The cult of deities of eastern origin in the Black Sea region

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Abstract

The dissertation describes and analyses the most significant deities of eastern origin in the Black Sea region, a region where many different spheres of cultural and religious influence were displayed. It is a common sense that the Black Sea, a very important geographically area, with important neighboring countries (the Anatolian ones in our case) had and still has access to various religious and cultural notions from all over the world. Among them, the cults of eastern deities were penetrated from East to the Black Sea and managed to play a small or bigger role in the official and private religious life of the Greek colonists.

The paper deals with Cybele, Attis, Mithras and Mên, deities of eastern origin, either Phrygian or Indo-Iranian. The information provided upon their cults stems from archaeological data and epigraphic material, despite the fact that the material for some deities is not so extent. Their emergence begins from the Archaic or Classical Period and continues to the Roman era. The study is divided in four parts, one for each deity, describing the following: their historical background, some elements for their name origin and their functions, their iconography, syncretic characteristics and cult festivals for some of these deities. The last part of each chapter deals with the colonies of the Black Sea region: in which of them their cult appear and in what extent those deities were incorporated or not to the local Greek pantheon.

The examination of the most significant monuments and temples of Cybele, Attis, Mithras and Mên in the Black Sea region would make the target reader realize that the Greek settlers remained faithful to the Greek pantheon but at the same time they “welcomed” more or less the Anatolian cults, mainly, due to their resemblance to the Greek gods. Therefore, it will be obvious through our analysis that Greeks not only affected the eastern religious ideas and cults but were also affected by them, a process that could never be one-sided.

Finally, in order to accomplish our research, texts of ancient sources, images of the most important monuments or sanctuaries and a general map containing all the colonies of the Black Sea region, in which the above deities appear, are added in our dissertation for a better documentation of the discussed issues.
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INTRODUCTION

The study of deities of eastern origin and their cult in the Black Sea area will be the aim of my research, a subject that should probably bring into light many different aspects including economic, political and religious ones. A principal feature that should be pointed out is how easily or not the Greek colonists of the Black Sea region assimilated the cult of the eastern deities and were able to embrace them in their everyday life. Other than that, the Greeks in general remained loyal to the Greek deities, a factor that should be taken into consideration during the analysis.

The Greek cities of the Black Sea had many different cults, mostly Hellenic and to a lesser degree local. Some gods were included into their official and private pantheon and others appeared in the Archaic or Classical periods after the colonization of the coast by the Greeks. My task in this dissertation is to trace which are the eastern deities and cults that were popular among the Greek and local inhabitants and to what degree they managed to penetrate into the Greek settlements. This means that the worship of these deities could have changed and developed, absorbed new components and characteristics as it moved from East to the West, from one civilization to another, as well as diachronically. Besides, it should be emphasized in which ancient Greek colonies of the Black Sea these eastern cults were expanded.

In the first place, the most popular eastern deities will be analyzed, such as Cybele and Attis, Mithras and the god Mên. Their main characteristics, their iconographical tradition, their influence and relation to the Greek deities and probably their close parallels and a syncretism are crucial points that the dissertation should focus on. It could be supposed that the Greek inhabitants of the Black Sea region must have identified some characteristics of the Eastern deities similar to those of the Greek ones and that is the reason why they accepted, in a degree, to “welcome” the eastern cults into their settlements.

Literary written sources, inscriptions, archaeological finds (for example coins, terracottas, votive and grave reliefs, statues) from the Greek cities will be examined in order to approach all the above questions.

Briefly, some of the most important aspects that the subject will cover should be the following: which eastern deities were worshipped in the different colonies of the Black Sea (North, South, East and West) during the antiquity, the ancient sacred...
monuments dedicated to those deities in the Black Sea, the most important worship objects, such as votive offerings, as well as inscriptions and texts of the ancient sources referred to cults, religious festivals and worship practices in the region of the Black Sea.

Finally, after the research reaches the end, it would be a great opportunity to gather all the most important conclusions from the eastern deities, in order to realize their nature and impact on the colonies of the Black Sea region.
Part A - Cybele

1. General facts about the goddess Cybele

In the cities along the north coast of the Black Sea the presence of the goddess Cybele is attested as early as the 6th c. B.C. Her worship was introduced by Greek colonists between the 8th and the 6th c. B.C. Vermaseren speaks about the Greek Cybele, worshipped in the coastal cities and the Roman Cybele in the interior, both of them descended from the Asiatic deity, who became a national Roman goddess during the Republic period.¹

Before speaking of her Phrygian origin, it is necessary to determine whether her cult had traits from the Bronze Ages and Early Iron Ages, earlier cultures of the Phrygian one. Hittites were the predecessors of the Phrygians with a large pantheon and sacred mountains to contact with their gods. Their most interesting female goddess was Kubaba which many authors consider to be the Greek deity Kybele or Kybebe,² after being hellenized. There are some parallels between the two deities in their appearance representations; however, the similarities are superficial and even the phonetic similarity between the two names is a coincidence and not an actual relation.³ As it will be shown from the following indications, the name Cybele is a Greek one for the goddess whose principal Phrygian name was “Mother” or “Matar” in Latin.

Cybele is a goddess from Phrygia, a teogonic divinity. The origin of her cult is probably brought from Asia Minor-Miletus. The first references come from the region of Afyon Karahisar and of Eskisehir, in the early 7th c. B.C., where some monuments witness her cult. Names like Matar (Mother in Greek) and Matar Kubileia or Kubeleia are some of those that we meet in inscriptions of Phrygia. Especially, the name Matar appears ten times in Paleo-Phrygian inscriptions and her second epithet that of Kubileya or Kubeleia, probably a Phrygian divine epithet, seems to be the root of the Greek name Cybele. According to Strabo, it is also probable that Cybele is the name of a mountain in Phrygia (Kybelon); thus, Hesychios, a Byzantine

¹ She was the first Oriental deity that was accepted and consecrated at Rome. Bujduveanu 2006: 19-20.
² There is an interpretation for the root Kube: since the goddess had a meteorite shape in her worship it could be possible that her name derived from the “cube”. Vermaseren 1977: 22.
A lexicographer, considers that the word *Kybelia* was referring to a Phrygian mountain with caves and sacred places. Therefore, “Matar Kubileya” probably meant the “Mother of the mountain”, where *Kubileya* was a feminine epithet, a Phrygian theonym referring to a mountain.\(^4\)

Consequently, Cybele is only an epithet, among others, describing a deity with a simple name “The mother” or “Matar” (as it is referred in Paleo-Phrygian inscriptions). Furthermore, “Mountaineous mother” (or Mother Oreia) is a name that sometimes was used by the Greeks.\(^5\)

The cult of Cybele spread quickly from Phrygia to the Greek world and Asia Minor. It was the first, among other Asian cults, that entered the Danube area, probably in the early Hellenistic period. It was a long procedure due to economic, social, political and religious aspects. Cybele appeared in the Greek language and literature in the mid 6\(^{th}\) c. B. C. and during the 5\(^{th}\) c. became a common name for the goddess.

It will be clear, through our research and analysis in that paper, that Cybele reached mostly the Greek colonies on the western and northern coasts of the Black Sea area during that time, despite the fact that her cult has not been so far the object of a detailed research and her interpretation causes many difficulties for her study. Greeks adopted both the iconography and the meaning of her cult and eventually included her worship at their customs along the Black Sea colonies.

**1.1 Epithets and functions of the goddess**

According to Philippe Borgeaud’s study, it is about a deity without a clear and proper name. Many different names and epithets are known for her, mostly related to the place or the mountain where she was venerated, as mentioned previously. The reference “Mother of Gods” does not seem to complete her image as a goddess. It is a general name that could possibly belonged to other deities, such as Demeter. Borgeaud adds also that there is a Homeric hymn giving us the following image for that goddess:

“Mother of gods and peoples, that likes the music from tympanums, loves the screams of wolves and lions, the mountains are full of echoes”.

In that description the deity appears in a primitive way, in a place quite exotic, with savage animals and the accompanying of music.\(^6\) Having a closer look to the inscriptions of the Black Sea region, we notice that she is usually named as “Μήτηρ θεών”.\(^7\) There is a dedication from Bizone,

\[\text{άγαθη} \text{ τύχ} \ ις \ Μητρι \ Θεών \ Λεωνάς \ ανέ \ [-] \ [-] \ [-] \ [-] \ [\pi] \ 5 \ (I\ G \ Bulg., \ P),\]

from Histria as “Μητρι Θεών”,

\[\text{Ἡλιος} \ Μητρι \ Θεών \ χαριστήριον \ (IScMI \ 128, \ 2^{\text{nd}} \ c. \ AD),\]

inscriptions from Tomis

\[\text{τον} \ \text{ένιαυτόν} \ \text{θυνταν} \ \text{ὑπὲρ} \ \text{τη}[z] \ \text{τον} \ \text{δήμου} \ \text{σωτ} \ ρια[z] \ \text{Μητρι} \ \text{Θεών} \ \text{kai} \ \text{Διοσκόροις} \ \text{δεδόχθαι} \ \text{τη} \ \text{βουλή} \ \text{(IscMII,} \ 2, \ \text{ca.100B.C.)}\]

a dedication from Marcianopolis as “Μητρι θεά”

\[\text{άγαθη} \ #56\ [τύχ} \ \text{I}. \ \text{Μητρι} \ \text{θεά} \ #56 \ \text{ε[ύχην]} \ (I\ G \ Bulg \ II, \ 806)\]

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\(^6\) The poet Pindar notes that music with cymbals, crotals and tympanums are features of “Mater” or else Cybele, “Mother of Gods” or simply “Mother” (Mater). Borgeaud 1996: 24-25; LIMC VIII, Ib: 744; Vermaseren 1977: 27.

\(^7\) Tacheva – Hitova denotes in her book that the name “Μήτηρ θεών” (Mother of Gods) was used at the Hellenistic period and remained also at the Roman times (Mater Deum in Latin). Some isolated dedications referred to her as “the Mother” or “the Mother Goddess” with the most popular “Great” (magna, μεγάλη). Tacheva- Hitova 1983: 136.
and another one from Marcianapolis giving to the goddess the epithet *Urania ἀγαθῆ τῆς*. *Oύρανια Μητρὶ Θεῶν* (IG Bulg II 805)⁸

Only an inscription from Doric Mesambria names her “Mater Kybeleia”, as Velkov informs us.⁹

Cybele was worshipped as Earth-Mother, Mother of Nature, of wild animals and mainly as Mountain Goddess in Asia Minor. She was the creator of agriculture, livestock breeding, music and the founder and protector of towns and fortresses. According to I. Kakridis, this Phrygian goddess of earth, vegetation, maternity and crop, was also protector of families because she used to hold in her arms the people from the time of their birth till they died. Her cult had a rural character and she was worshipped at the mountains, under a noisy music of tympanums, cymbals and flutes and howlings with ecstatic dances.¹⁰ She had also another function, as protector of sailors in the Black Sea region, a function that is attested in Herodotus, book IV, 76.

“καὶ ἐὗρε γὰρ τῇ μητρὶ τῶν θεῶν ὀνόματας τοὺς Κυζικηνοὺς ὀρτῆν μεγαλοπρεπῶς κάρτα, ἐξίσου τῇ μητρὶ ὁ Ἀνάχαρος, ἤν σῶς καὶ ὑμῖς ὀποιοστήπη ἔς ἐοντοῦ, θύσειν τε κατὰ ταύτα κατὰ ὀρα τοὺς Κυζικηνοὺς ποιεῖν τας καὶ παννυχόδα στήσειν”¹¹

Finally, in one of her temples at Dionysopolis (today’s Balchik city on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast) there are references in two honorary decrees and dedications naming the goddess “Μήτηρ θεῶν Ποντία” or simply “Μήτηρ Ποντία”. This epithet “Ποντία” is related here for the first time with that deity but Pontios-Pontia is also met in other deities connected with the sea (like Aphrodite Pontia, protector of sailors in Cos, as the inscriptions of the Hellenistic period mention).

⁸ All the inscriptions come from: http://epigraphy.pachkum.org/inscriptions/main.
¹⁰ These features were, already, common to the Greek people since some of them were recognised in their Greek deities, like Demeter, Athena, Artemis and Aphrodite. Consequently, Cybele’s cult was assimilated and widespread quickly among the Greeks. Κακριδής 1986: 240; Todorova 2007: 184; LIMC VIII, Ib: 745.
Consequently, the epithet Pontia in Dionysopolis is mentioned for a goddess worshipped near the sea (the Black Sea or else Πόντος) as protector of the sailors.12

1.2 Iconography of Cybele

In most of her representations Cybele appears as following: she is seated on a high-backed throne, with a mural crown on her head, usually accompanied by one or two lions, holding a patera in her right hand (vessel used in the libations) and a tympanum in the left hand. In some other representations she is depicted holding a phiale in the right hand and a scepter in the other hand. She wears a calathos on her head, a mural crown or a basket of fruits, as a symbol of fertility and abundance, and two ringlets-tresses frame her face. She is dressed in a chiton under a himation.

The mural crown seems to justify her function as the protector of the cities and their inhabitants and in some images, instead of the crown, she is wearing a polos, a flat rounded hat, probably associated with her role as a Chthonic deity. The lion, a frequent companion of her, tends to be small resting on her lap (in the early period) and from the 5th c. B.C. and on one or two lions stand beside the throne.13 It can be assumed that the lion’s presence indicates her origin from Asia Minor.

Concerning the coinage representation, there is not a great quantity for Cybele: she is usually represented with a calathos on her head, wearing a chiton and a himation and holding a patera and tympanum. At the Roman period the scepter replaces the tympanum in her left arm. There is lack of evidence for the coins’ representation of Cybele in the Pontic cities. Only at the colonies of Kallatis and Tomis some examples exist from the Imperial period where she was honored as protector of cities.14

Worth mentioning are also Cybele’s companions. She had a variety of companions. As a Great Mother of Gods appears in the company of a number of deities. Not only Attis (he will be examined separately), a Phrygian god of nature and

12 A statue base of the Hellenistic period was dedicated to Meter Pontia but referred to her as Meter Cathare, “The Pure Mother” (Μητέρα Καθαρήν). The name of the dedicant was Απολλώνιος Δημοφώντος. Lazarenko, Mircheva, Encheva, Sharankov 2010: 28-30.
13 During the Roman period the figures of the lions or the tympanum are missing. Tacheva-Hitova 1983: 138; LIMC VIII, Ib: 745, 764.
viticulture, was included among her partners along the Black Sea coast, but also Hermes, Eros, Pan and probably Zeus. The Thracian Horseman is another figure associated with her and was probably related to Thrace. Female deities appearing with her include Demeter, Artemis, Aphrodite, Hekate and Kore-Persephone.\textsuperscript{15}

Attis, the goddess’ lover, was first attested at Olbia (during the 4\textsuperscript{th} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} c. B.C.) in a red terracotta representing him on a rock playing a syrinx. His depiction varied from a young man to a little child, similar to the Eros-Cupid figure that often appears in the Hellenistic-Roman poetry. He is believed to have been accepted into the goddess cult in all the places where she was worshipped, despite the fact that only few representations of Cybele and Attis exist.\textsuperscript{16}

\subsection*{1.3 Cybele - a syncretic deity}

Being Mother, Matar and Mother of Gods, the goddess under those names was identified, even equated, with many prexisted Greek deities such as Rhea, Demeter (especially in Asia Minor) and less with Gaia-Earth. In the latter case, she had similar characteristics with Gaia, since she symbolized the fertility and the agriculture, despite the fact that Mother Earth, in Greek art, was not depicted with tympanum and lion.\textsuperscript{17}

There are many views about the syncretism of Cybele and Rhea, the wife of Kronos and mother of six Olympian gods. Rhea, a divine figure for the Greeks, had always been the mother for them. On the other hand, Cybele, another primitive deity, was known as the Mother of Gods and was also related to the “mountains” as it is indicated by her name “Mother of the mountains” and “Mother Oreia”. The names Rhea and (Mother) Oreia had similar sound leading to a possible connection between the two deities. Furthermore, the ecstatic rituals and the wild elements in their cults brought them close to each other.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{15}] Johnston 1996: 102, 106.
\item[\textsuperscript{16}] The earliest representation of the two deities was found in Mesambria (4\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C.). It was a silver relief plate found into a storage jar where the goddess is depicted in the usual iconography seated on a throne (in the frame of a naiskos) with her companion Attis. Johnston 1996: 110.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Cybele was also associated with Demeter from the 6th c. B.C. A syncretism of their cult is attested in literature where the Greek Demeter wanders at the mountains, with sounds of music instruments, looking for her daughter. Thus, archaeological data testify the representation of Demeter and Kore in an Attic black-figured vase with a lion, Cybele’s most frequent companion. Another Greek deity related to Cybele was Artemis. Her characteristic as the deity of wild animals brought her close to Cybele, as a protector of animals, too.

Concerning male deities, Cybele was connected to Hermes, Dionysos and Pan. Hermes, the divine messenger, usually stands on the right side of the goddess as tall as she is. Dionysos was related to ecstatic rituals and worshipped both at city and in wild places while Pan, a mountain god, appears with syrinx, shepherd’s pipes and all the characteristics of a pastoral role.18

From all the above indications it could be noticed that, bringing the Phrygian goddess into the “circle” of the Greek pantheon, strengthened her image and her position in the Greek cult and religion.

2. Testimonia for the cult of Cybele in the Black Sea area: A territorium sacrum” of the goddess Cybele in the lake Durankulak (temple, offerings, ceremonial practices)

Worth of mentioning is the presence of an extensive Hellenistic cave temple dedicated to Cybele, on the Big Island on Durankulak19 at the chora of Kallatis (today’s Mangalia), a powerful Greek trade and cult center during the Hellenistic period. The colonists of Kallatis, who came from Bithynia in Asia Minor, brought with them the cult of their deity, Cybele, and due to their tradition, they built a cave temple for her cult on the Big Island20 in the coast of Durankulak. Based on

19 Similarities to the temple of the lake Durankulak show the Anatolian cult centers carved into the rock face. Particularly, the cult centre of Ephesos is among the best known cave sanctuaries with many reliefs of Cybele. There is also another one at Pergamon and on the hill of Samos. Todorova 2007: 184-5; Naumann 1983: 217, 251.
excavations the sacred area consisted of a large cave temple, a votive enclosure, votive pits and a small burial ground.

The temple (fig. 1) was found at the end of the 4th c. B.C. and it remained in use until the beginning of the 2nd c. B.C.\textsuperscript{21} (the heyday of Kallatis). At the location of that Hellenistic cave temple existed a natural cave. The cave temple consisted of a porch, a dromos (corridor that led to Cybele’s temple), an enclosure hall, a western and an eastern hall.

\textbf{Fig. 1} The temple of Cybele- View from north\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{Fig. 2} The throneplace of Cybele\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21} It is assumed that the complex was abandoned at the end of the 3rd c. B.C. due to the rise of the sea level. Because of the flood that followed the statue of the deity probably was taken in another place. Todorova 2007: 175-181.
\textsuperscript{22} Todorova 2007: 228.
\textsuperscript{23} Todorova 2007: 230.
The most sacred area, which led to the throne of Cybele’s statue (fig. 2), was the eastern hall. The western hall was the votive area of the temple. In its southern part there was a stone votive basin sunk (probably for the blood-baptism, a process during Cybele’s cult).

Concerning the main parts of the temple of great interest is a votive relief (fig. 3) of the seated goddess from the Hellenistic period. This image was really common in the Greek Pontos-poleis since the iconography of Cybele in the west Pontic regions (and also in the Mediterranean area) depicts the deity usually seated on a throne, dressed with chiton and himation, holding in her right hand a phiale and a scepter or a tympanum in the left hand.

Fig. 3 A votive relief of the seated goddess- Big Island of the Durankulak lake- Hellenistic period

In the area of the votive pits (on the western part of the harbor) Cybele’s terracotta bust (fig.4) was revealed (probably dated at Hellenistic period), perhaps an indication that the votive rituals were carried out there as dedications to the goddess.

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Among the votive pits, of special importance were the cattle animals, as the bones of sacrificed animals show, mainly of bulls, proving that animals were a central element of the goddess’s cult. According to the roman sources, this ritual was called “Taurobolium”.26

Thus, the spring ceremonies around the cave temple of Cybele, at the Big Island of Kallatis, must have been accompanied by a lot of music in the forest and included animals for sacrifice; their blood used for purifying purposes. The remains of the sacrificed animals (intestines, fats) were normally offered to the goddess.

