

Shahmaran: A Multifaceted Exploration of Myth, Symbolism, and Cultural Endurance

I. Introduction

Shahmaran, a captivating mythical entity, half-woman and half-snake, occupies a significant niche in the rich tapestry of Middle Eastern and Central Asian folklore.¹ Her legend, with roots stretching across Indo-Iranian and Turkic traditions, resonates deeply within Iranian, Turkish, Kurdish, and Mesopotamian cultures, among others.¹ This enduring figure is not merely a relic of ancient storytelling but continues to be a vibrant symbol, adapted and reinterpreted in contemporary arts, literature, and social discourse. The enduring nature of her narrative, which encapsulates themes of wisdom, betrayal, healing, and sacrifice, speaks to its profound cultural relevance. This report endeavors to provide an expert-level exploration of Shahmaran, delving into her etymological and descriptive characteristics, tracing her mythological origins and ancient parallels, examining the core narratives and their myriad variations, and analyzing her profound symbolism. Furthermore, it will investigate her pervasive influence in traditional and contemporary arts and culture, explore various interpretations including feminist perspectives, and discuss her role in shaping modern identities and even fostering tourism. Through this comprehensive analysis, the multifaceted nature of Shahmaran and her lasting legacy will be illuminated.

II. Etymology and Description

A. Etymology

The name "Shahmaran" is of Persian etymological origin, a compound of two distinct words: *Shāh* (شاه), signifying "king" or "ruler," and *mārān* (ماران), the plural form of *mār* (مار), meaning "snake".¹ Thus, Shahmaran literally translates to "the king of snakes" or "shah of snakes".¹ Despite the masculine connotation of the title *Shāh*, which was historically used for Persian kings, Shahmaran is predominantly depicted and understood as a female entity across virtually all legendary accounts and artistic representations.¹ This apparent contradiction highlights an intriguing aspect of the myth, where a term of male sovereignty is consistently applied to a powerful female figure, suggesting a complex interplay of gender and authority within the cultural contexts that shaped her legend. In some Anatolian interpretations, the gendering of Shahmaran as female is seen as a significant adaptation, possibly influenced by pre-existing mother goddess cults in the region, distinguishing her from potentially male depictions in narratives outside Anatolia.⁶

B. Physical Description

Shahmaran is consistently characterized as a chthonic creature, a hybrid being possessing the upper body of a human woman and the lower body of a serpent.¹ This fundamental description forms the core of her iconography. However, variations exist in her portrayal. Some accounts describe Shahmaran as a dual-headed entity, featuring a human female head at one end and a distinct snake's head at the other.¹ Often, one or both heads are adorned with a crown, signifying her royal status as the queen or ruler of snakes.¹ The human portion of her body is frequently depicted wearing a large, ornate necklace, further emphasizing her regal and perhaps divine nature.¹ Some scholarly interpretations suggest that the dual-headed imagery, particularly the snake head, might carry phallic connotations, adding another layer of symbolic complexity to her form.¹ In many artistic renderings, especially in Anatolian traditions, she is depicted with a beautiful young girl's face, a dragon-like tail, and sometimes even six legs, though the core half-woman, half-snake form remains paramount.¹⁰

III. Origins and Ancient Parallels

The origins of the Shahmaran myth are deeply embedded in the ancient folklores of Indo-Iranian and Turkic peoples, suggesting a widespread and archaic narrative tradition.¹ While Mesopotamia is often cited as a likely cradle for the legend, from where it disseminated across various cultures⁵, its precise genesis is complex and likely draws from multiple antecedent mythological streams.

Several ancient myths and symbols exhibit parallels that may have contributed to the development of the Shahmaran figure. The Hittite legend of Illuyanka, for instance, features a formidable serpentine creature engaged in conflict with the storm god Tešup, indicating a pre-existing tradition of powerful snake deities or beings in Anatolia.⁴ Similarly, Medusa from Greek mythology, a chthonic female figure with serpentine characteristics whose gaze turned men to stone, presents another potential mythological precursor, particularly given the narrative element of her decapitation by a hero, which echoes themes of confrontation and the acquisition of power or knowledge from a formidable female entity.⁴

