

Mother of the Gods: Goddess of Power and Protector of Cities

Birgitte Bøgh

*University of Aarhus, Faculty of Arts
Taasingegade 3, 8000 Aarhus C, Denmark
BB@teo.au.dk*

Abstract

The article presents a survey of the roles and status of Meter's cult in the western Black Sea area, her reception in the archaic period, and the subsequent development of the goddess's characteristics. Based on new scholarship on the goddess's roles and status in Phrygia, and taking as a starting point an analysis of a selected number of archaeological Meter objects from the Black Sea region, it will be argued that Meter in this area throughout the centuries functioned as, primarily, a goddess of power, a protector of cities, and a goddess of the elite — the very traits that also characterised her cult in Phrygia. Furthermore, it is suggested that Meter, because of these traits, was eagerly embraced by official authorities outside the Black Sea area also, and that hence they were the primary reason for her early presence in Athens and later in Rome.

Keywords

Mother of the Gods, diffusion of Meter cult, Black Sea area, Athens, Rome

Introduction

Meter, Kybele, Meter *Oreia*, Meter *Theôn*, Mater *Deum Magna Idaea*; these are some of the most commonly used Greek and Latin names for the goddess with the Phrygian name Matar — *Mother*.¹ Meter is often

¹) Cybele is the Latin version of the Greek Kybele, whereas Meter is the Greek version of the Phrygian Matar. The present work will use the name Matar when dealing with the Phrygian goddess and Meter in the remaining contexts. The article includes a number of pictures, and I am grateful to the authors and publishers for allowing me to use these.

presented as a wild, uncivilised, even barbaric, mountain goddess: a goddess of wild nature and fertility who was celebrated with ecstatic, bloody rituals by delirious worshippers and effeminate, castrated priests. Accordingly, Meter's cult has often been viewed as being attractive to, primarily, those outside acceptable society, such as females, slaves, and transvestites, and in outright opposition to Greek and Roman official authorities and public religion.

Based on a selection of primary sources from the Black Sea area, this article will present another view of this goddess and her cult. It will be argued (a) that Meter was not primarily a fertility goddess, but a goddess of power and protection, (b) that these basic characteristics of the goddess did not change dramatically during the centuries, and (c) that her cult was no less attractive to official authorities than to individuals, and that this was an important reason for the spread of her cult to the rest of the Mediterranean world.²

Taking as my starting point the most recent research on the goddess in her homeland Phrygia³ and a short introduction to Phrygian Mater, I will present and analyse some of the materials from the Black Sea area, following a chronological order. The archaeological materials from the northern and western coasts will be included in the analysis of the *reception* of the Meter cult in the archaic period, but I have limited the scope to Thrace on the western coast of the Black Sea when dealing with its subsequent *transformation*.⁴

²) This article does not pretend to be an exhaustive representation of the goddess, nor of the West Pontic cult in general. First and foremost, it deals with Meter's roles and functions as well as the status of her cult in ancient society. Due to limited space, a number of themes, e.g., Attis and the *galli*, are left out, which would naturally benefit a fuller picture. For general introductions and more detailed analyses, see Roller 1999; Lancelotti 2002 (on Attis); Borgeaud 2004; Munn 2005. Moreover, the discussion of a possible Thracian origin of Matar will be left out, as will (with a few exceptions) the question of indigenous adoption of and influences on Meter's cult in Thrace. Both of these subjects deserve much more consideration than is possible within the scope of this article and are not immediately relevant for my purposes here. See particularly Vassileva 2001; Roller 2002, 2003 for relevant discussions of the Thracian-Phrygian relationship.

³) Cf. Naumann 1983. Recent studies of Phrygian Matar (iconography, attributes, sanctuaries, roles) include Rein 1996; Roller 1999; Munn 2005; Berndt-Ersöz 2006.

⁴) Although the area was divided into the Roman provinces *Thracia* and *Moesia* after the Roman occupation of the region, it is sufficient to employ the name Thrace for the

Furthermore, I will attempt to draw some conclusions as regards the role and status of the Meter cult presented by this evidence. The article will deal with the questions of why the cult was brought there and how it was transformed, but a major claim will be that a common thread runs through the cult all the way from her homeland to Thrace — from the Archaic period to late Antiquity. The reception of the cult in the archaic period will be studied in more detail than the subsequent chronological periods, since it serves to establish the argument of a close coherence between the previous roles of Matar and her roles in the following periods, a subject that, to my knowledge, has not been previously dealt with in any detail.

Finally, I will evaluate how this interpretation can contextualise our more general understanding of the Meter cult in the Mediterranean world. In Athens and Rome, the goddess's sanctuaries were situated in the heart of political control — in the Athenian *bouleuterion* and on the central Palatine Hill in Rome. These well-known facts have been explained (away) with different reasons, such as “official mistakes” (the authorities did not know what they had), as the result of *private* pressure on the officials (they *had* to accept her since she was so popular among the masses), or as *official* pressure by one Empire (the Persians) on another (the Athenians). Whereas the spread and establishment of Meter's cult has thus been viewed mostly in the context of pressure and official opposition, this article will suggest that it should rather be interpreted in the light of eager embrace and voluntary adoption.

Matar in Phrygia

The earliest evidence of Phrygian Matar dates to the beginning of the first millennium. She is the only Phrygian deity that can be evidenced in anthropomorphic form until well after the end of Phrygian autocracy in the seventh or sixth century B.C.⁵ In her Phrygian homeland,

entire west coast in this context. The sources for investigations of the Meter cult in the Black Sea area are, with very few exceptions, archaeological — mostly statuettes and reliefs, but also architectural, epigraphic, and numismatic. See Tacheva-Hittova 1983 (henceforth TH); Vermaseren 1989 (henceforth Ccca VI); and Chiekova 2008 for general collections of sources.

⁵ During this period, Phrygia was incorporated within the Lydian empire. It is still debated to which degree Phrygian Matar was similar to, different from, or even identi-



Figure 1. 8th century B.C. stone stele from Ankara showing Matar in a *naiskos* frame (height: 1.75 m.). Ankara Archaeological Museum.

Matar is shown standing, having predatory birds or, rarely, lions as her attributes. The stele from Ankara (fig. 1) represents one of the earliest anthropomorphic images of the goddess from about the end of the eighth century B.C., while the rock-cut façade from Arslankaya (fig. 2), probably built during the time of the Lydian dominion, shows Matar with two large flanking lions.

No temples for Matar have been found in Phrygia. The façade surrounding the goddess in both representations is seen on numerous other monuments as well and has been argued to portray a royal *megaron* rather than a temple building and — as such — to be a symbol of the state itself and of civilised society (Roller 1999:113; Berndt-Ersöz 2006:194, 208). The raptor birds, furthermore, are not symbols of wild

cal with Neo-Hittite Kubaba/Lydian Kuvava (cf. Munn 2005 with references). This is another subject, and it is not relevant to discuss it further in this connection since the very traits discussed both in relation to Phrygian Matar and Greek (and Roman) Meter are also valid for Kubaba/Kuvava.



Figure 2a. Rock-cut façade (Arslankaya, 7th–6th century B.C.) and niche with elaborated door frame and pediment.