The offerings remains were taken to the votive pits and were carried in amphorae and jugs. In many places of the votive pits amphorae were found. Those with Rhodian stamps witness that probably the Rhodian wine was oriented for certain offerings at the cave temple. During the period 281-270 B.C. there was an increase of offerings to the goddess. The chronology of many amphora stamps confirms the intense trade activities in the north-western Black Sea at that period.

From the above description there is no doubt that the temple of Cybele, on the Big Island of Durankulak, was a unique early Hellenistic complex. It reflected the culture of the Greek colonies of the Black Sea and their close relation to Asia Minor, the birthplace of Cybele’s cult. Lastly, it shows the development of the Greek colony of Kallatis and of the whole west Black Sea area in the early-Hellenistic period.27

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26 Taurobolium – Taurobolia (will be examined separately in Attis chapter) was a “feast” of sacrificing bulls and was taking place at March. It seems that was an ancient custom demanding the capture or killing of the bull as an honor to the goddess. Chiekova 2008: 127; Todorova 2007: 182; Vermaseren 1977: 101.
3. The Pontic Mother of Gods in Dionysopolis

3.1 The temple

The importance of another temple of the Mother of Gods is going to be highlighted in this chapter: the temple in Dionysopolis, today’s Balchik, on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Recent excavations (2007-2008) revealed a temple “in antis” with North-South orientation, 250m. from the sea, consisted of a naos, pronaos and a south entrance, erected by Demophon, son of Mys, priest of the goddess (according to an inscription of the aedicula’s entablature).

This type of temple (with two columns in antis) was widely used in the Greek world. It was spread in the Greek colonies on the northern Black Sea coast, during the Hellenistic period, and in the western part of the colonies. The construction date of the temple seems to be the end of the first quarter of the 3rd c. B.C. The architecture of the temple, the relief decoration, the inscriptions on the aedicula’s entablature and the statuettes of the Pontic Mother of Gods indicate that the early Hellenistic period is the most “appropriate” dating for the temple’s construction.

Concerning the interior part of the temple, it has to be noted that two bases of inscriptions were found “in situ” in front of the eastern part of the wall between the naos and pronaos, the one probably with a marble stele dedicated to Attis. The sacrificial place was, probably, in a fireplace in the western side of the pronaos and three marble statuettes of the goddess were found on the toichobate in front of both walls. A remarkable donation was also made by Emperor Licinius I (308-324 AD): a silver statue of Cybele with a weight (or value) of seven “librae” and eight “uniciae”. The statue of the goddess was lost but its pedestal with Latin inscription was found assuming that it was placed on the toichobate to the west of the entrance.29

28 Its first name was Krounoi (Κρουνοί). Lazarenko, Mircheva, Encheva, Sharankov 2010: 13.
3.2 Sculpture – Cybele and the Thracian Horseman

Most of the statues and reliefs found in this temple follow the typical iconography of the goddess: seated on a high backed throne, dressed in long chiton and himation, with a “kalathos” on her head. She usually holds a phiale in the right hand and a tympanum in the left and a lion is often lying in her lap (fig.5). The majority of them, due to their fragmentary condition, cannot be dated exactly.

Fig. 5 Marble statuette of the goddess with a lion in her lap- probably Hellenistic period

The main statue of the temple, almost completely preserved, (only the head is missing), depicts the deity in the usual type (fig. 6). A small variation is that her left hand is stretched forward, like as she was holding a scepter. At the right side of the throne a lion is resting.31

30 Lazarenko, Mircheva, Encheva, Sharankov 2010: 56.
31 The authors found another statue from Cybele’s temple in Panticapaion, with close parallels to that of Dionysopolis, dated to the 2nd c. AD and considered it to be a Roman copy of a Greek original of the 5th c. B.C. Lazarenko, Mircheva, Encheva, Sharankov 2010: 23.
There is an open question that the statue from Dionysopolis was made and set up in the temple of the Pontic Mother after the beginning of the 3rd c. AD. On the reliefs of the temple the goddess is depicted with her priestess Zouke (1st-2nd c. AD) and on the relief with the list of neomeniastai (society members devoted to the new moon) she holds a tympanum in the left hand, not a scepter. It is uncertain when the first statue was set up in the temple. All the suggestions lead to the Hellenistic period. However, it was about a temple among the most basic religious institutions in Dionysopolis.

Three marble reliefs are also related to Cybele’s cult. The two of them were found in the aediculae and the third one decorated the pediment of the list of neomeniastai. In the first aedicula (fig.7) the goddess is represented seated on a throne, dressed as usual. Long hair tresses fall down to her shoulders and she is wearing a kalathos. A lion is standing at the right side of the goddess. She holds a phiale in her right hand and in the left a tympanum. Although the date is not defined, generally statuettes depicting the deity with a lion seated on a throne and holding a tympanum are dated in the period from the 1st until the mid of the 3rd c. AD.

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32 Lazarenko, Mircheva, Encheva, Sharankov 2010: 56.
In the third aedicula the Pontic Mother (fig.8) is represented in the centre of the scene holding her common objects. Her clothing is the same (chiton and a himation over the left shoulder), a kalathos on her head and the lion at her left side. The goddess is surrounded by four men (probably the right figures are the deity’s priests and the figures at her left side are members of the neomeniastai list). It is a depiction of a scene from religious ceremonies honoring the Mother of Gods.

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33 Lazarenko, Mircheva, Encheva, Sharankov 2010: 57.
Five statues of standing goddesses were discovered in the temple of Pontic Mother, not well-preserved. The four were without the head and the fifth was preserved from the waist up. Some authors assume that these are probably statues of Demeter, a fertility goddess with parallel to Cybele’s cult.  

Of great interest are also the three votive reliefs of the Thracian Horseman, discovered in the temple. Despite the fact that the two of the three reliefs are without inscriptions, they were dedicated to the temple in a period when the Thracians (from the suburbs of Dionysopolis) could not visit their sanctuaries and addressed their pleas to the deities in that temple (probably in the half of 3rd c. AD). 

Based also on the work of D. Chiekova we notice that the Thracian Horseman was also depicted, in other monuments, together with Cybele. There is a marble relief (2nd-3rd c. AD) from the suburbs of Histria where the deity is presented in the right part of the image, on her back there is a tree and a snake around it and in the left the

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34 Lazarenko, Mircheva, Encheva, Sharankov 2010: 57. 
35 Statues of other goddesses were also found in the temple. Two of them belonged to Aphrodite. It is believed that Aphrodite’s Urania worship, as a goddess of fertility, was parallel to that of Cybele’s. Furthermore, a marble head of Poseidon was found in the temple of the Pontic Mother, indicating that Cybele was worshipped as a patron of people and protector of sailors (related to sea activities). Lastly, Heracles’ limestone relief, in the eastern part of the pronao, is another proof for the parallel worship of Heracles and the Pontic Mother. Lazarenko, Mircheva, Encheva, Sharankov 2010: 23-27.

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Thracian Horseman\textsuperscript{36} (fig. 9). This relation of the goddess to the Horseman reflects probably the religious beliefs of the Thracians; perhaps people of Thrace were aware of Cybele’s cult and her functions.

Fig.9 The Pontic Mother of Gods and the Thracian Horseman-2\textsuperscript{nd}-3\textsuperscript{rd} c. AD- Museum of Constanza\textsuperscript{37}

3.3 Rituals and dedications

The main public festival (πανήγυρις) of the Pontic Mother of Gods from the first half of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} c. B.C. was the “Metroa” (according to an inscription), celebrated on the eighth of the month Taureon (a spring month, the first in the Milesian year) honoring the goddess of fertility and nature. Other inscriptions from the 1\textsuperscript{st}-2\textsuperscript{nd} c. AD dedicated by priestesses\textsuperscript{38} of the goddess indicate a complex of rituals and give us

\textsuperscript{36} In some votive reliefs from Tomis a marble tablet exists with a dedication naming him as the god “Кarios” Πλευρωνάος Λυσινίου Θεό Καρίου ευχήν. Chiekoyna 2008: 136.


\textsuperscript{38} One of them was called “Zouke” (Thracian name): Lazarenko, Mircheva, Encheva, Sharankov 2010: 30.
details for their activities. The flower collection was an activity that, certainly, justifies that this festival was taking place in the spring.

The earliest dedication offered to the goddess was a marble bench (first half of the 3rd c. B.C.) and a Hellenistic one with 20 names as worshippers of the deity, organized in a cult association. Two inscriptions existed for the donations towards the goddess. The first one (first half of 3rd c. B.C.) concerned vineyards, in the region of Rhokole (Ροκόλη, a Thracian region) and workshops donated to the deity by Diodoros (son of Menis); the second one (1st c. AD) consisted of two aediculae, throne, wreath, a portico and a female slave.

Another interesting feature was the two cult associations: the “Koinon of the neomeniastai” (they celebrated the new moon with feasts, like the four persons at fig. 8 around the deity) and the “Attises” or Attiastai (temple servants of the Pontic Mother of Gods). The second list (on the back side of a Hellenistic decree) consisted of the names of the “Attises” (Attiastai). Attis, on the pediment of the relief, was depicted leaning on his shepherd’s crook near a tree and holding a syrinx with his right hand.

Concluding, it can be said with certainty, that this temple is one of the best preserved in the Black Sea region, until now, giving us at the same time many valuable details for the worship of the Pontic Mother of Gods. The temple functioned at least until the end of the first quarter of the 4th c. AD, reflected the religious and social life of the people in Dionysopolis and contained the largest amount of monuments (discovered in situ) of Cybele’s cult.39

4. The cult of Cybele in the North Black Sea region

4.1 Chersonesus

From a province of Chersonesus a stelai of Cybele was revealed dating approximately at the 2nd or 4th c. B.C. Fig. 10 depicts Cybele seated on her throne, wearing a calathos on her head, a chiton and a himation over it covering her bust and her legs. She is holding a big tympanum in the left hand and probably a phiale in the
right. A small lion is resting on her knees in an unusual position: the lion has its head raised, an element not very common in Cybele’s iconography. In that image the deity seems to be inflexible and probably the proportions of that image are not totally correct.

![Fig. 10 Cybele from a province of Chersonesus- Museum of Chersonesus](image)

Another remarkable sculptural find from the end of the 5th c. B. C. in Chersonesus is a marble woman’s head with a kalathos (fig.11). It is identified as Cybele, due to kalathos, which is considered to be an attribute of fertility goddesses.

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4.2 Olbia

For the cult of the Mother of the Gods in Olbia the material is not small. Firstly, the available sources prove the individual worship of the deity mostly during the Hellenistic period. Numerous terracotta fragments of the goddess were found in the Eastern temenos of Olbia. The dedicating graffiti in the Western temenos testify that the sanctuary of the goddess, from the foundation date of Olbia (590-570 B.C.), was probably located on the East of the sanctuary of Apollo Ietros (the patron deity of Olbia). In the 2nd half of the 6th c. B.C. small votive pillars were made for the...

41 Trofimova 2007: 118-120.
sanctuary of the goddess representing her seated in a “naïskos” as it is obvious from fig. 12.\textsuperscript{42}

![Limestone votive pillars of Cybele](image)

**Fig. 12** Limestone votive pillars of Cybele- second half of the 6\textsuperscript{th} c. B. C.\textsuperscript{43}

The cult of that deity started to play a major role in the religious life of the Olbiopolites from the sixth century and on. In all the inscriptions the goddess was referred as Mother of Gods or simply Mother and not with her Phrygian name Cybele. There are different theories concerning the names of the goddess: Rea, Cybele, Rea-Cybele or even Demeter are the names that some authors prefer to give to her. Others, who support the theory of the eastern impact on the development of the Greek cults, name her Cybele, although it does not seem trustworthy to many scholars. It can be supposed that, for the citizens of Olbia, the Mother of Gods was interpreted as Hera or Rea, the real mothers of Greek gods and she adopted gradually some features of the mother-deities.

Excavations that took place from 1974 to 1995 by A.S. Rousyaeva, at the Western Temenos of Olbia, revealed reliefs of local manufacture depicting, among others, the goddess Cybele. The image that follows (fig. 13) is a marble relief of Cybele dating the 3\textsuperscript{rd} c. AD.

\textsuperscript{42} Rousyaeva 2010: 74.

\textsuperscript{43} Rousyaeva 2010: 89.
It is hard to say if the goddess had a temple of her own because the temenos of Olbia was seriously damaged. However, there were some small altars proving her cult and some of their images remind the usual representation of her. Only in the western temenos an altar was founded, dedicated to her cult, and some graffiti with the name “Μητρός” or pedestals with the goddess inscription “Μητρί Θεών” (fig. 15). In the Hellenistic period many terracotta statuettes were produced in Olbia for her cult as the following image (fig.14) demonstrates.45

Lastly, it is important to mention a remarkable local sculptured monument, a small limestone relief, revealed among the sculptural monuments of the local workshop of Olbia. The relief shows the goddess in the usual iconography, seated in a chair with a lion at her legs, confirming thus that Olbia had a great local artistic tradition.\footnote{Kryzhytskyy, Krapivina, Lejpunskaya, Nazarov 2003: 462.}

\footnote{Rousyaeva 2010: 90.}
\footnote{Krapivina 2010: 162.}
4.3 Panticapaion

Evidence for the cult of the goddess Cybele in Panticapaion, the capital of Bosporus on the shore of the Kerch Straits, seems to be a stele with the dedication of a priestess (Μητρί Φρυγίαι) demonstrating that Cybele had a temple at Panticapaion in the 3rd c. B.C. The remains of that temple must have been discovered on Mithridates Hill, Panticapaion’s acropolis. Together with the temple and below it there was a cave for ritual purposes.

The temple of Cybele is estimated that was found on an ancient pre-Greek cultic place where she was worshipped. Considering that this is true about her cult in the Bosporan Kingdom, it can be assumed that her cult had not been influenced by locals.

Moreover, a roman copy from a Greek original, dating at the third quarter of the 5th c. B.C. was also discovered on Mithridates Hill around 1855. It is a statuette of the goddess Cybele seated on a throne and dressed as usual, as it is clear from fig.16. She is holding a tympanum in her left hand while the right hand is leaning on the lion’s head, next to her. The missing parts of the body are the head of the goddess, her left arm, the head of the lion and a small piece of the basement.

49 The dedication was made during the reign of the king Pairisades II (284/3-245 B.C.) Together with that temple there was also revealed a damaged Roman copy of a Greek statue of the goddess dated to the 5th c. B.C. and there is a possibility that it was imported from Bosporus. Ustinova 1999: 63.

50 Mithridates Hill, also called Mithridates Mount, is located in the historical centre of the city of Kerch. Its name was given at the 18th century, when Crimea was incorporated in the Russian Empire. Tolstikov 2003: 707.

51 It was at Panticapaion’s acropolis, a place with huge history, where the king Mithridates VI Eupator Dionis, the ruler of the Kingdom of Pontus, committed suicide. Tolstikov 2003: 707.

52 Ustinova 1999: 64.

4.4 Myrmekion

Despite the fact that Myrmekion was a small town in Bosporus, it displays important archaeological material of the Eastern Crimea. Located on the northern site of the Kerch Bay it is a place where many pottery fragments with dedications were revealed.

Especially, in one of the houses of the end of the 6th c. B.C. – first quarter of the 5th c. B.C. (Hellenistic period) a votive graffito to the Mother of Gods was found on the bottom of an attic black-firnis cup of the 5th c. B.C.\(^5\)

Furthermore, a statuette of Cybele dated at the 2nd c. B. C. was revealed at Myrmekion at 1952. This statuette (fig.17) represents the deity as a young woman seated on a throne having her legs rested on the back of a lying lion. She is wearing a crown on her head and braids are covering her shoulders. Her himation is ornamented with a belt at the waist.\(^6\)

\(^6\) The place-location where this bowl was found was near the fortification wall of Myrmekion. Vinogradov, Butyagin, Vakhtina 2003: 815; Johnston 1996: 103.
\(^{56}\) Kobylina 1976: 32.
4.5 Phanagoria (Taman Peninsula)

A significant Greek settlement on the Taman Peninsula characterized as “the metropolis of Asiatic Bosporus” is the city of Phanagoria; located in the centre of the Taman Peninsula, Phanagoria was gathering all the advantages: was surrounded by fertile lands and had easy access to other Greek sites.

Among the things that have to be pointed out is Phanagoria’s coroplastic workshop. Many terracotta statuettes and moulds were revealed in the southeastern area of the city’s suburbs. The second of the two types of the statuettes seems to depict the goddess Cybele. It was a statuette which its lower part was of 50cm. high (fig.18). The goddess is sitting in a chair, with a lion on her knees (the head is missing). This statuette and many others have not been preserved in good condition;

57 Kobylina 1976: plate 49.
however, this data is sufficient enough to demonstrate the artistic abilities of the craftsmen of Phanagoria.\textsuperscript{58}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{fig18.png}
\end{center}

**Fig.18** Terracotta statuette of Cybele -4\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{4.6 Gorgippia (Taman Peninsula)}

The colony of Gorgippia, that only few authors mentioned (Strabo is one of them), used to be a town in Syndica appearing on the place of the modern Anapa on the Taman Peninsula. In that settlement, where the Greek penetration is dated from the last stage of the Greek colonization and its economy was based properly on agricultural production, the fertility cults were very important and popular.

Apart from the cult of Demeter and of Aphrodite Urania, the cult of the goddess Cybele was also attested through some fragments of terracottas dated at the 4\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C. These fragments depict Cybele seated with a lion in her lap and her stomach was covered with folds.

\textsuperscript{58} Kuznetsov 2003: 915; Kobyлина 1976: 32.
\textsuperscript{59} Kobyлина 1976: plate 47.
Furthermore, she was still worshipped at the first centuries AD. This fact could be proved by terracotta figurines that were found in houses of Gorgippia during the already mentioned period.60

4.7 Tanais

Tanais, an important trade center of the Northern Black Sea coast, is of a certain interest. Located aside other Bosporan cities and on the crossroads of the Scythians, Maiotians and Sarmatians, managed to inspire and influence many of its neighbors; also the trade activities seem to set up the region as the most important trade center after Panticapaion.

According to the archaeological data from Tanais, the cultural life of its people is well known. The excavations at the settlement revealed some honorary and votive monuments, from the 1st c. AD; on two of them the goddess Cybele is depicted. Furthermore, the same goddess is represented on a marble relief and in a terracotta figurine, both seated.61

5. The cult of Cybele in the West Black Sea region

5.1 Introduction

Noteworthy in the West Pontic region is the fact that the presence of Cybele is mainly attested in Milesian colonies where some fragments of statues and terracotta reliefs were discovered from the archaic period.62

In general, the representations of the goddess from the West Pontic regions depict her in the common iconographic type: the goddess is sitting on a throne, dressed in long chiton and himation, holding the phiale in her right hand and the tympanum in the left; two braids are falling down on her elbows and a “polos”, rarely

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60 Alekseeva 2003: 972, 984.
a diadem, is decorating her hair. The lion, as we mentioned above, main characteristic of Cybele’s iconography, is present in some monuments. The image of the goddess appears usually inside a “naiskos” ⁶³.

Up to now we can assume that the Great Pontic Mother from the East was the most respectable in the whole Black Sea among other deities. Her cult was widespread in many colonies of that area and it is of great interest to notice in which other colonies of the West Black Sea she was worshipped.

5.2 Histria

The oldest evidence for the cult of Cybele is a terracotta from Histria, dated to the classical period (5th c. B.C.). The iconography is the typical one: the goddess is sitting in her throne, dressed in a long chiton, covering her knees, and a himation is falling at the left shoulder. Her shoulders are covered by the hair. Two marble statues existed from the 4th c. B.C. and some other statues and marble reliefs from the Hellenistic period are the most representative of her.

Generally, all the monuments of Cybele depict her in the usual iconography and in some of them there is also the lion or another big animal next to her. Among the monuments, there is one that differs from the others: the deity is accompanied by a kneeling woman, a feature not so common at the Black Sea region colonies. Furthermore, a graffito was found on a cantharos, from the third quarter of the 4th c. B.C., in the necropolis of Istros with the following dedication “Αιγύπτιος Μητρί” ⁶⁴.

