

# KYBELE IN ATHENS OF THE 5TH CENTURY BC. THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE INTRODUCTION OF A FOREIGN DEITY

Sylvana Katsaounou

The Great Mother or Mother of the Gods is none other than the Phrygian goddess Kybele whose cult spread from the region of Phrygia through the Greek cities of Asia Minor to mainland Greece during the 6th century BC.<sup>1</sup> The name Kybele is the Greek rendering of the adjective Kubileya which is a toponymic epithet derived from the name of a Phrygian mountain<sup>2</sup> and cited for the first time in Pindar.<sup>3</sup>

By the 4th century BC the process of her dissemination in Greece had been completed and a great number of Metroa were dedicated to her. The Phrygian Mother achieved an important position in ancient Greek religion during the 5th century BC in the region of Attika and particularly in Athens, the main center of her worship. Countless votive offerings and a plethora of inscribed and literary testimonies certify that this was a goddess, whose foreign origin and distinctive Anatolian features did not keep her on the sidelines of Greek worship for long. On the contrary, the goddess' distinct character with its varied properties, her correlation to deities of Greek religion, such as Demeter, Artemis, Aphrodite, Rhea and Gaia, and the fact that she gradually assumed Greek elements rendered Great Mother prominent in the Greek pantheon and the impact of her cult on the social and political life of the ancient Greeks unchallenged.

The reception of the Anatolian Mother of the gods by the Greeks and the introduction of her image that comprises Greek and Eastern elements was imposed on the pious Athenian society forming an integral part of public and private worship.<sup>4</sup>

1. Roller 1999b, 119.

2. Guittard 2012, 213-6. We prefer using the ancient Greek form Kybele to Cybele, which is the Latin form of the name. Kybele, which is cited in ancient Greek literature (see, below n. 3), is also used by modern scholars, such as Lynn Roller 1999b.

3. Pindar, Fr. 80.

4. According to some scholars the sanctuary of the goddess was associated with the Bouleuterion and the archives in early times, while from the beginning of her cult the Mother of the Gods was considered identical with Demeter. See, Thompson 1937, 205. Boegegold 1972, 23. Boersma 1970, 28-31. Gerard 1980, 155. Regarding the archaic structure, which lies on the North of the old Bouleuterion in the Ancient Agora of Athens and is believed to be a temple, there is no indication that it housed Mother's cult. On the archaic temple, see Thompson 1937, 134-5 and 140, who suggests that the archaic phase of the Old Bouleuterion is dated in the end of the 6th c. BC based on the fill of the Grain Drain which runs along the east side of the buildings on the West side of the Agora. See, also Thompson and Whycherley 1972, 29, 158-61, who consider this building and its neighbouring archaic Bouleuterion contemporary based on their structural similarity. St. Miller proposes a theory, which contradicts the generally accepted views of the excavators of the Athenian

From the combination of different versions presented by literary sources regarding the establishment of the Great Mother's worship in Athens, it is revealed that her shrine was closely connected to the Council House and the city's archives.<sup>5</sup>

From a scholiast on Aeschines' oration against Ktesiphon (187), we hear that the Athenians dedicated a part of the Bouleuterion to the Meter's cult.<sup>6</sup> From Lycurgus<sup>7</sup> and Deinarchus<sup>8</sup> we are also informed that the old council House was reserved for the goddess' cult and also for housing the public archives. A characteristic reference, however, to the Metroon both as a repository of records and as a cult place is that of the Hellenistic author Chamaileon from Herakleia Pontica,<sup>9</sup> in which it is mentioned that Alcibiades have entered the Bouleuterion in order to erase a pending lawsuit during the period between 408 and 405 BC.<sup>10</sup> The earliest evidence of the function of the building named Metroon as storage for public archives though is yielded by an inscription from the Athenian Agora dated in 375/4 BC.<sup>11</sup>

