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Book reviews

M. Xagorari-Gleissner, *Meter Theon: Die Göttermutter bei den Griechen* (Peleus Studien zur Archäologie und Geschichte Griechenlands und Zypern, 40), Ruhpolding: Verlag Franz Philipp Rutzen 2008. 161 pp., 14 pls. ISBN: 3-938646-26-7.

This study of the Mother Goddess by Maria Xagorari-Gleissner focuses on the Greek aspects of the goddess. It aims to examine both the relationship between Meter Theon and the Anatolian Mother Goddess Kybele, and between Meter Theon and the Mother goddesses of the Bronze Age; especially those of Minoan and Mycenaean cultures. The emphasis is on shrines and cult places, which is the most important contribution of this study, but other aspects of the cult such as the iconography, the priesthood and the festivals are also discussed.

Xagorari-Gleissner begins by examining the Greek nature of Meter Theon (Chapters 1–5) before she moves on to investigate the Greek metroa. This is a large undertaking and therefore it is not surprising that the examination of Meter Theon (Chapters 1–4) is, to a large extent, confined to being merely a summary of her earlier research. Her method of identifying the Greek features of Meter Theon by comparing her with the Anatolian Mother Goddess proves to be a difficult undertaking because the poor extant evidence of the Anatolian Mother simply does not allow a valuable comparison. Furthermore, I believe that it is perhaps not possible to define the origin of each and every specific feature in the cult because Greece was an integrated part of the *koine* of the eastern Mediterranean during both the Bronze Age and the Iron Age.

In the introduction (Chapter 1) the author questions the identification of Meter Theon with the Phrygian Kybele, and whether her cult was foreign or not in Greece. She further outlines the history of research regarding the Mother Goddess in Greece and Anatolia, but unfortunately she has missed several recent publications[1] which may have proven useful in her analysis. This is plausibly due to the fact that Xagorari-Gleissner's research was conducted during the years of 2002–2004, prior to the publication of these works in 2006. However, earlier works on Phrygian (cult) places, such as C.H.E. Haspels' *Highlands of Phrygia* (Princeton 1971), have not been consulted either.

The literary evidence, with focus on transmitted myths and the historical outline, is discussed in Chapter 2. Xagorari-Gleissner claims that a comparison of the myth and cult of Rhea with those of Kybele is useful in order to answer her questions. However, the extant sources force her to compare the myths of Rhea with earlier Hittite stories and, to a lesser extent, with the much later preserved stories of Kybele and Attis as are present in the Greek sources since there are no extant Phrygian literary sources. The fact that the literary accounts of so-called Phrygian myths are all Greek, dating to periods long after the Phrygian cult prospered, should have been taken into consideration to a larger extent when comparing the cults and myths. It is concluded that the Greek Mother Goddess came to be identified with the Anatolian Kybele during the course of the historical period, when she was referred to as Meter Theon. In earlier Greek literature (Homer and Hesiod) she was instead always referred to as Rhea, while the earliest example of the later appellation Meter Theon can be found in Herodotus and the 14th Homeric Hymn.

A more nuanced approach to the various goddesses of Asia Minor and the Near East would have been welcome. For example, Xagorari-Gleissner does not make any distinction between Kubaba and Kybele and treats them as one and the

[1] M. Munn, *The Mother of the Gods, Athens, and the Tyranny of Asia,* Berkeley 2006; S. Berndt-Ersöz, *Phrygian rock-cut shrines: Structure, function and cult practice*, Leiden & Boston 2006. The study by P. Borgeaud (*La Mère des dieux: De Cybèle à la Vierge Marie*, Seuil 1996) is briefly mentioned, but has not been taken into consideration.

same Mother Goddess. However, Kubaba is often compared with Aphrodite in earlier Greek sources and it is doubtful whether she can be considered to be a Mother Goddess. The Phrygian epithet Kubileya probably derived from the name of Kubaba, but the Phrygian Matar is a different goddess than Kubaba, as is proven by their different attributes.

Chapter 3 describes the Mother Goddess from prehistory to the Classical period in Greece and aims to place Meter Theon in a historical framework. It is argued that Meter Theon is the heir of the Minoan and Mycenaean *matere teija*, but that in Asia Minor she also adopted features of Anatolian mother goddesses. It is further argued that during the beginning of the Hellenistic period Meter Theon was frequently worshipped in the form of Agdistis in Greece. However, the evidence for Agdistis in Greece is sparse with less than ten preserved inscriptions, which in my opinion cannot be regarded as evidence that Agdistis replaced Meter Theon. Instead, Agdistis was another name for the Anatolian Mother Goddess who spread to limited parts of Greece with Anatolian immigrants.