The symbolism of the snake itself in ancient Near Eastern civilizations provides a crucial backdrop. In Babylonian, Sumerian, and Hittite cultures, serpents were often associated with health deities and healing.⁵ This connection is vital, as Shahmaran is almost universally recognized for her wisdom and healing properties. Ancient Mesopotamian and Semitic beliefs further attributed immortality to snakes due to their ability to shed their skin and seemingly rejuvenate, appearing youthful and renewed.¹¹ This concept of cyclical renewal and enduring life force is a powerful symbolic underpinning for a figure like Shahmaran, who embodies not only wisdom and healing but also a connection to the earth and the underworld. The reverence for snake cults in Canaan during the Bronze Age, predating Israelite presence, further attests to the deep-seated significance of serpentine figures in the region.¹¹ These ancient beliefs and narratives likely converged and transformed over centuries, contributing to the rich and multifaceted legend of Shahmaran as it is known today.

IV. The Legend of Shahmaran: Core Narratives and Variations

The legend of Shahmaran, while exhibiting numerous regional variations, revolves around a core narrative structure involving a human's encounter with this mystical queen of snakes, a period of shared existence, an act of betrayal, and Shahmaran's ultimate sacrifice, which often bestows wisdom or healing.

A. The Encounter with a Human

The central human protagonist who stumbles upon Shahmaran's subterranean realm is known by various names depending on the cultural and regional version of the tale. These include Camsab (also Cemşab, Camesel, Canibis, Jamasp, or Hasib Kerimeddin in Arabic translations), Canmest, Belkiya, or Tahmasp.¹ Typically, this individual, often a young man of humble origins like a woodcutter, accidentally discovers Shahmaran's hidden world.⁴ The discovery often occurs when he falls into a well or explores a cave, sometimes abandoned by companions during a quest for honey.¹ This descent leads him to a wondrous underground garden or palace, teeming with snakes, where he meets Shahmaran, their queen.³

During his time in this hidden realm, which can span many years, the human lives under Shahmaran's protection and tutelage. She imparts to him profound wisdom, knowledge of medicinal herbs, and the secrets of nature and healing.³ A bond, often of love and deep trust, develops between them. In some Persian versions, it's suggested that Cemshab was able to find her due to his pure heart and his *Ajna* (third eye), allowing him to perceive beyond the physical world.¹¹

B. The Betrayal and Sacrifice

Despite the idyllic existence in Shahmaran's realm, the human eventually yearns to return to the surface world, missing his family or former life.³ Shahmaran, often with foreknowledge of her own demise at human hands, reluctantly agrees to his departure but makes him swear an oath of secrecy, never to reveal her existence or location.³

Years pass, and the ruler of the land (a Sultan or Padishah) falls gravely ill with a mysterious ailment that defies all conventional cures.¹ The ruler's vizier, often a cunning or malevolent figure (sometimes a sorcerer), declares that the only remedy is to consume the flesh or a specific part of Shahmaran.³ A search ensues for anyone who knows Shahmaran's whereabouts. The human protagonist, Camsab/Tahmasp, is eventually identified, sometimes through a tell-tale sign such as snake-like scales appearing on his skin when he bathes, or he is tortured or threatened until he breaks his vow and reveals Shahmaran's hidden domain.³ Shahmaran, knowing her fate is sealed, often meets her captors with grace and resignation. Before her death, she provides crucial instructions regarding the preparation and consumption of her body, typically involving boiling her in parts.³ The effects of consuming different parts are specific: one part (often the tail or first water) is poisonous and kills the

malevolent vizier who consumes it; another part (often the body or second water) heals the ailing ruler; and a third part (often the head or third water/broth) bestows profound wisdom, knowledge, or healing abilities upon the human protagonist who betrayed her, transforming him into a wise man or healer, sometimes identified as the legendary Lokman Hekim.³ This act of sacrifice, where her death leads to healing and enlightenment, underscores the themes of wisdom gained through loss and the complex relationship between humanity and the mystical.

