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THE BEE-GODDESS ARCHETYPE IN THE MYTH OF SHAHMARAN

Şahmaran Mitinde Arı Tanrıça Arketipi

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ABSTRACT

Shahmaran (or Yamlika), a mythological figure depicted as half-human and half-serpent, holds deep significance in both Iranian and Turkish cultural traditions and functions not merely as a folkloric character but as a complex symbol representing transformation and wisdom. The narrative of Shahmaran can be read as an allegory of spiritual initiation, depicting the hero's descent into the sacred domain of the goddess and his access to her esoteric wisdom. Within this framework, the hero Hasib embarked on both an external and internal journey when he encountered Shahmaran; this journey symbolizes his spiritual maturation and acquisition of wisdom. This motif of initiation corresponds to a widespread archetypal pattern observed across cultures, as heroes initiated into the mysteries of the goddess often acquire sacred knowledge or power that elevates their status. In this article, I argue that Shahmaran can be interpreted not only as a mystical figure guiding the hero but also as a bee-goddess; this interpretation makes it possible for her to be read as a powerful manifestation of the sacred feminine principle, symbolically associated with the Moon, honey, and menstrual blood.

Keywords: Shahmaran, bee-goddess, honey, menstrual blood, moon

ÖZ

Şahmaran (ya da Yemliha), yarı insan yarı yılan biçiminde tasvir edilen mitolojik bir figür olup hem İran hem de Türk kültürel geleneklerinde derin bir öneme sahiptir ve yalnızca folklorik bir karakter olarak değil dönüşüm ve bilgeliği temsil eden karmaşık bir simge olarak işlev görür. Şahmaran anlatısı, kahramanın Tanrıça'nın kutsal alanına inişini ve onun ezoterik bilgisine erişimini tasvir eden bir ruhsal inisiyasyon alegorisi olarak okunabilir. Bu çerçevede kahraman Hasib, Şahmaran'la karşılaştığında hem dışsal hem de içsel bir yolculuğa çıkmıştır; bu yolculuk onun ruhsal olgunlaşmasını ve bilgeliği kazanımını simgeler. Bu inisiyasyon motifi, kültürler arası yaygın bir arketipsel örüntüye karşılık gelir; zira Tanrıça'nın gizemlerine erişen kahramanlar çoğunlukla statülerini yücelten kutsal bilgi veya güç kazanırlar. Bu makalede, Şahmaran'ın yalnızca kahramana rehberlik eden mistik bir figür olarak değil aynı zamanda bir arı-tanrıça olarak da yorumlanabileceğini ileri sürüyorum; bu yorum, onun Ay, bal ve âdet kanı ile simgesel bir biçimde ilişkilendirilen kutsal dişil ilkenin güçlü bir tezahürü olarak okunmasına olanak tanır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Şahmaran, arı tanrıça, bal, âdet kanı, ay

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Introduction

Joseph Campbell examines the journeys of heroes in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. A hero is someone who is spiritually enlightened in the womb of the cosmic mother with the help of a woman who represents her. This journey represents an initiation rite. The hero is forced to overcome various difficulties, such as battling giants, dragons and other creatures. For example, the hero, Theseus, kills the Minotaur, a half-man, half-bull creature, with the help of his lover Ariadne. Another hero is Odysseus, who has many adventures and tasks to complete before he can reunite with his beloved wife after his long sea journey. The hero sometimes goes to the underworld, sometimes travels by sea, visits several islands and fights monsters. We often see that at the end of his journey, the hero marries (sacred marriage) the girl (princess, queen) who helped him throughout this journey and thus becomes king.¹ Theseus marries the princess Ariadne, Jason marries the princess Medea, and Oedipus marries the queen Jocasta. Among the non-Greek heroes, we can count Gwion Bach from Wales and Muchukunda from India.²

