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Roma Dönemi Phrygia'sında Meter ve Agdistis: Epigrafik Veriler Işığında Teolojik Özdeşleşme ve Ayrışma

Deniz SEVİNDİK ERTEN*

Abstract: This article examines the cult of Agdistis in Roman-Period Phrygia, a deity of particular significance for the history of religions. The extant inscriptions are first evaluated, after which the goddess's importance for the inhabitants of ancient Phrygia, her place in social life, and the character and geographical distribution of her cult are analysed. The central question, pursued through selected examples, is whether Agdistis in Phrygia (whether named alongside Meter or not) in fact represents Meter, that is, whether a direct syncretic relationship obtained between them, or whether she should rather be understood as the local mountain goddess known from early mythological traditions as a hermaphroditic being who was later castrated and thereby became female. According to the epigraphic evidence currently available, most dedications derive from Midas City/Yazılıkaya, site of the sanctuary of Agdistis. Some appear to have been offered for the protection of family members, though in most cases the reason is not stated. A statuette from the site has been interpreted as either Agdistis or Kybele, while an object now in Madrid, possibly of the same provenance, depicts Kybele enthroned between two lions with an inscribed dedication to Meter-Agdistis. The material falls into four groups. In the first, Meter and Agdistis appear together without the conjunction *kai*, a formulation that points to syncretism. In the second, Agdistis is attested independently, under her own name. The third comprises inscriptions in which the two are linked by *kai*, together with objects on which they are rendered as separate divine figures. The fourth consists of dedications to Meter alone.

Keywords: Phrygia, Religion, Goddess, Cult, Agdistis, Meter

Öz: Bu makale, dinler tarihi açısından özel bir öneme sahip olan Agdistis'in Roma Dönemi Phrygia'sındaki kültünü incelemektedir. Öncelikle mevcut yazıtlar değerlendirilmekte, ardından tanrıçanın antikçağ Phrygia'sının sakinleri için taşıdığı önem, toplumsal yaşamdaki yeri ve kültünün niteliği ile coğrafi dağılımı analiz edilmektedir. Seçilmiş örnekler üzerinden ele alınan temel soru, Phrygia'daki Agdistis'in (Meter ile birlikte anılsın ya da anılmasın) gerçekte Meter'i temsil edip etmediği, yani ikisi arasında doğrudan bir senkretik ilişkinin bulunup bulunmadığı; yoksa onun daha ziyade erken mitolojik geleneklerden hermafrodit bir varlık olarak bilinen, sonradan hadım edilerek dişil hâle gelen yerel dağ tanrıçası olarak mı anlaşılması gerektiğidir. Hâlihazırda mevcut olan epigrafik verilere göre adakların çoğu, Agdistis kutsal alanının bulunduğu Midas Kenti/Yazılıkaya'dan gelmektedir. Bunların bir kısmı aile bireylerinin korunması amacıyla sunulmuş görünmekte, ancak çoğu örnekte adağın nedeni belirtilmemektedir. Aynı yerden ele geçen bir heykelcik ya Agdistis ya da Kybele olarak yorumlanmış; hâlihazırda Madrid'de bulunan ve muhtemelen aynı yerden gelmiş olan bir eserde ise Kybele iki aslan arasında tahtında otururken tasvir edilmiş olup, üzerindeki yazıtta Meter-Agdistis'e sunulan bir adak kayıtlıdır. Ele alınan malzeme dört öbekte toplanır. İlkinde Meter ile Agdistis, aralarında *kai* bağlacı bulunmaksızın birlikte anılır ve bu kullanım senkretizme işaret eder. İkincisinde Agdistis kendi adıyla, bağımsız biçimde karşımıza çıkar. Üçüncüsünü, iki tanrıçanın *kai* bağlacıyla birbirine bağlandığı yazıtlar ile aynı eser üzerinde ayrı birer tanrısal figür olarak tasvir edildikleri örnekler oluşturur. Dördüncüsü ise yalnızca Meter'e sunulan adakları kapsar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Phrygia, Din, Tanrıça, Kült, Agdistis, Meter

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The principal sources that provide information on the myths of Kybele, Agdistis, and Attis (among the best-known mythological traditions associated with Phrygia) are Greek and Latin authors. Among these, the accounts attributed to Timotheos are of particular importance. Burkert describes this narrative as the “hieros logos” of Pessinus, that is, its “sacred narrative”. Our main source for Timotheos, however, is Arnobius. Arnobius, who lived in the late third century CE, devotes an extensive section to the story of the Mother Goddess and Attis. According to Bremmer, Timotheos had rendered Serapis acceptable to the Greeks of Alexandria. It may therefore be assumed that his aim was similarly to make Kybele and her cult acceptable to them. Arnobius consulted not only Timotheos but also “*alios aequae doctos*”, that is, “other persons equally learned”. With regard to the narratives of Attis, Kybele, and Agdistis, the most prominent figures include Timotheos, Hermesianaks, Dionysios Skytobrachion (?), Diodoros Sikelos, the Anonymus Ovidianus, Ovidius, Pausanias, Theokritos, Seneca, and Lucian. Whereas Arnobius, who transmits Timotheos’ account, mentions both Agdistis and the Mother of the Gods, Pausanias refers only to Agdistis. By contrast, Hermesianaks, Dionysios Skytobrachion, and the Anonymus Ovidianus make no mention of Agdistis, speaking only of Kybele. Pausanias’ account is therefore regarded as an exceptionally valuable testimony to the tradition current at Pessinus toward the end of the second century CE. As can be seen, the authors who transmit these myths belong to a broad chronological range, and their testimonies are relatively late in date¹. As is well known, in mythological narratives Agdistis is a hermaphroditic² being closely associated with the Phrygian myth of Attis³ and with the cult of Kybele; the name itself derives from Mount Agdos near Pessinus⁴. According to the famous historian and traveller Pausanias, the mountain was called Agdistis, and Attis’ tomb was said to be located there⁵. Pausanias relates that Agdistis, a wild being possessing both male and female sexual organs, was born from a rock fertilized by the seed emitted by Zeus during his sleep, and that the gods were afraid of this being⁶. Timotheos, as transmitted by Arnobius, describes the formation of Agdistis as follows:

Within the boundaries of Phrygia, there is a rock of unparalleled wildness in every respect; its name is Agdos, a name given to it by the natives of the region. In accordance with the oracle of Themis, Deukalion and Pyrrha cast stones taken from this rock upon the earth, which had been emptied of humankind. Along with the others, the goddess called the “Great Mother” was also fashioned from these stones and animated by divine power. While the Mother Goddess lay resting and asleep on the very summit of the rock, Zeus assailed her with the most lustful desires. Yet, after a prolonged struggle, when he was unable to accomplish what he had intended, he was overcome and ejaculated his seed upon the stone. The rock received it, and, with many groans, Agdistis was born in the tenth month, taking his name from the mother-rock. Agdistis possessed an irresistible force, an uncontrollable savagery, and an excessive lust derived from both sexes. He violently plundered and laid waste to everything; wherever the ferocity of his disposition led him, he spread destruction. He paid regard neither to gods nor to humans, believed that nothing was more powerful than himself, and held the earth, heaven, and the stars

¹ For detailed information, see Roller 2004, 232 f., 236 ff.; Bremmer 2004, 534-573.

² Röhr 2009, 200; Chiai 2020, 237 fn. 742.

³ Gasparro 1985.

⁴ Knaack 1894, 767, 14-15; Bean 1954, 500 ff.; Baydur 1994, 97 fn. 3.

⁵ Paus. I. 4. 5; see also, Bádenas – Bádenas et al. 1987, 14.