C. The Tale of Lokman Hekim

In some narrative traditions, the legendary wise physician Lokman Hekim (Luqman the Sage) has a direct encounter with Shahmaran, from whom he learns the secrets of medicinal plants and the art of healing.⁴ In other versions, the human protagonist Camsab, after consuming the designated part of Shahmaran's body as per her instructions, becomes Lokman Hekim himself, thereby inheriting her vast medical knowledge.³ This connection firmly establishes Shahmaran as a source of profound healing wisdom, a fount of knowledge that, even through her demise, benefits humanity. The main purpose behind Shahmaran's killing, in many versions, is precisely this pursuit of health and healing for humans.⁴

D. Literary Sources

The legend of Shahmaran is attested in significant works of Middle Eastern literature. One of the most prominent is the *One Thousand and One Nights* (Arabian Nights), where her story appears under titles such as "The Story of Yemliha: An Underground Queen" (or "Jemlia - the Sultan of Underground") or, in Turkish, "Yeraltı Sultanı Yemliha'nın Öyküsü".¹ In these tales, the protagonist is often named Hasib Karim al-Din (or Camsab, as the Arabic "Hasib" is considered a translation of the Persian "Jamasp").⁹

Another crucial literary source is the *Camasb-name* (or *Cāmasbnāme*), a work of Persian origin that holds a significant place in both Persian and Turkish literature.¹ This text, originally in Persian, details the wisdom of the vizier Cāmisab (Jamasp) in response to questions from Shah Gūştasb about the universe and creation. The Shahmaran narrative is interwoven into this framework, with Camsab's encounter with Shahmaran forming a key part of the tales.⁶ The plot and narrative techniques of the *Camasb-name* are thought by researchers to trace back to the *One Thousand and One Nights*.⁶

Beyond these, variations of the Shahmaran tale have been collected from Uzbek sources, where Ibn Sina (Avicenna) is welcomed by "Shohimoron," the snake king, and gains magical powers from a snake broth, and from Uyghur folklore, where a youth named Cihanşah befriends Shahmaran and becomes a vizier after drinking a broth made from her.¹ These diverse literary attestations underscore the widespread appeal and adaptability of the Shahmaran legend across different cultures and languages.

V. Regional Manifestations and Cultural Significance

Shahmaran's legend is not monolithic; it manifests with distinct characteristics and cultural

weight in various regions, reflecting local beliefs and traditions.

A. Anatolian (Turkish) Folklore

In Turkey, Shahmaran is a figure of considerable cultural importance, often regarded as a national treasure.¹ Her legend is particularly prominent in southeastern and eastern Anatolia. The Mediterranean town of Tarsus in Mersin province is widely believed to be a primary locus of her story, with some traditions claiming she lived and was killed there.¹ The Yılkale (Snake Castle) in Adana, located between Ceyhan and Misis, is another site locally known as Shahmaran's home.¹ The city of Mardin, with its significant Kurdish and Arab populations, also holds a strong tradition of Shahmaran, where her image is a common motif in local art.¹ Furthermore, in Gaziantep's İslahiye district, the Şahmaran neighborhood and Şahmaran mountain are named after her, with local belief holding that she resided on this mountain near the ancient Hittite ruins of Yesemek.⁴

The narrative is so ingrained that it was cataloged by scholars Wolfram Eberhard and Pertev Naili Boratav in their *Typen türkischer Volksmärchen* ("Turkish Folktale Catalogue") as TTV 57, "Der Schlangenkönig Schahmeran," with seven variants listed.¹ A unique belief in Tarsus is that the snakes, unaware of Shahmaran's death, will one day learn of her demise and invade the city in revenge.⁴ This deep integration into local folklore underscores her enduring presence in the Turkish cultural consciousness.

B. Kurdish Folklore

Within Kurdish mythology, Shahmaran holds a particularly revered status. The serpent itself is traditionally viewed by Kurds as a symbol of luck and strength.¹ Shahmaran is often perceived as a wisdom goddess and a protector of secrets.¹⁶ Her image is frequently found on glass or metalwork displayed in Kurdish homes.¹ A distinctive element in some Kurdish versions of the legend is the belief that upon Shahmaran's death, her spirit passes to her daughter, ensuring a continuity of her wisdom and power.²³

Regions such as Mardin, Kars, and Iğdır have strong Shahmaran traditions.¹⁶ In areas like Kermanshah (Iran) and Dersim (Tunceli, Turkey), people honor Shahmaran with specific rituals and offerings. One such practice is the preparation of a ceremonial porridge known as "Dakulaney Şamaran" (or "dane kolane shamaran"). This dish, typically made from wheat, lentils, and spices, is distributed among neighbors annually to invoke Shahmaran's blessings and seek protection from snake bites and scorpion stings.⁹ This practice highlights her role as a protective deity deeply connected to the well-being of the community.