The heroes' journeys represent their participation in the mysteries of the goddess, and these journeys actually take place at sea, in the underworld, or in a cave, representing the womb of the cosmic goddess.³ The successful hero reaches spiritual maturity by participating in the mysteries of the goddess. The hero who enters and exits the womb of the goddess actually experiences death and rebirth. In order to reach this spiritual awareness, the hero must die in the womb of the cosmic mother and be reborn from her womb. The hero's journey through the sea or the underworld represents his entry into the womb of the cosmic mother, and when he has accomplished all the tasks he must overcome, he is reborn from the womb of the goddess as an enlightened person with new spiritual awareness and capabilities.⁴

¹ Regarding the hero's journey as a sacred marriage ritual, Campbell states: "The ultimate adventure, when all the barriers and ogres have been overcome, is commonly represented as a mystical marriage (ιερὸς γάμος) of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World. This is the crisis at the nadir, the zenith, or at the uttermost edge of the earth, at the central point of the cosmos, in the tabernacle of the temple, or within the darkness of the deepest chamber of the heart" (Campbell, 2008: 100). For sacred marriage, see also Eisler (1996).

² For detailed information on heroes' journeys, see Campbell (2008).

³ Concerning the relationship between the cave and the womb, Mircea Eliade observes: "It is worth remembering, too, that the caves and caverns were compared to the matrix of the Earth-Mother. The ritualistic role played by 'caves', attested in prehistoric times, could likewise be interpreted as a mystic return to the mother, which would also help to explain the sepulchres in the caves as well as the initiation rites practised in these same places" (Eliade, 1978: 41). For a detailed examination of the ritualistic significance of the cave as a symbol of the womb, see also Moyes (2012), Deger (2024).

⁴ The transformative character of the womb is well expressed by Campbell: "In the imagery of mythology and religion this birth (or more often rebirth) theme is extremely prominent; in fact, every threshold passage –not only this from the darkness of the womb to the light of the sun, but also those from childhood to adult life and from the light of the world to whatever mystery of darkness may lie beyond the

The story of Shahmaran, which bears similarities to the hero's journey, emerged and developed among the cultures that existed in the Middle East and Anatolia, including the Hittites, Sumerians, Assyrians, Akkadians, Persians, and Turks. Also, considering that most of these lands were part of the Greek Empire during the Hellenistic period and later the Byzantine Empire –especially the western part of Anatolia, which was colonized by the Greeks before the Hellenistic period– it would not be surprising to see the influence of Greek culture in this story. In addition, the Greeks, Hittites and Persians were Indo-European peoples, and we can trace this Indo-European culture in the myths and languages of peoples from Europe to India.

In my analysis, I examine two versions of the Shahmaran story –the *Thousand and One Nights* version entitled “The Tale of Yamlika, Queen of the Serpents” and the *Câmasb-nâme*⁵ through qualitative textual analysis grounded in an interpretive (hermeneutical) framework, employing symbolic and archetypal approaches to elucidate their multi-layered meanings, and I will argue that Shahmaran should also be seen as a bee-goddess due to the honey in the pit.⁶ To do so, I demonstrate that honey should be understood as a symbol of both sacred marriage (i.e., birth) and death, which in turn signifies the hero's initiation into the mysteries of the goddess. I will also show that honey can be interpreted as a symbol of menstrual blood through an analysis of myths, most of which are derived from the Indo-European tradition, as well as the etymology of certain terms from that tradition. I then interpret the Persian tale Shahmaran in light of these findings.

Before we start, I would like to say a few words about the sex of Shahmaran. Although Shahmaran is mostly depicted as a female creature, there are also examples depicting Shahmaran as a male serpent (Gedik, 2021: 306–315; Şimşek, 2019: 29; Yıldiran, 2001: 10–11). However, the serpent is primarily the symbol of the goddess, and the most famous example is the serpent goddess Tiamat from Sumerian mythology. Therefore, Shahmaran, a half-serpent female creature living in the subterranean cave, should be considered a goddess. I also think that the symbolic relationship between honey, the Moon and menstrual blood proves that Shahmaran is a female creature. If we consider that the initiation ceremonies took place in the womb of the goddess and that the story of Shahmaran is a remnant of such a

portal of death– is comparable to a birth and has been ritually represented, practically everywhere, through an imagery of re-entry into the womb” (Campbell, 1960: 61–62).