Later writers historically record the causes of the advent of the Phrygian goddess and her worship with variations in their narratives, which are partly based on legend. The most important of these records belong to the emperor Julian, the Lexicon Suda, the Lexicographer Photius and the Byzantine Apostolius, which explain that the erection of the Metroon in Athens was due to the execution of one of the Mother's priests, the so-called metragyrtes, who wanted to initiate women into her cult. A consequence of that murder was the outbreak of a plague. In order to propitiate

agora related to the identification of the buildings on the west side under the hill of Agoraios Kolonos. He believes that this archaic temple is nothing more than a product of imaginary hypothesis, while he makes a theoretical reconstruction of the area in 420 BC, in which the buildings of the Old Bouleuterion and its neighboring open-air older Bouleuterion dominate. His aspect, which is not based on archaeological evidence, is rejected by Leslie Shear Jr. (1995, 157-90) whose arguments are based on the results of the excavations conducted in the area. From the scholiast on Aeschines' speech against Ktesiphon (Schol.Aisch.187) we are informed that the Athenians had converted a part of the Bouleuterion into a Metroon. See Thompson 1937, 208 and 1951, 50-5. See, also Francis 1990, 112. Francis-Vickers 1988, 160. Shear (1993, 424-27), who reconsiders the chronology of the Old Bouleuterion based on the re-examination of the archaeological context in the layers of the building's foundations, according to which the building was erected in 500 BC and was destroyed in 479 BC while it was reconstructed almost immediately, in order to fulfill its function.

5. Thompson 1937, 205.

6. See, Thompson 1937, 208. However, Aeschines in the same part of the speech places the metroon near to the Bouleuterion: *Ἐν τοίνυν τῷ μητρόῳ παρά το βουλευτήριον...*

7. Plutarch, *Vitae decem Oratorum* 842 E.

8. *Deinarchus against Demosthenes* I, 86.

9. Chameleon Ponticus, in Athenaeus, IX 407B-0

10. Xagorari 2008, 106.

11. IG II<sup>2</sup> 1445, I. 24-26.

the goddess, the Athenians constructed the Bouleuterion in the very place where the metragyrtes was put to death and afterwards they erected a statue in his honor.<sup>12</sup>

It is possible that the official establishment of Kybele's cult was realized in the last quarter of the 5th c. BC after the foundation of a new council House next to the old one,<sup>13</sup> which housed the city's archives and the cult statue of the Mother goddess. However, according to Georgios Despines,<sup>14</sup> not long before the 3rd quarter of the 5th c. BC (450-440 BC), a statuary type was created by Agorakritus, which is reproduced in the naiskoi, the statuettes and the votive reliefs representing the Mother of the Gods.<sup>15</sup>

The mention of the word plague is perhaps a chronological indication of the introduction of Great Mother's worship as other elements of narratives do not indicate the exact period of her advent. And it is probably associated with the plague of 430 BC during which Pericles perished. It remains, however, a hypothesis since no specific reference is made to the context of the metragyrtes' death and its aftermath.<sup>16</sup>

M. Munn connects the murder of the metragyrtes and the foundation of the Metroon to the end of the 5th c. BC with the story of Darius' emissaries and the appeasing of the goddess for their murder based on the information furnished by Theopompus or Anaximenes, both historians of the 4th c. BC.<sup>17</sup>

12. Julian V 159 a-b; Suda (v. *Μητραγύρτης*); Photius s.v. *Μητραγύρτης*; Suda s.v. *Μητραγύρτης*; Apostolius II, 34.

13. For the chronology of the Old Bouleuterion, see Thompson 1988, 199 and above n.4.

14. Despines 1971, 122.

15. The agorakritan type of the statue of the goddess is repeated on the statue of the Mother of the Gods from Moschato which is dated to the beginning of the 4th c. BC. This work presents some similarities with that of Agorakritus which are related to the rendering of the garment and the placement of the left hand on the tympanum. See, Papachristodoulou 1973, 191-92. Palagia 2005, 124-25.

16. Possibly it is about a famine and not a plague which dates the introduction of the cult at the beginning of the 5th c. BC according to Martin Nilsson (1955, 727). In spite of the fact that according to Giovanni Cerri (1983, 168) the goddess's cult was introduced in the last quarter of the 5th c BC, Nicoletta Frapiccini (1987, 14) believes that it is correct to talk about a famine since in Suda at the lemma *βάραβρον* (chasm) and more specifically in the narrative of the same circumstance the word sterility is used for the definition of the term. The earlier literary evidence on the introduction of her worship in Athens is Euripides' Hippolytus (ls.141-144) in 428 BC. On the introduction of Kybele's cult in Athens see, Frapiccini 1987, 15-21. Thompson 1937, 115-17. Winter 1903, 43, 4, 50, 2 a, b, c and 3. Cerri 1983, 168. On the foundation of the Athenian Metroon, see also Picard 1938, 97.