Figure 2b. The Arslankaya niche (height: 2.40 m.) with Matar flanked by two huge lions.

nature (as was earlier assumed) but of royal power (Collins 2004) — comparable to the falcon symbol of Horus in Egypt and the eagle of Greek Zeus, and similar in symbolism to the lion that was the most distinctive attribute of royal power and sovereignty in Lydia (Munn 2005:126f). Despite her name *Mother*, there is little that relates Matar to fertility in Phrygia. Instead, she seems to have been first and foremost a goddess of power, a city protector, and the most eminent official goddess — the mother and protector of the king and the state (Roller 1999:111–115).

Spread of the Cult to the Black Sea in the Archaic Period

The northern and western coasts of the Black Sea were colonised by Greeks from western Asia Minor in the seventh century B.C., and the earliest evidence of Meter's cult in the northern and western part is found in the Greek cities Perinthos, Salmydessos, Apollonia, Histria, Olbia (with Hylaia in its *chora*), and Myrmekion.

The material from the west coast consists of stone *naiskoi* (mostly made of marble) from Apollonia, Perinthos, and Salmydessos and a terracotta statuette from Histria.⁶ From the northern coast, apart from a statuette and two *naiskoi* from Olbia, we have evidence of Archaic sanctuaries in Olbia's *temenos* (closely associated with Apollo) and, in Hylaia, an eroded letter inscribed on a sherd and, from Olbia and Myrmekion, some short inscriptions mentioning her name *Mother*.⁷ The sculptural materials all portray Meter seated.

In my opinion, Meter was brought to the northern and western coasts of the Black Sea by Greek colonists, but in her old Phrygian role

⁶ Apollonia: Oppermann 2004, figs. 7.1, 7.2, and 7.4 (Apollonia); Histria: Alexandrescu-Vianu 1990:183, 232, abb. 62 (Histria); Naumann 1983, cat. no. 67, taf. 18.4 (Salmydessos), cat. no. 66, fig. 18.3 (Perinthos).

⁷ In a few cases, she is called Meter *Theôn*. See for the Olbian sanctuaries: Rusjaeva 2003 and 2006:264f. The Meter sanctuaries in Olbia's *temenos* consist of an early sanctuary shared with Apollo and another situated next to a temple of Apollo. The statuette: Ccca VI, 511. The *naiskoi*: Rusjaeva 2003:100, fig. 4, 102; the inscriptions: Rusjaeva 1992:143–146, fig. 46; Alexandrescu-Vianu 1980:264; the letter (mentioning Hylaia): Dubois 1996, no. 24; see *ibid.*, no. 81 for an inscription that mentions Meter *Theôn*, mistress of Hylaia.

as a city protector, a goddess of power, brought there as an official goddess and supported by the elite — just as in Phrygia.⁸ Naturally, this must remain a hypothesis, since the archaeological objects themselves are more or less mute witnesses to her roles, status and worshippers in the Greek West Pontic world. But some arguments can be put forward in favor of this interpretation.

The relevant objects have all been dated to the archaic period, mostly the sixth century B.C. They all portray Meter with Greek iconography — primarily visible in the seated position — and they were all found in Greek colonies. The inscriptions found are also Greek. But we can recognise the Anatolian heritage in the fact that almost all of the objects portray the goddess in a so-called *naiskos*, a building-like frame, in a niche topped by a triangular pediment, and with decorated door frames. Examples of the correspondence between the Greek *naiskoi* and the Anatolian monuments are shown in figures 3a and b.

Despite the Greek seated position of the goddess and the eroded condition of some of the objects, we can clearly see their dependency on these Anatolian monuments.⁹ The Greek *naiskoi* are, in fact, Greek miniature models of the Anatolian monumental façades.¹⁰

⁸ More specifically, it is likely that Meter accompanied the colonists from Miletos, since this *metropolis* was the founder of most of the colonies where Meter's cult is first evidenced. In addition, the overall lack of lions in the Black Sea area (with two exceptions) corresponds to the lack of this attribute in the Milesian material. In contrast, the lion was a typical attribute of Meter already in the archaic period in the northern half of Asia Minor (where another great *metropolis*, Phokaia, was situated). As regards the seated and standing position of the goddess, both types were represented in the earliest Milesian materials. Cf. Rein 1996 for the role of Miletos in the spreading of the cult to other parts of the Mediterranean world and for the creation of the earliest Greek iconography of the goddess.

⁹ Compare also with figs 1 and 2, and eighth century stele from Etlik (Roller 1999:58, fig. 9), and the monumental Delikli Taş (Vermaseren 1987, no. 144, pl. XX), and another stele-*naiskos* from Apollonia (Oppermann 2004, taf. 7.4) as well as the *naiskoi* from Salmydessos and Perinthos (see ref. in n. 7).

¹⁰ Cf. Rein 1996 and Vikela 2001 for an analysis of the close relation between the Anatolian monuments and the Greek *naiskoi*. Vikela argues that both types functioned as separate cult monuments, which is possible (but see Berndt-Ersöz 2006 for a re-evaluation of the theory of a primarily cultic function of the Phrygian monuments). In my opinion, we must also acknowledge the strong symbolic value of the frame (a royal *megaron*, the organised state, civilisation). In relation to this symbolism, it seems



Figure 3a. Greek Meter *naiskoi* from 6th century B.C. (Thrace). Above, two marble *naiskoi* from Apollonia (height: 42 and 44 cm.), Burgas Museum. Below, two stone *naiskoi* from Olbia.

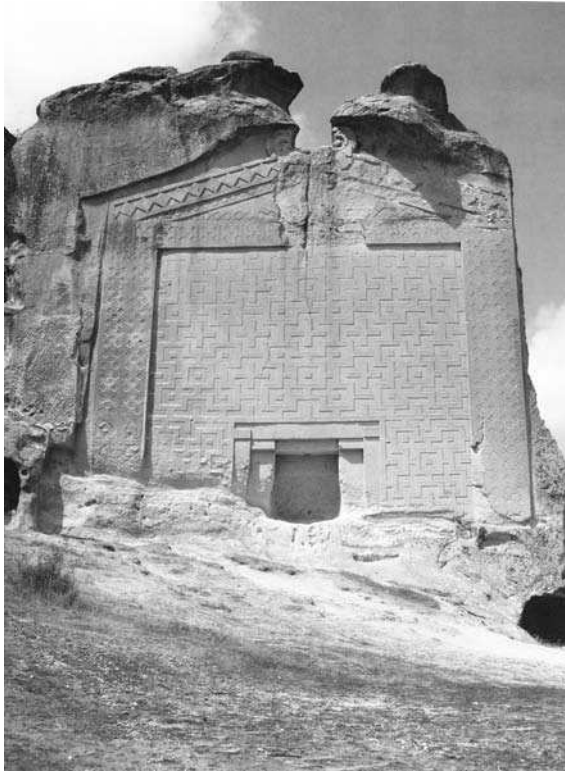


Figure 3b. Anatolian façade monuments, 7th–6th century B.C. From left to right: Bakşeyiş monument (height: 5.30 m.), Kumca Boğaz (height: 1.85 m.), Midas monument (height: 16.70 m.). Some façade monuments did not contain statues of Meter, but dowel holes found in the empty niches show that a statue was placed there on occasion.