⁵ For the *Thousand Nights and One Night* version of the story, see Mardrus, 1986. For *Câmasb-nâme* version, see Mûsâ, 2023. This work was translated from Persian into Turkish by Abdî Mûsâ in the fifteenth century and later presented to the Ottoman Sultan Murad II. For other Shahmaran stories among folk beliefs, see Sökmen and Balkanal (2018).

⁶ Shahmaran is a creature that is half human and half snake. However, a survey of world mythologies shows that goddesses are frequently associated with multiple animals. For instance, the goddess Demeter is linked with pigs, mares, and bees.

ceremony, we can conclude that the versions of this story that speak of Shahmaran as a male serpent should be evaluated as a patriarchal intervention.

Shahmaran: Bee-Goddess

There was a wise man named Daniel, who was especially knowledgeable about medicine. One day, the wise Daniel fell ill while his wife was pregnant. He feared that if he died, his unborn son might be deprived of his knowledge. Therefore, he condensed the knowledge from the countless manuscripts he had written over the years – first into five pages, and then into a single small page. He threw all the other manuscripts into the sea and, before his death, entrusted this final page to his wife to give to their son. The boy was named Hasib. He was sent to school when he was five years old, but he could not learn any letters. Then his mother wanted him to learn a skill. Even after many years, he still could not learn anything. Finally, she bought him a donkey so that he could go to the forest and earn money by cutting down trees and selling them. One day, while he and his friends were in the forest, a heavy rain started, and they found a cave to hide in. While in the cave, Hasib found a stone lid on the ground. He lifted it and discovered a pit filled with jars of honey. Hasib entered the pit and removed the honey. However, his friends took the honey but left Hasib in there. They put the stone lid back in place so he could not get out because they did not want to share the money they would earn by selling the honey. They then told Hasib's mother that her son had died. We know that the hero who descends into the underworld experiences death, and when he returns, he experiences rebirth. Therefore, when Hasib's friends informed his mother that her son had died, it refers to his experience of death during his initiation into the goddess's mysteries, symbolized by entering her womb, which is represented by caves, wells, and the underground.

Let me now consider in more detail the relationship between the goddess, menstrual blood, honey, and therefore bees. We learn from the Neo-Platonic philosopher, Porphyry, that the title of the priestesses of Demeter is 'Bees' (*Melissae*), that the goddess Persephone was known to the ancients as *Melitodes*, meaning "honeyed", and that the title of the Moon is Bee (Ransome, 2004: 96). We also know that there was a belief that the Moon is the source of all honey (Briffault, 1927a: 149). As for Persian culture, we can see that honey is also related to the Moon. The Iranian equivalent of soma in Hinduism is haoma (or homa) (Jamison and Brereton, 2020: 77). Hermann Oldenberg writes: "...the juice-extract of the Soma plant took the place of the honey-drink in the Indo-European period; it was mixed with water and milk. The Soma-drink is called *madhu* (honey) variously in the Veda; the obvious speculation has been made, that here the Indo-European name of honey-mead (*madhu*) has been passed on to the modified drink..." (Oldenberg, 1993: 204). Soma is also known as *amrita*, the nectar of immortality (Goblet d'Alviella, 2000: 170), and the vessel of this fluid of immortality is the Moon (Zimmer, 1946: 60). The god Vishnu encompasses the earth with his three steps, and with the third step he enters

heaven, where the *wellspring of honey* serves as the source of soma (Jamison and Brereton, 2020: 100). Here, we can argue that the honey drink *madhu* (soma) refers to the menstrual blood of the goddess, since the wellspring symbolizes the goddess's vagina⁷ and heaven symbolizes her womb.⁸ The Greek word *ambrosia* is semantically linked to the word *amrita*; both words are the drink of immortality and were drunk by the gods (Mallory and Adams, 1997: 494–495). And we learn from Porphyry that *ambrosia* is made of honey, as he states, “Some persons have thought that the nectar and ambrosia which the poet pours into the nostrils of the dead for the purpose of preventing putrefaction, is honey; *since honey is the food of the gods*” (quoted by Ransome, 2004: 136).