The cult statue of the Mother Goddess was brought from her home in Anatolia to Rome in 204 BC and the historical circumstances of this event have been widely discussed among scholars as the literary accounts differ on this point (See, e.g., L. Roller, *In search of God the Mother*, Berkeley 1999, Ch. 9). Xagorari-Gleissner, however, does not mention these converging theories, instead she claims that the statue was brought from Pessinous and kept in the Megalesion in Pergamon for some time before it was transported to Rome by Attalos I (pp. 25, 131). It would have been interesting to learn how the author came to this conclusion as her theory cannot solely be based on Varro, the only ancient source she refers to (p. 131), as Varro does not mention Pessinous.

In Chapter 4 the Greek iconography of the Goddess is analyzed and compared with those of the Phrygian Matar and the Neo-Hittite Kubaba. Do you mean that ' It would have been beneficial if comparisons with the Lydian images of Kybebe had been included in context with this.

The Phrygian Kybele is said to have been worshipped most frequently in aniconic shape (p. 25), but it is uncertain which deity the numerous so-called idols represent, as none of them are identified through inscriptions. The only certain images of Phrygian Kybele are those where she is represented in anthropomorphic shape. The Phrygian Kybele is further described as being flanked by lions, which is however, not the customary image of Matar. We know of only two such examples (the rock-cut façade at Arslankaya and a dinos from Boğazköy), instead Matar is usually associated with a predatory bird.

The specific features of the Greek images of Meter such as the naiskos, the seated position, the accompanying lions, the *tympanon*, the *polos*, the hair-style, the omphalos bowl and the sceptre are all dealt with one by one. It is concluded that the earliest Greek images date to around 600 BC, during which features from several cultures were combined. The author argues that the seated position and the polos have their origins in the Mycenaean world. In my opinion it is perhaps not possible to determine a specific origin, as the Mycenaean, the Minoan, and the Hittite world, as well as the Near East were part of the same Eastern Mediterranean *koine* where influences and borrowings took place. Both the seated position and the polos can, for example, also be found together with Hittite and Neo-Hittite female deities and there is also an Early Phrygian example of a seated figure. The latter may, however, not be a female deity.

The Greek cult of the Mother Goddess is addressed in Chapter 5 and is one of the more interesting parts of the study. The priesthood of Meter Theon is examined and it becomes clear that there were both priests and priestesses, but the only preserved images are those of female attendants, often holding a *tympanon* as their only characteristic feature. Xagorari-Gleissner interprets the female cult attendants as a heritage from Mycenaean and Minoan cult practices. It should be noted, however, that priestesses also played a central role in Bronze Age Anatolia, and that the preserved evidence from Iron Age Anatolia is not sufficient enough to inform us as to whether there were any priestesses of the Phrygian Mother Goddess or not.

The issue of castrated priests is dealt with on p. 53, where it is stated that self- castration was already practiced among priests in Anatolia during pre-Phrygian periods. This interpretation of Phrygian cult stems from the Christian writers of Late Antiquity who were trying to defame the rival cult of Attis and the Mother Goddess, and cannot be taken as evidence of self-castration during the Phrygian or even pre-Phrygian period. Castrated priests existed in Anatolia during the much later Achaemenian period, as for example at Ephesus. However, as we lack evidence for them during the earlier Phrygian period it has to remain an open question as to whether they existed or not during this period. Furthermore, it is difficult to accept that the worshippers actually castrated themselves, as castration usually took place before the boy reached puberty and was then performed by others.

The author's discussion of the iconography of the cult personnel is interesting, and Xagorari-Gleissner convincingly argues that a Classical relief from Kallithea/Mustaphades illustrates the cult personnel of the Mother Goddess. It is further demonstrated that those standing figures on the *antae* of certain *naiskoi*, which have usually been interpreted as divine, should instead be interpreted as cult attendants (p. 60).