⁶ Paus. VII. 17. 10-12.

in contempt⁷. After being made drunk by Dionysos, Agdistis, whose foot had been bound to his genitals with a strong cord, awoke and unwittingly castrated himself. The blood that flowed from the severed organs fertilized the earth, from which a pomegranate tree sprang up. Nana, the daughter of the river-god Sangarios, took the fruit of this tree, placed it in her bosom, and became pregnant. Thus a male child named Attis was born. Sangarios, believing that his daughter had been seduced, confined Nana and sought to have her starved to death. The Mother of the Gods, however, kept her alive with apples and other foods. Sangarios then ordered the child to be exposed. A man named Phorbas found him and raised him on goat's milk. Because of his extraordinary beauty, the Mother of the Gods fell in love with him. Agdistis, too, was his companion; as Attis grew up, Agdistis caressed and loved him, being bound to him by a shameful submission to desire in the only way now possible. He led him through wooded places and presented him with the spoils of many wild animals. At first, the boy Attis boasted that these spoils had been won through his own labour and effort. Later, however, under the influence of wine, he admitted both that Agdistis loved him and that he had been honoured by him with gifts brought from the forest. For this reason, entry into his sanctuary was forbidden to those defiled by drinking wine, for it was wine that had disclosed his secret⁸. Thereupon Midas, king of Pessinus, wishing to remove the youth from so disgraceful an intimacy, decided to give him his own daughter in marriage. He also ordered the gates of the city to be closed, so that no person of ill omen might disturb the joys of the wedding. The Mother of the Gods, however, knew the youth's fate: Attis could live safely among men only so long as he remained free from the bonds of marriage. Therefore, in order that no disaster might occur, she entered the closed city, raising its walls with her head; for this reason, her head thereafter came to be crowned with towers. Agdistis, burning with rage because the youth had been torn away from him and led to seek a wife, filled all the guests with frenzied madness. The Phrygians, terrified by the appearance of the gods, cried out loudly. The daughter of the adulterous Gallus cut off her breasts. Attis, in a state of frantic ecstasy and violent agitation, finally threw himself to the ground and castrated himself beneath a pine tree, saying: "Take these, Agdistis, for it is on account of these that you have stirred up such great and terribly dangerous commotions". With the flowing blood, his life departed from his body. The Great Mother of the Gods, however, gathered the severed parts, first covered them, wrapped them in the garment of the dead, and cast earth upon them. The maiden bride, whose name was Ia, covered the breast of the lifeless youth with soft wool, shed tears together with Agdistis, and killed herself. After her death, her blood was transformed into purple violets. The Mother of the Gods also shed tears, and from these tears there sprang an almond tree, symbolizing the bitterness of death. Then the Mother of the Gods carried away to her cave the pine tree beneath which Attis had deprived himself of his manhood. Agdistis, too, joined in her lamentations, beating and wounding his breast. Agdistis begged Zeus to restore Attis to life, but Zeus did not allow it. Nevertheless, he willingly granted what fate permitted: that Attis' body should not decay, that his hair should always grow, and that the smallest of his fingers should remain alive and be kept perpetually in motion. Content with these favours, Agdistis is said to have consecrated the body of Attis at Pessinus and to have honoured it with annual rites and priestly services"⁹.

In these narratives, the Mother Goddess and Agdistis clearly appear as two distinct divine

⁷ Arnob. *adv. nat.* V. 5.

⁸ Arnob. *adv. nat.* V. 6.

⁹ Arnob. *adv. nat.* V. 7.

beings¹⁰. According to J. N. Bremmer, Timotheos included both the Mother of the Gods and Agdistis in his narrative; yet, when compared with the other versions, this creates a surplus of one goddess. The other accounts employ either Kybele or Agdistis, but none of them presents the two together. Most probably, Timotheos considered Agdistis to be a figure insufficiently familiar to his intended audience and therefore introduced the Mother of the Gods in order to represent the ecstatic dimension of the goddess (excitement, rapture, trance, loss of self-control, loud music, dancing, drums and tambourines, shouting, ritual excess, and frenzy). At the same time, however, he seems to have felt unable to remove the hermaphroditic Agdistis from the narrative; for this reason, he incorporated both figures into his account. According to J. N. Bremmer, Agdistis was a local variant of the mountain-goddess type that also gave rise to Kybele¹¹. In versions of this narrative that contain certain minor variations, a pomegranate tree is mentioned instead of an almond tree; the king is named Midas; and the bride commits suicide¹². Moreover, Kybele and Agdistis are understood either to have competed with one another for the possession of Attis or to have driven him jointly into madness¹³. When the principal elements of the myth are considered, Agdistis does indeed appear as an autonomous being without any direct connection to Kybele, namely as a Phrygian mountain goddess. Agdistis is born either from Mount Agdos or from Gaia as a result of the seed emitted by Zeus; the figure is called Agdistis, and is not referred to as Kybele or Meter. A number of scholars, with whom we agree, have argued that these myths present Agdistis quite clearly as a divine being distinct from Kybele, and that this situation must reflect an early stage of the legend. In our view, this is entirely natural, since the essential characteristic of Agdistis is that of a wild and hermaphroditic being who is subsequently transformed into a female through castration. The Mother Goddess, by contrast, never possesses such characteristics: she is always the Mother, fertile, nourishing, and life-giving. Indeed, in a recent detailed study on the cults of Pamphylia, Kybele or Magna Mater and Agdistis are also treated as distinct goddesses, with Agdistis emerging as an independent Phrygian mountain goddess: “Kybele or Magna Mater was worshipped as a black stone that fell from the sky; the stone was preserved in Pessinous and later transferred to Rome in 204 BCE. The name of another Phrygian goddess, Agdistis, refers to ‘she, lady of the rocks’, revealing her connection with mountains and rocks”¹⁴.

Scholars have suggested, however, that the shared elements in the castration motifs of Attis and Agdistis, together with the idea of the mountain (the refuge of Kybele) being fertilized by Zeus, may have facilitated the subsequent “syncretism” of Kybele and Agdistis. At the same time, they consider it likely that the “distinction” preserved in the myths survived in a more pronounced form only at Pessinus, and they note that the accounts transmitted by Pausanias and Arnobius reflect this situation. They further argue that the rapid dissemination of the cult in the early period may have facilitated the formal identification of Kybele and Agdistis in relation to Attis, since the two divine figures became closely associated and intertwined in their shared response to Attis’ death¹⁵. They further contend that the “syncretism” between Kybele and Agdistis should not be dated as late as Gusmani suggested. While Gusmani grounded his

¹⁰ Bádenas et al. 1987, 14. For comments on Timotheos’ account, see Turcan 1996, 31-35; Röhr 2009, 199.

¹¹ Bremmer 2004, 534-573.

¹² Knaack 1894, 767, 35 ff.; Baudy 1996, 244.

¹³ Knaack 1894, 767, 48-50; Roller 2004, 233, 239.

¹⁴ Dağlı Dinçer 2020, see especially 125-126 fn. 132-133, 413 780-781.

¹⁵ Röhr 2009, 201.

interpretation in the chronology of the altars from Yazılıkaya (Midas City), dated to the second and third centuries CE, and in the testimonies of Pausanias and Arnobius, they argue that the phenomenon must have originated considerably earlier¹⁶. In the present study, however, an attempt will be made to offer a new perspective on the views concerning this “syncretism” on the basis of the epigraphic evidence from Phrygia.

Agdistis was indeed “closely connected” with the Mother Goddess, who had been held in great veneration in Anatolia since the Neolithic Age. The cult of the Mother Goddess came to prominence in Phrygia from the beginning of the first millennium BCE. By the sixth century BCE it was practised in the Greek world, and by the end of the third century BCE it had reached Rome¹⁷. This goddess was worshipped among the Hittites as Kubaba¹⁸, among the Phrygians as Matar or Matar Kubileya¹⁹, and among the Lydians as Kybebe; among the Greeks, she was known as Kybele, Meter, Meter Megale, and Meter Theon. The name Kybele, however, was not originally the Phrygian name of the Mother Goddess, but an epithet commonly explained as deriving from a Phrygian word associated with “mountain”²⁰. Among the Romans, this cult was continued under the name Magna Mater²¹. In antiquity, the sacred places of the Great Mother Goddess were commonly situated near springs, in wooded areas, in secluded mountain regions, and in caves. Accordingly, in many regions she was venerated as a mountain goddess under the name Meter Oreia²². In epigraphic evidence, the name Agdistis is attested in several variant forms, including Αγγδιστις, Ανγδιστις, Αγδιστις, Αγγιστις, Ανγιστις, Ανγδισση, Ανγδισσις, Αγδισσις, Αγγισσις, Ανδισσις, Ανγδισις, Ανδισις, Ανδξις, and Ανδιξις²³.