So far, we have seen that these immortality drinks are associated with honey and the Moon. As mentioned above, the Soma vessel is known as the Moon, and the god Vishnu enters heaven, where there is the *wellspring of honey*, suggesting that honey is seen as menstrual blood and heaven as the womb. We know that amphoras (or jars) also represent the womb, as do wells and caves. For example, in the passage about the Cave of the Nymphs in the *Odyssey*, honey is placed inside amphoras within the cave (Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 13, 256). In addition, in the Indo-European language, the Moon is associated with menstrual blood. The Latin word for menstrual blood, *menses*, is related to *mensis*, which means month, and it is also related to the Greek word *méné*, which means moon (Steinmetz and Barnhart, 1988: 651, 676). Also, *Kataménia* is the Greek word for menstrual blood, and it means (*katá* ‘down’ + *mén* ‘moon, month’) the moon below (Grahn, 1993: 178).

Given the aforementioned relationship among the moon, menstrual blood, honey, and the elixir of immortality, it can be concluded that honey is the symbol of menstrual blood. Again, since the womb is seen as the source of menstrual blood, and it is believed that there is a wellspring of honey (i.e., the elixir of immortality) in heaven (the womb), we can say that menstrual blood and honey have been identified. As for the story of Shahmaran, there is honey in the pit, and we can interpret

⁷ We know that wells were known as the vagina of the goddess in many cultures. For example, in the Babylonian language, the word *pû* refers to the ‘source of a river’ and ‘vagina’; and in the Sumerian language, the word *buru* means ‘vagina’ and ‘river’ (Eliade, 1978: 41). Judy Grahn explains: “Streams were understood as having a single source, like menstrual blood flowing from the vulva spring. Springs, pools, and mountain lakes were endowed with sacred character, dread, and taboo... In England, wells and springs still bear pagan female names such as <Maiden’s Well> or <Bride’s Spring>” (Grahn, 1993: 24–25).

⁸ Campbell states the following regarding the association of the womb with paradise: “The state of the child in the womb is one of bliss, actionless bliss, and this state may be compared to the beatitude visualized for paradise. In the womb, the child is unaware of the alternation of night and day, or of any of the images of temporality. It should not be surprising, therefore, if the metaphors used to represent eternity suggest, to those trained in the symbolism of the infantile unconscious, retreat to the womb” (Campbell, 1960: 65).

it as the womb of the goddess. Therefore, it should not surprise us that there is honey in it.

In goddess culture, menstrual blood (i.e., primordial waters, womb) gives birth to all things and takes them into itself to give birth to them again. Therefore, honey must be related to both birth (sexuality) and death. The Neo-Platonic philosopher, Plutarch, suggested a relationship between the words *Teleutan* (to die) and *Teleisthai* (to participate in the mysteries) and identified participation in the mysteries with dying (Meyer, 1999: 8). But those who participate in the mysteries not only experience death, they also experience rebirth, and rebirth implies sexuality. Another Neo-Platonic philosopher, Porphyry, says in his commentary *On the Cave of the Nymphs* that honey is associated with both birth and death (Porphyry, 1983: 31–32). The entrance to the womb signifies sexuality and, therefore, birth. The word *honeymoon* indicates honey's relationship with both the Moon and sexuality (birth). However, when one dies, one returns to the womb (menstrual blood) to be reborn, so menstrual blood or honey also signifies death. We know there was a saying in ancient Greek as follows: 'to fall into a honey jar,' and it means 'to die' (Persson, 1942: 12–13).⁹