The following image (fig.19) shows a marble statue of the goddess from Histria dated in late Hellenistic period. Cybele, whose head is missing, is seated on the throne with her left arm resting on a tympanum; the clothing is the usual one and a lion, whose head also is missing, is lying to her lap. Other missing parts of the statue are the deity’s left hand ⁶⁵.

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⁶³ Many authors assume that the iconography of “naiskoi” is Greek and derives from a sanctuary of North Ionia or South Aiolia; however, this statement has not been proved till now. Chiekova 2008: 127.
⁶⁵ Vermaseren CCCA, VI: 137.
From the same period comes fig. 20 depicting Cybele in a marble statue from a house outside the colony of Histria. The goddess is seated on a high back throne with a footstool, wearing a polos, a chiton and himation, a patera is in her right hand and in the left is holding a big tympanum. A lion is lying across her lap. All the details of that image are well distinguishable.
During the Roman period Cybele’s cult was more popular. A decree from the 2nd c. B.C. proves the respectable position that Cybele had in the colonies of the Black Sea at that time. According to its description, Aba, daughter of Hekataios and wife of Heracont (son of Aristomac), was a member of the high class society and a priestess of Cybele. The dedication honors the priestess (2nd c. AD) whose name was common in Asia Minor. The decorative motif of that stele depicts Cybele in her throne holding the usual objects (phiale in the right hand and tympanum in the left).

Finally, Cybele was also depicted in Histria’s coinage, during the Roman period, in the well known iconography. The only difference is that the goddess posed a scepter on the tympanum with the left hand, two lions were standing in each side of the throne and she wore a “crown” on her head.68

5.3 Apollonia- Odessos

Of particular interest for the religious life at Apollonia are the representations of Cybele (sculptured monuments) from the end of the 6th c. B.C. There is a stone monument decorating the facade of a sanctuary under which a rectangular relief exists (under the façade of a building). There, a female figure is sitting, holding a phiale in the right hand and a tympanum in the left. Scholars believe that it is a representation of Cybele from the archaic period (6th c. B.C.). Two statues from the necropolis of Apollonia of 6th c. B.C. were also found with the representation of Cybele and a terracotta one, preserved in the Museum of Sozopol, was revealed in a layer of the 5th c. B.C. representing a seated female figure, dressed in chiton and himation and surrounded by a lion. Furthermore, some terracotta reliefs of the goddess were also unearthed in the town itself and in its vicinity.

During the late 4th and early 3rd c. B.C. the cult of the Asia Minor deity, Cybele, was also expanded to Odessos. Many inhabitants worshipped the deity, some of which were probably immigrants of eastern origin. The epigraphic monuments in that colony are few. However, there is a Hellenistic statue of Cybele in the usual motif and all the other monuments come from the Roman period. The seated Cybele with phiale and

67 Vermaseren CCCA, VI: fig. 455.
68 Gotcheva 2007: 73.
tymanum and a lion next to her is depicted on two marble statuettes. An exceptional fact here is the dedication of the monument to the emperors Caracalla and Septimius Severus (fig. 21).

Fig.21 A relief in a niche with the Goddess and a huge lion -Roman period- Museum of Sofia  

Lastly, a marble fragment of a stele is decorated with a relief from which only its interior left part is preserved. The seated goddess is accompanied by the standing Heracles, in the left side and in the background of the relief there is a dedication for the two gods testifying the parallel worship of Heracles and the Great Mother of Gods.  

"πρώτως γενοίμενοι [— — — — —] εὐχαριστήριον Μητρὶ [καὶ Ἡ]-ρακλεί".  

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69 The image depicts the seated Goddess during the rule of Septimius Severus and Caracalla (198-211 AD). The goddess is dressed in a long chiton and himation that covers her head and holds a patera in the right hand. The left arm rests on the throne. This image was found at Odessos and it is now hosted in the Archaeological Institute and Museum in Sofia. Tacheva-_HITOVA 1983: 82.


5.4 Tomis

Among the deities of Asia Minor and Syria Cybele is one of the oldest and with the most numerous presentations in the colony of Tomis. There is an ancient testimony about the cult of that deity, a marble relief of unknown origin. Preserved is only the part with the bust of Cybele, depicted her with a crowning “polos”\(^\text{72}\) on her head and a tympanum next to her. On her left, the head of a bearded god appears and on the right another figure. According to G. Bordenache these divine figures represent, probably, Zeus (on the left) and Hermes (on the right). The whole scene is represented in the frame of a “naïskos” and perhaps it is connected to other votive reliefs of the same type from Ephesos of the 4\(^{\text{th}}\) c. B.C.

Cybele’s cult was also attested in a Hellenistic inscription, found at Tomis. The name of the goddess “Μήτηρ θεῶν” was mentioned in two decrees for the protection of the colony of Tomis, decrees from “boule” and “demos”.\(^\text{73}\) The first decree describes the situation of the city, problems caused by enemies and diseases. The second decree honores the volunteers who participated in the protection and defense of the city and made sacrifices to “Μ τρὶ Θεῶν καὶ Διοσκόροις”:

\[\text{τὸν δῆμον εἰς βελτ[ε]ιονας ἐλπίδας καὶ δοθὲν ἕαυτοί[ς]}\]
\[\text{εἰς ἀπαρχήν παρὰ τῆς πόλ[ε]ως αὐξήσαντες καθ' ἐκα[σ]-
τον ἐνιαυτὸν θύουσιν ύπερ τῆς τοῦ δῆμου σωτ' θυσίας[ς]}
\]
\[\text{Μητρὶ Θεῶν καὶ Διοσκόροις· δεδόχθαι τῇ βουλῆ[ς]}
\]

This inscription cannot be dated with certainty. There are authors believing that these events occurred in the 1\(^{\text{st}}\) c. B.C. during the war of Burebista and others, such as Rostovtcev, who support a date in the 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) c. B.C. (since the name of Burebista is absent in that inscription). However, the appearance of Cybele together with

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\(^{72}\) Cybele, as founder and protector of towns and fortresses, is depicted in many figures with a crown polos. Towns and fortresses were strategically related and this maybe justifies the gleaming over the polos. The polos’ depiction is typical of the Cybele terracotta in Kallatis. Todorova 2007: 184.

\(^{73}\) Chiekova 2008: 130; Buzoianu- Barbulescu 2007: 314.

Dioscuri is something natural for the city of Tomis. Many sacrifices included Dioscuri and their common cult is also attested in the coinage of Tomis during the Roman period where Cybele was depicted in a “crown” on the obverse side and the Dioscuri on the reverse side.\textsuperscript{75}

From the Hellenistic period there is also evidence for a marble naiskos found at Tomis (fig. 22) where Cybele is seated in a naiskos wearing polos, chiton and himation. She is holding a patera in her outstretched right hand and a tympanum in the left. Moreover, there is a lion lying on her lap.

During the Roman period the cult of the Great Mother played an important role at the West Pontic colonies. During the reign of Septimius Severus, an inscription was found at Tomis, dedicated to the emperor’s family by the “dendrophoroi” (the bearers of the sacred tree- a symbol of death). Dendrophoroi were associated to Cybele’s cult.

\textsuperscript{75} It is supposed a possible connection of Cybele and Dioscuri, based on Tomis inscription, with the Great Gods of Samothrace. It is believed that only in that island were taking place mysteries with a goddess, that looked like Cybele, and she was worshipped together with two male deities, probably Dioscuri. On the other hand, other scholars assume that there is a possible connection between the Thracian Chevalier, the “Θεός Μέγας” (Odessos) and the “Dioscuri-Gods of Samothrace”. However, neither connection is for certain: Chiekova 2008: 132; Gotcheva 2007: 72.

\textsuperscript{76} Vermaseren CCCA, VI: 130, fig.441.
Among them other names were mentioned such as "αρχιδενδροφόροι" "μήτηρ δενδροφόρων" "ιερεύς" "πατήρ", all of them members of a "thiasos" for Cybele.  

Worth mentioning is also a treasure of statues and reliefs that was discovered in 1962 in Tomis (Constanza) and was called “treasury of sculpture”. The treasury contains 24 marble statues and reliefs and is buried outside the early Roman wall of the city and within the Byzantine one. All the pieces are exhibited in the National Museum for History and Archaeology in Costanza.

Among the depicted deities there is a relief dedicated to Cybele, with the traditional iconography. In the following image (fig. 23) the goddess is sitting on her throne, is wearing the “calathos’ and holding the phiale (patera) in her right hand. Her left hand is missing. The marble statuette has a height of 20cm and is dated in the first half of the 3rd c. AD.

![Fig.23 A marble statuette of Cybele, first half of the 3rd c. AD](image)

In this regard, it is obvious that the cult of Cybele at Tomis was among the most popular since many monuments existed with dedications to the goddess.

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78 Alexandrescu-Vianu 2009: 15-33; Radulescu 1963:149.
5.5 Nikonion – Tyras

Another city in the lower Dniester region, Nikonion, one of the most important regions of Greek colonization and one of the most significant centers on the Tyras River, gives us evidence for the cult of Cybele. According to archaeological excavations, a terracotta relief of the goddess was discovered in the layers of the 5th c. B.C., in which she is seated on her throne having, in the right part, a muzzle of a lion. Cybele is also holding a bowl in the right hand, her left arm is bent at the elbow and slightly raised and is wearing a kalathos on the head and her hair is curled.

She is dressed in a “himation” and her traits are carefully and precisely depicted. All the described details are similar to the type of statuettes found on many monuments from Ionia and other Greek parts. Some of them associated to the throne, the position of the legs and the clothes, are probably related to figures of the 5th c. B.C.81

In the Greek city of Tyras, also in the lower Dniester region, existed many references for the deities of agriculture, a typical feature for the Greek centers of Pontos whose life depended on agriculture. Apart from Demeter and her daughter Kore – Persephone, some other terracotta female figurines were found including Cybele, the Mother of Gods, as protector of fertility and agriculture. Unfortunately, the information and the epigraphic data are not sufficient enough to inform us further about the culture and the religious beliefs of Tyrites and their relation to the Mother of Gods.

However, it seems possible that the worship of the goddess was also important at the first centuries AD since her images were found on coins of Tyras; in those coins Cybele was depicted seated on a throne, wearing a calathos on her head and holding a wreath or figurine of Nike in her hand.82

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80 Another monument dedicated to the deity by Aurelius Firminianus, in 293-305 AD, was found at the colony of Tomis. Buzoianu, Barbulescu 2007: 314. It is the following inscription and was written in Latin: “Matri Deum Magnae pro salute”: IScM II 144: http://epigraphy.pachkum.org/inscriptions/main.
81 Sekerskaya 2007: 500.
82 Samoylova 2007: 446-7, 457.
5.6 Kallatis

The cult of Cybele had also a place to the pantheon of Kallatis. She is represented in some marble and terracotta reliefs, sometimes with Attis in terracotta products from the Hellenistic era and sometimes she is connected to the Thracian Horseman (before the Roman period). The most ancient document seems to be a terracotta figure dated in 4th-3rd c. B.C. The iconographic scheme is the usual one: the deity is sitting on her throne, wearing chiton and himation, carrying polos on her head, two symmetric braids are falling on her shoulders. She is holding the phiale in her right hand and the tympanum in the left. A lion is resting next to her.

The usual characteristics of the goddess are also well represented in fig. 24 in a terracotta statuette of Cybele from the middle of 4th or 3rd c. B.C. The upper right corner is missing. The goddess is sitting on her throne with a small lion in her lap, dressed as usual. A calathos is on her head and two symmetrical ringlets cover her shoulders.83

Fig. 24 Terracotta statuette of Cybele- middle of 4th-3rd c. B. C. – Archaeological Museum of Kallatis84

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84 Tacheva-Hitova 1983: plate XXVII.
Some centuries later, from the 1st c. B.C. comes another marble figurine of the goddess with her bust and head. In the following image (fig. 25) Cybele is represented in long hair tresses and wearing a polos on her head.

Fig.25 Marble head of Cybele- Kallatis- 1st c. B.C.  

Furthermore, statues and statuettes of marble and terracotta were also found at Kallatis from the Roman period. The coinage of Kallatis and some monuments representing Cybele from the same period testify the continuance of her cult; a strong proof is an epigraphic dedication from a province of Kallatis dating at the Roman era:

“Matri Deorum [Magnae]”(from the area of Mangalia, 2nd-3rd c. AD)

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85 Vermaseren CCCA, VI: 124, fig. 418.
86 There is no evidence whether Attis is represented together with Cybele or not. Chiekova 2008: 134; Avram 2007: 255-6.
5.7 Mesambria-Bizone

Mesambria, a colony in the Gulf of Burgas, in the western part of Black Sea, testifies the cult of Cybele through a marble statuette from the Hellenistic period. There is a marble statuette of the seated goddess with a lion at her knees (Archaeological Museum of Nesebar). What is also interesting is that only an inscription from Doric Mesambria names the goddess “Mater Kybeleia” according to V. Velkov in his book “Inscriptions antiques de Mesambria” (1964-1984).

At Bizone, one of the latest colonies on the west Black Sea coast, established in the end of 5th c. B.C. by Megarean settlers (according to Skymnos and Anonymous), a dedication was found probably for the Mother of Gods, written on an “ara”. That inscription, as it is already mentioned in the chapter about the goddess’ epithets, named her “Μήτηρ θεῶν” (Μητρὶ Θεῶν) (fig. 26).  

![Fig.26 Inscription of the goddess with the dedication “Μ τρὶ Θεῶν”- Bizone](image)

88 Chiekova 2008: 135.

89 The full inscription of that altar found at Bizone is the following: ἀγαθῆι τύχι, Μ τρὶ Θεῶν Λεωνᾶς αὐε [— — — —]πε. Vermaseren CCCA, VI: fig. 404.
At the time of Arrian’s visit to Phasis (131 AD), the eastern part of the Black Sea (today’s Western Georgia), we learn that a statue of Phasiane Theos stood at the city’s entrance from the sea. Scholars have translated variously the word Phasiane-Φασιανή as the goddess of Phasis, of Phasians, or as a Phasian goddess.

Strabo, taking into account that Cybele was identified with Rhea, both deities of fertility and nature, he concluded the following: since Rhea had many local names ending in –νή, from the places she was honored, then the word Φασιανή could possibly be one of the local names of Rhea-Cybele. Consequently, Phasiane Theos could signify the goddess Rhea-Cybele.

On the other hand, some authors disagree to the above allegation wondering about the origin of that cult. A possible explanation could be that through the Milesian settlers90 Phasis became one of the cult centers of Cybele under the name of Phasiane Theos.91

According to Arrian, the statue of the deity, due to its similarity with the attributes (lion and tympanum) and appearance of Rhea, could be compared to the one92 that is located at Athens and is depicting Rhea seated.

It is difficult to judge whether that statue of the Roman period belonged to Rhea or Cybele. However, Arrian’s report is the only one that could confirm the cult of Cybele-Rhea as Phasiane Theos and protector of the city at the colony of Phasis.93

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90 The colony of Phasis was a Milesian settlement. Naumann 1983: 136.
92 That statue of Athens, in which the Phasiane Theos resembled and which Arrian called Rhea, is called Magna Mater or Mother of Gods in other places. Lordkipanidze 2000: 91.
7. Summary

Cybele, or Mother of the Gods, Mater, Μητρί Θεόν or even Μήτηρ Ποντία (Pontic Mother), was assimilated to the Greek inhabitants of the Black Sea Region and widespread very quickly. Greek colonists remained loyal to their deities but at the same time were able to embrace new religious values and adopted Cybele’s Phrygian cult and iconography. Noteworthy is that Cybele presented many features that were already common to Greeks due to their deities. Demeter, Artemis and Rhea had similar characteristics to that of the Mother of Gods. Goddess of earth, nature and agriculture the Phrygian goddess was mainly worshipped at the mountains and protected also the sailors of the Black Sea, according to Herodotus (book IV, 76).

Her temples in the lake of Durankulak, at the Greek colony of Kallatis, in Dionysopolis, on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast and in Panticapaion, prove that her cult was expanded from Asia Minor and penetrated in almost all the Greek coastal towns of the West Black Sea and some of the northern part.

The iconography of the goddess seems to be simple. Seated in a throne, with a crown or calathos on her head, holding a patera and a tympanum in her hands, dressed in chiton and himation and followed by a lion, her usual companion, these are the most typical features of her image, developed from the 6th c. B.C. and on.

Olbia Pontica, Panticapaion, Myrmekion, Tanais, Histria, Apollonia, Odessos, Tomis, Nikonion, Tyras, Kallatis, Messambria and Phasis are some of the colonies where the cult of Cybele played, among other deities, an important role in their religion. Many finds (altars, reliefs, inscriptions and statues) have been found in those settlements depicting the Anatolian deity according to the above mentioned iconography.

Although some different approaches about her origin and her epithets exist, it is a common idea that her cult was assimilated easily by the Greek inhabitants of the Black Sea area and the fact that she was the first Oriental deity officially accepted at Rome (204 B.C.) makes her figure unique and interesting for further research.
Part B - Attis

1. Introduction

In this brief but important chapter we are going to deal with the myth and the cult of Attis, the companion of Cybele: the versions for his birth, his relation to the Mother of the Gods, his self emasculation and death, his iconographic attributes and the festivals in honour of him. Furthermore, the most representative monuments of Attis will be discussed and certainly his appearance in the most important colonies in the Black Sea region.

Attis appears as a devotee-lover of Cybele, who in a moment of orgiastic madness performed a brutal mutilation. A Phrygian god of vegetation, representative of the seasons’ succession, is a personality with dramatic end. Many authors consider that his death symbolizes the seeds’ cultivation and his revival the vegetation. His story exists in two forms, the Phrygian and the Lydian, with many variations.

Despite the fact that there is lack of evidence concerning his presence in the Black Sea region, aim of this study is to collect as many representations of him as possible from the North and the West colonies of the Black Sea and evaluate his worship that shared with Cybele.
2. Name and epithets of Attis

His name was the result of either the custom of Lydia that handsome boys had that name or, according to some stories, he was fed by a goat and afterwards he took that name. Another theory is that according to Paleo-Phrygian inscriptions, Ates was the dedicator on the Midas Monument inscription dedicated to the Phrygian king Midas. The spelling of that name was Atas and it appears twice in that inscription, as the dedicator’s name (in the nominative case) and as the man who received the dedication (in the dative case). Probably the inscription of the 7th or 6th c. B.C. would have accompanied a cult statue of the Mother of Gods. With no more details in that inscription, it could be suggested that the name Ates-Atas was common for the Phrygians and not necessarily a name for deities. Attis became later the name for the Greek and Roman god.

Another possibility is that it could be used as a priestly title. A correspondence between the priests of Pessinous and the kings of Pergamon attested the name of Attis as the chief priest of the state of Pessinous. So, it could be assumed that the name Attis was a title and not a personal name. And together with the fact that the kings of Lydia in the 7th c. B.C. Alyattes and Sadyattes contain the name Ates, it should be concluded that the name Attis was referring to a prominent person of Phrygia, probable the king himself.

Regarding his epithets, Attis had the epithet Ποιμήν (pastor) worshipped as a patron of pastures and could be compared to Zeus Ποαρινός from Ποία, Πόα that means grass. It is also quite possible that the epithet pastor could be connected to the feeding of Attis by a goat, according to the birth version, mentioned in the next chapter.

In some dedications of Asia Minor Attis has the epithet “Menotyrannus” perhaps a relation to the months. In the first place he could be considered as a deity that entered in a new sign of zodiac every month; it seems possible that, through that function, he obtained the identity of a deity that was giving birth to nature, to the fertility. And probably under the word Men is hiding the lunar god Mên from Phrygia;

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94 Midas monument is located at the Midas City, a place in western Phrygia. The king Midas ruled in Phrygia in the late 8th and early 7th c. B.C. Roller 1999: 69.
it exists a statue from Ostia in Italy (fig. 27) where Attis is depicted holding a crescent, the basic characteristic at the cult of Mên. Attis is represented wearing a crown of fruits on the head, holding fruits in the right hand and at the back a crescent is apparent with its rays.  

![Image](image.png)

Fig. 27 Statuette of lying Attis with the crescent on his head- Ostia, Italy

It should be also highlighted that for the Greeks the real meaning for *Tyrannos* was the master. Therefore, Attis *Menotyrannus* was probably a master of earth who could dominate, like the Phrygian lunar deity of Mên, at the sky and the earth.