C. Iranian (Persian) Folklore

In Iranian folklore, Shahmaran is recognized as the queen of the *maran*, described as wise, intelligent, and caring snakes dwelling underground in peace.¹¹ She is depicted as all-knowing, beautiful, and a graceful leader.¹¹ Persian mythology also associates the snake, and by extension Shahmaran, with water, storm clouds, and fertility. Snakes are believed to be masters of storm clouds, dwelling in seas and guiding rain to the earth during lightning,

thereby causing fertility.¹⁹ This connection positions Shahmaran as a bringer of life and abundance.

The story of Cemshab (Jamasp) finding Shahmaran is particularly detailed in some Iranian versions, emphasizing that his ability to discover her hidden realm was due to his pure heart and the awakening of his *Ajna* (third eye), enabling him to perceive otherworldly realms.¹¹ A historical reference connecting to the name is the Shah Maran–Daulatabad basin, an ancient irrigation system from the Iron Age discovered near Tepe Yahya in southwestern Iran, suggesting the name's resonance in the region's history.¹

D. Mesopotamian Context

The legend of Shahmaran is considered to have a vibrant history within the broader Mesopotamian lands, an area recognized as a crucible of ancient civilizations and mythologies.⁵ The snake held potent symbolism in Mesopotamian beliefs, often representing immortality due to its skin-shedding and associated with healing deities, as seen in Sumerian, Babylonian, and Akkadian traditions.⁵ These ancient symbolic associations with snakes—wisdom, healing, immortality, and connection to the earth and underworld—provide a fertile ground from which the complex figure of Shahmaran could emerge and flourish, later spreading and adapting across neighboring cultures. The story of a man named Canmest falling into a well and encountering Shahmaran in a garden, leading to a tragic love, is one such narrative rooted in this Mesopotamian milieu.¹²

VI. Symbolism of Shahmaran

Shahmaran is a figure rich in symbolic meaning, embodying a range of concepts that have resonated across cultures and generations. Her multifaceted nature allows for diverse interpretations, reflecting the complexities of life, wisdom, and the human condition.

A. Wisdom and Knowledge:

Universally, Shahmaran is revered as a repository of profound wisdom and esoteric knowledge.³ She is the keeper of secrets, particularly those of the natural world and the medicinal properties of plants. Her interactions with humans often involve the imparting of this knowledge, transforming them into sages or healers. This aspect positions her as a guide and an enlightener, a source of understanding that transcends ordinary human perception.

B. Healing and Medicine:

Directly linked to her wisdom is Shahmaran's potent capacity for healing.³ The narrative core often involves her sacrifice leading to the cure of an ailing ruler or the bestowal of healing arts upon humanity. Her very flesh, or the broth made from it, is believed to hold curative powers. This symbolism aligns with ancient Near Eastern traditions where serpents were associated with deities of medicine and health.⁵

C. Feminine Power and Fertility:

Despite the masculine etymology of her name, Shahmaran is predominantly a female figure, embodying strong feminine power.⁵ She is frequently associated with abundance, prosperity, and fertility, symbols often linked to mother goddess cults prevalent in Anatolia and the ancient Near East.⁵ Her connection to the earth, the underworld, and, in Persian mythology, to

water and rain (life-giving elements), further reinforces her role as a symbol of fecundity and the generative forces of nature.¹⁹ The hanging of her image in bedrooms, especially by young girls and women, is often tied to wishes for good luck and fertility.³⁰

D. Betrayal and Sacrifice:

A poignant and central theme in the Shahmaran legend is that of betrayal by humans, followed by her willing or fated sacrifice.² Having shared her wisdom and trust, she is ultimately exposed by the very individual she harbored. This narrative arc explores the fragility of trust, the consequences of human fallibility, and the concept of redemptive sacrifice, as her death often brings about positive outcomes (healing, wisdom) despite the treachery involved.

E. Duality (Life/Death, Protector/Threat):

Shahmaran embodies a fundamental duality, reflecting the dual nature often attributed to serpents in mythology – they can be symbols of life, renewal, and protection, but also of danger, poison, and death.²⁸ She is a protector of her realm and secrets, a source of healing, yet her power, if misused or disrespected, can lead to dire consequences (as seen in the fate of the vizier). This duality highlights the balance between opposing forces in the natural and supernatural worlds.