Furthermore, some of the inscriptions from the northern coast from Olbia and Myrmekion simply call her Meter — directly translated from Phrygian *Matar* — in contrast to the name that later (from the Classical period) becomes the most widespread, namely *Meter Theôn* (Mother of the Gods), which was a Greek, not Phrygian, appellation. This close relation with her Phrygian background in terms of chronology, onomastics, and iconography therefore suggests that the goddess also continued to occupy the same roles and status as she did in her homeland, most notably her role as a city protector and a goddess of power. We may even wonder to what degree the *naiskos*-form still denotes her as a goddess of the state (albeit a Greek state) and of civilisation and ordered society, or whether it now represents an actual temple building (since the word we use literally means a “small temple”). Based on the widespread *naiskos*-form (found in numerous places in the contemporary Mediterranean world) and the corresponding rarity of actual contemporary temple buildings for Meter, I prefer the former option.

In the two statuettes from Histria and Olbia, Meter is represented with a lion on her lap. While this animal is not typically shown with the goddess in the earliest Greek Meter objects (except in the northern part of Asia Minor), it soon becomes an indispensable attribute of Meter. In the Anatolian, especially Lydian, context, it denoted royal power — like the raptor birds of Phrygian *Matar*. Even though this symbolism would undoubtedly have been reinterpreted in a Greek, non-royal society, the lions are most likely still symbols of *power*, pointing rather to this as an important aspect of Meter, instead of, for example, fertility or wilderness. The Greek seated position is, in my opinion, comparable to, possibly even derived from, that of Greek Zeus and thus indirectly also points to Meter as a goddess of power, order, and control.

The basis for the assumption that Meter was brought to the Black Sea as an official goddess and not on a private initiative is both the fact that she was definitely an official goddess in sixth-century B.C. Olbia, where her sanctuaries are some of the earliest documented in the city's *temenos* (Rusjaeva 2003:95), and — as for the west coast — Meter's obvious prominence in the sculptural materials. Thus, while the total

that the frame — the *naiskos* — should actually be understood as Meter's “attribute” in the Mediterranean world, since it was an almost indispensable part of her archaic iconography in all regions.

number of finds may not seem overwhelming at first sight, it actually constitutes a large amount compared to what can be related to other divinities around the Black Sea in this period, according to all of the scholars who have worked comparatively with the archaic cultic finds in the Black Sea area.¹¹ So, not only is Meter one of the best represented deities in the Archaic material, but the pieces from the western and northern coast are also locally made, which indicates a strong *local* cult in the sixth century B.C. This shows us not only that Meter must have been brought to the area earlier than that, but also that we are not just looking at a few, disparate votives made by a few private worshippers.

That Meter enjoyed the support of the elite can be argued from the fact that the objects (with two exceptions) were made of stone, especially marble, which was the most expensive material — in contrast to terracotta (burned clay), which was the cheapest type of material and the type of material most often used in the sixth century B.C. in other votives.¹²

¹¹ Rusjaeva 2003:97; Oppermann 2004:40; and Chiekova 2008:291. Sculpturally, very few identifiable gods, if any, apart from Meter and Aphrodite, have been found; mostly, the so-called “anonymous statuettes” are preserved from the Black Sea area, and then primarily in Histria and Olbia. These terracottas portray seated or standing females or males with no attributes, also found in various places in western Asia Minor, and it is not possible to identify them. In Histria, three archaic examples of this type show clearly Syro-Phoenician traits (Alexandrescu-Vianu 1994 suggests that they portray Meter), but otherwise the anonymous statuettes from the Black Sea area follow completely eastern Greek style. Histria and Olbia have provided the only evidence of other identified divinities, almost exclusively through single pieces of graffiti found in the temple areas. In Histria, two small temples for Zeus and Aphrodite have been found. In addition, the presence of Hermes, Dionysos, Hera, and Apollo is secured through one graffiti each (Birzescu 2006). In Olbia, the oldest graffiti and temples were dedicated to Apollo, Meter, and Athena. Moreover, in the inscription to Athena, Zeus is portrayed below. In addition, a few graffiti and/or new temple buildings from the late archaic period testify to the presence of Aphrodite, Dionysos, the Dioskouroi, and Hermes (Rusjaeva 2003:99; 2006:264f.). There is no evidence of worship of any indigenous gods in the colonies. See Oppermann 2004:37–41; Chiekova 2008 for surveys of the archaic findings. For Histria in particular: Alexandrescu-Vianu 1990:180–187, 2000; and Birzescu 2006. For Olbia: Rusjaeva 2003, 2006 with further references.

¹² Archaic stone figures are very rare in Olbia (oral communication with P.G. Bilde, Aarhus University). For the west coast, a few fragments in stone of unidentifiable figures (one female and three males) constitute the total number of other archaic stone votives, and the Meter *naiskoi* are the only stone reliefs found (Oppermann 2004:37).

But why would an originally non-Greek goddess occupy such a prominent role in the new Greek colonies? If we recall that Meter's role as a *city protector* is one of the most clearly recognisable in her Phrygian homeland, it is no stretch to suggest that this was also her primary role in the Greek milieu — and the reason why the eastern Greeks adopted her from the neighbouring Anatolians in the first place. Furthermore, Meter's primary role as city protector may explain why Meter was brought with the eastern Greek colonists abroad, not only to the Black Sea, but also to colonies in the western Mediterranean region, such as Massalia, Vela, Selinountos, etc., i.e., to all of the first colonies of the Ionian world.¹³

Observations in support of this interpretation are: (a) the lack of other evident options, e.g., a general absence of fertility symbols, (b) that this function is actually one of the best testified for Meter in earlier as well as later periods; the more indirect circumstances that (c) the statuette from Histria was found near the Archaic city wall (albeit in a mixed context), (d) the fact that the materials are primarily (and continue to be) found in the cities, and (e) Meter's joint worship with Apollo — another city protector — in Olbia. Furthermore, it makes sense that Meter, as a powerful city protector, would be an attractive companion to the Greeks settling in their new colonies, and that this was the reason why she was brought there.

Furthermore, marble was not found locally, which means that it had to be imported — a fact that furthermore stresses the value of this material. The many preserved Meter objects may be coincidental in the way that the cults of other gods of course existed (testified primarily through graffiti), but this does not diminish the fact that the preserved Meter objects in stone reveal a cult of importance.

¹³ The colony of Massalia in modern France, founded c. 600 B.C., presents an astonishing number of archaic Meter *naiskoi*, namely 80 found in 1863 and 1975, respectively (Naumann 1983:140, n. 125; Borgeaud 2004:7). I am not familiar with any studies that have seen this as the primary reason for her cult's spread, although her city protection functions have been widely recognised from the Hellenistic and (mostly) Roman periods. But an archaic role as city protector can also be seen elsewhere in the Greek world. A late archaic Meter relief (c. 490 B.C.) was found *in situ* in the city wall in Thasos (Vikela 2001:88); in Erythrai, a number of *naiskoi* were found on the city *acropolis*, and another was found in the city wall (Graf 1985:318). The late seventh-century B.C. sherd of Locri, a colony in Italy, was found just beneath the city walls, next to the Propylon, the city wall gate (De la Geniere 1985:694), and it was probably brought there by the colonists (Graf 1984:120).