3. Mythical traditions

The legend of Attis demonstrates his origin, his relation to the Great Mother of Gods and consequently to the Anatolian world. It is a Phrygian story, which could be created during the Hellenistic period to justify Attis existence; later many Greek and Latin authors repeated it, though they generally do not mention in details the birth of

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96 Saprykin 2009: 253; Cumont 1963: 58.
98 Another reference for Attis, according to a roman inscription, was Attis the Hypsistos; in Asia Minor Hypsistos was used to honour a superior deity in Israel. Perhaps they wanted to elevate Attis as the companion of the Great Mother and as a guardian of people .Cumont 1963: 59.
Attis. However, the myth of Attis and his passion for the Mother of Gods is known to everyone\(^9\), a love that did not develop easily and ended tragically for Attis.

Pausanias considers that Attis was Phrygian, while Herodotus mentions that Attis or Atys, son of the Lydian king Croesus, was killed during a boar hunt by a Phrygian prince, Adrastus.\(^{10}\)

There exist some different versions concerning the relation of Cybele and Attis. According to Diodoros, Cybele, from the moment she was born, was exposed by her father king Maion, on the mount Cybelon, where the animals took care of her and named her Cybele. When she met the shepherd Attis, she fell in love with him and became pregnant. Her father recognised her and killed Attis, responsible for her pregnancy. The girl came insane and wandered in the forest looking for her lover’s body.\(^{11}\) In the mean time, famine had spread around the country of Phrygia and then an oracle appeared to her: Attis’s body should be founded and buried and Cybele would be from that moment a worshipped deity with annual sacrifices.\(^{12}\)

Arnobius, in a more traditional legend, considers that the god Jupiter, struggling to conquer the Mother of Gods, lost his seed on the mountain-rock Agdos; from the goddess’s pregnancy a bisexual creature was born named Agdistis, unable to control its sexual powers. Agdistis,\(^{13}\) in a moment of madness, lost her male organs and an almond tree was created by them. Then, Nana, Sangarius’ (a Phrygian river) daughter, became pregnant eating the tree’s fruits and her parent tried to kill her, to save his family from the disgrace. However, the Great Mother intervened and “arranged” the birth of Attis.\(^{14}\)

On the other hand, the most popular and passionate version, is the love affair between the two figures and the final castration of Attis. According to the Roman poet Ovid (in his Fasti 4.223-46), the goddess fell in love with the handsome young shepherd named Attis, promising that under that love he could remain forever a boy.

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\(^{9}\) The myth of Cybele and Attis could be identified like the Greek tale of Aphrodite and Adonis, the powerful goddess who destroyed her lover. Roller 1999: 181.

\(^{10}\) This is the Lydian version. Vermaseren 1966: 2-3; Herodotus 1. 34-44; LIMC III, I: 22.

\(^{11}\) The image of Cybele wandering at the forest is close to that of the Greek goddess Demeter, looking for her daughter Persephone, a close parallel. Roller 1999: 255; Vermaseren 1977: 92.


\(^{13}\) Agdistis is none other than Cybele herself. Vermaseren 1977: 91.

\(^{14}\) In another version the boy was raised by goat’s milk and the Phrygians named him Attis, as their goats. Vermaseren 1966: 3-5; Roller 1999: 239-240; Vermaseren 1977: 90-1; Bremmer 2004: 544.
Attis, being unfaithful to the deity, because he was involved to a marriage with Ia, a daughter of Midas, king of Pessinous, castrated himself claiming that he deserved an end like that and died under a pine tree. From his blood, violets would spring. The goddess mourned his death and an almond tree was created from her tears. Zeus decided to listen to her requests that Attis body should remain uncorrupted and accepted that Attis hair should always grow and his smallest finger should remain alive and move continuously for eternity.

Finally, the relationship of Cybele and Attis could be justified by the version where the Phrygian Attis, after learning that he was unable to have children, moved to Lydia and started to establish the cult of the goddess as one of her followers. But Zeus started to be jealous of the spread of that cult and sent a boar to kill Attis.

In view of all the above versions is difficult to define the chronology of them since they derive from different periods and sources (Phrygians, Greeks and Romans) that perhaps some of them were reproduced variously.

What is noticeable is the fact that Attis, from the time of his birth, had to undergo many difficulties. Despite the fact that in one version was exposed, he was finally saved by the Mother of Gods and that is the point where, probably, begins his relation to earth powers. Either son of the Mountain deity, lover-companion, rival or a devotee of her cult, all are versions in which Attis is closely related to Cybele.

However, the common characteristic that runs through the various stories is that of a dramatic love. Cybele demands vengeance, mortals’ characteristic, when Attis meets another woman; Attis, unable to be faithful to the goddess’s love, is punished for that, sacrificing his own manhood. Perhaps, the subject of self-castration, which became the object of annual rites of Attis mourning (in Roman period), symbolizes a strong commitment to the cult of the goddess.

The myth, despite its variations, could be characterised as a series of ambiguities or creation allegories, a myth that reflects different experiences of the

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106 The city of Pessinous was a Phrygian site, the oldest and most important of the Mother of Gods. Roller 1999: 269.
people that venerated the Mother of Gods and Attis. The myth of Attis and Cybele was not popular only in Phrygia but also in the Greek world (around the 4th c. B.C.) and then in Rome with spring festivities created in honour of Attis. Attis, a vegetation god and mortal lover of Cybele, was a prominent and essential figure of her cult, a symbol of death and rebirth of the nature and together with Cybele were venerated as protectors of mortals and of nature.

4. Iconography (posture, dress, attributes)

Attis’s representations are of great interest. Many artists have found their respiration in Attis legend. He can be easily recognised by his Oriental costume, a standard feature in its iconography, either as a shepherd or companion of Cybele. He is depicted as a young shepherd seated on a rock and playing the syrinx in the majority of terracotta representations. Another exceptional figure of Attis is sitting on a flower, wearing a tiara and having wings fastened to his shoulders or his representations as a child riding a cock. Generally he is depicted seated or standing.

As a standing figure he usually wears an oriental dress, a tiara or else a Phrygian cap, tunica or mantle and stands next to a tree, pine tree in many images (used to be his symbol), or a tree trunk with his legs crossed. Another variation is Attis standing against a column with wings on his shoulders (fig.28) perhaps under the influence of the god Eros, or without them. He used to hold a syrinx in his left arm, a crook or a torch. The attributes of the crook and the syrinx, could associate Attis to Pan, the Greek god of wood and pastoral life, closely also related to the Mother of Gods as one of his companions. His belly is clearly visible, with no clothes over it, in most of the figures, especially from the 1st c. AD.

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110 Attis Oriental costume and his pointed cap were not necessarily related to Phrygia. Particularly, the cap seems to be worn by a Scythian archer (in a relief from the 7th c. B.C.) and the oriental appearance is usually depicted to identify a specific group as non-Greek. The long trousers are also recognizable at Attis costume falling down to his ankles (anaxyrides). Roller 1994: 250; Vermaseren 1977: 93.

111 Attis’s possible relation to the Greek god, Pan, made him a welcome and respected figure. He is sometimes represented as a pastor figure, a shepherd who carries the sheep on his shoulders. Roller 1994: 252; Vermaseren 1977: 94.

In other images, he is depicted carrying fruits without wearing any cloth (fig.29) or with upraised hands (fig.30).

Like many representations of Cybele, those of Attis as a sitting figure, were also offered as gifts to dead people or as votive gifts in the temple and were used in

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113 Vermaseren 1966: 63.
114 Perhaps he is holding a torch in his left upraised arm in fig. 30. Vermaseren 1966: 17.
In those seated figures he is represented as a shepherd, sitting on a rock with a syrinx at his breast and a *pedum* against his left shoulder. The oriental dress is the same as in the standing figures. There are some images where Attis supports his head with his left hand (perhaps he is sleeping) or playing a flute or syrinx with both hands.

Very often, next to Attis, are depicted a dog, a sheep or even a bull. His clothes are traditionally a long-sleeved tunica and trousers while the tiara is not always depicted on his head. He is sometimes wearing a sort of petasus (fig. 31).

![Fig.31 Attis wearing a sort of petasus on his head](image)

In some terracotta figurines or bronze statuettes (mostly from Hellenistic period) Attis is represented dancing perhaps celebrating his return to life, his resurrection. The oldest example of the dancing Attis (Attis hilaris) was revealed on a Hellenistic Greek vase of the 4\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C. (fig.32).

\footnote{Vermaseren 1966: 18-20, 69.}
Some artists, taking as an opportunity Attis’s castration, represent him in a rather feminine character. On the other hand, there are others trying to depict him in a sorrowful expression in his face like he is meditating his fate. Despite the fact that no further indication of the love affair has ever been found in art, the details in artists’ works were given in a so remarkable way that usually the results are spectacular.

His burial and grave are not lively subjects in art while Attis death is represented in an exceptional marble relief found in Rome (fig. 33).

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116 Vermaseren 1966: 47.
117 This often bisexuality in Attis’s representations was probably a way to show that his dramatic love led him in such a desperate act, the reveal of his sex. Vermaseren 1977: 95.
In the above image Attis is lying on a rock with both his hands raised and wearing a tiara and a tunica. His eyes are closed. At the right side two cymbals and a torch exist. Attis seems peaceful, resting in a deep sleep.

Finally, concerning the representations of Attis on coins, it should be noted that such images of him have not been an object of a detailed study, either from the point of view of the quantity, frequency or of characteristics related to his image.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{119} Vermaseren 1966: 38.
\textsuperscript{120} Vermaseren 1966: 21; Tacheva-Hitova 1983: 142.
5. Attis in Greece

One of the earliest representations of Attis on a Greek monument, the first evidence of an image of him and written reference to him, is fig. 34, proof that he was already known to Greece, at the beginning of the 3rd c. B.C.

It is a votive relief stele from the Metroon of Piraeus dated in the middle of the 4th c. B.C. The relief, placed in a naiskos frame, was excavated at the 19th c. and there is also an inscription under the figures.

Attis, on the left side, is sitting on a rock holding a syrinx in his left hand while his right one is upraised, in order to receive a small jug from the goddess. He is represented in full profile, wearing the oriental costume (a long sleeved tunica, trousers and boots with pointed toes) and a pointed cap.

His companion is Agdistis (though many scholars prefer the name of Cybele) as it is referred in the inscription. In order to show her pure love to Attis, she is approaching him. She is wearing, as usual, a chiton with a belt under her breast and is holding a tympanum in her left hand. In her extended right hand she is holding a jug.

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123 Agdistis figure, on the Piraeus stele, is likely to be a Greek adaptation of a Phrygian depiction. Roller 1994: 249.
124 Below the relief the inscription says that “Timothea (the dedicatar) dedicated this to Angdistis and Attis on behalf of the children according to normal”. So, it is clear that Agdistis is identified here. Roller 1994: 248.
There is also another relief from Greece (or Asia Minor), more recent than the previous one, dated in the 2nd c. B.C. where both figures are depicted in a temple or a sacred enclosure (fig.35). In that marble relief, the Great goddess is standing in a hieratic position, dressed in the conventional way, with a crown on her head, a scepter in her right hand and a tympanum in the left. A lion is lying next to her. Attis is standing in front of the goddess leaning upon a crook. Two other figures, a mother and her daughter, are coming to offer fruits to the Great Goddess, since she is a deity of fertility and protector of fruits.126

125 Vermaseren 1966: 70
126 Cybele (like Demeter) was supposed to be deity who invented and protected the fruits. Vermaseren 1966: 23.
Finally, another proof showing that the cult of Attis in Greece was closely connected to the cult of Cybele (from the 3rd c. B.C.) is another relief from the Athenian Agora found in 1950. Cybele is holding in her lap a naked child. It is uncertain whether that child is Attis or not, since the head of the boy is missing; however, through that image Cybele strengthens her function as protector of babies and children and thus for Attis. From the above epigraphic and iconographic data, it becomes obvious that the connection of Attis as the companion of the Mother of Gods and an integral part of her cult was accepted in the Greek world by the 3rd c. B.C. 128

6. Cult and festivals for Attis and Cybele

Despite the fact that there is no evidence about the celebration of the Roman festivities honouring Attis in the Black Sea colonies, we should, briefly, mention the ritual of the mourning of Attis, component of the cult of the Great Mother.

Attis festivals, a performance of his death during a sacred week,129 were taking place at Rome every March (from 15-27 March). They were beginning with the cannophores’ entrance, personifying the discovery of the abandoned Attis by the Great Mother and then, the civic high priests, the archigalli, would sacrifice a bull in

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order to ensure the fertility. A week later the *arbour intrat* began with the transportation of a pine tree into the Palatin temple and, at the 24th of March, was a day of grief and mourning in front of Attis image, commemorating his castration and the blood that flowed from his wound. The *galli*, the deity's worshippers who sacrificed their manhood, were lacerating their arms with knives and axes, perhaps to express the strong bonds between the deity and the worshippers; like Attis who emasculated himself at the banks of the river Gallus, through the same way *galli* wanted to express their devotion to the Great Mother of Gods and gain access to her.

The resurrection day took place at the 25th of March (Hilaria day); Attis awakened from his long sleep of death and returned back to life. The revival of the nature began and everyone was happy. The *Lavatio* day at 27 of March, indicated the purification day. The worshippers of Attis considered that through this ritual process their beloved god was reborn and so the nature; furthermore, their belief that Attis body and soul could be saved and continue to live after his death, was a strong evidence that the immortality of the souls was a common idea at that period and those funerary procedures can prove it.

In the same context of the cult of the Mother of Gods, the *Megalensia* festivals took place after Attis festivals; During the *Megalensia*, the festival of Cybele at April, feasts were organised among the Roman nobility, a kind of lavish banquets. Its aim was probably to strengthen the bonds of the worshippers and the common sense of sharing the same values, their devotion to the goddess. Moreover, the ritual

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130 The word *gallos* has many interpretations: it appeared in literature around the end of the 3rd c. B.C. and in a few years was spread as the group of priests of the Great Mother who castrated themselves. According to Borgeaud Philippe, it is a word found in the Greek language, after the establishment of the Seleucid Empire and suggests that the Greek γάλλος was borrowed from the latin gallus after the Gauls’ invasion in Asia Minor (around 278 B.C.). Therefore, the same word could mean the cock and the Gaul; it seems to be a play game with the meaning of the word *gallos*. During the Roman period those priests were dressed in a bizarre way, in long feminine dresses and heavy bijoux; at the Megalensia festival for Cybele they were traversing the roads under the music of cymbals and tambourines and collecting money for the construction of her temple. The action of castration symbolized for them the sacrifice of their manhood, for the saviour of them and the continuation of their goddess’s cult. Borgeaud 1996: 61, 64, 120; Cumont 1963: 49; Alvar 2008: 250-3.


132 The purpose of the Megalensia festivals was to celebrate the arrival of the Great Mother in Rome in 204 B.C. The fact that her image was placed on the top of the Palatine Hill, in the heart of Rome, denotes that Romans had in high esteem the goddess and her cult. Upon her arrival in the city, the goddess was already honored in other parts of Italy denoting that she was not a stranger deity to Romans. Roller 1999: 273.
of taurobolium-criobolium,\textsuperscript{133} from the late 2\textsuperscript{nd} c. AD, was another Roman characteristic of the cult of the Great Mother.\textsuperscript{134} The blood of the animals symbolized a spiritual purification; it was believed that the vital power of the bull’s blood could have an influence on humans, perhaps a type of immortality. Many votive altars have been found throughout the Roman Empire commemorating a taurobolium-criobolium.

However, the only evidence that connects their existence in the Black Sea region, during the Roman period, is the sanctuary of the Mother of Gods in Dionysopolis, in the chora of Kallatis; as it is said in a previous chapter, that temple had a particular place for the sacrifices of animals, as the finds of the animals’ bones in the votive pits area have showed.

From all the above information it becomes evident that the Roman worshippers of the two deities wanted to show, through the festivals process, their respect to them; that devotion could be a “mean” for the rebirth and protection of the nature, and the immortality for themselves.

7. Attis in the North Black Sea Region – Introduction

After the emergence of Attis’ cult during the 4\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C., he became popular beyond the Phrygian borders, in Greece, Rome and in the region of the Black Sea. Through the worship of Cybele, the cult of Attis was mainly spread and became known at the North coast of the Black Sea region during the Hellenistic period, as it is confirmed by the majority of terracotta statuettes of him found in Panticapaion and other colonies. Certainly there also existed many local statuettes of Attis made in local workshops in the Black Sea settlements. The following paragraphs demonstrate in which parts of the Black Sea the cult of Attis was mostly spread and through which kind of monuments or other evidence (e.g. epigraphic).

\textsuperscript{133} Taurobolium was a custom that comes probably from Asia Minor. The sacrifice, mainly, of a bull or a ram (criobolium) was a religious process; in Roman times a taurobolium was addressed to salute the emperor and for his well-being. Its introduction, in the cult of Cybele, appeared in the middle of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} c. AD (the first evidence comes from 295 AD in Rome). At Ostia many inscriptions referring to this “blood bath” have been found near the sanctuary of Cybele. The animal’s sacrifice, symbolising the immortality and the eternity, was usually performed by the priests of Cybele. Certainly, it was a mean for Romans to show respect to their goddess. Alvar 2008: 173-5; Vermaseren 1977: 101-7.

\textsuperscript{134} Borgeaud 1996: 156-8; Cumont 1963: 63-5; Alvar 2008: 261-5.
7.1 Panticapaion

At the capital of the Bosporan Kingdom some statuettes of Attis were revealed either in seated or standing positions. In fig.36 Attis is depicting seated on a tree trunk with a flute in his mouth.\(^{135}\)

\[\text{Fig.36 A statuette of Attis from Panticapaion-3rd c. B. C}^{136}\]

Another statuette from Attis founded at Panticapaion is illustrated in fig.37 in a standing position; Attis, as a child, is holding a flute in front of his chest and is dressed in a chiton having his belly nude. It is clear that his face is round and childish with rich hair. The date of that statuette is estimated around the 2\(^{nd}\) or the 1\(^{st}\) c. B.C.\(^{137}\)

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\(^{135}\) Kobylina 1976: 20.
\(^{137}\) Kobylina 1976: 20.
One of the most interesting images is fig. 38 where Attis, with the characteristic Phrygian cap, is depicted in a sleeping position, seated on a hillock. Noteworthy are the wings coming out of his back. The low part of his belly is again with no clothes on it. \(^{139}\)

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\(^{138}\) Kobylina 1976: plate 11.
\(^{139}\) Kobylina 1976: 23.
\(^{140}\) Kobylina 1976: plate 17.
Finally, fig. 39 depicts Attis riding a cock from a grave of Panticapaion, dated at the 1st c. AD. He is dressed as usual, with the pointed Phrygian cap, boots at his legs, his belly is uncovered since the mantle is buttoned only at his chest; the rest of the mantle is falling aside his body.

Fig. 39 Attis riding a cock-Panticapaion, 1st c. AD-Museum of Moscow

7.2 Olbia

At the colony of Olbia the only archaeological evidence for the cult of Attis is a disc lamp (fig.40) from the 2nd c. AD in which Attis and Cybele are depicted together, one of the rarest representations of the two deities together in the Black Sea. Cybele is dressed in the usual style, in a chiton and himation, with a crown on her head and the phiale in her right hand. The object on her left hand is not clear to be identified. On both her sides two lions are standing and behind the left one Attis is standing wearing a Phrygian cap and holding a flute in his hands.

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141 LIMC III, 2: 34.
It is quite remarkable and bizarre at the same time the fact that while Cybele played a significant role in the religious life of Olbia, as already mentioned, the cult of Attis was not so common in the same colony, as the data testify; Attis was not easily identified to Greek gods and together with his “feminine” characteristics made him probably a not so “welcomed” deity for the people of Olbia. Nevertheless, a future and extended research will probably throw light to the reasons of that phenomenon in order to avoid assumptions.