In the cyclical character of the goddess, death and birth refer to the same thing. The beginning and the end are the same point on a circle, so the womb or menstrual blood, as a transformative ability of the goddess, swallows everything, that is, takes them into itself, so that it can give birth to them again. A hero must die and be reborn in order to be transformed (i.e., enlightened) by the mysteries that take place in the womb of the goddess. Our hero, Hasib, enters the womb of the goddess, and the honey and the lake (that is, water) in the cave represents both his death and his sexual union with the goddess (sacred marriage).¹⁰ His exit from the cave (womb) symbolizes his rebirth. A symbol of sacred marriage (sexual intercourse) is also encountered in the Eleusinian mysteries: In the final stage of the mysteries, participants looked up to heaven and cried, "Rain!", then looked down to earth and cried, "Conceive!" (Baring and Cashford, 1993: 381).

We know that in the Anatolian region, the priestesses of the goddess Cybele were also called the *Melissae* (the Bees) (Ransome, 2004: 58). The goddess Cybele was identified with Rhea, who concealed her son Zeus in a cave and entrusted his nourishment to bees. Therefore, one of Zeus's titles is *Melissaios*, which means "Bee Man" (Ransome, 2004: 96). Zeus was also nourished by Amalthea with goat's milk.

Regarding the Asiatic Great Mother's relationship with bees, Hilda M. Ransome says:

⁹ According to Greek mythology, Glaukos, the son of the legendary King Minos of Crete and his wife Pasiphaë, died after falling into a jar full of honey while chasing a mouse (see Kılıç and Eser, 2017: 131).

¹⁰ For further discussion of the relationship between water, birth, and death, see also Kılıç and Eser (2017).

One of the most important animals connected with the worship of the Asiatic Great-Mother was the lion, and it is a curious fact that we often find a connection between bees and lions. At the old Hittite town of Car-chemish, sculptures have been found of the goddess on her lion throne and behind her a long line of priestesses bearing various articles. We do not suggest that these were called Melissae, but in the jewellery illustrated on Plate VI we see how the goddess with her lions merges in or is connected with the <Bee-goddess> (Ransome, 2004: 60).

Among the Hittites, we see that the sacrificial priest put two jars of honey on the altar, and the other vessels were filled with honey and covered with figs (Ransome, 2004: 56). Here again, we see the association of honey with death. And it is not just a coincidence that the honey in the vessels is covered with figs, because figs are also associated with sexuality, that is, rebirth, and also with spiritual awakening. The fig tree is a symbol of fertility and reproduction. We know that Demeter was not only the “Corn Mother,” she was also connected to the fig tree (Simon, 2021: 363). In ancient Egypt, the fig tree called *sycamore* is the manifestation of the goddesses Nut, Isis, and Hathor (Wilkinson, 2003: 168–169). In Vedic times, there was a sacrificial rite called Soma-yaga; in celebration of this ritual, soma was drunk by the participants, and women in Maharashtra performed the ritual by circling the sacred fig tree when the new moon fell on Monday (Goblet d’Alviella, 2000: xvii). The fig is a fruit that symbolizes the female sexual organ, as is the case with the lotus plant (Kapleau, 2001: 8–9). There is a sacred fig tree in India known as the Bodhi Tree. When we look at the etymology of the name Bodhi, we see that this name means ‘awakening’; in this case, the Bodhi Tree means ‘Tree of Awakening’ (Campbell, 1962: 15–16; Leeming, 2005: 144). Buddha became awakened by sitting under the Bodhi Tree, and indeed, the literal meaning of the title Buddha is ‘the Awakened One’ and is derived from the word Buddh, meaning ‘absolute truth’ or ‘ultimate mind’ (Kapleau, 2001: 8–9). Honey and figs are both associated with birth and death, and therefore with the mysteries, and provide spiritual awakening to initiates. These explanations about the fig, awakening, and goddess are to show the reader that it is not a coincidence that honey and figs are seen next to each other in the sacrificial ceremonies of the Hittites. Both honey and figs are related to death and rebirth (therefore sexuality/marriage, fertility), and as they relate to death and rebirth, they also relate to the spiritual awakening achieved through the mysteries of the goddess. Initiating into the mysteries represents dying and rebirth in the womb of the goddess (which is represented by caves, wells, tombs, and temples).