The only apparent obstacle to the interpretation of Meter as a city protector and, consequently, as primarily an urban goddess is the presence of a Meter sanctuary in Hylaia — a place situated in the distant *chora* of Olbia and primarily known for its wooded character. Hence, this is a decisively non-urban and “wild” place which seems at first sight to point to Meter’s (relations with) wild nature, i.e., it seems in line with the traditional way of understanding the character of this goddess. However, in my opinion, it is precisely Hylaia’s urban (and not extra-urban) connection that is important here.

It is evident from the so-called “letter from a priest,” a much-eroded inscribed sherd dating to the sixth century B.C., that Hylaia was related to Meter. This letter was written by someone who travelled around to different places (all sanctuaries?) in Olbia’s *chora*.¹⁴ He wrote his report to his superior in Olbia, where the letter was eventually found. In the report, it is stated (among other things) that the altar of Meter in Hylaia had been ruined *again*.

Moreover, Hylaia certainly was a wooded area: the letter mentions that two hundred trees had been destroyed (probably by hostile Scythians), and the almost contemporary Herodotus mentions it twice. In his *Histories* (4.19), we hear that “the entire area is bare of trees, except Hylaia;” in 4.76, Herodotus writes: “So when he (Anacharsis) came to Scythia he went down into the region called Hylaia (this is along by the side of the racecourse of Achilles and is quite full, as it happens, of trees of all kinds).” Dubois (1996:130) suggests that the Olbian citizens probably exploited its resources (trees and game) from very early on, which, in my opinion, brings us on the right path. Dubois furthermore sees Hylaia as an appropriate context for a vegetation goddess (i.e., Meter) and suggests that Meter’s sanctuary in the Olbian *temenos* would be a kind of *polis* branch of this (primary) Hylaian cult. However, I think it is the other way round: Meter’s cult was installed in Hylaia precisely due to Hylaia’s connection with and importance for the city Olbia, where Meter was *already* established as a city protector because its resources — the trees (necessary for building defences, ships, houses, providing wood for fire, etc.) — were crucial for the city’s

¹⁴ Dubois 1996, 55–63, and XVI, map III (Olbia’s *chora*).

upkeep.¹⁵ In this light, despite its wooded character, Hylaia can be interpreted as an example of Meter's *urban* relations and not of her connections with wild nature.

All of this, admittedly, is only indirect evidence. Yet, in conclusion, it seems that we can see the archaic Greek Meter in the northern and western Black Sea area — similar to the Phrygian Matar — as a goddess of power, in the role of city protector, and as an official goddess supported by the elite.

Classical Period

The picture from the fifth and first half of the fourth century B.C. is different. If we compare the number of Meter's cult objects with the number of those that belong to other cults, she is no longer a prominent figure, although in fact we cannot claim that any divinities are abundantly attested to in this period.¹⁶ With the exception of one fifth-century B.C. stone *naiskos* from Abdera in southern Thrace (fig. 4), the Meter objects are all made of clay, they are all statuettes, and they are relatively few in number.¹⁷ Two statuettes (one of them only perhaps Meter) were found in graves, i.e., in a purely private context, while the *naiskos* was found in a later (second-century B.C.) room, probably a private shrine. Nothing from this period gives us any indications of specific West Pontic cult practices.

¹⁵ Cf. Liddell and Scott (Greek-English Lexicon) s.v. *hylê* A.II. It is imperative to keep in mind that Hylaia was the only place in the region that could provide this vital type of material.

¹⁶ See Oppermann 2004:96ff. for a survey of all Classical cultic finds. I use the word “classical” solely as a practical designation of the period between the Archaic and Hellenistic periods.

¹⁷ Classical finds: the *naiskos*: Ccca VI, no. 319, two unpublished statuettes from Apollonia (see Chiekova 2008:130 for one of them, found in a grave; the other is seen in the local museum), and a doubtful piece from Sladkite Kladenci (Balabanov 1985:20f., no. 14, abb. 14), also from a funerary context. The amount of Meter material from other parts of the Mediterranean world is also lower in this period (Vikela 2001:91, 98). It is uncertain whether this reflects a general situation of poverty caused by the Graeco-Persian wars or an actual, albeit temporary, diminished popularity of the Meter cult (for the same reason, see Roller 1999:168f.). For Olbia, less material in general from the Classical period has been preserved (Rusjaeva 2003:104).



Figure 4. Stone *naiskos* with seated Meter from Abdera (height: 38 cm.). Kavala, Archaeological Museum.

Basically, we are left in the dark when it comes to Meter's roles, status, and worshippers in this period, but if there is any explanation of the apparently less prominent position of her cult, beyond that of coincidence of finds, or a most general condition of poverty, it is possible that this apparent shift was caused by the democratic changes that took place in the Classical period. Even though Meter's cult soon regains her age-old relation with the governing powers of a state, in a democracy, such power would rest not with the *aristocratic*, but the *democratic* governing bodies, the *boulê* and *dêmos*. The change in government may have caused a temporary crisis for this originally elitist goddess. The finds from this period are (except for the one *naiskos*) all statuettes, which can be interpreted as a sign of Hellenization since statuettes were the usual Greek way to present their divinities in this and the previous periods.

Hellenistic Period

In many ways, the Hellenistic cult of Meter in the West Pontic area continues on this path of Hellenization, which also reflects its embeddedness in Greek society. The deity is regularly called Meter *Theôn*, her Greek name, and we still find mostly statuettes, even though the tendency of showing Meter in a *naiskos* is clearly increasingly re-emerging. Her priest in Dionysopolis (see below) was called by the Greek title *hierous* and bore a Greek name, and Meter is increasingly associated with other Greek divinities. Another Hellenising trait can be inferred from the mere circumstance that she is now worshipped in a temple. This is witnessed by a most recent discovery in modern-day Balchik (ancient Dionysopolis), where a temple building (about 8.5 × 11 m) was found in 2007.¹⁸

¹⁸ Excavation reports: Lazarenko *et al.* 2008 and 2009. The construction of the temple is unusual since it had an enormous inner *naiskos* in the *naos* as well as an altar inside. Therefore, it is possible that we should interpret the sanctuary as a courtyard with a *naiskos* and a *portico* (suggestion of S. Bernd-Ersöz, oral communication). However, it seems clear that an actual temple building existed, at least from some point later in time, since it had a roof construction and since it is called a "temple" in a later inscription; hence, it is possible that the construction with an inner *naiskos* placed in a courtyard preceded the actual temple building.