According to the generally accepted view in the scholarship, these two goddesses are identical²⁴. Indeed, the name Agdistis is regarded as a local epithet of Kybele, and this goddess is most often designated not as Kybele, but as “Mother” (Meter) or “Mother of the Gods” (Meter Theon)²⁵. Roller likewise regards Agdistis as a specifically Anatolian name for the Mother Goddess²⁶. Röhr argues that Agdistis was probably incorporated at a later stage into the great Anatolian cult of the Mother Goddess Kybele²⁷. This situation is also supported by the information transmitted by Strabo: “The Phrygians in general and the Trojans living around Mount Ida worship Rhea and honour her by offering sacrifices, calling her the Mother of the Gods, Agdistis, or the Great Phrygian Goddess. In the places where this goddess was worshipped,

¹⁶ Bádenas et al. 1987, 14-15 fn 18.

¹⁷ Roller 2004, 237.

¹⁸ For a different view on Kubaba and Phrygian Kybele, see also, Chiai 2020, 219 fn. 663.

¹⁹ For the place and significance of Matar in Phrygian political life, see also, Işık 2008, 44 ff.; Altın 2023, 73-100.

²⁰ Roller 2004, 238 fn. 21.

²¹ For detailed information on the cult of Kybele, see Schwenn 1922, 2250-2298; James 1959, 179, 251; Vermaseren 1977, 21-24; Simon 1997, 744 ff.; Rehrenböck 2004, 443; Roller 2004, 28-127; Karayaka 2007, 20-21 fn. 175 and 189; see especially Işık 2008, 33-68; Röhr 2009, 218-219.

²² Schwenn 1922, 2258 ff.; Baydur 1994, 1 fn. 2; Röhr 2009, 220.

²³ Haspels 1971, 200; Bádenas et al. 1987, 15-16; SEG 37 no. 1168.

²⁴ Karayaka 2007, 21 fn. 189-193; Röhr 2009, 201 fn. 661; Erten 2025, 153 fn. 18. Nevertheless, according to some scholars, Agdistis became an independent divine power at a later period, see also, Knaack 1894, 767-768 cf. Baudy 1996, 244.

²⁵ Bádenas et al. 1987, 14 fn. 15.

²⁶ Roller 2004, 365 fn. 149.

²⁷ Röhr 2009, 201.

she also bore such names as Idaia, Dindymene, Pessinuntis, Kybele, or Kybebe”²⁸. Strabo also states elsewhere: “Pessinus is the greatest of the emporia in that part of the world and contains a temple of the Mother of the Gods, which is an object of great veneration. They call her Agdistis”²⁹. In addition to the statements of this important ancient author, some inscriptions also mention Meter and Agdistis together. The absence of the conjunction “kai” between their names suggests that they were identified with one another in a syncretic sense. As will be noted below, such examples are known from Phrygia. Parker, however, draws attention to the view that Mother Kybele is one figure, whereas the local Mothers (whether identified by a toponymic adjective or by a “ktistonym”) constitute another category. Since both Kybele and various local Mothers may occur within the same region, they have been regarded as distinct; indeed, according to this view, not only should Kybele be distinguished from the local Mothers, but the local Mothers themselves should probably also be differentiated from one another. Parker, however, argues against this view by emphasizing that there was only one “Mother of the Gods”. Although dedications to local Mothers do not usually depict this goddess, the different forms of naming tend to flow into one another, to such an extent that even Agdistis could be characterized as the “Mother Goddess” or the “Mother of the Gods”. It is clear here that Parker, too, in fact regards Agdistis as a local “goddess” distinct from the Mother Goddess³⁰.

Parker further notes that a dedication to Tetraprosopos, “the four-faced” from the Upper Tembris valley depicts four female figures standing side by side; that two other dedications from the region of Dorylaion designate her respectively as “the goddess Tetraprosopos” and “Mother Tetraprosopos”; and that several other examples from the region show four figures without naming the divine recipient of the dedication. In his view, these examples reveal the emergence of a different conception of the “Mother”. A similar row of four female figures is also attested approximately thirty kilometres to the southwest, in the territory of Akmoneia, on a dedication to Meter Theon Kasmine. According to Parker, the epithet “Four-faced” is unique among the epithets of the Mother in that it bears a clear Greek meaning, and for this reason it may be regarded as a special case. Meter Theon Kasmine, however, appears in other respects to be a perfectly standard local Mother; indeed, in another dedication she appears in the normal manner as a single standing figure between lions. For Parker, the emergence of this “Mother multiplied by four” sometimes marked as exceptional by an unusual name, yet at least once concealed under a familiar guise, is striking. On the present evidence, however, it appears to be unique. Parker nevertheless emphasizes that the activities and functions of the different “Mothers” cannot be distinguished from one another. In his view, they may differ from one another as much (and as little) as Zeus bearing different epithets³¹. In our opinion, the designation and depiction of the goddess as Tetraprosopos may likewise indicate the presence of local goddesses who, like Agdistis, possessed attributes distinct from those of the Mother Goddess.

²⁸ Str. X. 3. 12: οἱ Φρύγες καὶ τῶν Τρώων οἱ περὶ τὴν Ἰδὴν κατοικοῦντες Ῥέαν μὲν καὶ αὐτοὶ τιμῶσι καὶ ὀργιάζουσι ταύτῃ, μητέρα καλοῦντες θεῶν καὶ Ἀγδιστίν καὶ Φρυγίαν θεὸν μεγάλῃν, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν τόπων Ἰδαίαν καὶ Δινδυμήνην καὶ Σιτυληνὴν καὶ Πεσσινοῦντίδα καὶ Κυβέλην καὶ Κυβήβην cf. Chiai 2020, 232 fn. 716.

²⁹ Str. XII. 5. 3: Πεσσινοῦς δ’ ἐστὶν ἐμπόριον τῶν ταύτῃ μέγιστον, ἱερὸν ἔχον τῆς μητρὸς τῶν θεῶν σεβασμοῦ μεγάλου τυγχάνον: καλοῦσι δ’ αὐτὴν Ἀγδιστίν.

³⁰ Parker 2023, 45-46 fn. 39.

³¹ Parker 2023, 46-47.

The Geographical Distribution of the Cult in Phrygia

The epigraphic finds from the region of Phrygia in which Agdistis is mentioned independently, or in which Meter and Agdistis are attested together, are presented below. Each of these inscriptions has been briefly analysed in its own context. Inscriptions in which Meter is mentioned independently of Agdistis (that is, in which she appears alone) have not been included here, since the present study is directly concerned with the relationship between Agdistis and Meter.

Eumenia (Işıklı)³²

1. Honorary inscription for a priest of Meter Theon Angdistis and other deities.

Findspot: Işıklı cemetery. Current location: Unknown. Date: ca. third century CE.

- Ὁ δῆμος ἐτεῖ[μῃσεν Αὐρήλιον]
 2 Μόνιμον Ἀριστίων[ος Ζηνόδο]-
 τον λαμπαδάρχη[ν ἱερέα Διὸς]
 4 Σωτήρος καὶ Ἀπόλλ[ωνος καὶ]
 Μηνὸς Ἀσκαηνοῦ [καὶ Μητροῦς]
 6 Θεῶν Ἀνγδιστεω[ς καὶ Ἀγαθοῦ]
 Δαίμονος καὶ Εἵσε[ιδος καὶ Σε]-
 8 βαστῆς Εἰρήνης, στρατηγόν]
 τῆς πόλεως τὸ ἕκτον [χρεοφυλα]-
 10 χήσαντα καὶ ἐκλογισ[τεύσαντα]
 καὶ ἀγορανομήσαντα κ[αὶ εἰρηναρ]-
 12 χήσαντα καὶ παραφυ[λάξαντα καὶ]
 [γραμ]μ[α]τεῦ[σαντα].

“The demos honoured Aurelius Monimos Zenodotos, son of Aristion, lampadarkhes, priest of Zeus Soter, Apollo, Men Askaenos, Meter Theon Angdistis, Agathos Daimon, Isis, and Sebaste Eirene, strategos of the city for the sixth time, and former holder of the offices of khreophylaks, eklogistes, agoranomos, eirenarkhes, paraphylaks, and grammateus”.