7.3 Phanagoria (Taman Peninsula)

A statuette of Phanagoria (fig. 41) in Taman Peninsula is the only available find representing Attis as an infant in a dynamic and at the same time fast movement. He is wearing the Phrygian cap, his clothes are closed in front of his chest and for one more time his belly is nude. He is holding a bird from its neck in his left hand and a round object (perhaps a fruit, an apple) in his right one. It seems that a dog is trying to jump over him at his right side. He is represented like a figure of nature, as a deity of vegetation, linked with animals.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{143} Kobylina 1976: plate 12.
\textsuperscript{144} Kobylina 1976: 23.
8. Attis in the West Black Sea region

8.1 Kallatis

Concerning the settlement of Kallatis the archaeological data for Attis are few. A terracotta figurine of Attis was found in a grave near the Stadium in Kallatis. Fig.42 represents Attis seated on a base, wearing a Phrygian cap and a short shoulder cape. He is holding a cock in his left hand and probably grapes in the other. That terracotta piece is dated from the Hellenistic period.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{145} Kobylina 1976: plate 19.
\textsuperscript{146} Vermaseren CCCA, VI: 121.
Another evidence of Attis cult are the following two figures, a terracotta bust and head of Attis found in the colony of Kallatis. In the bust image (fig. 43), dating at the Hellenistic period, Attis is depicted with the Phrygian cap and long curled hair. It seems that the expression of his face is a kind of sorrow. In the next image (fig. 44) he is wearing again the cap on his head, the hair is long and his face expression is neutral, perhaps a little happier than the previous image. The chronology of that image should be again from the Hellenistic period. Finally, some terracotta products of Attis and Cybele, dated at the Hellenistic era, testify their worship together at the settlement of Kallatis.

147 Vermaseren CCCA, VI: fig. 405.
8.2 Odessos

Another colony with few data about Attis cult is Odessos. A terracotta figurine of Attis (fig.45) is the only archaeological find revealed at the colony of Odessos, in which Attis is depicted in a usual scheme: he is seated cross-legged on a rock, wearing a Phrygian cap and a chiton- himation. He is playing a syrinx holding it with both his hands. The statuette is probably dated at the Hellenistic period.\textsuperscript{150}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Fig.45.jpg}
\caption{Attis seated on a rock and playing syrinx- Odessos, Hellenistic period- Archaeological Museum at Varna\textsuperscript{151}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{149} Vermaseren CCCA, VI: fig.426, 427.
\textsuperscript{150} Vermaseren CCCA, VI: 120.
\textsuperscript{151} Vermaseren CCCA, VI: fig.402.
9. Summary

The tale of Cybele and Attis is likely to be one of the best known aspects of the cult of the Mother of Gods. Despite the fact that the majority of ancient sources claimed to be a Phrygian story, including Phrygian elements, their myth is more a combination with Greek and Roman features.

Having a closer look the drama of Cybele and Attis could be characterized as a drama of nature, of human emotions through which nature exists. The Phrygian Attis, with no direct reference to his Phrygian homeland, in contrast to Cybele, became popular and important when the goddess was attracted by his beauty and desired to be her lover; under the hope of being youth forever, he was seduced by her, but unfaithful to the goddess, due to his human character, he died. Attis committed *hybris* against the goddess’s love and should be punished for that. His death is a kind of agreement between gods and men: the young Attis sleeps and dies but he will awake again and arise, unlike to common dead people.

Attis cult was linked to that of Cybele’s and was spread from Phrygia, to Greece, Rome and in some colonies of the Black Sea. As an attendant or companion of Cybele, he entered in Greek art and cult and his image seemed to be a Greek creation enabling the Greeks to worship him as Cybele’s companion.

As the few archaeological finds demonstrated, he was venerated in the colonies of Panticapaion, Olbia, Phanagoria, Kallatis and Odessos, colonies in which Cybele was worshipped, too. However, as we have seen in previous chapters, Cybele’s cult existed in the Black Sea colonies already from the end of the 6th c. B.C. (e.g. Apollonia, Myrmekion) while Attis was introduced only from the Hellenistic period and then. Thus, the evidence did not show, till now, many depictions of the two deities together except the case of the Olbian lamp, from the Roman period and some terracotta products of Kallatis, from the Hellenistic era. His dependence of Cybele is also confirmed by Attis presence in Rome, only after Cybele’s introduction. The Roman festivities honoring him were a ritual process testified only in Rome, since there is no data for the colonies of the Black Sea region.

Attis, the youthful consort of Cybele, a figure with much cultic and mythic information, was the only person that had the privilege of an intimate contact with Cybele. Their rarely depictions and his limited worship throughout the Pontic area
indicate that he was not an easily accepted god in the religion of the Greek colonizers, perhaps due to his “feminine characteristics” in his iconography or to his unusual behavior, the castration. However, the Phrygian god of vegetation, who died and then arises, was a deity who could offer a hope of immortality to his worshippers in conjunction with Cybele and their powerful myth opened a window into the Phrygian religion and practices.
Part C - A general view of Mithras

1. Introduction

Task in this part of our paper is to trace the most important characteristics of the god Mithras and all the information necessary for the understanding of the Mithraic ideology and cult. His origin is believed to be Indo-Iranian. He was mainly popular as god of warriors and horsemen and his name was given to Persian kings, as their patron.

We shall begin from his Persian origin and his adoption by the Romans. An overview for his miraculous birth and its iconographical tradition that presents a big variety will follow.

His duty was to maintain the order of cosmos, conquer the evil and watch over the morality of mankind. Furthermore, a horse rider god (ephippos), tauroctonos, soldier, god of Sun (Sol Invictus), creator-demiourgos of Genesis are some of Mithras’ usual epithets.

Subjects like the main elements of the tauroctony scene, the crucial theme of the Mithraic ideology, the sacrifice of the bull and some of Mithras functions are going to be analysed in the first part of the present chapter.

In the second part we are going to analyse Mithras’ worship in the Black Sea settlements, in the Northern, Southern, Western and Eastern part; it is likely that Mithras was the most venerated god in Pontus. Despite the fact that the archaeological data of Mithras are limited, we have gathered the most representative monuments and images of Mithras killing the bull, the only available evidence for his cult in the whole Black Sea with some syncretic characteristics to the deity of Attis.

The cult of Mithras and its ideology is plenty of symbols, questions and mystery; however, it is our aim to discover the most essential characteristics from a religion with difficult though dynamic concepts and the influence that had in the Black Sea colonies.
2. Mithras background

2.1 The Persian Origin

Mithras is an Indo-Iranian god\textsuperscript{152} of contract, unity, light and fear, mainly adopted by the Romans as one of their main deities with a mystery cult during the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and the 3\textsuperscript{rd} c. AD. According to written sources (literary and epigraphical) the information about Mithras come mostly from the eastern Indo-European region of Iran and India (2\textsuperscript{nd} and 1\textsuperscript{st} c. B.C.), some from the Hellenistic Kingdoms (1\textsuperscript{st} c. B.C.) and lastly from the Roman Empire (2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} c. AD). The earliest evidence for him seems to be an Iranian one where Mitra (Μίθρα) together with Varuna (another Iranian god) were responsible for the cosmic order.

In Indian language Mithras means friend, friendship and the sacrifice of the bull, the central theme of Mithraism, exists in many Indian depictions. Thus, Mithras in Iranian means contract and fear (because he was the rainmaker responsible for plants’ growth).\textsuperscript{153} However, Mithras for the Indians is not a god of “high class”.

Among his duties were the justice matters, contracts, treaties and everything related to the “social order”. He was the master of the social relations, of the animal sacrifice, of the rain that leads to fertility and growth and also the light god with the fire as his symbol.

Plenty of information concerning the god Mithras derives from the Persian Old Avesta, the hymn to Mitra (or else Yaṣṭ 10), created at the 5\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C. in the Achaemenid Period. The most important feast of Mitra was the Mithrakana, a festival for the celebration of the autumn equinox by the Achaemenid Kings. The cult of Mitra began to shrink from the moment that Alexander the Great conquered many places of the Achaemenid Empire but it remained in Anatolian sites, in Armenia and in the East.

Mithras identification with the sun was common in the Persian Empire, especially from the 1\textsuperscript{st} c. B.C. and due to that relation he was also connected to the

\textsuperscript{152} His Indo Iranian origin is likely to have relation with the Persian royal god Ahura-Mazda, protector of the Achaemenid Empire in ancient Iran. In fact, some scholars consider that Mithras was the son of Ahura-Mazda, although this relation has not been proved yet. Saprykin 2009: 255; Vermaseren 1951: 285.

\textsuperscript{153} LIMC VI, I: 583.
god Apollo till the end of the 1st c. AD. A lot of depictions of the Persian Empire represent the god driving a chariot ahead of the sun. Mithras is also associated with the sun as a god that brings light and life to the world.\textsuperscript{154}

2.2 The Roman Mithras

The cult of the Indo-Iranian Mithras flourished in the Roman Empire during the 2nd c. AD and became known due to archaeological data (find-spots, inscriptions, sculptures, paintings). Despite the debate of scholars, concerning Iranian transmission matters, Mithras was adopted by Romans as the highest deity of a mystery cult; he symbolized the Kosmokrator, the creator of the mankind and at the same time he was a mystique cult for many scholars. The Mithraic cult firstly was spread at the Latin parts of the Roman Empire and the most ancient sources come from around 90 AD.\textsuperscript{155} Mithras the Invincible (Sol Invictus Mithra), the Sun God and the bull-killer were some of his main titles.

Most of the Mithraic finds were revealed in central Italy, mainly in the area of Rome and Ostia (also in northern Dalmatia, the Rhenian and Danube provinces). The \textit{Mithraism}\textsuperscript{156} was consisted of small groups of men, the \textit{Mithraists},\textsuperscript{157} (people from low classes) that met for the worship of the god in the \textit{Mithraea},\textsuperscript{158} small “cave” temples for the veneration, rituals and the \textit{initiation} of the members.\textsuperscript{159} Between AD 180 and 220 the Mithraic cult was spread rapidly. In the 3rd c. AD the Roman elite

\textsuperscript{154} LIMC VI, I: 583; Hornblower - Spawforth 2003: 991; Alvar 2008: 79-80; Cancik -Schneider 2007: 74.
\textsuperscript{155} LIMC VI, I: 584-5; Beck 1987: 304; Hornblower - Spawforth 2003: 991.
\textsuperscript{156} According to R. Beck, one of the teachings of Mithraism is “a cosmic and astral religion derived from Platonism and centred on a doctrine of the soul’s celestial ascent”. Beck 1987: 298.
\textsuperscript{157} The initiation of Mithraists was accepted through a hierarchy of seven grades, under the planets’ protection with a prime priest- Father in the presidency. Thus, the recruitment procedure was held inside the temples. Women were not permitted as mystai. Hornblower - Spawforth 2003: 991; Alvar 2008: 346.
\textsuperscript{158} A \textit{Mithraeum} was considered as an image of the world cave, the cosmos of Mithras, in which the tauroctony took place. Most of the Mithraea were discovered in Rome and usually inside them were symbols related to the world creation and the movement of planets. Alvar 2008: 105; LIMC VI, I: 585.
\textsuperscript{159} Among the Mithraic processes the Mithraic meals held a central position. Many provincial Mithraea included kitchens for their preparation. Alvar 2008: 355-7.
came closer to the Mithraic cult. During the reign of Constantine the Great the cult started to perish and eventually disappeared at 400 AD.\footnote{LIMC VI, I: 583; Cancik - Schneider 2007:75-6; Hornblower - Spawforth 2003: 991.}

According to Mithraic iconography, the central idea was the bull slayer by Mithras into a cave, a scene with a number of interpretations and meanings. Other episodes are Mithras birth from a rock and the celebration meal of Mithras and Sun-Sol.

The aim of the whole cult and the sacrifice of the bull is a subject with many versions; however, as shown from the following chapters, it is about a religious identity related to the creation and the salvage of the world with the aid of Mithras, a phenomenon not so usual in the public religions of other cities.

### 3. Mithras Birth

Due to rich archaeological material many birth versions exist about Mithras. However, the most widely accepted and the only one depicting the god as a child\footnote{Rarely Mithras is represented as a child. From the time he was born he is depicted as a youth. Vermaseren 1951: 287.} is the scene of his rock birth, the commonest of all the scenes of Mithras after the bull-killing. In that scene the god is emerging from a stone rock, where rock symbolises the earth,\footnote{It is likely that Mithras is identified with a Babylonian sun-god, Shamash, appearing on the top of a mountain just as the Persian god. Vermaseren 1951: 288.} with upraised hands holding a lighted torch and a dagger or knife to kill the bull.

In most of the rock birth depictions Mithras is nude and wears only a Phrygian cap to denote his “oriental” origin. His sex identity is not always clear since his legs are closely connected in a hieratic position.\footnote{Alvar 2008: 81; Vermaseren 1951:285-6.} In a picture from the Mithraeum at Dura-Europos (fig. 46), in Euphrates region, flames are getting out from the rock, perhaps related to the primitive way that people made fire by a stone. It is likely that at Dura-Europos image Mithras is represented as a baby.
In another one Mithraic relief at Romula (an ancient city in Roman Dacia) a fountain arises from the rocky earth, a characteristic related to the water; also amphorae could be found on Mithraic reliefs, as a water element.

Mithras sometimes is depicted as a bearded god or carrying a quiver, arrows, knife and a bow indicating his strong personality to his followers. A globe in his hand and the circle zodiac sign in the other, the four wind-gods and the four main elements of the rock birth people (a serpent, a crater, a bird and a lion) are depicted in a relief from Trier in Germany (fig. 47) denoting that Mithras is a demiourgos, a kosmokrator, ruling the seasons of the year and managing to conquer the evil. And certainly is a deus invictus who kills the bull.

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164 Vermaseren 1951: plate XXV.
165 As a bearded god the scholars seem to agree that he is identified to Oceanus. Despite the fact that Mithras is born from the earth (rock), he is characterised as a water god. Some scholars accept the Greek theory that everything is created by the water and that the gods of water and of heaven were one and the same. So, it is not a surprise that these two different traits can be found at the same time. Vermaseren 1951: 289, 293.
Furthermore, two torchbearers usually appear at his rock birth: Cautes and Cautopates helping the god at his birth and bringing light in it. They are considered as the helpers of Mithras and the three together constitute a popular trinity in the iconography. Fig. 48 (from an altar of a Mithraeum at Poetovio in Pannonia Superior—today’s Slovenia) clearly represents Mithras birth from a rock, supported by Cautes and Cautopates. Mithras is holding a sword in his right hand and a torch in the left hand. Above them it should be the figure of Saturnus having a prophetic dream about Mithras rock birth. The altar is dated around the middle of the 3rd c. AD.

166 Vermaseren 1951: plate XXIV.
Finally, another well known representation of the rock-birth, but not so popular in the iconography, is the one showing Mithras bursting out of an egg, a clear influence of Orphism.\(^{168}\)

Mithras from the moment of his birth is represented as a god that conquers the evil and gives life and light to the earth; a new Sun arises.\(^{169}\) Besides, the killing of the bull opens a new era for the world, with no darkness and evil elements.

4. Main elements of the tauroctony scene:

4.1 The Mithraic cave

The central theme of the Mithraic ideology, the killing of the bull, is mostly represented into a cave, a main element of the Mithraic initiation. There, it was performed all the mystery process and it was considered as the path for the descent and the ascent of the souls.

The cave, or else the Mithraeum, an image of the Mithraic cosmos, was either a natural rock cave or an artificial one, a cave vault. Its origin is not yet clear: it is

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\(^{167}\) Alvar 2008: 450.

\(^{168}\) Vermaseren 1951: 289-91; Alvar 2008: 83.

\(^{169}\) Saturn, who was considered as an old god, dies and he is replaced by the Sun god, Mithras. Vermaseren 1951: 297-8.
possible that the cave had a relation to the conception of Mithras being a cattle thief. Many Indo-Iranian myths narrated that the cattle thieves used a cave as their refuge and it seems possible that Mithras, as a cattle thief, used the cave as his “home”.  

4.2 The four assistants

There is no evidence for a proper myth for the cult of Mithras; only some authors (a certain Euboulus and Porphyry) wrote more or less some things about the Mithraic cult. On the other hand, the iconography is the one that helped a lot to “reconstruct” all the elements that the Mithraic cult is consisted of.

In the tauroctony scene, Mithras is depicted as a young god holding the bull down with a dagger or knife into his neck and pressing his left leg into the bull’s back, in order to prevent the animal getting up. Usually in the iconography there exist four “assistants” in Mithras mission: a dog, a snake, a raven and a scorpion.

The dog is often shown licking the blood of the bull’s wound. In some reliefs the dog accompanies Mithras Ephippos or Mithras in hunting scenes. The snake, more frequent than the dog, is shown beneath the tauroctone group: normally it licks the blood from the wound, like the dog, its size is larger (one or sometimes three headed) and in some images it also accompanies Mithras Ephippos. Despite its chthonic character, the snake is not depicted with evil and disastrous powers like in the Greek religion.

The raven is a messenger, a “hierokeryx” as Vermaseren describes in his article; depicted at the top left of the scene, is giving the message from Helios-Sol that Mithras should kill the bull. Occasionally, the raven is shown holding the edge of Mithras mantle. Lastly, the scorpion, a prominent symbol, attacks the bull’s testicles, probably to obtain some of its life force.

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171 In Greek religion the dog was usually Artemis or Hekate’s companion, deities of fertility and underworld. Campbell 1968: 14.
172 Vermaseren 1950: 146.
4.3 The torchbearers: Cautes and Cautopates

Apart from the above classical motif there are many figure variations in the tauroctony scene. The two torchbearers Cautes and Cautopates, attested also in Mithras birth, often appear in the killing bull image (earlier in the West than in the East). Their identity is not clear: sometimes they are depicted as Mithras helpers, when they carry the body of the dead bull from the cave to the sacrifice site or they participate at the feast of Sol and Mithras after the sacrifice process.

Usually they are holding torches to bring light to earth and they have their legs crossed. Their normal position in the scene is the following: Cautes on the spectator’s left and Cautopates on the right. It is possible that under these positions they represent the rising and evening-setting sun with Mithras as the midday sun. Thus, their position can be seen reversed; that characteristic appears in the Danube areas and possibly identifies the two seasons, the spring and the autumn.

Their relation to the death of the bull is quite bizarre: in a number of Mithraic reliefs, as it is illustrated in fig. 49 from the Sidon Mithraeum in Syria, Cautopates is depicted looking downward and away from the dying bull as an unpleased action while Cautes is looking upward and towards the killing action, as a favourable one.\(^{174}\)

![Fig. 49 Cautes (on the left) looking upwards and Cautopates (on the right) looking downwards-Sidon Mithraeum\(^{175}\)](image)

\(^{174}\) Alvar 2008: 85-6; Campbell 1968: 30-35.
\(^{175}\) Campbell 1968: 34.
Finally, the two torchbearers, forming a trinity with Mithras, are likely to have another role: that of genesis and apogenesis. Cautes is linked to the genesis of the souls, the pre-existence and Cautopates to the apogenesis, the life after genesis, the immortality. It is believed, in Mithraic ideology, that the souls follow a journey; a journey in which the souls pass from the stage of mortality, the genesis, to that of the immortality, the apogenesis, the beginning and the end of the journey.176

4.4 Subordinate elements (fire, water, crater, winds, star and crescent)

Some divine elements, represented quite often in the tauroctony subject, are the fire and the water. They seem to be means of “purification” and they appear in many reliefs of the Danube areas.

Therefore, crater is an important symbol; many scholars disagree about its content. Some believe that it contained the water from the rock while others suggest that perhaps it contained the collected blood of the bull. Definitely, it is a symbol that through its liquid content gives life to all fluids but acquires further attention and detail.

On the other hand, the four wind-gods are often depicted in the corners of some monuments, as divine traits with an influence on nature.177 The most possible explanation could be the seasons’ identification; through the winds the bull’s death is related to the order of the cosmos, from its beginning till the end.

The star and the crescent, symbols of the religious aspects of the Persian Zoroastrianism, are also depicted in the Mithraic scene of tauroctony. There are some cases that the star is illustrated within a crescent, characteristic of the coins of Mithridates Eupator in Pontus (the king himself and his successors introduced these emblems to the Bosporus). The star and the crescent reflected their victory over the darkness, the evil and were also linked with the cult of the Anatolian god Mên and used as emblems by the Achaemenid Empire.178

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176 In Mithraic doctrine, the names of descent (Cautopates) and ascent (Cautes) are also used for the souls instead of genesis and apogenesis. Beck 1994: 29-30.
177 Alvar 2008: 79, 89-90.
5. The Mithraic tauroctony: a star map

According to many scholars, the Mithraic tauroctony has a character of celestial system-world. In other words, it is considered as an astrological map of great complexity and difficult allegorical meanings; the bull, the main component in Mithras tauroctony, is characterised as the Taurus constellation, the Torchbearers the pair of Gemini, the dog as Canis Major and Canis Minor. Mithras, always depicted in the centre, is definitely the unconquered Sun in the sign of Leo, the strongest figure with a great influence (Solar Mithras).  