In Chapter 6 the author finally deals with the cult places, which is the main objective. This chapter is supported by a

catalogue where shrines attested to in archaeology or literature are collected. Also, the structures of a more uncertain character are included in a special section. The catalogue comprises 48 entries where each entry includes basic measurements and a bibliography, followed by a paragraph discussing the particular shrine. Several interesting discussions are therefore 'hidden' in the catalogue texts, instead of being in Chapter 6.

The investigation shows that there were surprisingly few monumental temples, which Xagorari-Gleissner explains by saying that the metroon was intentionally built in a simple manner because it imitated the earlier *Herdhaus* (house with hearth). In the *Herdhaus* both cultic and profane functions took place and, as she suggests, it is possible that it once also housed the cult of the predecessor of Meter Theon. The Prytaneion later replaced the *Herdhaus,* and it is suggested that its earlier cultic function came to be moved to separate shrines or temples. Although the evidence is lacking, the suggestion has some potential and would help to explain why the Metroa is often located by the agora and also had other functions apart from pure cultic, as it many times housed the city's archive as well. Xagorari-Gleissner wants to see the metroon as a continuation of earlier Mycenaean buildings via the Greek Geometric *Herdhaus*. However, the most relevant parallel; the Phrygian megaron, is not considered in the study. Instead, a comparison is made with the Bronze Age temples at Hattusha, which are quite different, and the much later megaron-styled temples from Larisa. The Early Phrygian (10th-9th centuries BC) megara at Gordion were also centrally located, and at least some of them were surely also used for cultic purposes (although their precise functions are uncertain). A combined function of profane and cultic duties as suggested for the Greek *Herdhaus*, is very probable for these buildings as well (see e.g. Roller 1999, 112; Berndt-Ersöz 2006, 180). We may further note that later Phrygian images (7th and 6th centuries) depict Kybele standing in the porch of such a megaron building. These façades are often part of rock-cut shrines, but they are likewise not considered in this context. Instead, the only Phrygian cult monuments used as comparisons are the rock-cut step monuments. These, Xagorari-Gleissner believes, are dedicated to the Mother Goddess, and as this type of monument cannot be found in Greece, she interprets them as evidence that the Greeks did not have the same conception of the Mother as the Phrygians. Different conceptions are likely, but the step monuments cannot be used as evidence as it is uncertain which deities these were associated with (see Berndt-Ersöz 2006, 158-166).

In Chapter 7 the popularity of the Mother Goddess and the geographical distribution of her cult in Greece are discussed. It is explained that Meter Theon was an important goddess as her shrine was located by the agora, but she never became as popular as many other female deities such as Demeter.

The Greek sanctuaries of the Mother Goddess are a topic that has hitherto been neglected, so therefore this is a welcome contribution. Xagorari-Gleissner treats several aspects of the cult and her collection of information on and discussion of the Greek Metroa are the most valuable contributions, in addition to her analysis of the cult personal which offers some new and illuminating insights.

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Ralph W. Mathisen & Danuta Shanzer (eds.), *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World. Cultural Interaction and the Creation of Identity in Late Antiquity*, Farnham: Ashgate 2011. 378 pp., 27 ills. ISBN: 978-0-7546-6814-5

The present volume is the published result of the sixth biennial *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity Conference* held at the University of Illinois in 2005. As the title suggests, the conference—and consequently the book—dealt with the integration of barbarians in the period between the early fourth and seventh centuries CE, "one of the most significant transformations of the Roman world" (1). As stated in the Introduction, the inclusion of the phrase "The Transformation of the Roman World" in the title of the conference was a deliberate comment by the organizers. They felt that the vast research project of the same name funded by the European Science Foundation between 1993 and 1998, had failed to present a single or more coherent theme about the transformation of the Late Antique world; rather it produced as many models as there were participants (of which there were 150!). Therefore, the stated aim of the conference was to present such a coherent theme: the role of barbarians.

Apart from the Introduction by the editors, the book contains 25 chapters grouped thematically into four main parts. I will not concern myself with the minutiae of editorial details apart from one little quibble: the volume does not include a bibliography, which lessens its usefulness somewhat. As it is, one has to trawl through the notes to find a particular reference which is unnecessarily annoying. The quality of the chapters is generally good but, as can be expected in a collection of this kind, somewhat uneven with the occasional excellent chapter as well as some of poorer merit. The limited space allowed for this review precludes an assessment of all chapters individually; I will limit myself to discussing some general concerns and points of interest raised by the book and