As mentioned above, the Shahmaran story is understood as a derivative of initiation rituals. Those who are initiated into the mysteries experience death and rebirth and undergo a spiritual transformation, thereby gaining wisdom and special abilities. For example, the god Odin gains his wisdom by drinking from Mimir’s well; to do so, he sacrifices one of his eyes. This sacrifice symbolizes wisdom

and initiation, as blindness represents the opening of the inner eye, the source of true knowledge. In this sense, Odin is initiated into the mysteries of the goddess through the act of drinking from the well, which, as noted earlier, symbolizes the goddess's womb. In some narratives, heroes undergo initiation simply by descending into and returning from the underworld. Similarly, the Turkish epic hero Koroghlu becomes both a great warrior and a bard by drinking the foam from the waters of the Goşabulag spring (Bayat, 2016: 122).

In the Shahmaran story, Hasib becomes the king's vizier and a wise man after returning from the underworld. The narrative does not mention that he eats the honey he finds in the pit. The substance that heals the king's disease is not honey but Shahmaran's milk; however, Hasib does not drink her milk. After the king is cured by drinking the milk, he appoints Hasib as his new vizier, and Hasib then has the leisure to read and write.

In Abdî Mûsâ's *Câmasb-nâme* version of the story, however, it is Shahmaran's flesh –not her milk– that cures the king's disease.¹¹ In this version, Câmasb (Hasib) gains wisdom by drinking the foam of the boiling water in which Shahmaran's body is boiled, as the text states: "As he drank, his heart filled with emotion, and wisdom surged through his veins" (Mûsâ, 2023: 439). From this perspective, it may be argued that not honey but rather Shahmaran's milk or flesh functions as the transformative substance, rather than honey, which represents menstrual blood.¹² However, these narratives undergo change before they are written down; therefore, it is to be expected that variations appear among different written versions.

Despite these changes, traces of initiation rituals can still be seen in the stories. The foam of the boiling water resembles the foam drunk by Koroghlu, and in Turkish cultural tradition it is said that bards gain their ability by drinking the wine (*bade*) offered to them in their dreams by a princess or by a beautiful girl (Bayat, 2016: 54). And in some versions of the Koroghlu story, he is nourished with goat's milk (Bayat, 2016: 57). In other narratives, heroes eat apples or, as in the case of the Buddha, sits beneath a fig tree; all of these acts signify initiation. Some heroes become kings, some acquire wisdom, and some become bards.

Milk, however, is not only a symbol of maternity, nourishment, and protection; in many traditions, it appears alongside honey. For instance, regarding how the gods acquire Soma, Hindu myths recount the following:

... the various saps exuded from the great trees and the juices from many herbs flowed into the water of the ocean. And from these juices, which

¹¹ In other versions of the narrative, the king is also said to have been healed by consuming Shahmaran's eye or drinking her blood (Gedik, 2021: 423).

¹² Besides the *One Thousand and One Nights* and *Câmasb-nâme* versions, the following versions likewise include a cavity containing jars of honey: Şâhmerân Hikâyesi, (Eds.) Gamze Beşenk et al. İstanbul: Beyan Yayınları, 2017; Şâh-mârân Hikâyesi, (Eds.) Sibel Üst et al. İstanbul: Akademik Kitaplar, 2009.

had the essence of ambrosia, and from the exudation of liquid gold mixed with the water, the gods obtained immortality. Then the water of the ocean turned to milk as it became mixed with those supreme juices, and from that milk there arose clarified butter.

... they... all together violently stirred the milk of the great ocean once more. Then from the ocean there arose Soma, the calm moon, with its cool rays, and the sun of a hundred thousands rays (Doniger, 1994: 276).