In this important inscription from the city of Eumeneia, a man named Aurelius Monimos Zenodotos, who bore a name of Greek origin and who had held numerous civic offices as well as priesthoods of various deities, was honoured by the people of the city. His father likewise bore a name of Greek origin. Among the deities for whom he served as priest was Meter Theon Angdistis. This attestation demonstrates the existence of an official cult of this goddess in the city and also suggests the possible presence of a sacred building. The title “hiereus” indicates an institutional cultic office rather than ordinary personal piety. In other words, this individual held an official and regular function on behalf of Meter Theon Angdistis, probably connected with various rituals, sacrifices, festivals, the reception of dedications, or the organization of the cult. Zenodotos may have served as priest of each of these deities separately, or he may have held the priesthood of several cults simultaneously. In this case, Meter Theon Angdistis may have had a distinct cultic unit in the city, and perhaps even a sanctuary of her own. A second possibility is

³² For the bibliography, see also, Vermaseren 1987, no. 84.

that these deities were mentioned within the same public cultic framework, perhaps as part of a common priesthood or a combined cult system. Thus, the priesthood does not directly attest a “temple of Meter Theon Angdistis” but rather indicates that she was included within a broader local pantheon or public cultic organization.

The significance of the inscription for the present study lies in the fact that Agdistis appears here in a syncretic relationship with Meter Theon. Since the conjunction “kai” does not occur between the two names, the two divine figures seem to have been identified with one another. Yet does this identification necessarily mean that Agdistis was regarded as completely identical with Meter Theon, or that her own identity was absorbed into that of the latter? Syncretism may be defined as the process by which two or more divine identities of different origins are brought into close association, combined, or perceived in cultic practice or religious thought as different manifestations of the same divine being. In the tradition of ancient religion, there are hundreds of examples in which different deities were syncretized for various reasons—usually on account of shared or analogous characteristics—by being mentioned side by side without the conjunction “kai” between their names. In our opinion, however, even if the juxtaposition of the names of two distinct divine beings serves such a purpose, the very fact that their names are preserved separately at the same time inevitably points to an underlying distinction between them. In our view, another problem with identifying Meter and Agdistis lies in the fact that, in the mythological narratives, Agdistis initially appears as a “hermaphroditic” being, possessing both male and female characteristics and sexual organs. As noted above, Agdistis was subsequently transformed into a female through castration. Meter, by contrast, is the fertile Mother Goddess who ensured the continuity of lineage and whose presence in Anatolia can be traced back to the Neolithic Age; she possesses no such masculine characteristics. We may now proceed to examine the other epigraphic evidence for Agdistis from the region of Phrygia.

Midas City/Yazılıkaya

The region in which the goddess, who appears in inscriptions mostly under the forms “Angdistis” or “Angdisis” is most densely attested is Upper Phrygia. Near Afyon lies Mount Dokimeion, which was home to the famous marble quarries of antiquity. L. Robert identified this mountain with Mount Angdisseion mentioned in the ancient sources. In antiquity, this place was regarded as a natural sanctuary of Kybele-Agdistis. Close to this point, not far from the settlement of Kümbet, lies Midas City/Yazılıkaya³³. The site is located 18 km northwest of the district of Han in Eskişehir Province, 30 km south of the district of Seyitgazi, and 75 km from Eskişehir. The architectural remains and other finds demonstrate that a sanctuary of Agdistis existed at Yazılıkaya, to the northwest of Midas City, and that this sanctuary was in use between the third century BCE and the third century CE³⁴. Four rock-cut steps were carved into the bedrock. Below the lowest step are foundation traces of a wooden roof. The sanctuary consisted of a central rectangular chamber flanked on either side by two additional rooms. An open portico probably extended around the complex on all sides³⁵.

L. Robert identifies the sanctuary at Yazılıkaya as the main sacred centre of the northern Phrygian Metropolis situated in the Kümbet valley. Drew-Bear argues that this small city was not

³³ Roller 2004, 83-84 fn. 29-38.

³⁴ Haspels 1971, 154 figs. 15-16; Bádenas et al. 1987, 12 fn. 10-11; Vermaseren 1987, no. 148; For recent studies and detailed information on Midas City/Yazılıkaya, see especially Polat & Tamsü Polat 2025, 365.

³⁵ For the plan and map, see Vermaseren 1987, 52-53; see also Roller 2004, 190-191.

a “metropolis” in the strict sense, but rather took its name from the Mother of the Gods³⁶. According to Bádenas, Elvira and Gago, the sanctuary of Yazılıkaya also appears to have belonged to the Phrygian city of Metropolis, which derived its name directly from the Mother of the Gods. In reality, this city had the character of a “hieropolis”, that is, a sacred city, comparable to the case of Dionysopolis³⁷. The dedications discovered in the sanctuary of Agdistis at Midas City/Yazılıkaya, discussed below, are of considerable significance for understanding the cult³⁸. The inscriptions discovered here show that Agdistis, a local mountain goddess who was a product of the ancient Anatolian religious tradition and who evidently enjoyed a strong cultic presence in Phrygia, was not forgotten in the Roman Period, but continued to attract lively devotion among the inhabitants of the region. In view of the mythological tradition associated with king Midas, it is natural that the cult of Agdistis should have had deep roots at this site. These dedications are dated to the second and third centuries CE; however, the fact that the cult in reality goes back to a much earlier period is demonstrated by the object published as MAMA VI no. 401, which will be discussed below³⁹.

2. Dedication to Agdistis (?)⁴⁰

Small marble stele with a triangular pediment. The stele is broken across the middle. It has large acroteria, and a small patera is depicted within the pediment. On the framed shaft, a shepherd wearing a paenula cucullata is represented. The first line of the inscription is placed on the lower moulding of the pediment, while the remaining lines, which were located on the base, have been lost. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum, inv. no. 725; the upper fragment bears no inventory number. Date: 180 CE (Lochman).

Ἀνδρᾶς Ἰ[- - -] (Akyürek Şahin)

or

Ἀνδ[ι(σ(ε)ι εὐχρήν] (Haspels)

or

Ἀνδ[ι(σ(ε)ι] (Vermaseren)

Akyürek Şahin notes that the lower part of this stele was published by Drew-Bear and Yıldıztüran (no. 551), but with an incorrect inventory number. She further states that the authors were unaware both of the upper part of the stele and of the fact that the monument had previously been published by Haspels. Because of the representation of the shepherd, they interpreted the dedication as having been made to Zeus Alsenos or Zeus Petarenos. The stele, however, had already been published by Haspels with a good photograph. Although the inscription has become more difficult to read over time, some letters can still be distinguished. Haspels read the inscription as ανδι[- - -]. According to her, since the stele was found in the sanctuary of this goddess, it must have been dedicated to Agdistis, perhaps to be restored as Ανδι[σι] or Ανδι[σει]. Akyürek Şahin, however, argues that, when the photograph published by Haspels is examined, it is difficult to read the text as ανδι[- - -]. In her view, the preserved letters do not refer to the goddess Agdistis, but rather to the name of a dedicator, with the first letter of his father's name also preserved. Vermaseren, on the other hand, like Haspels, states that

³⁶ Drew-Bear 1976, 259.

³⁷ Bádenas et al. 1987, 14.

³⁸ Haspels 1971, 295-302 no. 1-17 cf. Drew-Bear 1976, 259-260 no. 14 fn. 44; Parker 2023, 47 fn. 44-45.

³⁹ For Agdistis, see also Paus. VII. 17, 10-12.

⁴⁰ Haspels 1971, no. 17, pl. 612; Vermaseren 1987, no. 166; Drew-Bear, Thomas & Yıldıztüran 1999, 341 no. 551; Lochman 2003, 314 no. 3, 538; Akyürek Şahin 2007, 94-95 no. 70; SEG 57 no. 1345.

this stele was dedicated to Agdistis⁴¹.

3. Dedication to Agdistis (?)⁴²

Fragment of a marble stele with a triangular pediment. The fragment preserves the lower left corner of a small stele. A relief, now lost as a result of the break, was originally present on the stele; only a small part of its left corner is preserved. The inscription was arranged around this relief. The final letter is located on the tenon. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum, inv. no. 789. Date: Roman Period.

 I[- ---- -]
 2 εὐ relief
 χή
 4 v.

“(Name/Names) (dedicated) this votive offering”.

Akyürek Şahin interprets the object, though not with certainty, as a dedication to Agdistis, probably on account of its findspot.

4. Dedication to Agdistis (?)⁴³

Fragment of a small marble stele. In the lower right corner of the stele, three female figures standing side by side can be discerned. On the narrow base is preserved the final word of the damaged inscription. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum, inv. no. 718. Date: Roman Period.

 [- -] εὐχ[ήν].

“(Name/Names) (dedicated) this votive offering”.