17. In the beginning of the 5th c. BC a great historic event, the destruction of the temple of the Mother of the Gods, Kubebe, in Sardis, meant to be the excuse for a war which was a historical landmark for the ancient Greeks. The Persians exploited this destruction in order to burn down the sanctuaries of the ionic cities and attack against the Greeks and particularly the Athenians. When the Persians sent their ambassadors in 491 BC to Athens they demanded "earth and water" proclaiming the omnipotence of the goddess Kubebe, known to the Ionians and the Athenians as the Great Mother. One of the members of the Persian mission was a sacred person with religious jurisdiction, who addressed this demand in the name of the goddess. M. Munn (2006, 253-67)

During the peace of Callias (450-448 BC), the Athenians, who had become prominent among all Greeks, began to review the common cultural elements they shared with the powerful Persian Empire. The first step was the recognition and acceptance of the Mother of the Gods. The character of this goddess was adjusting to the new order in which Athens possessed a predominant place, serving the idea of the Athenian rule over the Greeks, in the same way she did with the power of Phrygian, Lydian and Persian kings who were subject to the protection of the Mother goddess. The tyrannical image which Athens gradually obtained during the second half of the 5th c. BC was the background for the establishment of a cult suitable to express the city's omnipotence.<sup>18</sup> This was manifest through Pericles' power, but it was more intense through Alcibiades' attitude at the end of the 5th c. BC.<sup>19</sup> The plague and the disastrous outcome of the Sicilian campaign for the Athenians may have been the echoes of their blasphemy towards the goddess in 490 BC according to M. Munn,<sup>20</sup> although the wide chronological gap between these two incidents and the Persian Wars should make us rather skeptical about this assumption.

In order to understand the primary character of the Mother of the Gods, it is useful to look at a Phrygian tradition, according to which the goddess was a wise maiden from Telmessos, who managed to interpret some omens for the future king of Phrygia Gordius, to whom she was married. From their union the legendary king Midas was

believes, that in this story should be recognized that of the metragyrtes, who was killed by the Athenians. Like the Phrygian priest this metragyrtes would have proclaimed that the Anatolian Kubebe was the same with Gaia, Rea, mother of Zeus, Aphrodite, escort and mother of kings (e.g. Anchises-Aineias, Gordius-Midas), and Demeter, goddess of agriculture, whose daughter represented the participation of humanity to the cycles of life. Obviously, the Athenians were confronted with a sacrilegious claim, which assimilated a barbarian deity to the primeval Greek goddesses. Therefore, they arrested the Persian heralds and put them to death defending their theology and history. Perhaps Mother's wrath and the plague of 430 BC were the outcome of the treatment of those heralds which resulted to a more intensive veneration of Demeter to whom the Persian heralds assimilated their own Kybebe. In 490 BC the Athenians extended the sacred precinct at the slopes of the Akropolis over the Agora, which already belonged to a chthonic cult and dedicated it to Demeter founding the Athenian Eleusinian sanctuary. In addition, a new telesterion was constructed in Eleusis, while an increasing preference to Eleusinian subjects in attic pottery was manifested since 480 BC.

18. Munn 2006, 322-3.

19. The profanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries, for which Alcibiades was accused, reveals an action that threatened the Athenian democracy and led to the death penalty of all those who were blamed for that sacrilege, a case very similar to that of Darius' heralds. In my opinion, the mutilation of the Hermai, to which Plutarch refers (*Nicias* 13, 2), before the campaign of the Athenians against the Syracusans in 415 BC could be possibly connected to the introduction of Hermes to the iconography of the Hellenized Kybele and Mother of the Gods.