The temple was probably built sometime towards the middle of the 3rd century B.C., and according to inscriptions, it owned land and vineyards, slaves, workshops, and buildings that were rented out. Significantly, the temple's *pronaos* (or *portico*) functioned as a city archive guarding the official decrees and laws issued by the *boulê* and the *dêmos* of the city. In my opinion, this circumstance is related to Meter's old role as a city protector.¹⁹

Furthermore, we find transformations in Meter's Hellenistic iconography, such as two new attributes, namely, the sceptre and the mural crown. However, even though these may be *iconographically* new, it seems that they express a much older role of the goddess, namely, as a goddess of power and as a city protector, respectively.²⁰ From the iconography of the largest cult statue found in the temple from Dionysopolis (fig. 5), it is clear from the position of the arm — bent out and upwards — that Meter once held a sceptre, although it is now missing. A seated lion is visible on the side of the throne, and in fact this animal is represented on virtually all of the votives from the Classical period onwards.²¹ A silver plate (fig. 6) was found in southern Thrace (Aegean Mesambria) in an early Hellenistic sanctuary built up against the city wall — a placement

¹⁹ Cf. Meter's primary sanctuary in Athens, the *bouleuterion*, where she guarded the city's laws, and the *metroon* in Sardis, where public documents were inscribed on the *antae* of her temple (Robertson 1996:274). In Kolophon, Smyrna, and Delos, her temples also functioned as city archives, and in Kalydon, Tamassos, Priene, Amphipolis, and Pergamon, Meter's sanctuaries were also situated near the city wall. In Troy, the *metroon* was situated near the *bouleuterion* and below the fortified *acropolis*, dedicated to Athena (Borgeaud 2004:77).

²⁰ Cf. the sceptre as Zeus' primary attribute together with the eagle. Despite the lack of archaic representations of Meter with a mural crown and sceptre, the assumption that these roles pre-date the iconography is based on the similar semantics of the sceptre (Greek version) and the raptor bird (Phrygian version) and the fact that Meter does not wear a mural crown in Phrygia, even though we know that she was a city protector there. Munn (2005:30–37) likens Meter to the female, fertile supporters of Zeus, such as Gaia, Demeter, and Aphrodite. But, iconographically as well as in terms of roles, Meter was perhaps more the Phrygian equivalent of Greek Zeus himself — a divinity of power and protection, law and order, upholder of oaths, absolute sovereignty, victory, etc. While it is beyond the scope of this article to elaborate on this, I believe it is another important basis for understanding Meter's character both in Phrygia and in Greece and Rome.

²¹ The statue is tentatively dated to the second century A.D. on the museum's homepage, but certain features of its iconography point to an earlier Hellenistic model, especially the low-girt *chiton*. Other finds from the temple can be seen at www.museumbalchik.com.



Figure 5. Hellenistic marble statue of seated Meter from Dionysopolis (height: 86 cm.). Historical Museum, Balchik.



Figure 6. Silver plate portraying Meter in a *naiskos* from Aegean Mesambria (height: 12 cm.). Komotini Museum.

obviously related to Meter's role as a city protector (cf. note 19). In this plate, just as in the more monumental lay-out of the *naiskos* in Dionysopolis, we also see Meter seated in a *naiskos* holding a sceptre.²²

Another new attribute, the mural crown, is seen on several objects from the Hellenistic period, such as coins from Dionysopolis.²³ Meter's role as a city protector is also clear from an official Hellenistic inscription (IScM II, 2) from Tomis, the capital of the Greek Pontic league. The long inscription first describes how a serious threat to Tomis had caused its citizens to escape and had led to the establishment of a city patrol consisting of forty men to guard the city. Having got rid of the threat, the city augmented its yearly sacrifices to Meter Theôn and the Dioskuroi for the salvation of the people, and the *boulê* and the *dêmos* later decided to commemorate these events in the inscription.²⁴ The Dioskuroi were considered mythological founders of Tomis, and obviously — together with Meter — seen as its protectors.

In this connection, it is relevant to mention a Meter statuette from Seuthopolis — a Thracian city founded by the Thracian king, Seuthes III, and capital of the Odrysian kingdom from 320 B.C.²⁵ The rather fragmentary statuette portrays Meter in clothing that differs from the usual *himation* and *chiton*. The torso of the goddess is covered with a foldless garment arranged into six squares divided by shallow grooves.

²² Johnston 1996:112 pointed to the fact that not only horizontal but also vertical lines are (albeit vaguely) visible on Meter's headdress in this 4th-century B.C. silver plate, wherefore it probably represents a mural crown.

²³ See, for example, <http://www.acsearch.info/record.html?id=288025> [last accessed 8 December 2011]. Meter with a mural crown is also found in Athens and Piraeus, e.g., Vermaseren 1982, no. 267, from the end of the fourth century B.C., and elsewhere in the Greek world. In Anatolia, she is depicted with this headdress more frequently than in the Greek mainland. In Rome and in the Roman period in general, the mural crown becomes one of her primary attributes.

²⁴ "... after augmenting the (amount of money) donated for sacrifices by the city, they offer yearly sacrifices to the Mother of the Gods and the Dioskuroi for the salvation (*sotêria*) of the people" (IScM II, 2, ll.36–38, translation in Chiekova 2008:131)

²⁵ Before the Hellenistic period, we have only very few indications that the Thracians had adopted the cult. In contrast, Meter objects from the Hellenistic period and onwards found in the *chora* of the colonies or in inland Thrace show us that the goddess had now been more widely adopted by the local peoples. In the second and third centuries A.D., numerous sources testify that Thracians constituted a substantial part of her worshippers and were even serving as Meter priests.

This has been convincingly argued to represent a city layout (Nankov 2007). Following this interpretation and on the basis of a variety of analogies, Nankov furthermore suggests that Meter holds a key in her hand, portraying her as the keeper and protector of the city gate (Nankov 2007:54). This statuette was probably made locally, since it differs from all other known Meter representations. But it is significant that the Thracians, in transforming the iconography and thus adding their own imprint, still chose to portray the goddess's city protective functions as the main feature of Meter.²⁶

Finally, in addition to the architectural, numismatic, and epigraphic sources that show us Meter's role as a city protector, several Hellenistic statuettes from a number of different West Pontic cities also show us Meter wearing a mural crown, as seen on fig. 7.²⁷ The head of a lion in her lap is still visible in the fragment.

In this period, again, Meter counted members of the upper strata of society among her worshippers. This can be gathered not only from the records that show how wealthy citizens donated rich gifts to the temple in Dionysopolis (Lazarenko *et al.* 2008), but also from the large number of marbles among the votives from various places, in addition to a number of silver plates found in Aegean Mesambria.²⁸ If we compare these with the *number* of votives to other divinities, Meter seems to be the most popular divinity between the fourth and the second centuries B.C. (Oppermann 2004:200; Chiekova 2008:128f). This circumstance naturally indicates that Meter's cult enjoyed a high status in this area. But even though her cult is perhaps the best documented, it does not necessarily mean that she was in fact the most popular goddess. This statement is prompted by an analysis of the material used for the votives. Even though the remains include a number of terracottas of

²⁶ I suggest that the mural crown in fact not only shows Meter as a city protector, but (like Tyche) portrays her as the personified city. This interpretation is valid as well for the Seuthopolis statuette. Cf. also Roller's theory (Roller 2002) about a Thracian goddess with similar functions as Meter, and Borgeaud's theory (mentioned below) that the Mother was easily identified with local mother goddesses.

²⁷ Radulescu *et al.* 1999:59, pl. 4, 3. See also for further examples: Velkov 2005:65, no. 41, fig. 41; Dremisizova *et al.* 1971, no. 93; Ccca VI, no. 424, pl. CII; Bordenache 1960:501, fig. 15.

²⁸ Only a few votives are inscribed (in contrast to the Roman period), so the analysis of the social status of Meter's adherents rests largely on the material of the objects.