Similarly, this object is also interpreted by Akyürek Şahin, albeit tentatively, as a dedication to Agdistis.

5. Dedication to Angdisis⁴⁴

Tuff altar, like the other examples from the same sanctuary. The upper and lower parts are provided with projecting mouldings; the upper moulding is decorated with relief acroteria. A similar moulding is found on the lower part, except on the rear face, which has been left roughly finished. The front face depicts a snake⁴⁵, the right side a two-handled amphora, and the left side a damaged object. The left face also carries a heavily abraded Greek inscription. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Date: Roman Period.

Ἀνγδισι |
 2 εὐχήν.

“(Name/Names) (dedicated) this votive offering to Angdisis”.

⁴¹ Vermaseren 1987, no. 166; Akyürek Şahin 2007, 95.

⁴² Akyürek Şahin 2007, 97, no. 74; SEG 57 no. 1349.

⁴³ Akyürek Şahin 2007, 97 no. 75; SEG 57 no. 1350.

⁴⁴ Drew-Bear 1976, 259-260 no. 14; SEG 26 no. 1382; Vermaseren 1987, no. 149.

⁴⁵ Compare the snake on this altar with the stylized snakes in Haspels' no. 6 example, pl. 607, and no. 9 example, pl. 608. In those examples, however, the snakes are depicted in a fully coiled form, whereas the snake on the present altar is shown in an extended form.

Haspels did not include this altar in her publication among the dedications from the sanctuary of Agdistis now kept in the Afyonkarahisar Museum. This votive stele from the sanctuary of Agdistis is one of the examples demonstrating that, in this region where the cult of the Hellenized Mother Goddess Meter was widespread, the cult of Agdistis (a deity of Phrygian origin and therefore possessing local Anatolian characteristics) remained active in the Roman Period. As the inscription shows, the dedicator or dedicators offered this object directly to Agdistis. No other divine being is mentioned together with Agdistis. Accordingly, this monument is one of the examples indicating that Agdistis, a goddess of Anatolian origin, was worshipped in Phrygia (especially in a form distinct from the Hellenized Meter, that is, with an independent identity). Although Agdistis' close cultic connections with Kybele or Meter are well known, the examples in which she is mentioned independently require us to approach with caution the view that she was entirely assimilated to Meter in a syncretic sense, or that she was merely an epithet of Meter. On the other hand, the inscription does not allow us to determine the gender, profession, or any further cultic details concerning the dedicator or dedicators.

6. Dedication to Angdisis⁴⁶

Limestone altar. On the front face there is a two-handled amphora. On the right side, a five-petalled rosette is depicted within a circular frame. On the left side there are two boukrania. The rear face is plain. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum. Date: second–third century CE.

Μενεκ-
2 ἄ(ς) Δημο-
κρά-
4 του
Ἀνγδι-
6 σι εὐχή-
ν.

“Menekas, son of Demokrates, (offered) this dedication to Angdisis”.

The altar under discussion constitutes important evidence for the cultic rituals performed for Agdistis in this region during the Roman Period. The inscription indicates that the person who made the offering to Agdistis, a goddess of Phrygian origin, was a male individual bearing a name of Greek origin. His father likewise bore a Greek name. The significance of the inscription lies in the fact that it demonstrates that this mountain goddess of Phrygian origin retained her power in the second and third centuries CE, and documents the continuation of her worship among Greeks, with her ancient Anatolian characteristics, independently of Meter.

7. Dedication to Andissis⁴⁷

Limestone altar. The front face depicts an amphora. The right side bears a ring, above which a horse is represented. The left side bears a boukranion, above which an ox is depicted. The rear face is plain. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum. Date: second–third century CE.

⁴⁶ MAMA 6 no. 390, pl. 69; SEG 20 no. 40; see also, Haspels 1971, 295, no. 1; Vermaseren 1987, no. 150.

⁴⁷ MAMA 6 no. 391, pl. 69; SEG 20 no. 40; see also, Haspels 1971, 295 no. 2; Vermaseren 1987, no. 151.

[N]ουμήνιος Δη-
 2 μοκράτου
 εὐξάμεν-
 4 ος Ἄν-
 δισσ-
 6 ι θεᾶ ε-
 ὕχην.

“Noumenios, son of Demokrates, (offered) this dedication to the goddess Andissis in fulfilment of a vow”.

The personal names attested in this inscription are of particular importance for the cult of Agdistis. The dedicator bears a name of Latin origin, whereas his father has a Greek name. Accordingly, Noumenios (Numenius), the son of Demokrates, offers a dedication to a divine being of Anatolian origin without merging her with the Hellenic Meter. In this inscription, Agdistis stands out as fully independent of Meter and is addressed as “thea”, that is, explicitly in her female aspect.

8. Dedication to Thea Angdisis⁴⁸

Limestone altar. The lateral faces and the rear face are undecorated. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum. Date: second–third century CE.

Καρικὸς
 2 Ἀσκληπίδ-
 ου Ἀνγδισι
 4 θεᾶ εὐχῇ-
 ν ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ
 6 ῦ.

“Karikos, son of Asklepios, (offered) this dedication to the goddess Angdisis on his own behalf”.

From the point of view of the onomastic evidence, the father of the dedicator Karikos likewise bears a Greek name, Asklepios. What makes this inscription particularly noteworthy is that Agdistis is described as an independent “goddess” thereby emphasizing her feminine aspect, and, more importantly, that she is again invoked under her own specific name, completely apart from Meter. The dedication is therefore addressed to Agdistis in her capacity as a Phrygian mountain goddess. If the dedicators had intended otherwise, they could have offered the dedication simply to Meter, or they could have mentioned Meter together with Agdistis.

9. Dedication to Asklepios by a priest of Angdisis⁴⁹

Limestone altar. The right side bears a boukranion, while the left side bears a rosette. The rear face is plain. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum. Date: second–third century CE.

Ἀρτᾶς Μη-
 2 νογένου
 Νητηνὸς

⁴⁸ MAMA 6 no. 392, pl. 69; SEG 20 no. 40; see also, Haspels 1971, 296 no. 3; Vermaseren 1987, no. 152.

⁴⁹ MAMA 6 no. 394, pl. 69; SEG 20 no. 40; see also, Haspels 1971, 296 f. no. 5; Vermaseren 1987, no. 154.

- 4 ἱερεὺς Ἄν-
 γδισσης κή
 6 Ἀσκληπιῷ [ε]ὐ-
 ξάμενος
 8 ἀνέστησα
 εὐχήν.

"I, Artas of Neton, son of Menogenes and priest of Angdissis, made this dedication to Asklepios in fulfilment of a prayer".

The ethnic Netenos, probably connected with a place called Neton or Neta, is known. There was also a city named Neton in Sicily. The inscription shows that a priest of Agdistis named Artas made a dedication to Asklepios. By bringing together a personal name of Persian origin (Artas), a theophoric name associated with the Anatolian moon-god Men (Menogenes), the Phrygian cult of Agdistis, and Asklepios, the Greek god of healing, the inscription constitutes a striking epigraphic example of the multilayered religious and cultural synthesis characteristic of Phrygia in the Roman Imperial Period.

From a sociological perspective, it is noteworthy that Artas, who bore a Persian name and held the important office of priest within the cult of Agdistis, had a father whose name was connected with Men, a deity who enjoyed strong cultic devotion in the region. It is likely that Artas' family also had a strong attachment to the cult of Men. Artas himself, however, made a dedication to Asklepios, a Greek god. The question that should be asked here is whether Artas offered this dedication because he himself, or members of his family, suffered from a health problem, or whether he intended to establish a cultic connection between Agdistis, whose priest he was and who may have possessed certain healing qualities, and Asklepios, the Greek god of healing. Roller likewise notes that Agdistis belonged among the healing or saving deities⁵⁰.

Another, and relatively more speculative, possibility is that Artas deliberately emphasized his status as a priest of Agdistis in order to ensure the fulfilment of the requests he made to Asklepios concerning health; in other words, he may have sought to influence Asklepios by making Agdistis function, as it were, as an intermediary. For the purposes of the present study, the significance of the inscription lies in the fact that Agdistis is once again mentioned by her own distinctive name, entirely independently of other deities and especially of Meter. By stressing that he was a priest of Agdistis, Artas at the same time indicates that the sanctuary itself belonged specifically to Agdistis. Accordingly, this inscription also points to a distinction between Meter and Agdistis. It is therefore one of the important examples suggesting that caution is required with regard to the view that, in inscriptions where Agdistis is mentioned together with Meter, she was completely identified with Meter, that is, that she was virtually "absorbed" into the Hellenized Meter, or that the name Agdistis was reduced merely to the status of an epithet of Meter.