F. Immortality and Rebirth:

The serpent's ability to shed its skin and emerge anew is a powerful ancient symbol of immortality, transformation, and rebirth.⁵ Shahmaran, as the queen of snakes, partakes in this symbolism. In some Kurdish traditions, the belief that her spirit passes to her daughter upon her death further underscores this theme of continuity and cyclical existence.²³ Her story, therefore, often carries undertones of life transcending death, and wisdom enduring beyond individual mortality.

G. Protection:

The image of Shahmaran is widely believed to offer protection against malevolent forces, bad events, and the evil eye.¹⁰ Displaying her likeness in homes and on personal items serves as a talismanic practice, invoking her benevolent and safeguarding qualities. This protective aspect contributes significantly to her enduring popularity in folk art and everyday life.

VII. Shahmaran in Arts and Culture

The enduring figure of Shahmaran has not only persisted in oral traditions but has also found vibrant expression across a multitude of artistic and cultural forms, from ancient crafts to contemporary media.

A. Traditional Arts and Crafts

Shahmaran is a ubiquitous motif in the traditional arts and crafts of the regions where her legend thrives, particularly in Anatolia and Kurdish areas.¹ Her image is meticulously rendered in various mediums, including:

- **Textiles:** Embroidery, fabrics, and rugs (kilims) frequently feature her likeness.¹ These items often adorn homes and are part of dowries.¹⁰
- **Paintings:** Under-glass painting (Turkish: *camaltı*) is a particularly popular medium for depicting Shahmaran, showcasing vibrant colors and intricate details.¹⁰ Traditional

paintings on various surfaces are also common.⁴

- **Metalwork and Jewelry:** Shahmaran is crafted into jewelry, such as necklaces and brooches, and adorns metalwork items like copper trays.¹
- **Sculpture and Stonework:** Sculptural representations and stone carvings of Shahmaran exist, further cementing her visual presence in the cultural landscape.¹

Common visual characteristics in these traditional depictions include her half-woman, half-snake form, often with a beautiful female face, a crown signifying her royalty, and sometimes multiple heads (one human, one serpentine) or even additional legs.¹⁰ These artistic creations are not merely decorative; they carry significant cultural weight.

Shahmaran's image is traditionally displayed in homes, especially in bedrooms of young girls and women, with the belief that it brings good luck, fertility, abundance, and protection against the evil eye and other misfortunes.¹⁰

B. Literary Adaptations

Shahmaran's narrative has been a rich source of inspiration for literature, both classical and modern.

- **Classical Texts:** As previously discussed, her tale is found in seminal works like the *One Thousand and One Nights* (as "Jemlia - the Sultan of Underground" or "Yeraltı Sultani Yemliha'nın Öyküsü") and the Persian *Camasb-name*.¹ These texts served as early vehicles for the dissemination and preservation of her legend.
- **Folk Tale Collections:** Raphael Emmanuel's 1944 book, *The Ring of Shah Maran, A Story from the Mountains of Kurdistan*, presents a version of the folk story where a boy earns Shahmaran's respect by sharing bread with animals.¹
- **Modern Literature:** Contemporary authors continue to engage with the Shahmaran myth. Turkish author Murathan Mungan's work, notably "Şahmeran'ın Bacakları" (Shahmaran's Legs), offers a complex, archetypal reinterpretation of the legend, exploring themes of betrayal, knowledge, and the master-apprentice relationship within a modern sensibility.²⁰ In Kurdish literature, authors like Abdulsamad Yegit have explored her legend in novels such as *Şamaran*.¹⁶ These adaptations demonstrate the myth's capacity to be re-contextualized and to address contemporary concerns while retaining its core symbolic power. Literary analyses often focus on the archetypal elements within the Shahmaran narrative, examining its structure, character functions, and enduring psychological resonance.²¹

C. Contemporary Art and Music

Shahmaran's allure extends into contemporary visual arts and music, where artists reinterpret her image and story for modern audiences.

