaya Hymn to Sargon II, SAA 3, Nr. 4, pp. 13-16) and Neo-Babylonian periods we see the same attributes of Nanāia: ‘*mother goddess*’ (A1), ‘*love (fertility)*’ (A2), ‘*royal patron*’ (A3).

The goddess Nanāia has become extremely popular in Bactria and Gandhāra (today’s Afghanistan and Pakistan) since the 2nd cen. BC. First, her images appeared within the classical Hellenistic iconography of Cybele in the “Temple with Indented Niches” at Ai-Khanoum (Afghanistan) and in the “Oxus Temple” at Takht-i Sangin (Tajikistan). They then appeared on the coins of the Kušāna rulers with legends in Greek mentioning her name *Nāvava* (Nanāia). At that time she was the main royal patron of the dynasty of Kušānas. So, ‘*royal patron*’ (A3) was her main attribute there. These Kušāna rulers spoke Bactrian (one of the Eastern Iranian languages) and at the height of their power reigned over the territory of modern-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and North India at least up to Varanasi. This dynasty existed from the early 1st century AD until the late 4th century AD. Initially, they used Greek as their official language, but the situation changed after the reform of the Kušāna emperor Kaniška (Bactrian: *Kāvηκικι*), presumably in 127 AD, that was mainly devoted to changing the official language of the Kušāna Empire from Greek to Bactrian. The text of this reform is known as the Rabatak inscription (Mukherjee 1995; Sims-Williams 1998: 2008) and, after the reform, all the legends on the Kušāna coins were written only in Bactrian and the goddess was called *Nāvva* (Nanā). So, after 127 AD, the spelling of the name of goddess in Bactria and Gandhāra changed (it became Nanā), but it remained the same in Soghd: *nny* (Nanāia).

In the Rabatak inscription we see an identification of Nanā with Umā, the Buddhist goddess: “the lady Nanā and the lady Umā” (*τα αμσα Nava odo τα αμσα Ομμα*). In Buddhism of the 2nd century AD Umā had the following attributes: ‘*mother goddess*’ (A1), ‘*love (fertility)*’ (A2), and ‘*marriage (children)*’ (A2-1 as paradigmatically subordinated to A2), and she was considered a wife of Maheśvara (Bactrian: *Oηβο*; Sogdian: *wyšprkr*), the Buddhist-Zoroastrian deity of wind and exaltation (Shenkar 2014: 82). In Hinduism, Umā became a wife of Śiva and she has the same attributes now.

We can assume that the name *nanā* started to take on the meaning of “mother” in Sanskrit and later in Farsi (this word *ننه* in Farsi has the additional meaning of being an old lady) only after the Kušānas. It is worth noting that this meaning of *nanā* “mother” is missing in Vedic and Avestan languages, but it corresponds to the main connotation of the name Nanāia/Nanā as divine mother.

Hence, the dynamics of the identification of Nanāia/Nanā and her attributes from the earliest references in Ur III allow us to understand which of her attributes were finally accepted in Central and South Asia and could have continued as some attributes of Durgā as the Hindu goddess, such as ‘*mother goddess*’ (A1) and ‘*woman warrior*’ (A4). Let us trace back these dynamics in more detail.

The earliest archaeological evidence of Nanāia in Central and South Asia is to be found in Bactria and dated to the 2nd cen. BC and then in Sogdiana and dated to the 2nd cen. AD. Her main attribute is to be ‘*sitting on a lion*’ (A4-1). (Mesopotamian Inanna/Ištar was also often represented with lion in iconography, and even compared with lion, see e.g., Inanna and Ebih, lines 7-9, ETCSL, <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr132.htm>). This ‘*sitting on a lion*’ (A4-1) can be identified as paradigmatically subordinated to the attribute ‘*woman warrior*’ (A4) and it may be treated as a diffusion of the cult of Cybele in the Hellenistic states of India (Shenkar 2014: 118). It is worth noting that ‘*sitting on a tiger*’ (A4-1-1) meaning a ‘*woman warrior*’ (A4) is the main attribute of Durgā now. This attribute denoted by A4-1-1 is paradigmatically subordinated to ‘*sitting on a lion*’ (A4-1).

Nanāia as ‘*mother goddess*’ (A1) was very popular first in Bactria and Gandhāra (from the 2nd cen. B.C. to the 8th century AD) and later in Sogdiana and Khoresmia (from the 2nd cen. AD to the 9th cen. AD)—see (Tanabe 1995; De Jong 1997: 268–284; Potts 2001). Her attribute ‘*sitting on a lion*’ (A4-1) occurs in different forms. So, in the mural from Jartepa II Temple (Sogdiana) dated to the 4th or early 5th cen. AD, she is depicted as sitting on a throne, the legs of which are formed in the shape of lion protomes (Berdimuradov & Samibaev 2001: 59). On the the Kušāna coins she is depicted as a lion or a woman holding the lion protome. On these coins her name is spelled *Nāvava* (Nanāia), *Nāva* (Nanā), or *Nāvavao* (Nanā-šah, “Nanā, the ruler”).

Nanāia sometimes appears on the coins of Kušanšahs, too. The Kušanšahs are a branch of the Kušāna dynasty becoming satraps of the Sasanian rulers. So, on the coins of Pērōz I (Bactrian: *Πιρωσο κοβανο βαηο*) dated from ca. 245 to ca. 275 AD we observe a nimbate Nanāia with a crescent on top of its head, appearing in the form of a female bust mounted on an altar. On both sides of the bust there is the Bactrian inscription *Bayo Nāvo* “the goddess Nanā”. Her attribute here is represented by a ‘*crescent moon*’ (A1-1) on the top of her head (Cribb 1990: no. 31). This attribute is paradigmatically subordinated to the attribute ‘*mother goddess*’ (A1). This image of bust on an altar was borrowed from a Bukharan coin (Naymark 1995: 43, 3).