Figure 7. Fragmented terracotta from Albesti from the 4th century B.C. showing the torso of a seated Meter with a mural crown and a lion on her lap (height: ca. 12 cm.). Archaeological Museum, Constanta.

Meter, we also find a large number of marbles, especially in the northern half of the area. And marble tends to be preserved much better than the cheaper clay figurines, among other things because marble figures were often reused as building material, but also because terracottas simply break much more easily. Therefore, Meter may not have been the most popular deity on an *overall* basis, but she is the one for which we have the best and most extensive evidence for this period, simply because many of her worshippers, namely the rich ones — the elite — could afford marble votives.²⁹

So despite the changes and new attributes that we do see in the Hellenistic period, we also see a continuance, namely, of Meter as a goddess of power (seen in the sceptre and the lions), a city protector, and an official goddess who continued to enjoy the support of the elite.

Roman Period

Not many votives to Meter have been preserved from the first century of our era. In contrast, we see an enormous growth in the number of statuettes and reliefs of the goddess in the second and third centuries A.D. This is a general condition for other divinities as well, as can be gathered from the numbers in Table 1, which include votives to all deities.³⁰

Table 1 shows that the total number of votives from the first century A.D. amounts to about 26, while the number from the next two centuries is 440.³¹ From Table 2, showing all of the votives in Dobrudja from the Roman period, we see that Meter is, again, by far the best represented among goddesses.

²⁹) Certainly, Meter would have had adherents from all levels of society. What I intend to point out is that (a) Meter retained (or regained) her popularity with the elite in this period, and (b) her worshippers were not primarily social outcasts, but may even have counted more elite members than those of other popular deities. We may compare this with the status of “plebeian” Demeter and “elitist” Meter in later Rome (Roller 1999: 283). Hence, we cannot make a straightforward equation between quantity of remains and level of popularity. Therefore (c) her apparent status as the most popular deity must be evaluated in light of the fact that marbles are better preserved than votives from worshippers from the lowest strata of society.

³⁰) Tables 1 & 2 are based on Covaceff 2002 on the sculptural workshops of Dobrudja from the Roman period. Dobrudja is a region that covers more or less the middle part of the west coast of the Black Sea.

³¹) The Thracian Rider accounts for a good number of these votives, 166 in full.

Table 1: Votive Finds by Period

Period	Votives Found
First Century A.D.	26
Second and Third Centuries A.D.	440

Table 2: Votive Finds in Dobrudja by Goddess

<i>Goddess</i>	Meter	Aphrodite	Hecate	Artemis	Fortuna
<i>Votives Found</i>	36	18	9	7	4

However, since almost all of the Meter objects from the Roman period (also from other places in Thrace outside of Dobrudja) were made of marble, it is likely this can account for at least some of this prominence of Meter in the Roman period.³² Nevertheless, it is obvious that we see an enormous growth in Meter's popularity in the second and third centuries A.D., a situation probably spurred by the influx of Roman settlers in this period, following a concurrent, great interest in and support of her cult among the emperors in Rome.

Also in this period, we see a number of changes which could be called Romanization, since they are seen more or less simultaneously in Rome and elsewhere in the Roman Empire. By now (and only now), Attis can be claimed to be a somewhat regular partner of Meter, simultaneously with his achievement of this status elsewhere.³³ In addition, an *archigallus* (an Imperial contribution to Meter's cult) was now part of the temple organisation in Dionysopolis, and we find our first epigraphic evidence of the new association of the *dendrophori* — the tree-bearers — as well as of another type of association, called a *doumos*, connected in at least one case with mysteries.³⁴

³² Note, for example, that Demeter is missing from the top five of Table 2, which is probably because most of the simpler terracottas dedicated to this goddess have simply not been preserved for us today.

³³ A relief from fourth century A.D. Byzantion portrays a seated Meter with a mural crown and a lion; next to her stands Attis with his legs crossed (Ccca VI, no. 368, pl. XCII). To their right are Hermes and (probably) a seated Demeter.

³⁴ IGBulg IV, 1925b; IG Bulg I, 22 (2); IGBulg IV, 1925b; IScM II 83; CIL III.763; IScM V 160. The associations of the *dendrophori* are only found in the Imperial

But beyond these transformations, we also find a strong strand of continuities; her name is still mainly Meter *Theôn* (*Mater Deorum* or *Mater Deum* in Latin), and we still see her portrayed with lions, a mural crown, and a sceptre (fig. 8).

On a series of pseudo-autonomous coins from Callatis from the second and third centuries A.D. (e.g., <http://www.acsearch.info/record.html?id=158914> [last accessed 8 December 2011]), Meter is portrayed on the reverse of the coins with a mural crown, while Heracles — the mythological founder of Callatis — is shown on the obverse. This is a situation comparable to Meter's companionship with the Dioskuroi in Tomis in the Hellenistic age and is similarly related to her old role as a city protector.

As for the status of her followers in this period, almost all of the preserved votives from the Roman period are made of marble, and we find among her adherents the *dux* (governor) of the province of Scythia, a member of the *boulê* from Nicopolis ad Istrum, as well as the first *archon* of the city of Dionysopolis.³⁵ In our region, as well as in Rome, we see the cult of Meter intimately connected with the emperors. We find a large number of inscriptions dedicated to Meter which begin or end with the wish for the *salus* of the emperor or his family. This was a normal procedure in associations from this period (although in fact more frequently documented for Meter's cult than for others in Thrace), but it is important to note that the interest went the other way as well: in one inscription (IScM II 83), a group of *dendrophori* thanks the emperors for the gift that they had bestowed on the group, and one of the inscriptions from Dionysopolis records how the emperor Licinius had financed the restoration of a silver statue in Meter's temple (Lazarenko *et al.* 2008).

But we also have inscriptions that establish a continued connection between Meter's cult and the democratic institutions, as seen for example in two decrees commissioned by the *boulê* and the *dêmos* in honor of two priestesses of Meter *Theôn*. The first one (IScM II, 72 from

period and are particularly well known from Rome. The Meter *doumoi* are primarily attested in Anatolia and Thrace.

³⁵ IGBulg II, 678; IScM II 144: "Aurelius Firmianus, *dux* of the province of Scythia, dedicated this to Mater Deum Magnae for the health and safety of our lords, the Caesars." The first *archon* of Dionysopolis was a priest of Meter, as is attested in a not yet published inscription. The inscriptions are currently being treated by N. Sharankov in Sofia, and I am very grateful to him for letting me see the epigraphic material.



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Figure 8. Materials from Thrace portraying with Meter with mural crown and sceptre from the 2nd–3rd centuries A.D.: a marble relief from Shoumen (Sofia Archaeological Museum, height: 23 cm.), an oval finger ring from Aegean Thrace (Éphorie des Antiquités of the Rhodopi District), and a coin from Histria with Meter on the reverse and Roman emperor Elagabalus on the obverse.

Tomis) reads: “The *boulê* and the *dêmos* of Tomis honour Sossia Africana, . . . priestess of Meter Theôn, because she exceeded her predecessors and completed the ornaments of the goddess with offerings of gold.” The second example (Ccca VI, no. 458), a 52-line long inscription from Histria, is an appraisal of another Meter priestess, Aba. Meter is portrayed in the pediment, and the inscription honours Aba for her outstanding benevolence and largesse towards a number of civic institutions (of which the *boulê* is mentioned first), professional and private associations, as well as the citizens of the *polis* during her priesthood.