Certainly, it is very difficult to decode the astrological message of the tauroctony scene; Mithras, the main figure, has been given the identity of more that one constellations; there is a debate among Orion, Perseus and Lion as the most appropriates for Mithras. The constellation of Leo, a fire symbol, seems to be the strongest argument. The lion, due to its strong and fiery nature, always winner in its aims, represents the maximum power and the greatest influence that Mithras could have from the time he was born.

6. Mithras and the hypercosmic sun

In the Mithraic iconography Mithras is almost always represented together with the sun god as separate beings. This is obviously why Mithras is called Sol Invictus, the unconquered Sun. In Mithraic ideology they believed in the existence of

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179 The bull has a double symbolism: that of the Taurus and of the Moon. Taurus is the exaltation of the Moon; in addition to Mithras relation to the Sun, the bull’s death should identify the Moon. Beck 1994: 34.
181 The sign of Leo indicates that the Sun, arriving in July, brings the hottest weather of the year and being from the highest point is trying to approach the lion. Beck 1994: 45.
182 Perseus was a mythical patron of the Mithridatids in Pontus mostly after the reign of Mithridates IV. Saprykin 2009: 260.
183 It is believed that the celestial Lion is the house of the Sun, a place of strong power and influence. Beck 1994: 45.
185 It was considered that the sun, in Iranian astronomy, was the highest and the most fiery and powerful of all the lights; consequently, the Solar Mithras was a superior god. Therefore, the inscription of Deus Sol Invictus Mithras which exists in many reliefs, is another proof for the sun relation. Campbell 1968: 212.
two suns: the one is the sun’s image, the normal and visible sun and the second is Mithras, the unconquered, the *hypercosmic* sun.\(^{186}\) Mithras must have been understood as a second sun besides the normal one, or else the hypercosmic sun\(^{187}\) as Platonists used to refer. Mithras birth is definitely a hypercosmic phenomenon where the rock symbolizes the world seen from the outside and Mithras with the torch in his hand becomes the hypercosmic sun that gives new light to the world.\(^{188}\)

Thus, the relation of Mithras and the sun is clearly attested by the arranged meal\(^{189}\) between Mithras and the Sol after the bull’s sacrifice (fig. 50).

![Fig. 50 The banquet of Mithras and Sol with the two torchbearers- Mithraic relief from Konjica, Bosnia-Herzegovina\(^{190}\)](image)

The meaning of the above scene was that Mithras after ending successfully his “mission”, that is killing the bull, he celebrated with the Sun in a meal, also attended by the two torchbearers; after the meal was over the two “friends” mounted the Sun’s quadriga\(^{191}\) to reach the sky where Mithras took his place near the gods.

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\(^{186}\) The sun is used as a symbol in Plato’s Ideal Forms that is of the Good; the sun is represented as an illumination source, the source of the Good. Ulansey 1994: 258.

\(^{187}\) Furthermore, the sun is depicted in many tauroctone type scenes as a god driving a chariot drawn by horses; in some of these the Moon is also represented in the chariot. Perhaps there is a relation between the Sun and the ascent since the Sun is a power of movement, of domination and of vitality. Campbell 1968: 139-141.

\(^{188}\) Ulansey 1994: 258-264.

\(^{189}\) The table of that meal was covered by the dead bull’s skin. Cancik - Schneider 2007: 76; Hornblower - Spawforth 2003: 992.

\(^{190}\) Alvar 2008: 453.

\(^{191}\) Alvar 2008: 91.
7. The tauroctony image: a deeper approach

The central scene of the Mithraic iconography, the bull’s killing in which Mithras is mounted on the bull’s back plunging a dagger into the bull’s flank, is already known from above. A raven has already sent him the message from Helios-Sun that he should kill the bull.

There exist many reliefs representing other parts of that scene as the wrestle of Mithras and the bull, Mithras riding the bull or carrying him by its legs into the cave (Mithras taurophoros). However, emphasis is given to the sacrifice scene and its meaning.192

Mithras duty is to kill the bull in order to give light and life to the world. The forces of that “divine” animal should have been released in order to help the world and come out of the darkness. A safe world must be established and the only way to happen is the sacrifice of the bull.193

According to some scholars, the sacrificial scene is a transit –point of two worlds: the one before the saviour with evil elements and the new one after the sacrifice, safer than the previous for the people. Mithras sacrificed the animal aiming in the recreation of the world, the re-awakening of the whole nature. Probably the animal’s death was also a donation, an offering to the gods despite its violent character.194 In other words, the tauroctony represents the beginning and the creation of a new world, the establishment of a new cosmic order that Mithras took care of and it is also a symbol of the vegetation and growth of the world, since the animal’s tail, after the deadly hit, changed into an ear of wheat.

Among the various depictions of the tauroctony scene, there is one that should be mentioned here: according to M.J. Vermaseren, a Roman copy of a relief found in a Mithraeum on the Coelius, today the Piazza della Navicella in Rome, exists with a rather unique representation: the Persian god (fig. 51) is shown on the top of the dying animal putting his right foot on the bull’s head and holding in his raised hand a globe, as in the birth figures. From that description it is common sense that the Persian god

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193 According to ancient Persian Zoroastrian sources, the bull’s sacrifice meant a new era for the world, a new beginning. Alvar 2008: 104.
194 As M. Luther denotes, the tauroctony is an image of violence of a domesticated animal aiming in the domination of the natural world, a victory of the nature by the powers of the animal. Luther 1994: 222.
was considered as a ruler of the world and a kosmocrator (with the globe in his hand), elements that appear from the time he was born.\textsuperscript{195}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Fig. 51 Roman relief- Mithras killing the bull in an unusual representation\textsuperscript{196}}
\end{figure}

8. Mithras Ephippos

There are many reliefs in which Mithras is represented as a horse rider and charioteer. For the Mithraic ideology the horse rider god was considered to be the Unconquered, the Invincible deity who could save the world.

It is likely that the horse symbolizes the victory; Mithras riding a horse or as a charioteer\textsuperscript{197} towards the sky is the only one who could conquer and save the mankind.

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{195} A standing Mithras is quite unusual in the god’s iconography. Vermaseren 1950: 144.
\textsuperscript{196} Vermaseren 1950: plate 2.
\textsuperscript{197} Sassanian Kings were mounted in horses while the Old Persian kings were mounted on chariots. Campbell 1968: 191.
“Mithra goes along the whole width of the earth after the setting of the glow of
the sun, sweeping across both edges of this wide round earth whose limits are apart;
everything he surveys between heaven and earth, holding his mace in his hand”\(^{198}\)

Riding his horse or the four (usually white) horses of the chariot he passes all
over the world, as a skilful rider, and he leads the world towards the sun, the light, the
victory.

As a rider, he was mainly worshipped in Pontus\(^{199}\) by the end of the 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) c. AD
as the Roman coins from Trapezus testify; he was depicted as a horseman near a tree
and a fire altar. His usual companions the snake, the raven, the fire and the two
torchbearers sometimes appear on these depictions and the lion, another occasional
companion of Mithras, symbolises the power and virility, a conquering force. Thus,
Mithras as a horseman is almost always followed by the Sun, probably as the one who
gives light with its rays. In a relief from Syria a horseman is represented with a snake
under the horse and in the upper corners the moon and the sun (fig.52). There is a
possibility that the relief should be Mithraic and Mithras as the mounted god.

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\(^{199}\) There is evidence that Mithras was represented as a horse rider in the Bosporan area with elements
of other deities; among them is the solar god Apollo-Oitosyros venerated as a chariot rider and
probably was connected to Mithras. There is a relief from the Kuban region (at the Karagodeouachkh
kourgan) depicting a male deity, similar to Apollo Phoebus, standing on a chariot. That deity is very
close to Apollo Oitosyros and obviously to Mithras. Ustinova 1999: 274; Blawatsky-Kochelenko 1966:
6.
Furthermore, Mithras Ephippos was also armed with arrows and bow, a way to demonstrate another function of him as a hunter or as a patron of warriors.\textsuperscript{201} Some monuments represent him riding so swift and quick, like the wind, perhaps to demonstrate his ambition to accomplish its duty as fast as he could.\textsuperscript{202}

Consequently, the Mithraic iconography with the horse rider Mithras aimed to demonstrate that the Persian god was a Deus Invictus (a world conqueror) that his main duty was to lead the world to the sky where the light dominates and the evil perishes.

9. Mithraic rituals in Roman period

The Mithraic iconography offers some details about the ceremony process of the Mithraic cult, a crucial element of the Mithraic ideology. Many symbols are represented in the Mithraic reliefs in a way that demonstrates the most important steps of the Mithraic rituals during the Roman era: the initiation, the sacred meal and lastly the apotheosis.

\textsuperscript{200} Campbell 1968: 193.
\textsuperscript{201} As a warrior, in some terracotta reliefs, he is depicted wearing a Phrygian or Persian leather cap (known as “Perseus hat”, deity officially venerated in Pontus) mostly worn by warriors from Bosporos and Armenia. Thus, Mithras is related to Attis appearance, when he is depicted with a shield; an appearance that lead many scholars to believe in the existence of an influence of military matters (battles, victories against the evil), a religious policy of the Pontic Kings. Saprykin 2009: 267-8.
\textsuperscript{202} Campbell 1968: 191-200; Vermaseren 1950: 154-5.
For the *initiation* rite, despite its big variety, the most common scene of the Mithraic iconography, is the one where a priest figure (a Pater, according to the seven grades of initiation) is usually on the left side and a kneeling person on the right, the recipient of the rite, often naked. The priest has his hands on the recipient’s head. The main rite action seems to be the water pouring from a horn on the initiate’s head, a sort of “baptism”. After that process, the purification follows; here the priest strikes the head or the shoulder of the initiate with the shank of the dead bull. The placement of a solar crown on the initiate’s head is the next step, as is represented in the Mithraeum of Santa Prisca in Rome, a type of “coronation”.

The second main step of the Mithraic ritual is the *sacred meal*, mostly represented on reliefs from Southeast Europe. Like the seated Mithras and the Sol at a table, in the same way two persons are usually depicted at a table into a small cave. A lion is often depicted in these images. On the table exists the bull’s skin and apart from the two seated persons the Torchbearers are present in many scenes.

Finally, the last stage is the apotheosis (consecration) with the representation of a quadriga and its charioteer driving the horses to the right part of the image, towards the sky. It is considered that the charioteer helps Mithras to mount the chariot and in some images he is holding a torch in his hand. The above scene is often depicted on the reliefs of Mithraic iconography. The main idea, the context of that image, is likely to be the ascent to a better world where the Sun gives the light; in Iranian ideology the Sun is the highest ascent.

Consequently, the Mithraic doctrine, through the above ritual symbols, is an ideology where the souls have a journey beginning from the descent through the initiation process and ending to the ascent through the Sun gate.

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203 Many scholars consider that the initiation could also include other type of ceremonies including that of washing the hands of the initiate with honey, a type of fiery water. Alvar 2008: 196.

204 The seven grades of the initiation procedure had the following names: Corax, Nymphus, Miles, Leo, Perses, Heliodromus and Pater all related to the seven planets. Swerdlow 1991: 51.

205 The nakedness of the initiate was a symbol of his refusal to things hostile to its soul. Campbell 1968: 316.


207 In the provinces many excavated Mithraea included kitchens for the preparation of food, meals. As the excavations revealed, at these sites were found bones of sacrificed animals. Thus, it is believed that such meals performed in Mithraea, were common meals that probably took place once a month. Alvar 2008: 351, 361.

208 Campbell 1968: 316-8, 325-8.
10. Mithras in the North Black sea Region- Introduction

During the antiquity the Northern part of the Black Sea was a crossroad of many people, Greeks and indigenous. The Greek settlements, at the Black Sea coast, were different from each other from the beginning of their existence. A reason for that should be the social customs, ideas, religious and political beliefs they brought with them from the time of the colonies’ establishment; all these acquired new elements from the locals and, in the end, they were modified in a new form, an interesting point to see how the Hellenic and other cults have interacted with each other.

Referring to the religion, a major role for the Black Sea pantheon played, apart from the cult of the Great Mother, the cult of the Persian god Mithras. God of sun and light, as it is previously said, Mithras cult emerged in the East and it was spread from there to Asia Minor and throughout the ancient world. According to the archaeological data, the Mithraic cult influenced many settlements of the Black Sea region and in the following chapters, beginning from the Northern part of the Black Sea, we are going to present the cultic evidence and the colonies in which Mithras was venerated as the supreme deity.

10.1 Olbia

The culture of the people of Olbia was influenced by elements of many traditions. Many deities were penetrated into the spiritual life of Olbia, as their images show; among them, Mithras was represented, sometimes as a Thracian horseman. It seemed that Mithras had a small special role to the Olbian pantheon as it is attested by relief fragments.

Some marble reliefs (today kept in the Museum of History at Moscow) not well preserved, found in Olbia, depict Mithras killing a bull, Mithras tauroctonos (fig. 53, 54). Fig. 53 shows the interior part of the bull, the right hand of Mithras and his right leg; a dog, one of Mithras assistants, as it has already been presented, seems to lick

209 Deities like Ammon Zeus were among the depicted ones in reliefs found in Olbia. Kryzhytskyy, Krapivina, Lejpunskaja, Nazarov 2003: 448.
the blood from the animal’s blood. In fig. 54 the same scene is depicted in an analogue of an Olbian relief, though in a more clear way.

Fig. 53 A marble relief fragment from Olbia-Mithras tauroctonos

Fig. 54 Analogue of an Olbian marble relief

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210 Fig.53, 54: Blawatsky-Kochelenko 1966: 32.
It is possible, as M. Rostovtzeff believes that the above monuments of Olbia representing Mithra tauroctonos belong to the period of Olbia’s Roman garrison, until the middle of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} c. AD. If this statement is correct, then it could be justified the fact that some Thracian characteristics exist at the votive reliefs of the colony of Olbia during that period.

According to the information mentioned above, it could be concluded that the archaeological material for the cult of Mithras in the colony of Olbia is not so rich; apart from Apollo, the patron deity of Olbia, Mithras and other deities had only a small role to the pantheon of the Olbian population.\textsuperscript{211}

10.2 Panticapaion

The cult of Mithras is testified at the capital of the Bosporan Kingdom from some terracotta statuettes. The following images show terracotta statuettes of Mithras-Attis repeating the central subject of the Mithraic iconography: Mithras killing-hitting the bull but in a costume that reminds us the figure of Attis, especially for his nude belly.

Fig. 55 represents the adult Mithras in Asiatic clothes killing a bull. His right hand is going to be “fatal” for the animal. It is an image with nice features, natural and vivant. The most “special” element of the statuette is the unusual clothes of Mithras and the fact that the low part of its body is uncovered. His left knee is on the bull’s back. In his left hand is holding the horns of the bull and in the right hand he is probably holding a knife. The statuette, found in a female tomb at Panticapaion, is probably dated at the 1\textsuperscript{st} c. B.C.\textsuperscript{212}

\textsuperscript{211} Blawatsky-Kochelenko 1966: 32-34.
Mithras-Attis is depicted again at the moment of killing-hitting the bull in fig. 56. The precise depiction of his face characteristics is remarkable. He seems calm and determined for his action, despite the fact that it is a “violent” figure. The characteristics illustrated in that image are common to fig. 55: Mithras is wearing again the Phrygian cap, the chiton covers the half of his waist, his belly is uncovered and so his legs. The right arm and leg of Mithras and the back of the bull are missing. The statuette is dated to the 1st c. B.C. and it was revealed at the Mithridates Hill, the acropolis of Panticapaion.214

213 Blawatsky-Kochelenko 1966: plate VIII.
In the following image (fig.57) is represented a terracotta fragment found in a terracotta workshop, during the excavations at Panticapaion in 1949. The main parts of the statuette are missing; however, it has many similarities to the previous figures though its date is uncertain.216

217 Blawatsky-Kochelenko 1966: plate IX.
All the terracotta statuettes from the Bosporan territory represent Mithras tauroctonos with more or less similar characteristics. Certainly, the scene of the bull sacrifice, reflects the main characteristic of the Mithraic mysteries. What it is also interesting in Panticapaion’s statuettes, is Mithras oriental costume with the nude part of the body, his belly, main element of Attis appearance. It is probably a syncretic image demonstrating the interdependence of the cult of Attis-Cybele with that of Mithras or even a confusion between these cults in the area, since that phenomenon is attested mostly in Panticapaion and not elsewhere.218

It is not clear whether this syncretism of Mithras-Attis is a result of the religion of the people at Panticapaion or a tradition that came from somewhere else. Some scholars such as F. Cumont consider that the cult of Mithras came from Asia Minor to the Roman Empire, where the population was already prepared to accept that Iranian deity. However, this point of view is not acceptable today since there are no representations of Mithras-Attis in Asia Minor. On the other hand, there exists a coroplastic workshop at Panticapaion confirming the local production of that group of terracotta statuettes mentioned above.

From all the previous indications it could be noticed that the cult of Mithras-Attis existed or even was found only at Panticapaion; and since Mithras was also related to powers of nature, fertility and agriculture, it is probable that it was absorbed by the cult of Attis, especially between the 1st c. B.C. to the 1st c. AD. Bearing also in mind that despite the public character of Cybele’s cult, the cult of Mithras and other deities, such as Attis and Mên, was private and mystic, an element also proved by the terracotta statuettes of those deities.219

Finally, according to reliefs from tombs of Panticapaion, another syncretic character is presented between Theos Ypsistos (or Theos Epekoos) and the Iranian god Mithras during the Roman period; Theos Ypsistos, a solar and rider deity of Bosporus in the 2nd and 3rd c. AD, a deity of victory, is likely to have many common elements with Mithras cult, under the aspect of Sol Invictus Mithras (Mithras the unconquered sun). The diadems found into the tombs of Panticapaion with figures of that Bosporan Solar deity demonstrate its special place in the cult of Bosporus

presenting at the same time similar to Mithras characteristics. Those indications together with the fact that Theos Ypsistos was considered as a local deity allows us to suppose that the cult of Mithras could not have a unique role at the pantheon of the Bosporan Kingdom and a wide acceptance to the people of Panticapaion; it is more likely that Mithras was “overshadowed” by the Bosporan deity of Theos Ypsistos and the only way to penetrate easier to the Bosporan pantheon was under the cult of Attis, together with other fertility deities.

10.3 Chersonesus

The only available find for the god Mithras in Chersonesus is the fragment of a marble relief not well preserved (fig. 58). Most of the parts are missing. It comes from the common scene of Mithras killing the bull. It was found at Chersonesus in 1911, at the North-East of the city.

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220 Theos Ypsistos cult was mostly spread at the colony of Tanais and had also common elements to the Thracian deity of Sabazios. Blawatsky-Kochelenko 1966: 8-12.
10.4 Gorgippia

The figure of the Sun God moving through the sky driving a chariot was something common in Greek art and in the Black Sea, too. In Gorgippia’s cult Mithras was spread and honoured as the Sun God from the first centuries AD; besides, according to the Mithraic iconography, many reliefs represent Mithras as a charioteer leading the world towards the sun, the light. What is interesting is the fact that over the god’s head are often depicted some solar symbols (a six rayed star and a crescent) as it is already mentioned in Mithras iconographic characteristics. On the other hand, some authors consider that the god with these traits could be Helios, or Mithra-Helios.

Moreover, from the same period many vessels exist from Gorgippia, again with solar symbols that could be identified to cults such as of Helios, Mithras, Mên, Apollo or even Adonis.223 Despite the fact that Mithras presents solar elements and images as a Sun god in the iconography, the lack of evidence does not help the research, in order to make sure which cult was mostly spread in the colony of Gorgippia.

11. Mithras in the South Black Sea Region

11.1 Amisos

On the Southern Black Sea coast, 3km west of the modern Samsun in Turkey, the rich settlement of Amisos is located.224 Due to its favourable geographical position and its port with rich hinterland, Amisos was the main road leading in the central Anatolia.