- **Music:** Dutch-Iranian singer Sevdaliza prominently featured Shahmaran in her work, including a song titled "Shahmaran" on her debut album *ISON* and an ambitious, critically acclaimed music video for the track.¹ Directed by Emmanuel Adjei, the video explores themes of racial oppression, power struggles, and marginalized identities

through a fine art lens.³⁹

- **Visual Arts:** The Mardin Metropolitan Municipality hosted a public art exhibition in 2020, "Shahmaran Mardin," which featured statues of Shahmaran created by artist Ayla Turan and decorated by local artists and businesses, showcasing her continued relevance in public art.¹ Furthermore, contemporary artists like Zehra Doğan and Canan Şenol have utilized Shahmaran's image to symbolize the strength and resilience of Kurdish women.¹

D. Film and Television

The captivating narrative of Shahmaran has also been adapted for the screen, most notably in recent times.

- **Netflix Series "Shahmaran" (2023):** This Turkish supernatural thriller series, released on Netflix in January 2023, brought the legend to a global audience.¹ The series follows Şahsu, a modern woman who travels to Adana and becomes involved with a mysterious community descended from Shahmaran, awaiting the completion of a historical prophecy.⁴⁰ The show achieved significant viewership, ranking in the top 10 in multiple countries shortly after its release.⁴⁰
 - **Reception:** Critical and audience reception has been mixed. While aspects like cinematography, acting (particularly by Serenay Sarıkaya and Burak Deniz), costume design, and the intriguing premise were praised, criticisms were leveled at the pacing (often described as a "slow burn"), plot coherence, and perceived departures from traditional cultural authenticity, with some critics noting excessive nudity or scenes out of context with regional Turkish traditions.⁴¹ Some viewers found the story captivating and a fresh take on mythology, while others felt it did not do justice to the original legend.⁴³ The series' adaptation of the legend into a contemporary setting with modern characters and concerns necessarily involves transformation, leading to discussions about authenticity versus creative interpretation.⁴⁴

The continued presence of Shahmaran across these diverse artistic and cultural platforms underscores her dynamic nature as a myth that is constantly being retold, re-imagined, and imbued with new meanings.

VIII. Interpretations and Modern Relevance

The figure of Shahmaran, far from being a static relic of the past, continues to evoke diverse interpretations and holds significant relevance in contemporary discourse, particularly concerning gender, identity, and cultural heritage.

A. Feminist Interpretations

Shahmaran's legend has become a fertile ground for feminist analysis and reinterpretation.

- **Symbol of Female Strength:** In a world often dominated by male heroes in mythology, Shahmaran emerges as a strong, brave, intelligent, and wise female figure.² She is a

queen, a possessor of profound knowledge, and a being who commands respect and fear. This portrayal offers an empowering alternative to traditionally passive female roles in folklore.

- **Critique of Patriarchal Narratives:** Many feminist readings scrutinize the common narrative arc where Shahmaran's wisdom and power are ultimately appropriated by a male figure (Camsab/Lokman Hekim) through her betrayal and sacrifice.²⁶ This can be seen as reflecting patriarchal structures where female knowledge and agency are subsumed or exploited for male advancement. The narrative of her "victimization" and the subsequent empowerment of the male protagonist through her demise is viewed critically as a ratification of male dominance.²⁸
- **Empowerment through Her Image:** Despite potentially problematic narrative elements, the image of Shahmaran has been reclaimed by many women as a symbol of empowerment, wisdom, and resilience.²⁶ The act of women creating and displaying her art, particularly in their own spaces, is seen as a form of rebellion against patriarchal norms and an assertion of female presence and voice.²⁶ The fact that the Shahmaran legend often highlights her goodness and sacrifice, even when faced with betrayal, resonates with many women who see her as a special, powerful figure.²⁶
- **The "Problematic Gender" and Fertility:** The ambiguity of Shahmaran's gender in some accounts (though predominantly female) and her strong association with fertility and the life-giving earth connect her to ancient mother goddess figures.⁵ The snake's symbolism of immortality through skin-shedding, paired with female fertility, underscores the continuation of life, a powerful feminine principle.⁷ The feminization of a potentially male "king of snakes" in Anatolian traditions is itself a significant cultural adaptation.⁶

B. Shahmaran and Modern Identity

In contemporary times, Shahmaran has been adopted as a potent symbol by various groups seeking to assert their identity and challenge normative structures.