So, despite the obvious transformations that took place in the course of these thousand years in the western Black Sea area, Meter’s old Phrygian role as a city protector, a goddess of power, her associations with the rulers (aristocratic or democratic), and the elite support of her cult is as clear as ever in the Roman material.

Conclusion and Perspectives

Above, I have presented a small section of Black Sea materials, admittedly leaving out a number of discussions that could also have been interesting. However, my purpose was primarily to show that the Phrygian characteristics of Meter, as they have been illuminated by recent scholars, are not only visible, but also — despite other transformations and alterations — continued to be important as her cult travelled outside her homeland. In my opinion, this conclusion is relevant for our general understanding of Meter, but it also serves to illuminate (at least partly) why her cult initially became so widespread in the Greek world. In short, I suggest that her cult was introduced in new areas because Meter’s primary role as a goddess of power and a city protector, and her role as a supporter of the rulers — kings, aristocrats, or democrats alike — made her cult attractive to official authorities outside her homeland as well. Hence, they can explain why the cult spread from Phrygia to the Greek world as early as the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., and later to Rome. But is it reasonable to claim that my interpretations of the Black Sea materials are not only locally but also globally valid?

There can be little doubt that Meter’s cult developed differently in different areas — in the Greek mainland, in western Asia Minor, and in

Rome. This is clear from Roller (1999), who has undertaken a study of the cult in these three regions. One of the reasons for this is probably that her anonymous name — Mother — facilitated a large degree of syncretism with local goddesses (Borgeaud 2004:8–25) and caused local differences in her cult. This indeed seems likely and makes regional studies of Meter all the more interesting. Nevertheless, it is also valid for other divinities, albeit perhaps in a lesser degree, that their cults were not identical from one place to another. Just as this circumstance does not discourage us from discussing, e.g., Demeter or Zeus on a more general basis (despite local variations), this is also possible for the study and discussion of Meter. Therefore, the regional study of the cult of Meter in the Black Sea area can, in my opinion, also contribute to our more general knowledge of Meter's cult, even though there are local Black Sea characteristics as well.³⁶

This claim is supported by an overall survey of the Mediterranean archaeological sources, which do not differ substantially from one place to another; on the contrary, there is a surprising similarity across time and space.³⁷ Hence, it seems appropriate to consider the relevance of my conclusions from the Black Sea materials in a wider Mediterranean context. More specifically, I will relate my interpretations to the discussion of how and why Meter's cult was introduced into Athens and Rome. There seems to be a widespread tendency (even in the most recent literature) to view the establishment of Meter's cult in Athens in

³⁶ First, it is clear that the cult enjoyed a higher status in Thrace than in mainland Greece, as it also did in Asia Minor. Second, we see Meter connected with Heracles and the Thracian Rider in our regions, which is (obviously for the latter constellation) not the case in other areas. Third, the number of representations of Meter wearing a mural crown is higher in our area than in mainland Greece but on a par with the Anatolian and Roman materials. In the Roman period, which also portrays the greatest number of Thracian adherents, we also find a Meter festival with unusual features in Dionysopolis. Following the general theory of Borgeaud 2004, we may suggest that this development is due to influence from Meter's identification with a Thracian goddess.

³⁷ The iconography is quite similar (seated on a throne), the attributes are the same (not only the lions, the phiale, and the tympanon, but also the mural crown and the sceptre), and the *Metroia* (the Meter festival mentioned by Strabo [10.3.18] at the end of the first century B.C. in connection with a fourth-century B.C. parade in Athens) is also testified in a third-century B.C. unpublished inscription from Dionysopolis in Thrace.

the optics of official opposition and resistance. Similarly, the ancient sources relating how Meter was actively sought out and brought to Rome by official and aristocratic authorities have been viewed with suspicion.

Let us start with Rome, where the cult was established c. 204 B.C. Although this is chronologically later than the Athenian case, I will mention it first since it seems to be much less complicated than that of Athens.³⁸ Numerous archaeological and literary sources from Rome confirm that the cult of Meter was actively sought out by the Roman authorities (i.e., welcomed on a voluntary basis) in order to save the *Urbs* from Hannibal, and that she continued to be one of the most important city protectors there. This fact has not often been reflected, however, even in recent scholarship. Thus, Starke (2006:86) states that “even though the Senate attempted to isolate Cybele and prevent Romans from taking up this faith, her followers proliferated until she had more temples in the city than did any traditional god.” He explains the evidence from the literary sources with the much older scholarly theory that the authorities did not know what they got (“the Romans were shocked,” Starke 2006:92). Alvar (2008:244) instead argues that the Roman aristocratic authorities were under pressure from the populace to accept the goddess and, having failed to resist the establishment of her cult, only later masked this fact by inventing the literary traditions that made the dominant class responsible for the introduction. In the light of the analyses above, I do not agree with these interpretations. Following the conclusions from the Black Sea materials, I simply suggest that we trust the testimonies of the Latin sources.

The Athenian case is more complicated. It is a well-known fact that Meter’s Athenian sanctuary was situated in the political heart of Athens — in the *bouleuterion* (the seat of the *boulê*) in the *agora*. This has caused confusion and debate in earlier as well as recent research literature. Parker (1996:118) uses the word “puzzle” to describe the Athenian Meter sanctuary. Similarly, Roller (1999:162f) states that “while the importance of the Athenian Metroon is clear, it is much less

³⁸) L. Roller is one of few scholars who have stressed the positive value of Meter’s cult for the Roman state (1999:263–287). P. Borgeaud is also more appreciative of the credibility of the sources than previous scholars, although he has focused mainly on the diplomatic reasons for the Roman adoption of her cult (2004:71–89).

clear why the cult of Meter should have occupied such a conspicuous place in Athenian civic life.” Parker (2007:407) states that the “wild goddess from the Phrygian mountains” in the role of a guardian of the official documents in Athens “is a surprising choice,” but that this can be explained through her anonymous name Mother, which allowed her also to be conceived of as an ancestral goddess. In this he follows the theory investigated in most detail by Borgeaud (2004:20–23), and this is also an explanation found in Lancellotti (2002:62, 74f).³⁹ According to this widely accepted view, Meter’s syncretism with the better known (and accepted) Greek goddesses thus facilitated Meter’s official acceptance in Athens.

But despite allowing for assimilations between Meter and ancestral Greek goddesses, this circumstance hardly seems to suffice as an explanation of Meter’s central presence in the *bouleuterion*. If the political goddess in the *bouleuterion* was basically conceived of as a Greek goddess, why was she consistently shown in the iconography of the Phrygian Mother (cf. the famous statue of Agorakritos) and called the Phrygian goddess? And why did the Athenians adopt the Phrygian goddess at all if they had to syncretise her with their own goddesses in order to accept her? While there can be little doubt that Meter was at some point assimilated or regarded as similar to a variety of Greek goddesses, this — in my opinion — was only gradually taking place and was not the reason why she was welcomed in the first place. In other words, “syncretism” was a long-term *result*, not a *cause* of her presence in Athens as elsewhere.