The lack of archaeological data does not allow us to conclude whether the cult of Mithras was spread or not at the colony of Amisos. However, among the archaeological finds revealed at Amisos, the most interesting should be the terracotta

223 Alekseeva 2003: 985.
224 According to ancient sources, Amisos was established around the 6th c. B.C. by Milesians and existed till the 12th century AD. However, the date of the establishment is still open for discussion. The origin of the name of Amisos is not yet clear. There is information that the name is not Greek and this fact strengthens the possibility that there could be a pre-Greek settlement. Atasoy 2003: 1342.
statuettes. Their quality, type and colour decoration demonstrate that this settlement had a significant local production especially during the Hellenistic period. Many of these statuettes have similarities to other Hellenistic types. The god Mithras and others like Attis, Apollo, Satyr, Eros, Hermes and many more are some of the male deities depicted on those statuettes.225

11.2 Trapezus

Mithraism is also attested in the region of Trapezus, a colony of Sinope, at the southern Black Sea. There are scholars dating the beginning of Mithras cult at the Imperial Period and others attesting its existence during the Hellenistic period. It is considered that Persians, who came to Trapezus and to Colchis (in South-Western Georgia) with the first settlers of Sinope, brought with them Iranian beliefs related to the cult of Mithras.226

The coinage of Trapezus representing Mithras proves that it was an important god, probably a supreme deity for the region. It has already been said that he was depicted as a horseman227 on the coins of Trapezus during the 2nd -3rd c. AD.228 Another proof of Mithras cult is a sanctuary of the god at the West side of Trapezus, the today’s Boz-Tėpé, under the name Μιθρίος βουνός. According to F. Cumont, the sanctuary contained a crypt of Mithra’s temple for his worship and a statue of him as a horse rider, a common figure on the Roman coins of Trapezus.229

Moreover, the existence of the cult of Mithras in Trapezus is also testified by a Byzantine tradition: according to the local narrations, Saint Eugène, an apostle from Trapezus, during the reign of Diocletian, with the contribution of two peasants, threw

225 The Greek settlers of Amisos have developed a strong trade net that was extended in the whole Black Sea coast and in Mesopotamia. Furthermore, the archaeological material proved that there was a large production in Amisos despite the fact that most of the statuettes are not well preserved. Atasoy 2003: 1363, 1365.
227 From the end of the 2nd c. AD, the right foreleg of Mithras was usually raised above an altar. Tsetskhladze 1992: 121.
228 Despite the fact that the representation of the god on a horseback seems rare in Mithras iconography, it indicates a significant symbol of that deity. Ustinova 1999: 272-3.
229 Apart from the usual horse rider figure, it was also common in some coins to depict a protome or a bust of Mithras riding a horse and wearing a pointed hat (a mixed Mên-Attis figure) and a radiated crown, as a Solar god. Saprykin 2010: 491.
a statue of Mithras from a hill, in order to inaugurate the period of Christianity for the population of the city.\textsuperscript{230} This history proves that probably the statue of Mithras was a symbol of paganism in the region. Furthermore, since the cult of that deity has not been attested in many Greek colonies of the North Black Sea, it is possible that Mithras cult began its penetration to Bosporus from Trapezus; and the most probable period for that seems to be the end of the Hellenistic period, the 2\textsuperscript{nd} half of the 1\textsuperscript{st} c. B.C.\textsuperscript{231}

Lastly, worth of mentioning is that, according to Saprykin J. S. and judging from the fact that many kings of Pontus were named Mithradates, Mithras should have been a patron of the Mithridatids (related to his name: given by Mithras-Mithradata).\textsuperscript{232} Therefore, the coinage of Trapezus is a strong proof that Mithras should have a superior position at the religion of that city. However, the lack of evidence for Mithras cult in Pontus requires a more extensive research to conclude whether Mithras was venerated as a dominant deity in Pontus or not.

12. Mithras in the West and East Black Sea Region

12.1 Tomis

The colony of Tomis was found together with Histria and Kallatis during the Greek colonization at the West Black Sea region in the 7\textsuperscript{th}-6\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C. Despite the fact that there is not a rich archaeological material for the cult of Mithras, the information concerning the cult and the religion of that settlement can be traced in the epigraphic data and the iconography.

Apart from Apollo, who was the leader-protector of the colony, some oriental deities such as Cybele and Mithras are also attested there. According to few archaeological data, Mithras was honoured in the colony of Tomis only in the first centuries AD and his name was also mentioned at some monuments’ inscriptions,

\textsuperscript{230} Tsetskhladze 1992: 122.
\textsuperscript{231} During the reign of Mithridates Eupator. Blawatsky-Kochelenko 1966: 20-21; Saprykin 2009: 259.
\textsuperscript{232} Theophoric names in Mithr- were quite popular all over Anatolia. Alvar 2008: 80.
indications demonstrating that he had a small role in the pantheon of the people of Tomis.\textsuperscript{233}

12.2 Colchis (at the city site of Pichvnari)

A fragment of a Colchian amphora which bore a stamp is the evidence for the cult of Mithras in ancient Colchis. The amphora, discovered at the Pichvnari region in 1983, in South-Western Georgia, is dated at the Hellenistic period; the stamp is round, an impression from a seal and it is supposed that the seal impressed on the amphora from Pichvnari belonged to a merchant.

At the stamp of that Colchian amphora (fig. 59) a horseman was depicted in the centre, and a six pointed star;\textsuperscript{234} above his head there is a crescent moon and next to it a bird.

\textbf{Fig. 59 The stamp on the Colchian amphora}\textsuperscript{235}

\textsuperscript{233} Buzoianu- Barbulescu 2007: 314.
\textsuperscript{234} The horse figure was very common in ancient Georgia and was found on many seal fragments. Therefore, the star symbols were also popular. Many gems, amulets and rings of Colchis have star and solar symbols on them, probably symbolizing the cosmic nature of the gods. Seals from the 4\textsuperscript{th} and 5\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C. originating from other Colchian sites depict horsemen and one of them had a star emblem. (The sun and the crescent moon were among the most accepted emblems of the Iranian gods). Tsetskhladze 1992: 119-120.
\textsuperscript{235} Tsetskhladze 1992: 117.
According to the scholars, there were celebrations in ancient Georgia honouring Mithras as the god of light and prosperity during the month of February; this is evidence showing that the cult of Mithras was not unknown in the region. The represented horseman must be Mithras with the already known attributes from his iconography (star, crescent, bird) testifying that his cult was also widespread in Colchis and became popular among the craftsmen of the region, as well.  

Consequently, the Colchian amphora stamp and the information coming from the region of Trapezus led many scholars to the point that Mithras was closely associated to Pontus and thus must be one of the most venerated gods of the Pontic Kingdom.

13. Summary

Mithras, an Indo-Iranian god with many functions and attributes seems to be a rather mystery deity. Having the bull as its symbol, a symbol of fertility and growth, managed to spread its cult from Iran to the Roman Empire and throughout the whole world. A religion, with a multi-functional character, where every symbol has its significance, reached even the colonies of the Black Sea.

It is difficult to draw some definite conclusions about Mithras cult in the Black Sea region, since the archaeological evidence is not enough; however, the available data testify that the Greek colonists were able to adopt the religion of Mithras and worship him as one of their deities. Most of the evidence comes from the capital of the Bosporan Kingdom, where Mithras is likely to be absorbed under the cult of Attis; both of them are related to powers of agriculture and nature and it is probable that Mithras was easily venerated together with Cybele and Attis. Besides, the representation of Mithras-Attis on many reliefs of Panticapaion proves that relation, a relation with a syncretic character.

Apart from Panticapaion, the Mithraic cult is also attested in Olbia and mostly in the southern Black Sea. The archaeological data demonstrate that the colony of Trapezus seems to be a crucial point of the Mithraic cult; it can be assumed that the

236 It seems that Helios was the dominant deity in the region of Colchis; however, Mithras cult gradually was spread and came to merge with the one of Helios and other local cults in Colchis. Tsetskhladze 1992: 116-124.
cult began its penetration to Bosporus from Trapezus and the neighboring places from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} half of the 1\textsuperscript{st} c. B.C., during the reign of Mithridates Eupator. All that evidence together with the depiction of Mithras in the Colchian amphora at the Pitcvnari region is a proof that Mithras was mostly worshiped at the region of Pontus and less in other parts of the Black Sea.

Actually, its cult did not have the same expansion in the Black Sea as in the Roman Empire where Mithras was among the highest gods of the Romans’ pantheon and a whole religion was created honoring him. Nevertheless, it is about a deity with long history, mystery and matters to be solved that certainly needs more careful research and thorough study in order to be well understood.
Part D - The god Mên

1. Introduction

In this chapter we are going to discuss the Phrygian lunar god Mên, who was worshipped throughout western Asia Minor. His precise role in the pantheon of the Asiatic divinities has not yet been determined. However, it is about a deity with many functions, epithets and a large iconographic material that needs to be examined. We shall start our presentation with the location of the god’s cult, the origin of his name and his main epithets.

His functions and attributes, his most popular representations and certainly some of his syncretic elements are going to be also examined. The Anatolian god seems to have a variety in his depictions; the crescent moon is his main symbol and some of his representative animals are the cock and the ram. The earliest iconography was developed in Athens as many monuments and coins testify. The evidence for Mên’s cult comes from the Hellenistic period and mostly from the Roman.

The cult of Mên was mostly popular in the Pontic Kingdom as the coinage of the city of Pharnakeia and his temple in Kabeira proves, testified also by Strabo. His cult was also spread at the Black sea region though there is lack of data. Our evidence demonstrates his influence in the North Black Sea, at the colonies of Panticapaion and Chersonesus and in Amisos, a settlement in the Southern Black Sea area. It seems that, besides Hellenic deities, the population of the Black Sea introduced in their religion the cult of the Anatolian deity of Mên.

2. Geographical and chronological scope

Several scholars have studied the Anatolian god Mên. He was a Phrygian god having an Indo-Iranian origin. His worship was better traced in Asia Minor, mostly in Lydia and Phrygia, in Antioch in Pisidia and many remains of his cult were found in Greece, Near East, Smyrna, Pergamon and the Black Sea area.

The earliest evidence for his cult comes from the 4th c. B.C. and the latest from the 4th c. AD. Thus, the Roman geographer Strabo mentions the altars of the god in Pontus and in Pisidian Antioch. The presence of Mên is also attested in Manisa
through a votive relief in the Izmit Museum in Turkey. Moreover, he appeared in the Kushan Empire on a bronze coin dating approximately at the 2\textsuperscript{nd} c. AD.\textsuperscript{237}

Anatolian Mên, god of moon, is mostly represented holding a crescent upon its shoulders. He was worshipped in Athens during the 4\textsuperscript{th} and the 3\textsuperscript{rd} c. B.C. as many inscriptions and an altar in Piraeus testify; during the 4\textsuperscript{th} century it is possible that the god adopted his epithet \textit{Tyrannos}. Apart from Athens, Eretria, Thasos, Rhodes and Delos present evidence for his cult.

Italy had also accepted the god’s cult, a cult that became a soldier’s cult. On the other hand, Romania and Dacia have some traces of the worship of Mên; especially in Dacia the god has many geographical epithets.\textsuperscript{238}

3. Name etymology

Some authors believe that the etymology of the god’s name probably comes from a native language, while others support the theory that the name Mên\textsuperscript{239} was Greek. Having a close relation to the Greek “month” and “moon” it is possible that his name could have derived from these two Greek words. There is also another etymology stating that the name Mên could have come from the Lydian word for “bright” or even “powerful”.

Moreover, a bronze coin of the Kuban territory with the god on the reverse side depicts the lunar god Mao of the Kushan pantheon. So, it is likely that the depiction of this lunar god of Mao could be identified with the Microasian Mên.

Another view is that the original name was the Hittitian or Anatolian Masnes which was transformed to Mannes, Manes and eventually Mên.\textsuperscript{240} Whichever point of view is closer to the truth, the fact is that the Anatolian god was also combined with many epithets as showing in the following section.

\textsuperscript{237} LIMC VI, I: 462; Cancik-Schneider 2006: 658.
\textsuperscript{238} LIMC VI, I: 462; Mitropoulou 1974: 7-8; Moga 2005: 45.
\textsuperscript{239} \textit{Μείς} or \textit{Μήν} in Greek, Mensis in Latin are related to Moon-Luna. Hornblower-Spawforth 2003: 955; Cancik-Schneider 2006: 656.
\textsuperscript{240} Another element of this god was the horns of the crescent moon, that he adopted and eventually he became a Moon god, latinized as Lunus. The crescent was also the emblem of the moon god, Sin, in the Near-East. It appeared in art earlier than the sun emblem. Mitropoulou 1974: 9; Moga 2005: 45.
4. Mên and his epithets

It seems that Mên’s cult had a local character and almost always bears a local epithet or the name of the local cult founder. Its most basic epithet was that of Tyrannos, meaning a ruler, a master, a protector of slaves and a watchman of the law. However, there is a variety of epithets given to the deity. Among them were epithets\textsuperscript{241} such as Patrios, Ouranios, Soter, Megas, Hosios, Akraios, Petraeitis, Katachthonios, Lavanas, Phosphoros, Karos, Artemidoro, Pharnakes, Askaienos and Epikratos\textsuperscript{242} and some toponymic like Mên Labanes, Tiamos or Axiottonos.\textsuperscript{243}

Ouranios, as a god of Heaven and Megas (Great) demonstrates that he was considered as a superior deity; Katachthonios signifies the protector of the Underworld, the dead people and graves, and Phosporos deals with oracles. Epikratos could be connected to the one “who wants to succeed, to conquer, in comparison to others”.\textsuperscript{244}

Sometimes the god possessed the epithet of Mên “Pharnakes”.\textsuperscript{245} The cult of Mên Pharnakou was introduced by the king of Pontus Pharnakes I when the temple of the god Mên was erected in Kabeira\textsuperscript{246} and continued to exist since the time of Mithridates Eupator IV. According to Strabo (12.3.31) the Pontic kings used to have a royal oath into the temple of Mên beginning with “I am vowing by the king’s Tyche and by Mên Pharnakou”; in that way they demonstrated that they respected the deity of that place and its temple. Pharnakes I was the “founder” of the cult of Mên and its great influence is also testified by the coinage of the city of Pharnakeia with the bust of the god, the crescent and the sun. This is clear evidence that the cult of Mên turned to be official, a royal one in Pontus.

\textsuperscript{241} For many of those epithets there are the relevant inscriptions in the book of Lane E. CMRDM, vol. I. For example the epithet Ouranios is referred to the inscription of plate 7 (Greece), plates 11,12,13 for Tyrannos (Greece) and from Asia Minor plate 62 for Petraeitis and Lavanas, plate 63 for Tiamos, plate 85 for Axiottonos, plates 87, 291, 293 for Askaienos and plates 124,135 for Phosphoros. Lane CMRDM, I: 5-155.
\textsuperscript{242} Hornblower- Spawforth 2003: 956; Moga 2005: 46; Mitropoulou 1974: 30.
\textsuperscript{243} There is a reference for Mên Axiottonos in a Lydian monument of the Roman period where the moon god took revenge of a thief, proving his function as a deity who believes in justice. Arnold 1995: 76.
\textsuperscript{244} Moga 2005: 46; Hornblower- Spawforth 2003: 956.
\textsuperscript{245} The name Pharnakes was related to fortune following a gem from Amisos that represented Tyche (Fortune) holding an oar, a cornucopia and the bearing name Pharnakes. Probably the owner of the ring had the name Pharnakes. Saprykin 2010: 491.
\textsuperscript{246} The temple is a strong proof for the cult of Mên in Pontus, testified also by Strabo. Saprykin 2010: 490.
Moreover, the most probable meaning of the epithet *Pharnakes* is “the king’s fortune”, the god Mên who possess fortune. It is likely that the epithet was associated with the Persian name “farrukh” which means happiness. Consequently, Mên Pharnakou should mean the god who possesses happiness, a bearer of fortune.\(^{247}\)

Another crucial reference for the god Mên seems to be the so-called “theoi epekooi” meaning the gods who listen to the prayers. There is a dedication to *Μηνί επηκώοι* in an inscription of Pisidian Antioch where the god is depicted with a crescent behind its shoulders riding a horse or a bull. That epiclesis of epekoos usually was referring to deities whose representations on the monuments had ears. The purpose was to show the obedience towards the orders that gods were giving to people and the attention of the deities to their devotees’ prayers.\(^{248}\)

Lastly, though very important, is another epithet of the god as Mên Askænos with its temple-sanctuary\(^{249}\) at Pisidian Antioch (fig.60). Strabo considers that this temple was one of the greatest temples of the god in Phrygia and in Asia Minor. Mên Askænos was considered as the patron deity of the colony of Antioch. The temple of the god was built around the middle of the 2\(^{nd}\) c. B.C. and its cult had a great influence in and outside the city, at the neighboring area.\(^{250}\)

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\(^{247}\) Mithridates Eupator VI, the last king of Pontus (120-63 BC) tried to pass the cult of Mên to his successors. Some scholars believe that it was a royal propaganda on behalf of Mithridates and that is why he is depicted as Mên – Pharmacou in many Bosporan coins. Sapykin 2009: 259-260; 2010: 490; Mitchell 1993: 24.


\(^{249}\) According to Strabo there were two temples of the god, one close to the city and the other in the suburbs. It is estimated that they were built around the middle of the 2\(^{nd}\) c. B.C. The larger temple of Mên was an Ionic one with votive dedications inside and outside. His cult was also extended beyond the colony. Mitchell 1993: 24-5.

5. Functions and attributes of Mên

This Phrygian moon deity was considered as master of the animals, of vegetation, of fertility and procreation. He was a protector of the weak people and slaves, wanted justice to prevail above all and the criminals to be punished;\textsuperscript{252} he was considered as a ruler of the people (alive and not) having oracular functions and in the Roman times he appeared as a soldier’s god ensuring fertility in nature. Thus, as a Moon god was associated with the Underworld.

In the whole Anatolian world the god Mên was a deity considered to have celestial powers especially when helping the plants to grow and ensuring the prosperity and reproduction of the cattle and poultry. By that evidence it could be assumed that the worship of Mên was more popular in the countryside among the peasants.\textsuperscript{253}

Another function was his healing capability; according to some votive reliefs, he was a healing god, related to Zeus Hypsistos, a healing god, too. As it is said above, among the epithets of Mên is the one of Tiamos; there is a strong possibility

\textsuperscript{251} Mitchell 1993: 14, fig.1.
\textsuperscript{252} An inscription dating from 118-9 AD mentions that a punishment was given to someone who had not obeyed to the god’s indications. Moga 2005: 47; LIMC VI, I: 471.
that Tiamos was also associated with its healing function since most of the reliefs concerning that epithet depict parts of the human body.

The crescent, the symbol of the moon god, is his main attribute; either seated on it or placed it upon his shoulders. This religious characteristic of Persian Zoroastrianism is depicted in a lot of Mên’s images probably as the emblem of a powerful, superior deity that fights the evil and injustice. Many marble fragments exist from Greece depicting the god with the crescent or seated on it and most of them are dated at the Hellenistic period.

The second most important attribute of this god was the cock and that is why he was often represented riding a cock or holding a cock in his hands. A marble fragment from Athens represents the god Mên seating on a cock, holding a phiale and wearing the characteristic Phrygian cap and the chiton (3rd c. B.C.). An architectural relief discovered during the excavations of the Athenian Agora in 1936, depicts Mên seated on a crescent and a cock standing next to him. In front of the god there is a table with fruits and three worshippers (probably from the Hellenistic period).

The cock, with an Indo-Iranian origin, was considered a sacred animal because with its crow begins and ends the day. Apart from the cock the god as Mên-Pharnakou is represented holding a cornucopia on a coin of Pharnakes I, proving his responsibility of fertility and growth, a link with Attis, another vegetation deity.

On the other hand, there are some reliefs in which Mên is holding a round object, probably a pinecone, as it is illustrated in a Roman relief from Turkey (Izmit Museum) with Mên and Cybele. Moreover, again from the Roman period, there are two bronze statuettes of Mên from Asia Minor (fig. 61, 62) where the god is wearing his usual clothes, a short sleeved chiton bound up at the waist with a long cloak over it, high boots (fig. 62) and a Phrygian cap and is holding a pinecone in his hands. Despite the fact that the meaning of the pinecone is still uncertain, it could be

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254 Mên Tiamos together with Mên Tyrannos were often encountered on dedications with Zeus Masphalatenos, a local deity of Asia Minor, venerated under the name of a Greek god. Moga 2003: 47.