20. Munn 2006, 280. The peace of Callias ameliorated the relations between Persians and Athenians. Callias was the hereditary Hierokeryx in the Eleusinian mysteries and perhaps it is not random that he was the one who negotiated peace.

born.<sup>21</sup> His mother was deified becoming the natural source not only of life but also of political power and human domination, which Midas received through his birth.

M. Munn makes an interesting parallelism concerning the myth of Midas' birth and its relationship to the couple Pericles and Aspasia. He considers their bond in the light of a sacred marriage, which as an action serves the assurance and legitimacy of sovereignty. They are placed in this way in a superior sphere that renders them sacred and legitimate bearers of political power. This coincides with the great fame that Pericles bore during the period of the Athenian Hegemony, which according to Plutarch reached the limits of tyranny.<sup>22</sup> Pericles, whose name means "surrounded by glory" was arguably the most prominent and influential Greek statesman, orator and general of Athens during the Golden Age, which denotes the period of his leadership (461-429 BC), specifically the time between the Persian and Peloponnesian wars. He was descended, through his mother, from the powerful and historically influential Alcmaeonid family. Pericles, who turned the Delian League into an Athenian empire, had such a profound influence on Athenian society that Thucydides acclaimed him as "the first citizen of Athens!"<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, Aspasia was considered to be a woman of great virtues, such as intelligence, rhetoric abilities and beauty, thus having, according to M. Munn, all the elements which characterized Midas' mother; and just like her Aspasia was united with a powerful man in order to make an analogous couple that gives birth to sovereignty.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, we may wonder how intriguing a connection of such a case with the introduction of the Phrygian Mother to the Athenian cults and religion could possibly be. Furthermore, it is most likely that this parallelism had not escaped the perception of Pericles himself. Similar histories like that of Midas were already known in his era mainly through Herodotus's written work.<sup>25</sup> In view of this, it would not be difficult for the Athenians to promote an analogous idea in the context of a political propaganda which could reinforce his fame, consolidate his position and legitimate his relationship with a courtesan.<sup>26</sup> The introduction of a cult that refers to these correlations and especially blesses such a bond which protects political power coincides with the hegemony of Pericles. And the statue created by Agorakritus had already been finished in 440 BC according to Georgios Despines,<sup>27</sup> and must have been ordered by the ruler of the city since it was intended to serve the official cult. This fact

21. Munn 2006, 86-7.

22. Plutarch, *Pericles*, 24.3-6.

23. Thucydides, 2.65.10. See, also, Mosse and Schnapp-Gourbeillon 2011, 250-57.

24. Munn 2006, 102-3.

25. Herodotus, 1.61.1-2, 3.1 and 1.135.1.

26. Herodotus, 1.84.3.

27. Despines 1971, 122.

probably suggests an earlier chronology for the official establishment, or in other words, the existence of a public cult.

The admission of the Phrygian Kybele into Greek religion was also a result of an allegory connected to the glorious past of the Achaeans in the Trojan War period. As the Phrygians were identified with the Trojans in the Athenian tragedy, they were also considered parallel with Persians to whom the Trojans found an allegoric correlation.<sup>28</sup> This could be paralleled with the Great Mother's introduction to the Roman cult. In 204 BC the Romans received the cult of the goddess within a climate of political propaganda concerning the connection of their origin through Aeneas with Troy.<sup>29</sup>

Correspondingly, placing this controversial but forceful religious figure in the cradle of Democracy, the Athenians wanted to display that they had the Mother's support. This reminds us of the neo-Hittite reliefs depicting Kubaba, the Hittite predecessor of Kybele, which were put in a setting that propagandized the power of the king and his protection by the goddess.<sup>30</sup> In the same way, the setting of the council house, in which the cult statue of Kybele was placed, reflected an analogous propaganda: this time for another political institution, the polis-state, and its superior democratic values.