- **Symbol for the Turkish LGBT Community:** Since approximately 2016, Shahmaran's image has been increasingly used by LGBTQ+ supporters in Turkey and other parts of the Middle East.¹ Her hybrid nature (half-human, half-snake), perceived non-binary qualities, dignified story, and powerful essence make her a symbol of hope and resilience for this community. She is seen as embodying "queer folklore" and challenging the notion that queer identities are incompatible with Turkish cultural values or Muslim identity.³² Her existence within traditional narratives provides a historical anchor for identities that are often marginalized in modern society.
- **Emblem of Kurdish Cultural Identity:** For many Kurds, Shahmaran is more than a myth; she is a profound emblem of their cultural identity, embodying resilience, wisdom, and protection.¹⁶ Her stories and images are deeply woven into the Kurdish cultural tapestry, serving as a reminder of ancient heritage and enduring values. Her depiction as a guardian against evil and a source of abundance resonates with a collective desire

for well-being and cultural continuity.¹⁶ The act of sharing her legends and creating art in her image becomes a way of preserving and celebrating Kurdish folklore and identity.⁴⁶

C. Tourism

The legends surrounding Shahmaran also contribute to cultural tourism in specific regions of Turkey.

- **Shahmeran Hamam in Tarsus:** The historical Shahmeran Hamam in Tarsus is directly associated with the legend, as it is said to be the place where Shahmaran was killed.³ This historical bathhouse, built on Roman foundations and restored during the Ottoman era, draws visitors interested in the myth and local history.⁴⁷
- **Tarsus and Mardin as Cultural Hotspots:** The towns of Tarsus and Mardin, both rich in Shahmaran lore, attract tourists interested in exploring the myth's origins and its manifestations in local art and culture.¹ Tour itineraries sometimes include learning about the Shahmaran legend as a key cultural experience in these areas.⁴⁸ The vibrant depictions of Shahmaran in local crafts, paintings, and public art further enhance the touristic appeal.

The adaptability of Shahmaran's symbolism allows her to remain a relevant and dynamic figure, speaking to contemporary concerns about gender equality, identity politics, and the preservation of cultural heritage, while also drawing interest to the historical and mythological landscapes from which she emerged.

IX. Conclusion

Shahmaran, the enigmatic Queen of Snakes, stands as a testament to the enduring power of myth. Originating from the ancient wellsprings of Indo-Iranian, Turkic, and Mesopotamian folklore, her legend has traversed centuries and cultural boundaries, embedding itself deeply within the collective consciousness of diverse communities, most notably in Anatolian, Kurdish, and Persian traditions. Her multifaceted nature—half-woman, half-serpent—is not merely a physical description but a symbolic representation of profound dualities: wisdom and vulnerability, healing and sacrifice, protection and betrayal, life and death.

The core narratives, centered around her fateful encounter with a human, the imparting of esoteric knowledge, the inevitable betrayal, and her ultimate sacrifice for the sake of healing or enlightenment, have been preserved and reinterpreted through countless oral retellings, literary works such as the *One Thousand and One Nights* and the *Camasb-name*, and a rich array of traditional arts and crafts. From intricate embroideries and vibrant glass paintings to contemporary sculptures and digital media, Shahmaran's image continues to be a potent symbol of cultural heritage, often associated with wisdom, fertility, protection, and feminine strength.

In the modern era, Shahmaran's significance has not waned. Instead, her story and symbolism have been embraced and re-contextualized to address contemporary issues. Feminist interpretations highlight her as an emblem of female empowerment while critiquing patriarchal appropriations of her power. She has emerged as a symbol of hope and resilience

for the Turkish LGBT community, challenging exclusionary narratives and affirming the existence of queer identities within traditional folklore and Muslim contexts. For Kurdish communities, she remains a powerful emblem of cultural identity, wisdom, and the enduring connection to ancestral lands and traditions.

The continuing evolution of Shahmaran—from ancient deity and mythical queen to a symbol in modern art, literature, film, and social movements—underscores her remarkable adaptability. She is a figure who bridges the past and the present, the mystical and the mundane, embodying the timeless human quest for knowledge, healing, and understanding in a complex world. Her legend persists, not as a static artifact, but as a living narrative that continues to inspire, challenge, and enchant.

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