10. Dedication to Meter Thea Andksis⁵¹

Limestone altar. On the front face there are an amphora and two stalks of grain. On the right side there is a coiled snake. On the left side there is an eight-petalled rosette. On the rear face there is a boukranion. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum. Date:

⁵⁰ Roller 2004, 239 fn. 27.

⁵¹ MAMA 6 no. 395, pl. 69; SEG 20 no. 40; see also, Haspels 1971, 297 no. 6; Vermaseren 1987, no. 155.

second–third century CE.

[᾽Α]λέξανδρος
 2 ᾽Αλεκκᾱς εὐ-
 ξάμενος Μητ-
 4 ρὶ θεᾷ ᾽Ανδξι
 εὐχήν.

“I, Aleksandros Alekkas, (offered) this dedication to the goddess Meter Andksis in fulfilment of a prayer”.

This second name Alekkas, presumably a vulgarism for Aleksas, possibly is an abbreviation of the first name⁵². The person who offered this dedication to Agdistis bears a Greek name. No information, however, is provided concerning his family. In the inscription, Agdistis is syncretized with the goddess Meter, since the conjunction “καὶ” does not occur between the two names. Nevertheless, when the examples discussed above, which clearly emphasize the independent character of Agdistis, are taken into consideration, it becomes apparent that even if a syncretic conception was intended here by the dedicator, the names of both the Hellenized Meter and Agdistis of ancient Anatolian origin were in fact preserved separately through their juxtaposition. Therefore, in our view, it would not be correct to regard the name Agdistis here merely as an epithet of Meter and to place Meter alone in the foreground. Such an approach may risk reducing the value attributed by the local population to this Anatolian goddess, who possessed a deeply rooted tradition in Phrygia. The fact that Meter, the Hellenized form of Kybele, and Agdistis, a component of the Phrygian religious tradition, were combined in this way in the inscriptions demonstrates that local Anatolian elements continued to survive in religious beliefs even in a relatively late period, such as the second and third centuries CE. Aleksandros, who bore a Greek name, expressed his reverence for one of the deep-rooted divine figures of Phrygia by integrating her into his own conception of the Mother Goddess.

11. Dedication to Thea Angdisis⁵³

Limestone altar. The right and left faces are decorated with a wreath with long ribbons. A boukranion is depicted on both the front and rear faces. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum. Date: second–third century CE.

Ἑρμων Ἀπολλωνί-
 2 ου εὐκτέω θεᾷ
 ᾽Αγγδιση ἀνέτη-
 4 σα εὐχήν.

“I, Hermon, son of Apollonios, dedicated this votive offering to the goddess Angdisis in fulfilment of a vow”.

This dedication and no. 12, which will be presented immediately below, were offered by the same person. The significance of the present inscription lies in the fact that a man named Hermon, whose own name and whose father’s name are both Greek, made a dedication directly to Agdistis without mentioning Meter alongside her. Accordingly, this inscription is also among the examples that support our view that the Hellenized Meter and the local mountain goddess

⁵² Vermaseren 1987, no. 155.

⁵³ MAMA 6 no. 396, pl. 69; SEG 20 no. 40; see also, Haspels 1971, 297 no. 7; Vermaseren 1987, no. 156.

Agdistis were perceived as two distinct divine beings. It should therefore be regarded as evidence that, in the Roman Imperial Period, Agdistis continued to be venerated with her own distinctive Anatolian identity, independently of Meter. The second dedication by Hermon, to be discussed immediately below, further strengthens this view and even offers a new perspective on the syncretic situation attested in examples where Agdistis and Meter are mentioned without the conjunction “kai” between them.

12. Dedication to Meter Theon Angdisis⁵⁴

Limestone altar. A boukranion is depicted on both the front and rear faces, an amphora on the right side, and a wreath on the left side. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum. Date: second–third century CE.

Ἑρμων Ἀπολλω-
2 νίου Μητρὶ θεῶν
Ἀνγδισσῇ εὐ[χ]ήν.

“Hermon, son of Apollonios, (dedicated) this votive offering to Meter Theon Angdisis”.

When evaluated together with the preceding inscription, this votive inscription becomes a particularly significant example for the purposes of the present study. The recipient of this dedication, again offered by Hermon, son of Apollonios, is now Meter Theon Agdistis. In other words, on this occasion Hermon did not mention Agdistis alone, as he had done in the previous inscription, but referred to her together with the Hellenic goddess known as the Mother of the Gods. Thus, in one of the two dedications offered by the same individual, Agdistis appears as a goddess independent of Meter, whereas in the other she is combined with Meter Theon, the Hellenized form of Matar Kubileya. In our view, these two inscriptions are therefore important examples documenting that, in Phrygia during the second and third centuries CE, Agdistis was worshipped both independently and in association with Meter. The fact that the same individual adopted two different modes of dedication suggests that he was aware of a perceptible distinction between the two goddesses.

13. Dedication to Angdisis⁵⁵

Limestone altar. A boukranion is depicted on both the right and left sides. The rear face bears a six-petalled rosette within a circular frame. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum. Date: second–third century CE.

Ἑρμων Ἀν-
2 θεοτίου Ἀ-
ζου Ἀνγ-
4 δισσῇ εὐ-
χήν.

“Hermon, son of Anthestios and grandson of Azos, (offered) this dedication to Angdisis”.

When the onomastic evidence in the inscription is considered, a genealogical sequence becomes apparent. The dedicator’s grandfather, Azos, bears a local Anatolian name. His father, by contrast, bears a name of Greek origin, Anthestios, while the dedicator himself likewise has a Greek name, Hermon. Thus, Hermon’s grandfather Azos was probably a member of an

⁵⁴ MAMA 6 no. 397, pl. 70; SEG 20 no. 40; see also, Haspels 1971, 298 no. 8; Vermaseren 1987, no. 157.

⁵⁵ MAMA 6 no. 393, pl. 69; SEG 20 no. 40; see also, Haspels 1971, 296 no. 4; Vermaseren 1987, no. 153.

Anatolian family whose roots went back to pre-Hellenic times. Over time, however, under the influence of Hellenization and in accordance with the developing fashion, he appears to have given his son a Greek name. That son, in turn, gave his own son the typically Greek name Hermon, which is connected with the god Hermes. What is particularly interesting here is that, although Hermon bears a Greek name, he continued in the second or third century CE to maintain his attachment to the cult of Agdistis, a product of deeply rooted Anatolian beliefs, and thus to uphold the religious traditions of his grandfather, who was of Anatolian origin, and by extension those of his family. In this way, Hermon also appears to emphasize that his family possessed a long-established past. Here, one may almost discern an emphasis on Agdistis' role as a protector of the family or lineage, while the local Phrygian mountain goddess is invoked under her own distinctive name, independently of Meter.

14. Dedication to Thea Angdisis⁵⁶

Tuff altar. The front face bears a Greek inscription; the right side is decorated with a coiled snake. On the left side, a probably male figure is shown on a rearing horse, on which traces of red paint are still preserved. The rear face bears an eight-petalled rosette carved on a rounded relief boss. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum, inv. no. 709. Date: second–third century CE.

Καρικὸς
2 Ἡλίου Ἄ-
νγδισι
4 θεῶ εὐ-
χήν.

“Karikos, son of Helios, (offered) this dedication to the goddess Angdisis”.

In this votive inscription as well, a man named Karikos makes a dedication to Agdistis, who is addressed as “thea”, thereby emphasizing her specifically feminine aspect. The dedicator’s father bears the name of the Greek solar god Helios. What is noteworthy about the inscription is once again that Agdistis is worshipped independently, with no mention of Meter. Accordingly, this inscription too represents one of the important examples in which Agdistis is invoked independently of Meter.

15. Dedication to Thea Angdisis⁵⁷

Tuff altar. The front face bears a boukranion surmounted by a Greek inscription. The right side is decorated with a wreath preserving traces of red paint, while the left side bears a six-petalled rosette. The rear face is plain. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum, inv. no. 711. Date: second–third century CE.