What impresses the most is the absence of archaeological evidence for the establishment of the Meter's official cult in Athens. If we correlate it with the period when the agorakritan statue was placed in a sacred area then the problem gets complicated, raising a series of questions. If the statue had been constructed according to G. Despines' estimation in the decade 450-440 BC, then why did it not find its place immediately? Perhaps the sculpture had been completed a while before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian war and the Athenians did not have time to install it in the place where it was destined to be. But what place could that possibly be? Should we suppose that its primary place had been decided to be inside the old Council House since the time it was created? <sup>31</sup> And who could testify to it? If this is indeed the case, then the goddess would have been associated with the state's archives and its political life since that period. Unfortunately, we are not provided with any evidence, and it is a fact that there is considerable chronological distance between the statue's creation and its placement in the old Bouleuterion. Therefore, if we accept the literary evidence that the cult statue was placed in the old Bouleuterion after the new Bouleuterion was erected, that is, in the period between 415-406, then we have to consider the likelihood that it was at that particular time that the Mother goddess was related to the public records. But then one more question arises. Why did the goddess have to be housed in the Bouleuterion?

28. Roller 1999b, 168, n 90.

29. Bowden 2010, 94.

30. Roller 1999b, 52.

31. See, also, Roller 1999a, 143, who observes that the Megaron 2 of Gordion, which is considered to be a temple associated with the Mother, is more possible to be a building with political or public character.

The Phrygian Kybele, the Mother of the gods, as has already been mentioned, symbolized power and dominion since the middle of the 5th century BC when the goddess protected the Athenian Hegemony, which, however, started to fail during the Peloponnesian War. Yet the most important incidents that shocked Athens' political world and society were not its defeats by the Lacedaemonians and their allies. The two episodes that overturned Athens' internal balance were the first and second oligarchic revolution of 411 and 404 BC, respectively, that dismantled the Athenian democracy, the foundation stone of Athens' dominion and prosperity. Placing Meter's statue in the spot where once the heart of democracy used to beat was not a random action, I believe. A year after the first oligarch revolution the democratic heart started to beat again generating perhaps the necessity for the foundation of a new council house.<sup>32</sup> The Athenians would keep the city's decrees, laws and every public record that validated Athens's supreme institution, democracy, inside the old one. Thus, it was probably the time for the Athenians to place them under Meter's protection. As a symbolic but strongly influential action it would defend Pericles' democracy, the source of Athenian omnipotence and prosperity. In my view, this was an action to revive of the old glorious days of Athens' greatness when it shone under Pericles' leading light. And this probably would need a superior religious power, especially during a period in which everything seemed so fragile, to impose and assure Athenian power and its base, democracy, that had now returned more radical than ever.

At this point it is essential to note that the period of the construction of the new Bouleuterion accords with the testimonies related to the period of the establishment of a central archive in Athens. In the years from 410 to 400, according to certain decrees attested on inscriptions or cited by later writers, such as the decrees of Kleisofos and Patrokleides, the official public records of Athens were organized and systematically collected in a central public archive.<sup>33</sup> Thus, evidence of the existence of a central archive is provided by the epigraphical sources dated to the last decade of the 5th c. BC. But we do not have any evidence that this was converted to a metroon when the new Bouleuterion was erected. The reference of Chameleon quoted by Athenaeus gives a terminus post quem (408-406 BC) for the association of the metroon with the Bouleuterion,<sup>34</sup> although modern scholars have expressed their doubts about the histo-

32. Shear (1995, 184) dates the construction of the new Bouleuterion in the period 410-403 based on the pottery found among the builder's debris. On the establishment of a public archive, see Boegegold 1972, 28. Todd 1993, 56.

33. Decree of Kleisofos: IG II<sup>2</sup> I, 25-32. Decree of Patrokleides: in Andokides I, 73-9. Both are dated to 405 BC. In 410 BC a board of anagrapheis was put in charge of assembling and writing down earlier laws. See Boegegold 1972, 29-30 who comments: "\_\_\_\_\_ it appears that the Athenians created a state archive, which they distinguished from the Bouleuterion, between the years 409 and 405. But that was only an attempt maybe in the framework of the moderates' administrative reforms".

34. Munn 2000, 171.

ricity of the incident described.<sup>35</sup> I am of the opinion that the establishment of a public archive should not be considered solely in conjunction with the installation of Meter's cult image in the council House. Perhaps these two events are irrelevant and the Athenians sought only to assure their democracy by submitting it to the tutelage of the Great Goddess. And given the absence of clear evidence of the date of Meter's accommodation in the building perhaps the Great Mother was installed in the old Bouleuterion before the Peloponnesian War since her cult statue had been already completed.