As we learn from Macrobius, in Roman mythology the wine offered as an offering during rituals dedicated to Bona Dea –the goddess of fertility, healing, and abundance, as well as the protector of women– was referred to as “milk,” and the vessel in which it was contained was called a “honey pot” (Ransome, 2004: 120). This shows that milk, wine, and honey could be used interchangeably. Another example can be given from the well of Frau Holle, who –also known as mother Holle or Helle– was regarded as the leader of the spirits of the underworld. An Alsatian version of the legend describes Holle’s water source as a stone well in a meadow, from which milk flows instead of water, while flowers filled with honey bloom around it (Ransome, 2004: 160). As seen in this myth, there is milk instead of water in the well, and honey-filled flowers surround it. Therefore, milk is associated not only with motherhood and nourishment, but also with spiritual transformation in initiation rituals.

As shown above, given the shared associations of honey and menstrual blood with the Moon, death, rebirth, sexuality, initiation rituals, and the elixir of immortality, honey can be interpreted as symbolizing menstrual blood. Entering the underworld can likewise be understood as symbolizing entry into the womb and, consequently, sexuality, which is conceptualized as the sacred marriage. Indeed, every initiation rite –that is, initiation into the mysteries of the goddess– represents a symbolic sexual union with the goddess. Therefore, one should not expect the story of Shahmaran and Hasib to lack marriage or sexuality; rather, Hasib’s journey to the underworld (i.e., the womb) represents his sacred marriage with the goddess symbolised by Shahmaran.¹³ To clarify this point, let me provide an example: When

¹³ The story states that Shahmaran is a virgin; this raises the question of how virginity and the sacred marriage ritual can coexist. It should be noted that the word “virgin” carried a different meaning than it does today, simply meaning unmarried. The following explanations by Briffault are illuminating: <<It is by that dissociation from a divine consort that the rise to matriarchal predominance of the agricultural goddesses is above all characterised. They have no husband; they are ‘Virgins.’ Ishtar, the morning star, was doubtless originally the wife of the moon god; but with her rise to supremacy she is divorced from him, the abolition of the relation being marked by making her his daughter, a relationship destitute of significance. She is, “in accordance with her whole nature, not the exclusive wife of any male god.” She is habitually referred to as ‘The Virgin,’ ‘The Holy Virgin,’ ‘The Virgin Mother.’ The term ‘virgin’ is, if course, used in those titles in its primitive sense as denoting ‘unwed,’ and connoting the very reverse of what the term has come to imply. The virgin Ishtar is also frequently addressed as ‘The Prostitute’; and she herself says, “A prostitute compassionate am I.”... The hierodules, or sacred prostitutes of her

we examine the baptismal rite in Christianity, we see that “rebirth” in baptism refers not to a biological birth, but to a spiritual and symbolic transformation. According to Christian theology, during baptism, a person leaves behind their old, sinful self; immersion in water symbolizes death with Christ, and emerging from the water symbolizes resurrection with Him. What I want to emphasize about the baptismal rite is that it has been forgotten that the baptismal rite is, in fact, a sacred marriage ritual. Campbell’s explanations on this subject are particularly significant:

The female water spiritually fructified with the male fire of the Holy Ghost is the Christian counterpart of the water of transformation known to all systems of mythological imagery. This rite is a variant of the sacred marriage, which is the source-moment that generates and regenerates the world and man, precisely the mystery symbolized by the Hindu lingam. To enter into this font is to plunge into the mythological realm; to break the surface is to cross the threshold into the night-sea. Symbolically, the infant makes the journey when the water is poured on its head; its guide and helpers are the priest and godparents. Its goal is a visit with the parents of its Eternal Self, the Spirit of God and the Womb of Grace. Then it is returned to the parents of the physical body. Few of us have any inkling of the sense of the rite of baptism, which was our initiation into our Church. Nevertheless, it clearly appears in the words of Jesus: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” The popular interpretation of baptism is that it “washes away original sin,” with emphasis rather on the cleansing than on the rebirth idea. This is a secondary interpretation. Or if the traditional birth image is remembered, nothing is said of an antecedent marriage. Mythological symbols, however, have to be followed through all their implications before they open out the full system of correspondences through which they represent, by analogy, the millennial adventure of the soul (Campbell, 2008: 232–233).