Εὐτυχ[ος]
2 Τάτας [Ἄ]-
νγδισι θ-
4 εῶ εὐχή-
ν.

“Eutychos, son of Tatas, (offered) this dedication to the goddess Angdisis”.

⁵⁶ Haspels 1971, 298 no. 9; Vermaseren 1987, no. 158.

⁵⁷ Haspels 1971, 298 no. 10; Vermaseren 1987, no. 160.

In this example, Eutychos himself bears a Greek name, whereas his father, Tatas, has a typical name of Anatolian origin. Eutychos, who made a dedication to Agdistis alone, did not mention Meter together with her, nor did he syncretize the two goddesses. As if wishing to emphasize his father's, or his family's, attachment to local Anatolian cults and to display pride in his lineage, he made a dedication to Agdistis, perhaps with particular regard to her role as a protector of the family or lineage.

16. Dedication to Thea Angdisis⁵⁸

Tuff altar. The front face bears a Greek inscription. The right side is decorated with a broken boukranion, while the left side bears a damaged rounded boss. The rear face is plain. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum, inv. no. 710. Date: second–third century CE.

Ἑρμῆς Μα-
2 νουν Ἀγ-
δισι θεῶ
εὐχῆν.

“Hermes, son of Manes, (offered) this dedication to the goddess Agdisis”.

In this dedication, which resembles the example discussed above, a man named Hermes, whose father bears a local Anatolian name while he himself has a Greek personal name, makes a dedication to the goddess Agdistis. Agdistis once again appears as an independent goddess in her own right and is neither combined with Meter nor mentioned together with her. The name of Hermes' father is one widely attested in Phrygia and is of Anatolian origin. This suggests that Hermes' lineage was rooted in Phrygia. At this point, it is noteworthy that he made a dedication specifically to this local goddess known as Agdistis, without any reference to Meter. Here too, Agdistis was probably worshipped as a local and deeply rooted goddess who came to the fore in her role as protector of the family or lineage. As if wishing to demonstrate the antiquity of his own ancestry, this man named Hermes offered a dedication to the powerful local goddess of the region without syncretizing her with the Hellenized Meter. In this respect, a comparable example may be cited from Termessos: a recently discovered dedication offered to Agdistis on behalf of his “syngeneia” by an individual named Logbasis, who likewise bore a local Anatolian name⁵⁹.

17. Dedication to Thea Angdisis⁶⁰

Tuff altar. The front face bears a damaged amphora and an inscription. The right side is decorated with an ox head, and the left side with a six-petalled rosette. The rear face is plain. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum, inv. no. 723. Date: second–third century CE.

Μενεκᾶς
2 Ουαζου Ἀ-
νγδισι
4 θεῶ [ε]-
εὐχῆν.

“Menekas, son of Ouazos, (offered) this dedication to the goddess Angdisis”.

⁵⁸ Haspels 1971, 299 no. 11; Vermaseren 1987, no. 159.

⁵⁹ Erten 2025, 165-166.

⁶⁰ Haspels 1971, 299 no. 12; Vermaseren 1987, no. 161.

Scholars have suggested that the name of Menekas' father may also be read as Thyazos and that it may have been derived from the name Thys. In this inscription as well, a man named Menekas, whose father bears a local Anatolian name, dedicates his offering to the goddess Agdistis independently of other goddesses, and especially independently of Meter. In this dedication too, Menekas' family of Anatolian origin seems, as it were, to be placed under the protection of the cult of Agdistis, whose roots in the Phrygian region go back to an early period. At the same time, Menekas probably also emphasized in this way the deep and perhaps distinguished roots of his own lineage.

18. Dedication to Meter Thea Andissis⁶¹

Tuff stele with a triangular pediment and acroteria. The pediment contains a bunch of grapes. Beneath the inscription there is a fragmentary amphora, surmounted by two *boukrania*. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum. Date: second–third century CE.

Ἀγαθὴ τύχη·
 2 εὐλαικεινεατη
 οἱ κατοικοῦντες
 4 εὐξάμενοι ἀνεστή-
 σαμεν Μητρὶ θεᾷ Ἀν-
 6 δισση εὐχὴν.

“Good fortune! We, the inhabitants of the area around Lageina/Lageineate, having prayed to Meter Thea Andissis, set up this dedication”.

According to scholars, the word “eulaikeneate”, which occurs in the second line of the inscription, may have been prominently placed at the beginning of the votive inscription as a local title of the goddess. Alternatively, it may refer to the settlement in which the dedicators lived. In that case, it may represent “Eulaikeneat(ai)” and would thus agree with “katoikountes”. It is also possible that, as the result of an error, the intended reading was “e(n) Laikeineate”, which may be regarded as a form of the name Lageiniatis.

For the purposes of the present study, the inscription is significant in two respects. The first is that it provides an example of inscriptions in which Meter and Agdistis are combined, while the names of both goddesses are nevertheless preserved. Agdistis, who in the second inscription of Hermon discussed above is combined with Meter Theon, that is, the Mother of the Gods, is here combined with Meter Thea. The second point is even more important, since the dedication in question was offered collectively by the inhabitants of a settlement. This indicates the existence of an official cult of Agdistis syncretized with Meter Thea. In one of the examples discussed above⁶², only the name of Agdistis is mentioned and reference is made to one of her priests, indicating the existence of a sanctuary directed specifically to Agdistis alone. In the present example, by contrast, a dedication is made by the entire village community to Agdistis in combination with Meter. The inscription therefore documents that, around the second and third centuries CE, Agdistis held a position of sufficient importance in this region to receive official worship not only independently, but also in syncretic association with Meter. It seems that, through this collective dedication, the inhabitants of the settlement wished to combine these goddesses of Phrygian and Hellenic origin as a symbol of respect for the beliefs of all members of the village community.

⁶¹ MAMA 6 no. 398, pl. 70; SEG 20 no. 40; see also, Haspels 1971, 299 ff. no. 13; Vermaseren 1987, no. 162.

⁶² MAMA 6 no. 394.

19. Praise and Dedication to Andiksis⁶³

Tuff altar with a triangular pediment and corner acroteria. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum. Date: second–third century CE.

- Πασικράτης κλυτὸν ἔργο[ν]
 2 ἔτευξεν ἑῆς παλάμῃσ[ι]
 Βευδουσοικείου Παπύλ[ου]
 4 γόνος ἐνθάδε νήων
 εὐξάμενος γλυκε-
 6 ρῶς Ἀνδιξεὸς ἀγλα-
 ὦν αὖχος ἥτις ἐπ' ἄλ-
 8 λοδαπῇ διέσωσε
 νέον Πυθόχ[ρηστον].
 10 βήμασ[ιν ο]ὔν [ιε]ροῖς
 ἐπελευσάμενος
 12 πελεκήσας εὐχὴν
 ἀέναον ξυιδόγλυ-
 14 φον εὐπρεπὲς ἔργον
 ἔστησα τεμῆν ἱε-
 16 ροῖς ἐπὶ βήμασι θεεί-
 ρις.

“Pasikrates, son of Papylos, from the village of Beudos, that is, Beudos Vetus, dwelling here, made this fair work with his own hands, having prayed devoutly and celebrated the splendid glory of Andixis, who had saved the young Pythochrestos in a foreign land. Therefore, having approached the sacred steps, I carved the stone and set up this fair work, fashioned with delicate craftsmanship and destined to remain forever, upon the divine sacred steps as a token of honour”.

Line 4: νήων = ναίων, Haspels and Peek.

In *MAMA* 6 no. 399, the inscription is recorded only as far as line 10. Haspels and Peek later published the inscription together with its remaining portion. Peek incorrectly gives the findspot of the inscription as Midaion, located east of Dorylaion in the northernmost part of Phrygia. It has become clear, however, that this assessment resulted from a mistaken interpretation of the expressions “Midas City” and “Midas Kale”. The actual findspot is Yazılıkaya, where the famous Phrygian rock monuments are located⁶⁴. On the other hand, the inscription gives the name of the settlement in which Pasikrates’ father lived. This appears to be a form of the ethnic of Beudous Oikos, in the sense of ouikos = vicus, with the suffix -einos used here instead of the usual -enos. Ramsay locates the settlement known as Beudos Vetus in the plain of Synnada, modern Şuhut, in connection with Manlius Vulso’s Anatolian/Galatian campaign of 189 BCE⁶⁵.