The acceptance of her worship in Athens expressed the Athenians' hope for the restoration of their dominion after the Peloponnesian War.<sup>36</sup> However, that hope faltered. Hence the cult of the Mother goddess assumed a different concept during the 4th c. BC.

This was the age when Athenian society, injured and exhausted by the military defeats, was seeking the road of recovery through introspection, which would help trace the causes. The Athenians became aware of the responsibility and need for regaining values that guarantee progress and prosperousness in a society. The peaceful character of the goddess, as depicted in the niches of her votive naiskoi, and the blessing of the libation, which is aided by other deities, like Hermes, Hecate and Pan, as apotropaic figures, were the desires of the popular faith and intelligence of the Athenians during the 4th c. BC.

In order to further understand the background of Phrygian Kybele's transformation to a Hellenic mother goddess of ecumenical character, we must investigate the historical and sociopolitical circumstances that concern the end of the 5th and the ensuing century. Religion and ritual practice fit in a wider cultural context, which is developed and determined by certain factors. Such a decisive factor for the course of the Athenian state was the Peloponnesian War and its consequences. Pericles does not exist anymore and with him the image of the old mighty Athenian power fades away. New features are gradually added to the portrait of the Mother of the gods. But let us put under the microscope the reasons for these developments and their implications.

The period of the Peloponnesian War coincides with the collapse of the moral, political, and primarily, religious values of Athenian society. Insecurity and instability bring into question the established class of the Olympian gods. The perception of men that the twelve gods interfere in terrestrial life by administering justice and setting the rules by which it is governed comes under review.

The clash of these traditional values with the new world order is reflected in the works of Euripides. The innovative tragedian does not hesitate to reform the heroic mythology mainly within the framework of new ideas coming in sharp contrast to the constant values of the Aeschylean tragedies. This is the period of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC), which influences the fiction of the Euripidean tragedies. Through them the virtues of the Athenians are highlighted and the deficiencies of the Lacedaemonians are empha-

35. Munn 2006, 328, n.40.

36. For the 4th c. BC, see Knell 2000.



sized aiming at public satisfaction. A consequence of these tactics was the transformation of myths, which shook the validity both of heroes and gods in addition to faith in the mythical world.<sup>37</sup> In such a political-social context, which was determined by Euripides since dispute surrounding the background of myths on which traditional religion was grounded had spread with his plays, new divinities emerged.

This is also the era when a mortal feels his solitude and weakness. Dealing with situations that he cannot control, like the plague of 430 BC, he seeks refuge in consoling deities which are surrounded with warmth from the lower social strata. In this way, the Mother of the gods, competing with Demeter and Rhea that belong to the old traditional Olympian society, predominates in the religious faith, embodying the functions and traits of these goddesses. Her cult as a fertility deity could help with overcoming the demoralization of the Athenian people.

The prevalence of the image of a goddess in a portable temple like a relief with the accompaniment of figures that supplement her cult thus facilitating her Hellenization cannot be, in my view, irrelevant to this concept. Kybele is depicted enthroned inside the niche of the naiskos holding in her right hand a phiale, the vessel for pouring liquid offerings, and a tympanum in the left with a lion on her lap or at the sides of her throne. She is flanked by two smaller figures represented in a low relief at the antae of the naiskos or more rarely, inside the niche by a youth with an oinochoe and a torch-bearer maiden.<sup>38</sup> There is no iconographic evidence for this particular type in the 5th c. BC.<sup>39</sup> On the contrary it is appeared during the 4th c. BC when the production of such votive reliefs increased within the Attic borders since they are products of the Attic artistic creation that spread later throughout the Greek territory as is revealed by a small number of examples found outside Attica.<sup>40</sup>

During this century the political power of Athens had diminished and the Athenian citizens tried to make up lost ground by praising their history. This is achieved through the athidographers whose works (4th - 3rd c. BC) contain many elements related to the Attic cults, the Customs, the festivals diary, the mythological traditions

37. Kakridis 1986, 124.

38. For their interpretation as Hermes and Hecate I have argued in my doctoral thesis: Katsaounou 2012, 284-367.

39. Except perhaps from a silver lid of pyxis from Olynthus (Thessaloniki, Archaeological Museum 28.401) which depicts a youth and a torch-bearer maiden escorting the Mother who drives a chariot drawn by lions. Its dating is not certain though. D. Robinson (1941, fig. 17 a-b) dates it to the 4th c. BC.