temples, were also called “the holy virgins.”... The Greek word ‘parthenos’ had the same meaning as the Semitic term ‘bathur,’ ‘batim,’ for ‘unwed.’ Children born out of wedlock were called ‘parthenioi,’ ‘virgin-born.’... Hera herself, although in later mythology the type of the matronly spouse, retained a reminiscence of her earlier character in the title of ‘Virgin.’... Artemis, though she was the mother of Telephos and of the fifty daughters of Endymion, was regarded as a virgin-goddess in the later acceptation of the term, and indeed as the patroness of fierce virginity and chastity>> (Briffault, 1927b: 169–170).

There is no explicit marriage between Shahmaran and Hasib, as there is in other monomythic narratives (such as that of Jason and Medea). However, Hasib's journey to the underworld symbolizes death and rebirth from the goddess's womb; therefore, it points symbolically to sexuality – that is, to sacred marriage. Consequently, the discovery of jars full of honey in a deep and wide cavity in the earth cannot be regarded as a coincidence or merely as a narrative element functioning as a commercial commodity, which directly leads to Hasib's betrayal by his companions. Instead, jars filled with honey, found in a deep and wide cavity in the earth, perfectly fit into a monomythical story symbolizing Hasib's death and rebirth, his sacred marriage to the goddess, and his spiritual transformation. This transformation is evident in the *Câmasb-nâme* version of the story, where, after drinking the foam of the boiling water in which Shahmaran's body was placed, Hasib's (Câmasb's) heart is filled with emotion and wisdom. Here, the foam of the boiling water can be seen as the transformative substance, but this does not diminish the symbolic power of honey, which is not directly visible in the story. As mentioned before, stories vary according to their narrators. In the *One Thousand and One Nights* version, Hasib drinks neither milk nor the foam of boiling water, yet he transforms from someone who could not learn a single letter before visiting Shahmaran into the king's vizier, mastering reading and writing. Even if honey had not been mentioned in this story, visiting Shahmaran in the underworld would have been sufficient for Hasib's spiritual transformation. Therefore, the presence of jars of honey in a deep, wide cavity in the earth in the story stems from its symbolic meanings, which also reflect one of the goddess's (Shahmaran's) attributes as a bee.

Conclusion

In this study, I have primarily utilized two versions of the Shahmaran story: 'The Story of Yamlika, Queen of Snakes' from *The Arabian Nights* and the *Câmasb-nâme* version of the story. To establish the symbolic connection between Shahmaran and bees, I have employed symbolic and archetypal approaches, conducting a qualitative textual analysis within an interpretive (hermeneutical) framework. By examining the etymologies of the aforementioned terms alongside relevant mythological narratives, this article has sought to demonstrate the archetypal relationship between menstrual blood, the moon, and honey. Therefore, I have tried to show that the presence of jars full of honey in the pit where Hasib descends is not about the honey being a tool for his friends' betrayal, but rather about the story representing an initiation ritual and revealing Shahmaran's connection with bees.

I have used Hasib's experience of death and rebirth, that is, entering and exiting the womb, points to his sacred marriage with the goddess, which means he was initiated into her mysteries. Hasib's friends tell his mother that he is dead. This is truly significant and symbolic because going to the underworld (i.e., the womb of the goddess) means dying. When Hasib goes to the subterranean cave, he symbolically experiences death and sees Shahmaran, the goddess, there. This does not only

mean dying, as mentioned above; it also means having sexual intercourse with the goddess (rebirth), that is, sacred marriage.

The heroes who experience death and rebirth during the mysteries of the goddess acquire certain abilities: these abilities may include becoming a king, becoming a sage (such as the Buddha), becoming a bard, and becoming a shaman. As for the hero Hasib (Câmasb), after returning from the goddess's underworld –the place where he experienced death and rebirth– he becomes the king's vizier and a wise man.

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