The existence of the Athenian Metroon was the puzzle that Munn set out to solve, arguing that previous scholars had provided no good explanations of Meter’s acceptance as an official Athenian goddess (Munn 2005:6f). As this scholar pointed out, there is no need to imagine that the officials were forced to accept her due to private pressure, as was often claimed by earlier scholars. Munn instead argues that just before the Persian wars, the Persian King Darius sent a *gallos* on an official

³⁹ Chiekova 2008 offers the same explanation for Meter’s popularity in the Thracian area (without discussing her roles) — namely that this was due to influence from a Thracian Great Goddess. A much simpler explanation (in regards to all areas) seems to be that Meter in her own capacity possessed attractive powers that made her popular and welcome.

mission to Athens asking the Athenians to recognise Persian supremacy in the name of the goddess. The Athenians rejected the claim, killed Meter's *gallos*, and the Persian wars broke out (Munn 2005:5). In 408 B.C., just as the Athenians were about to lose the war with Sparta, they repented, and Meter's cult was established by the Athenians (being representative of an empire) in the *bouleuterion* as an act of atonement and a token of submission towards the Persian monarchy (Munn 2005:329).

While I do not follow Munn in his stress on the erotic and sexual traits of Meter, I certainly agree with other of his descriptions of the goddess, most importantly his primary argument that the goddess was a protector of sovereignty. However, in regard to the question of the cult's reception and spread, Munn's suggestion basically follows in the footsteps of earlier scholars in the underlying assumption that the cult of Meter was not simply welcomed by the Greek authorities but installed as a result of pressure. Furthermore, Munn's solution not only presumes that the Athenian case was exceptional, but also that she was not already worshipped there before this period. But Athens was definitely not the only place where Meter guarded the city's laws, and there are no compelling arguments for his assertion that the Metroon in the *bouleuterion* was only first established in 408 B.C., when it is much more likely to have existed there at least since the beginning of the fifth century B.C. (Wycheley & Thompson 1972:30, 35; Roller 1999:162f), and perhaps already earlier.

In my opinion, a very simple solution seems to lie at hand when we interpret Meter's guardianship of Athens's laws as another expression, or variant, of her city-protecting function. The *bouleuterion*-Metroon and the fact that a series of statuettes from the sixth century B.C. was found on the Athenian *acropolis* (Roller 1999:133) may support the proposal that Meter was welcomed in Athens as a city protector already in the sixth century B.C., i.e., simultaneously as she was found in a large number of the Greek colonies.⁴⁰ Furthermore, an early literary source

⁴⁰ Of course, Athena, whose main sanctuary was on the *acropolis*, was and remained the primary city protector in Athens, but we should not imagine that this prevented the Athenians from embracing other such divine protectors and benefactors. Meter's status was certainly lower in democratic Athens than in Phrygia or Rome, but it is only natural that a basically elite-oriented cult would blossom especially in aristocratic milieus. In addition, much of our knowledge of the status of Meter's cult in the earliest

significantly (although mockingly) assigns to Meter the role of a city protector of the new bird city (Arist. *Birds*, 875–81, cf. Roller 1996:310). Meter may not have been a generally important official deity in Athens, and certainly her character was gradually influenced by indigenous Greek goddesses, but she was accepted as an official goddess in Athens for a reason — and, as far as I see it, this was not pressure from the private masses, syncretism with Greek divinities, an official mistake, or because of Athenian submission to Persia, and I doubt that the initial establishment was followed by official opposition and conflict.⁴¹ Meter was, in my opinion, embraced and welcomed by authorities — first by the eastern Greeks, who also brought her along to the colonies, and the Athenians, and later by the Romans in 204 B.C. They did so because she was a goddess who sustained the leaders with her power and offered protection and welfare for their cities.

Figures⁴²

Fig. 1: Vermaseren 1987, no. 38, pl. VI. © Brill.

Fig. 2a: Roller 1999, 87, fig. 19. © University of California Press.

Fig. 2b: Berndt-Ersöz 2006, 398, fig. 122. © Brill.

Fig. 3a: Apollonia: Oppermann 2004, figs 7,1; 7,2. © Beier-Beran Verlag. Olbia: Rusjaeva 2003, 100, fig. 4, 102. © Anna Rusjaeva.

Fig. 3b: Roller 1999, 90, fig. 23, and 97, fig. 30. © University of California Press, and Berndt-Ersöz 2006, 407, fig. 134 © Brill.

Fig. 4: Ccca VI, no. 319 © Brill.

period and its — probably unproblematic — place in Athenian public life is blurred by the negative picture that later intellectuals painted of Meter after the Persian wars.

⁴¹ Although there is little doubt that Meter's cult later encountered a certain intellectual resistance — this is what is reflected in the literary sources — that should not be assumed to reflect the general atmosphere or actual cult practice. Numerous sources testify that the Athenian politicians in fact took an active (albeit low-scale) part in the Meter cult: Dem. *Prooem.* 54; Theophr. *Char.* 21.11; IG II² nos. 1006 (23, 79), 1009 (7, 37), 1011 (13), 1028 (40), 1030 (35), 1817, 3580 (9–13); Agora I 286 (27, 28). Cf. Ps. Plut. *Vit X Orat.* 842 on Lycourgos (fourth century B.C.): “When about to die, he gave orders that he should be carried into the *metron* and the *bouleuterion*; he wishes to give an account of his political actions.”

⁴² I am grateful to the copyright holders, the authors, J.M. Højte, the Museum of Balchik, and the Archaeological Museum of Constanta for kindly allowing me to reproduce the pictures and images.

Fig. 5: Photograph by author by the kind permission of Balchik Museum, Bulgaria.

Fig. 6: Ccca VI, no. 335 © Brill.

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Fig. 8a: Tacheva-Hittova 1983, no. 9, pl. XXI. © Brill.

Fig. 8b: Ccca VI, no. 339, pl. LXXXVI. © Brill.

Fig. 8c: Pick 1898, no. 512, pl. XVIII, 14. Berlin: Kgl. Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Abbreviations

- CIL III *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum. Inscriptiones Asiae, provinciarum Europae graecarum, Illyrici latinae.* Theodor Mommsen (ed.), 1873 (impr. iter. 1958).
- IG Bulg I *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae, Vol. 1: Inscriptiones orae ponti Euxini.* Georgi Mihailov (ed.), 2nd ed., 1970.
- IGBulg II *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae, Vol. 2: Inscriptiones inter Danubium et Haemum repertae.* Georgi Mihailov (ed.), 1958.
- IGBulg IV *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae, Vol. 4: Inscriptiones in territorio Serdicensi et in Vallibus Strymonis nestique repertae.* Georgi Mihailov (ed.), 1966.
- IScM II *Inscriptiones Daciae et Scythiae Minoris antiquae. Series altera: Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris graecae et latinae. Vol. 2: Tomis et territorium.* Iorgu Stoian (ed.), 1987.
- IScM V *Inscriptiones Daciae et Scythiae Minoris antiquae. Series altera: Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris Graecae et Latinae. Vol. 5: Capidava, Troesmis, Noviodunum, Bucharest.* Doruțiu-Boila. Emilia 1980.

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