40. Eleven naiskoi of Kybele with supplementary figures are also found outside Attica and come from Pella, Amphipolis, Boeotia, Patrai, Andros, Cyrene, Ephesos, Pamfylia and Dionysopolis: see, Lilibaki-Akamati 2000, no 553. Vermaseren 1989, no 291. Vermaseren 1982, nos 422, 424, 483, 581. Vermaseren 1986, no 39. Vermaseren 1987, nos 646, 734. Petropoulos-Maslennikov 2010, 24, fig. 22. For some representative parallels of the iconographic type in question, see: Naumann 1982, 230, 278-79, 355-56, nos 525-530, 665. Vermaseren 1982, nos 310, 382, 529. Vermaseren 1989, nos 198, 558-559. Reeder 1987, fig 1-2. Reber 1983, 77-78, fig.1.

and so forth.<sup>41</sup> Within this context of the promotion of Athens, the emergence and predominance of a mighty indisputable goddess with universal character, such as that of the Mother of the gods, was inevitable.

At the end of the 5th c. BC the profound philosophical search of the Euripidean tragedies and the introduction of compassionate deified heroes such as that of Asclepius are not irrelevant to the establishment of the Mother's cult.<sup>42</sup> The numerous votive offerings in his honor during the 4th c. BC are not accidental, while an intense practice of offerings to the Eleusinian deities is attested during the late classical period. An anthropocentric movement and the awareness of the fragile human nature are the distinctive characteristics of this century, which led to the emergence of deities associated with fertility and good fortune. But what made people sense their fears and set a boundary which connects or separates the old theocentric world from the new anthropocentric one as demonstrated by Euripides?

The plague of 430 BC,<sup>43</sup> the destruction of Athens after their ill-fated Sicilian expedition and the subsequent Athenian defeat which brought about the end of the Peloponnesian War were factors all capable of changing a worldview which had been established in the popular conscience for many centuries. One of the characteristics of this period was the sophists' theory, which was characterized by atheism and agnosticism and according to which the ultimate value was the gnostic ability of man. This theory, as was expected, caused reactions amongst the citizens, which culminated in the persecutions of philosophers as well as of sophists starting in Athens in about 430 BC.<sup>44</sup>

In fact, the teaching of the sophists urged people to find more radical solutions to their everyday problems. As traditional religion was challenged, superstitions and witchcraft gained ground. Prophets, oracle givers, and agyrtes were those who dominated the new scene creating a chasm between rational thought and superstitions.<sup>45</sup> During the 4th century conflicts among common people and intellectuals, rich and poor, oligarchs and democrats become evident in social reality.

Perhaps it is not accidental that the number of curses with invocations of Hermes, Persephone and Hecate increased during the period of the emergence of the iconographic type of Kybele with her divine attendants on the naiskoi, in the 4th century when the rise in superstitions reflected changes in religious ideas and cult practices.

41. Kakridis 1986, 141.

42. The introduction of Asklepeios in Athens is ought to Sophokles (Philoktetes, line 1438: *ἐγὼ δε Ασκληπιὸν παυστήρα πέμψω τῆς νόσου*) and his cult image was created by Alkamenes in 420 BC. On the introduction of Asclepius' cult to Athens and its connection with the plague of 430 BC, see Wickkiser 2009, 56.

43. Thucydides, 2.47.1-2.54.5.

44. Kakridis 1986, 253-54. On the development of sophistic movement and its impact on the Athenian society see, also Romilly 2002, *passim*.

45. Parker 2005, 116-35.

This factor favored the increasing popularity of deities like Hermes, who, apart from Hecate and Persephone, is the only one who stands between the upper world and the underworld having the authority to transcend their boundary.