255 Notwithstanding is the fact that the reliefs depicting Mên Tiamos also present the goddess Artemis. Mitropoulou 1974: 30; Kobyлина 1976: 7.


257 LIMC VI, I: 471.
assumed, from these images, that it symbolizes fertility, procreation or even eternity, immortality\textsuperscript{258} (like in Attis case).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Fig. 61 Bronze statuette of Mên from Asia Minor- Fogg Art Museum-Roman period}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{258} The god is associated with a bull in fig. 62 (his leg rests upon the bull’s head); perhaps there is a relation with the role of the sacrificial animal in the cults of Cybele-Attis and Mithras. Hiesinger 1967: 303-6.
6. Iconography

The first documents represent the god Mên as a lunar-type god. As it has already been said, his characteristic symbol is the crescent moon rising above his shoulders; however, in some images the crescent is absent and in others the god is depicted seated on a ram, or a cock (the bull, the horse and the lion are not so often represented).

Among the earliest evidence for Mên’s cult is an Attic relief, dated around 340 B.C., now exhibited in the Boston Museum; the god is represented seated on a ram,

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259The crescent moon appears behind the god’s shoulders in both images (fig.61, 62). Hiesinger 1967: plates 1, 3.
(many representations, from the Hellenistic period, show the god sitting on an animal), and the crescent rises behind him.\footnote{260}

Therefore, there are examples of the Greek art depicting the god Mên next to some deities. In a fragment from the Acropolis in Athens, dated to the end of the 4\textsuperscript{th} c. B.C., the god is depicted on a large crescent with Hermes and Artemis as a triple cult.

Another fragment of Pentelic marble from Attica represents Mên with the god Pan at the left and a Nymph at the right side. He has a crescent behind him and holds a cock in his left arm and a scepter in the right one. It is dated to the 4\textsuperscript{th} c.-3\textsuperscript{rd} c. B.C.

During the Hellenistic period the god is represented seated, wearing a \textit{chiton} and a \textit{himation}, a Phrygian cap, high boots and his face has characteristics of an adolescent. His hair follows a wavy type and sometimes the crescent appears upon his shoulders. There exist some representations of him where instead of the Phrygian cap he is wearing a solar crown, with the sun and the crescent in the centre. In the Roman period (especially during the reign of Augustus) the god appears as a standing figure and as a rider, too.\footnote{261} The following image is a small terracotta figurine, probably of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} c. AD, (fig. 63) depicting Mên as a horseman. The crescent moon is again behind his shoulders and he is holding a patera in the right hand.\footnote{262} The rider god was a popular image among the Anatolian deities (such as Mithras) and had a character of victory and power.

\footnotemark[260] LIMC VI, I: 471.
\footnotemark[261] LIMC VI, I: 471-2; Lane CMRDM, I: plates 87, 91, 123.
\footnotemark[262] Very close to that terracotta is another marble statue from Galatia representing Mên on horseback. Hiesinger 1967: 307-8.
Fig. 63 Mên as a horse rider-terracotta figurine acquired by McDaniel Collection (Harvard University)-3rd c. AD\textsuperscript{263}

One more example illustrating Mên next to another deity is a relief from Turkey, dated at the Roman era; it represents Mên with Cybele. As the fig. 64 shows the god Mên is on the left with a crescent at his back and a Phrygian cap. He is wearing a long short sleeved chiton with a shorter Doric chiton over it and a chlamys on the top of them. At his legs he is wearing the usual high boots. Its left hand is raised holding a scepter and probably there is a pinecone in his right hand.\textsuperscript{264}

\textsuperscript{263} Lane CMRDM, I: plate 139.

\textsuperscript{264} Next to him is the goddess Cybele in a polos and long hair, wearing chiton and her left hand is extended holding a round object, perhaps a tympanum. In her right hand she is holding a phiale. Below the relief an inscription exists. According to it, the relief is dated in 162 AD and is referred to Cybele and the god Mên Tyrannos. It is possible that Cybele acquired a new cosmic power, through her connection with the moon god Mên. Mitropoulou 1974: 11-12.
Consequently, in most of the reliefs, the god Mên is usually represented with a crescent behind him, seated or riding a ram or a cock, holding a pinecone, as it is supposed and sometimes he is connected with other deities, probably a mixture of Hellenic and Eastern elements in his cult.

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265 Mitropoulou 1974: 11.
7. A syncretic deity

In view of all the above it becomes evident that the Anatolian moon deity was not always depicted alone but together with other deities. Thus, according to monuments’ inscriptions, there is strong evidence that Mên shows some syncretic tendencies to other deities. Attis is one of them based on an inscription at Ayasören, in Asia Minor. The most important characteristic is the crescent moon on the relief; the god Mên is depicted wearing the usual long sleeved chiton and boots, a Phrygian cap and holding a round object in his left hand, probably a pinecone, an appearance similar to that of Attis.

Therefore, under the function of the shepherd exist some other examples where Mên was also identified with Attis. There are monuments where Mên holds a pinecone in his hand; some of these were found in the region of Panticapaion and will be analyzed in the following section. Thus, under the aspect of a warrior-soldier figure with shield, many terracottas of Mên were found at Bosporos and their appearance is closely connected to Attis; this is another indication for a syncretism of Mên and Attis. The following image (fig. 65) denotes clearly the warrior’s character; Mên is wearing a Phrygian cap and a dress and is represented with a shield in his left arm while the right one is resting on the shield.

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266 The pinecone was also a symbol of Attis. In the right side of the image there is a bull and at the god’s feet two lions are standing in both sides. Moga 2005: 48.

267 It seems that the cult of Mên had not only influenced the Black Sea region but also the Pontic Kingdom where it followed the local and other Pontic traditions. Saprykin 2009: 264-5.
However, apart from Attis, the god Mên could be also identified with Mithras, the Indo-Iranian solar deity. Some of their small similarities are the bull’s depiction, their Oriental appearance in tunics, the Phrygian caps and certainly the existence of the crescent symbol. Moreover, their relation could be close enough due to representations of Mên as a horse rider. A coin from Seleukeia in Pisidia from the Roman period shows the Phrygian god riding a horse. It is likely that some mutual influences existed between Anatolian deities and that is why they present common symbols-motives, as the victory elements of the rider’s image.269

Lastly, worth of mentioning is another syncretic character of the god Mên with the Iranian goddess Anahita.270 She was warmly accepted in Sardis, then was assimilated with Cybele and the Greek goddess Artemis and was worshipped in conjunction with Mên. However, the evidence is not enough to present more details about a joint cult of Mên and the Iranian Anahita.

268 Saprykin 2009: 266.
270 There is an inscription from Asia Minor (Roman period) referring to the goddess Anahita-Artemis in plate 63. Lane CMRDM, I: 43.
8. The god Mên in the North and South Black Sea Region

8.1 Panticapaion

As it is said in the beginning of this chapter, the cult of Mên was not only popular in Asia Minor and Pontus but also in Greece, Italy, Dacia and in the Black Sea area. The Greek colonists tried to incorporate the worship of Mên in their local pantheon perhaps due to his similarities to Attis, as a god of fertility and nature or due to his abilities as a healing god and protector of the weak people.

The first settlement that presents archaeological material for Mên is Panticapaion. The older statuette of the god Mên was discovered in the Mithridates Hill in the remains of a coroplastic workshop and is dated to the 1st c. B.C.271

Moreover, a bronze coin from the same period (fig.66) was found depicting Mên’s head in the obverse and Dionysos with a panther in the reverse. This coin is likely to depict the god as Mên- Pharnakou.272

![Fig. 66 The head of the god Mên on a bronze coin from Panticapaion - 1st c. B.C.](image)

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272 Saprykin 2010: 491, 514.
According to archaeological evidence, the head of Mên was revealed into a tomb in Mithridates Hill, dated at the 1st c. B.C. As it is clear from the following image (fig. 67), he is wearing a Phrygian cap, he has a wavy hair type and his face has childish characteristics and a smile.

![Fig. 67 The head of Mên in a mask - Panticapaion](image)

Mên was also represented in the capital of Bosporan Kingdom seated on a cock and dressed like Attis in a chiton and himation. As the following image illustrates (fig. 68) he is wearing the Phrygian cap and probably he is holding a bunch of grapes in his right hand. Being a fertility and chthonic god it could be said that these elements justify his resemblance and syncretic character to Attis whose statuettes from Panticapaion present many iconographic similarities with those of Mên.

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8.2 Chersonesus

The only evidence depicting Mên as an adult wearing a chiton and a himation, with the crescent behind him, is a lamp from Chersonesus dated at the 2nd c. AD (fig. 69). In this illustration the god’s head is not very distinct; however, the chiton covers a part of his chest and the himation falls at his elbows. The crescent is clear behind the figure and some authors believe that perhaps there are wings at his back, though this interpretation is not so probable.277

277 From the same period there is a lamp of Olbia depicting Attis and Cybele (mentioned in previous chapter). It could be suggested an influence of the cult of Attis-Cybele to that of Mên’s in the Northern Black Sea. Kobylina 1976: 8, 24.
8.3 Amisos

A protome of a male figure, probably related to the god Mên, was discovered among the terracottas of the colony of Amisos, in the Southern Black sea, dated between the 2nd and the 1st c. B.C. As it is clear from fig.70 a male portrait is depicted with curly hair and an eight-rays star with a crescent on its head surrounded by two rosettes that look like an eight-rays star. According to scholars, the star\textsuperscript{279} above the head could signify the royal status of a person, characteristic of the Pontic monarchs.

\textsuperscript{278} Kobylina 1976: plate 21.
\textsuperscript{279} Many scholars identify this male figure with a portrait of Alexander of Macedon. Saprykin 2010: 492.
God Mên is a wide-ranging Indo-Iranian god, influenced by solar cults (Mithras) and attributes of Anatolian deities such as Attis. It is a lunar deity worshipped mainly for its fertility and healing functions and for the protection of the weak people and slaves. Celestial and chthonic at the same time, it is a complicated god with the crescent as its main symbol and the characteristic Phrygian cap on its head.

According to the archaeological data, the various representations show him next to other deities like Hermes, Pan, Artemis and Cybele. He also presents some syncretic tendencies to Attis and Mithras. He is a savior god, protector of wealth, justice and ruler of people, with many functions and epithets and a cult that was

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1. Summary

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280 Saprykin 2010: 513.
extended beyond ethnic Phrygia, like that of the Mother Goddess. Particularly, in Central Anatolia (Pisidian Antiochia) Mên Askaenos was considered the patron deity of the colony having his own temples and a cult that travelled outside Pisidia in the Roman period.

On the other hand, Mên does not possess sufficient archaeological material and data to understand the extension of his cult in the Black sea area. However, from the above information it seems that he was mainly worshipped at the northern part of the Black Sea, at Panticapaion and Chersonesus, during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. He was mainly influenced by the cult of Cybele-Attis. The similarities that the representations of Mên have with those of Attis images are remarkable. Besides, the functions of Mên as a god of vegetation and nature with chthonic characteristics make him a figure closely connected to Attis. The Chersonesian lamp with Mên reminds us the lamp of Olbia with Attis-Cybele, both of them dated at the 2nd c.AD; another proof that there was an interaction between Mên and Attis worship.

Lastly, worth of mentioning is the royal cult of Mên-Pharnakes that is documented in the region of Pontus. The coins of the city of Pharnakeia and his worship in the temple of Kabeira testify that the Anatolian god had a prominent place in the Pontic kingdom. The star and the crescent over the god’s head at the terracotta protome from Amisos clearly reflect the royal status of Mên, characteristic of the Pontic kings, too. Despite the fact that the evidence for Mên is limited, he is a relative popular moon deity with interesting iconography and a quite geographically expanded cult in the North and South Black Sea area.
Conclusions

We have tried to present briefly the most important deities of Eastern origin and their cults in the Black Sea region. The Black Sea, a very complex, multifaceted and cross-cultural region had been influenced by many cultural and religious ideas. Therefore, an attempt to draw the most significant conclusions concerning the eastern deities is quite difficult. However, the fact that new religions and cultures from East all met and contributed to the complexity of the Black Sea region, made our research much more challenging and attractive at the same time.

The spread of the Eastern deities was mainly attested through archaeological finds, epigraphic monuments and less with evidence concerning temples or sanctuaries. The Greeks colonists tried and finally managed to welcome and adopt those “foreign” deities in their religion and pantheon mostly due to their familiar characteristics to the Greek gods. Cybele, Attis, Mithras and Mên were introduced in the religion of many Black Sea colonies due to their resemblance to Greek gods. The ways that these oriental deities and their cults penetrated to the Black Sea area could be traced in the cultural and commercial relations of the Greeks with Asia Minor and other neighboring regions. Black Sea was and still is an outlet to the Mediterranean, an attractive economic and trade area, where many valuable products, religious ideas and people have access to.

In the case of Cybele or else Mother of the Gods the research was easier since the archaeological data and literary sources provided us with many information. She was easily assimilated to the Black Sea colonies and spread quickly because her characteristics were similar to those of the Greek deities of Rhea, Demeter and Artemis. As a goddess of fertility and nature, protector of wild animals, of families and babies was easily incorporated into the pantheon of the Black Sea colonies. Her cult began from the 6th c. B.C. and onwards, in contrast to the other three eastern deities that came much later in the Black Sea. The Phrygian goddess managed to play an important role beyond the Phrygian borders in Black Sea, Greece and eventually in Rome during many centuries and to keep alive some of her Phrygian iconographic characteristics.
The qualities and functions of the Mother of the Gods made her a distinctive and unique deity in the Black Sea colonies. Her temples in the Durankulak Lake and in Dionysopolis prove strongly that her cult was among the most powerful ones reflecting also the close relations between the Black sea and Asia Minor. The Hellenistic seems to be the period of the bigger expansion of her cult having as a starting point the Northern colonies such as Olbia, Apollonia, Chersonesus and Myrmekion and lasting till the Roman period, especially in the West Pontic region.

Enough material comes from the colonies of Tomis, Histria and Olbia where Cybele was represented in many reliefs and statuettes. In the case of Olbia many altars, graffiti, reliefs prove her cult even from the end of the 6th c. B.C. It seems that for the people of Olbia Cybele was identified to Rhea, Hera or even Demeter, the original mothers of the Greek gods and so she had a major role in their religious life.

On the other hand, Attis, the traditional youthful “consort” of Cybele, the Phrygian god of fertility, nature and vegetation, was another deity of Eastern origin that emerged in the Black Sea region. His cult was attested in some settlements of the Black Sea, mostly during the Hellenistic period, not earlier. He became popular as an important element of Cybele’s cult and worshiped in conjunction with her. His cult was attested at Panticapaia, Olbia, Phanagoria, Kallatis and Odessos. The two deities appear together in a silver relief of Mesambria (4th c. B.C., the earliest evidence of them), in terracotta statuettes from Kallatis (Hellenistic era) and Olbia (Roman period). He also entered in Greek art in the 4th c. B.C., as the regular companion of the Phrygian goddess, though most of the representations depict him alone (except his picture on the Piraeus relief).

His Oriental appearance was widely shown in the iconographic material and his powerful image as the castrated lover of Cybele made him popular not only in the Black Sea but at the same time in Rome, just after the arrival of the goddess. Attis, as a part of the cult of Cybele did not manage to spread in many Black Sea colonies, as it is indicated by the lack of evidence on that subject; however, either worshipped as the human lover of Cybele or as one of her devoted followers, Attis, the fertility god with chthonic features, guardian of the dead and protector of the living people, was among the venerated deities spread from the Phrygian land to the Black Sea next to the Greek gods.
Mithras, an Indo-Iranian god of light, victory and social order came from the Persian Empire to the Black Sea region and became one of the most venerated gods in Pontus. His identification to the Greek god Apollo as the Sun-Helios god or his syncretic character to Attis made him a popular deity worshipped by Greeks and locals in the Black Sea. Especially, his syncretism to Attis, both deities of agriculture and growth, is apparent in many of Mithras depictions at the Black Sea colonies. At the Bosporan capital, Panticapaion, Mithras has many figures killing the bull in oriental costume, one of Attis characteristics; this image, either an interdependence of the cult of Cybele-Attis in that colony or a confusion between those deities, prove that Mithras, as a god of power, fertility and agriculture, was absorbed by Attis cult and thus easily was adopted by Greeks and locals. Furthermore, many authors consider that Mithras functions could be recognized in the Egyptian god of Serapis, who became a warrior god of Northern Anatolia, who was worshipped together with his female companion, Isis, as gods of love and fertility.

His cult is testified during the Hellenistic period and mainly the Roman. His origin from Persia made the spread of his cult easier to the Southern Black Sea and certainly at Trapezus. There, the data confirm his existence and his “particular position” through a sanctuary, a statue of Mithras and also through the coinage depictions, from the end of the Hellenistic era and onwards. Moreover, many kings of Pontus were named Mithra-dates denoting that Mithras had a special role in Pontic religion. Additionally, the Colchian amphora from the Hellenistic period depicting Mithras as a horseman with the crescent, testify once more that his cult probably began from Trapezus and spread then to Bosporos. However, his role into the Greek pantheon of the Black Sea was not equal to that of the Roman Empire as one of the highest and most powerful gods, as the written and archaeological evidence shows.

Mên is a god mainly worshipped in Pontus. A moon god with a great variety in his iconography was really popular in the Pontic Kingdom, as the coins of Pharnakeia demonstrated and his temple in Kabeira proves, one of the greatest in Phrygia, in Pisidia (near Antiocheia) and Asia Minor, as Strabo himself mentions. He is the god of fertility and crops, of reviving nature that presents many similarities to Attis. Either riding a cock or holding it, he is depicted in the colonies of Panticapaion, with many syncretic characteristics to Attis, in Chersonesus and Amisos. His cult began its
spread from the Hellenistic and reached its peak in the Roman period. The earliest evidence for his cult comes from Athens where he is represented in many scenes next to other deities like Hermes, Pan, Artemis and Cybele.

Apart from his syncretic character to Attis, which is evidence that his cult was probably influenced by the cult of Attis-Cybele, there are also many depictions of Mên as a horse rider, one of Mithras characteristics. This information could lead us to the assumption that there was a mixture of Mên-Mithras-Attis cult and some attributes or characteristics of one god appear to the other.

Greeks of the Black Sea together with the local people identified Mên-Mithras with Attis, Helios, Apollo and Cybele with Rhea, Demeter and Artemis. Apart from that, they remained loyal to their Greek gods but at the same time embraced new values from Eastern religious. Anatolian and Persian deities reflected some religious feelings of the Greeks and that is the reason why they have been accepted more or less in these Greek colonies. The Anatolian cults and their religious beliefs, within the centuries and with the support of the great trade relations, were transferred and finally accumulated upon the Greeks of the Black Sea and became familiar to them mostly due to similarities with each other. However, those cults did not play a leading role in the Greek religious pantheon of the Black sea cities; it seems that the gods of the Greek pantheon retained the dominant positions while the local deities and the deities of eastern origin played a secondary though important role in the religion of the Black Sea region.
MAP OF EASTERN DEITIES IN THE BLACK SEA COLONIES

- Myrmekion
- Cave temple of Cybele (Durankulak)
- Pontic Mother of Gods

Key:
- Red: Cybele
- Blue: Attis
- Green: Mên
- Orange: Mithras
**Abbreviations**

*Ammold*: Arheologia Moldovei.

*CLPhil*: Classical Philology.

*CCCA*: Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque.

*CMRDM*: Corpus Monumentorum Religionis dei Menis.


*EPRO*: Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’empire romain.

*HarvStClPhil*: Harvard Studies in Classical Philology.


*IGBulg I*: Inscriptiones graecae in Bulgaria repertae (Histria).

*IGBulg II*: Inscriptiones graecae in Bulgaria repertae. Inter Danube et Haemum.

*IScM I*: Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris graecae et latinae I. Histria et vicinia.

*IScM II*: Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris graecae et latinae II. Tomis et territorium.

*IScM III*: Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris graecae et latinae III. Callatis et territorium.

*LIMC*: Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae.


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