Nanāia was a patron goddess for the Kušāna dynasty, and later for the Kušanšahs. As we can see, her attribute ‘*royal patron*’ (A3) was very significant at that time. The same attribute is reconstructed in Sogdiana as well. So, in the Panjikent city of Sogdiana, Nanāia was a patron goddess, also being represented as the most significant deity in several private houses (III/7; VI/26; VI/41; XXI/2; XXIII/50; XXV/12) – see Shenkar

(2017: 198). Her image appears not only on the coins of Kušānas and Kušanšahs, but also on the coins of Sogdiana – on the coins minted during the reign of Dhēwāštīch (died in 722 A.D.) with the Sogdian legend *pncy nn(δ)-βnpn-wH* “Nanāia, the Lady of Panč” (Lurje 2004).

Hence, the Mesopotamian attributes of Nanāia: ‘mother goddess’ (A1) and ‘royal patron’ (A3) continued in Central and South Asia. An additional attribute was presented as ‘woman warrior’ (A4) with the sub-attribute ‘sitting on a lion’ (A4-1).

‘Love (fertility)’ (A2) as the Mesopotamian attribute of Nanāia was well expressed within her sub-attribute ‘marriage (children)’ (A2-1) in Central and South Asia. So, according to the Rabatak inscription (Mukherjee 1995; Sims-Williams 1998: 2008), Nanāia can be associated with her manifestation Ομμα/Ομμο (Umā), the wife of the bodhisattva Maheśvara. On some coins of Huviška (Bactrian: Οηηκτι), the son of Kaniška, we can see the couple Ομμο/Οηηο (Umā/Oešo) – see (Rosenfield 1967: 94, c.166; Cribb 1997: 35, pl. G8). This Oešo is the most important royal patron of Kušānas, together with Nanāia. He is very often depicted on their coins with the following main attributes of the Buddhist deity Maheśvara: bull; two-, four- or six-armed; single or three-headed; trident-axe or simple trident; thunderbolt; water pot; lion skin; lotus flower; antelope; elephant goad; wheel; club; nimbus (sometimes flaming); diadem as Kušāna royal crown (Shenkar 2014:154). On the coins of Kušanšahs we quite often find a female bust mounted on an altar. She is identified as Nanāia (or Anahita). We also find a bearded male bust mounted on an altar, but very often without inscriptions (Cribb 1990: no.24–29). He can be identified as Oešo (Bago Borzando) on the basis of one coin where he is depicted with the inscription in Pahlavi: *bwrz 'wndy yzdy* “the god who acts in the high regions” (Cribb 1990: no.59). On the coins of Kušanšahs of other types we see the classical iconography of Oešo, i.e., a bearded man holding a trident accompanied by a bull. The Bactrian legend is as follows: *βορζοανδο ιαζαδο* or *βαγο βορζανδο* “the god who acts in the high regions”, the same as in Pahlavi. Thus, this deity is identified as Oešo (Οηηο) from the earlier Kušāna coins of Kaniška and Huviška (Shenkar 2014: 82).

In the paintings of Panjikent in Sogdiana, Oešo (Οηηο) is represented under the Sogdian name *wyšprkr* (Wēšparkar). The latter name is treated as deriving from the following Avestan epithet of Vayu: *vaiiuš uparō kairiūō*, “Vayu, whose activity lies in the upper region”. Therefore the Bactrian name Οηηο may represent *wēš*, delivered from the Avestan *vaiiuš* (Humbach 1975).

For the Kušānas, the wind god Wēšparkar/Oešo was considered an emblem of royal glory (Lo Muzio 1995: 169) to the same extent as Nanāia. There is no doubt that Wēšparkar/Oešo is associated with Maheśvara (treated as bodhisattva from Mahāyāna *sūtras*).

Hence, for the Kušānas and Kušanšahs, Nanāia possesses the following attributes and subattributes: ‘mother goddess’ (A1), ‘crescent moon’ (A1-1), ‘love (fertility)’ (A2), ‘marriage (children)’ (A2-1), ‘royal patron’ (A3), ‘woman warrior’ (A4), ‘sitting on a lion’ (A4-1), ‘four or many arms’ (A4-2). Meanwhile, in the paintings of Panjikent (the temple II) dated to the 7th cen., the divine couple of Nanāia and Wēšparkar/Oešo can be treated according to its iconography as the Umāmaheśvaramūrti, i.e., a representation of Maheśvara along with his wife Umā, sitting on the bull (Lo Muzio 2002: fig. 2).

To sum up, Durgā as a ‘warrior woman’ (A4), ‘sitting on a tiger’ (A4-1-1) with ‘four or many arms’ (A4-2) can be traced back to the Mesopotamian goddess Nanāia.

#### Note

In enumerating divine attributes we follow the structuralist approach established by Claude Lévi-Strauss. We therefore distinguish the following two orders in their enumeration: syntagmatic (horizontal) and paradigmatic (vertical). The syntagmatic order: A1, A2, A3,... shows the most important attributes belonging to a god or goddess, but each attribute from this line can have an additional paradigmatic order: A1-1, A1-2, A1-3, ... or A2-1, A2-2, A2-3, etc.

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