Furthermore, Athenian intellectuals played a catalytic role in redefining religious faith. Plato and Euripides claimed that traditional religion was based on the myths that were constructed by Homer and, principally, by Hesiod. Plato in particular proposed a reformation of the myths for the benefit of his *Politeia* that is a combination of popular and philosophical religion as well as a combination of political and religious education.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, it could be considered that the Mother of the gods made her appearance within this context as a combination or compromise between the traditional religion and the new order as this was prompted by the syncretism of Kybele and the divinities of the Greek pantheon, especially Demeter who incorporated most of the divine functions as a goddess of fertility. Moreover, this particular deity had played a significant role in the Greek victory over the Persians during the Persian Wars and it was with this goddess that the mythological background of droughts, famines and pestilences, which the Athenians suffered during certain periods of time, was connected. This syncretism justifies, in my opinion, the iconographical coexistence of Kybele and Hermes, Hecate, and Pan. The propitiatory and reconciling function of the libation scene, which is depicted on the naiskoi, placed a greater sacredness on Meter's figure. This transformation was produced by the combination of religious and philosophical reviews with political considerations.

Summing up, let us review the process of the assumption and development of the mightiest and at the same time most malleable religious figure named Mother of the Gods. The Athenians had rejected the cult of the goddess at the beginning of the Persian Wars. During the second half of the 5th c. BC they reconciled with her by instituting her cult in order to gain her favor and her custody. The assurance of peace that was disrupted during the 5th and 4th centuries, especially after the loss of Athenian predominance, constituted one of the most important goals of the goddess's representation within the architectural frame of her reliefs and the propitiatory symbolisms that were attached to them. The goddess continued to symbolize the harmonious relations between Persians and Athenians during the 4th century and for this reason the peaceful character of the Mother was of essential importance, reinforced by the presence of Hermes who was the supreme peacemaker god and whose cult was intensified during the Peloponnesian war. But the most important change in the Mother's religious context is her association with democracy that formed the basis of Athens' supremacy and sovereignty during the 5th century and a major part of the Athenians' second effort to regain it during the following period. This change, dated to the Age of Pericles, may mark one of the most crucial stages of an intricate process: the Hellenization of Phrygian Kybele.

46. Plato, *Laws* I, 886 a-d.

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ΣΥΛΒΑΝΑ ΚΑΤΣΑΟΥΝΟΥ

e-mail: sinanakat@yahoo.gr

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η άφιξη της φρυγικής Μητέρας των Θεών Κυβέλης στον αρχαίο ελληνικό χώρο υπήρξε μία σύνθετη διαδικασία με ασαφές χρονικό πλαίσιο. Ειδικότερα, η εισαγωγή και επίσημη εγκαθίδρυση της λατρείας της στο κυριότερο κέντρο της, την Αρχαία Αθήνα, μπορεί να αναζητηθεί την περίοδο λίγο μετά το τέλος των Περσικών πολέμων και να συνδεθεί με την πολιτική προπαγάνδα που ασκήθηκε εκεί κατά το β' ήμισυ του 5<sup>ου</sup> αι. π.Χ. Η χρονολόγηση της επίσημης καθιέρωσης της αθηναϊκής λατρείας της Κυβέλης πιστεύουμε δεν είναι ανεξάρτητη από την χρονική περίοδο της κατασκευής του λατρευτικού της αγάλματος που, όμως, προσκρούει στην προβληματική χρονολόγηση της τοποθέτησής του μέσα στο βουλευτήριο και της αφιέρωσης μέρους αυτού στη λατρεία της. Το γεγονός αυτό καταδεικνύει την άρρηκτη σύνδεση της θεάς με την αθηναϊκή δημοκρατία και τα κρίσιμα στάδια της εξέλιξής της κατά τον 5<sup>ο</sup> αι. π.Χ. Οι πολιτικοκοινωνικοί μετασχηματισμοί του επόμενου αιώνα στην Αθήνα προσέδωσαν στη θεά έναν ειρηνικό χαρακτήρα, τον οποίο επέτεινε η προσθήκη νέων γνωρισμάτων και συμβολικών αναφορών ολοκληρώνοντας τη μακρόχρονη και πολύπλοκη διαδικασία του εξελληνισμού της.