⁶³ *MAMA* 6 no. 399, pl. 70; *SEG* 20 no. 40; see also, Haspels 1971, 300 no. 14; Peek 1980, 32 no. 15; *SEG* 30 no. 1486; Vermaseren 1987, no. 163.

⁶⁴ For critical remarks and discussion on this issue, see *BE* 1982, no. 403.

⁶⁵ *MAMA* 6 no. 399. Beudos Vetus was an ancient settlement in the region of Phrygia. The ancient city, whose Latin name means “Old Beudos” is thought to have been located within the modern province of Afyonkarahisar, near

As far as can be understood from the inscription, Pasikrates, son of Papylos, who lived in the village of Beudos, praises Agdistis and makes a dedication to her. The reason for the dedication was presumably his belief that Pythochrestos, who was probably his own son, had been saved by Agdistis from a dangerous situation. It is not clear, however, what kind of danger Agdistis had rescued him from. Most likely, this was a matter related to health, and Agdistis saved him through her healing power. Indeed, in one of the examples discussed above, we noted that the dedication made by a priest of Agdistis to the healing god Asklepios may point to precisely such an aspect of the goddess⁶⁶. Alternatively, another kind of dangerous event may have been involved, although this cannot be determined. In any case, the inscription brings to the fore Agdistis' character as a saviour and protector. An important example showing that Agdistis could possess a protective function with regard to the "house" or "lineage" is provided by an inscription from Philadelphia in Lydia. In this inscription, Agdistis is mentioned together with saviour deities, above all Zeus and Hestia, and appears as the sacred protector and mistress of the *oikos*⁶⁷. Pasikrates states that he made this dedication by carving it with his own hands. What is particularly noteworthy here is that the dedication in question was placed upon the steps of a sacred structure. Peek interprets the word *θείς* in the final part of the inscription as *τῆς θεᾶς*, "of the goddess" thereby yielding a sense such as "upon the steps of the goddess". This, in turn, leads to the possibility that the structure may have been a temple belonging to Agdistis⁶⁸. There is likewise no sufficient evidence to reject the possibility that Pasikrates placed his dedication at the entrance of a sacred structure belonging to this goddess. It is therefore possible to regard the present inscription as pointing to a sanctuary of Agdistis⁶⁹. What is important here is that Agdistis is once again mentioned alone, independently of Meter, and in connection with a sacred space.

20. Dedication to Andisis⁷⁰

Tuff votive stele. The pediment is adorned with palmette-shaped acroteria and small volutes. Beneath the inscription are a bead-and-reel moulding and plain mouldings. The object is preserved in two pieces. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum, inv. nos. 765 and 762.

[...]τος ΔΠΛ
 2 [...ε]ύχην Ἀνδ-
 [ισει...ο]ύκ ἐτέλεσεν
 4 ...ΤΗ ΚΕ..η ἔνδα.

This fragmentary piece shows that a dedication was once again made to Agdistis independently. However, because the object is preserved only in fragmentary condition, no information can be obtained about the dedicators.

21. Dedication to Andisis⁷¹

Grey marble plaque. A standing frontal figure, with his right hand placed on his chest, is depicted

Yarıklı or the nearby village of Belkaracaören, to the southwest of the Şuhut (Synnada) plain.

⁶⁶ MAMA 6 no. 394.

⁶⁷ Stowers 1998, 293 ff.

⁶⁸ Peek 1980, 32; SEG 30 no. 1486. In Vermaseren 1987, however, it appears as *θεᾶς*.

⁶⁹ For a possible sacred structure of Agdistis (or of Agdistis/Meter/Kybele) identified in light of a recently discovered inscription at Termessos, see Erten 2025, 149-169.

⁷⁰ Haspels 1971, 301 no. 15; Vermaseren 1987, no. 164.

⁷¹ Haspels 1971, 301 no. 16; Vermaseren 1987, no. 165.

within a tabula ansata, of which only the left handle is preserved. The figure is surrounded by an inscription. Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum, inv. no. 714.

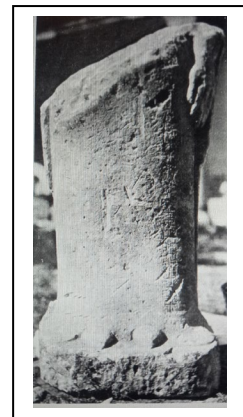
Κλεωνίδη[ς]
 2 ὑπὲρ
 γυν-
 4 αικὸ-
 ς
 6 καὶ π-
 αιδί-
 8 ων
 Ἄνγδ-
 10 ισει
 εὐ[χρήν].

“Kleonides (dedicated) this votive offering to Angdisis for his wife and children”.

The inscription shows that a man named Kleonides, who bears a name of Greek origin, made a dedication to Agdistis on behalf of his family, again addressing her as a goddess independent of Meter. Assistance was probably sought from the Anatolian goddess Agdistis because of her healing power. Agdistis thus once again comes to the fore in her role as protector of the family or lineage, and in this respect recalls the inscription from Termessos, mentioned above, in which Logbasis made a dedication on behalf of his syngeneia⁷².

22. Statuette of Agdistis/Kybele (?)⁷³

Lower portion of a statue, in chalky limestone. The goddess probably represents Agdistis⁷⁴ or Kybele⁷⁵. In view of Kybele’s general iconography, it is more probable that the statuette represents Agdistis. The sheathlike robe, spreading out at bottom, curves over the feet, shod in pointed shoes and seen below the instep only. The left arm—broken off above the wrist and hand hang vertically, with fingers extended and palm touching the robe. That the right arm and hand did not hang thus is evident from the absence below the break of any trace of fingertips. On both sides, about half way between back and front, project the edges of what appears to be a thick cloak covering the back of the goddess and touching her left hand. Near the thumb of that hand a meander strip 0.05 wide runs from the break downward to the side



of the left foot; this decoration of the robe is represented by incisions on the surface. This statue, closely resembling in style the Hera of Samos, probably dates from about 550 BCE Findspot: Midas City/Yazılıkaya. Present location: Afyon Museum. Date: ca. 550 BCE. The significance of this object undoubtedly lies in the fact that it represents Agdistis independently. Unfortunately, the object, which is thought to belong to Agdistis on the basis of its findspot and clothing features, bears no inscription.

Phrygia / Unknown Provenance

⁷² Erten 2025, 166.

⁷³ MAMA 6 no. 401, pl. 71; SEG 20 no. 40; see also, Haspels 1971, 97, 106; Bádenas et al. 1987, 14; Vermaseren 1987, no. 172.

⁷⁴ MAMA 6, no. 401.

⁷⁵ Vermaseren 1987, no. 172.

23. Dedication to Angdissis⁷⁶

Small statuette of grey marble. It depicts a goddess seated on a throne, wearing a peplos with an overfold, a headdress, and a himation pulled over her head. The front face of the base bears a Greek inscription. The object was offered for sale at the Bonhams-Brooks auction in London, and the inscription was read by the editors of SEG on the basis of a photograph. Findspot: Phrygia (?). Date: second–third century CE (?)

Ἀππας Ἑρμοῦ

2 [Α]γγδισσει εὐχή-

ν.

“Appas, son of Hermes, (offered) this dedication to Angdissis”.

As can be understood from this votive inscription, a man named Appas, who bears a local Anatolian name, made a dedication to Agdistis. The reason for the dedication is unknown. His father, by contrast, bears a theophoric Greek personal name. The origin of Hermes, who gave his son a local Anatolian name, remains uncertain. It is not surprising, however, that families of local Anatolian origin, under the strong influence of Hellenization, gave their children Greek names, while in a later generation local names reflecting the family’s ancestral roots could reappear. Appas, therefore, probably bore the name of one of his Anatolian ancestors. What is interesting here is that Appas made a dedication to Agdistis, a goddess with a deeply rooted tradition in Phrygia, without associating her with any other divine being, thus seemingly according her a position of particular prominence. It is especially noteworthy that Meter, the Hellenized form of Matar, does not appear alongside Agdistis and is not syncretized with her. As is well known, from the late fourth century BCE onward the cult of the Mother Goddess underwent transformation under the influence of Hellenism. Nevertheless, rather than simply adopting the Greek model wholesale, the cult of Matar in Anatolia developed into a “hybrid” cult that preserved certain features of the Phrygian Mother Goddess while also incorporating characteristics of the Hellenic Meter. Despite this, through his dedication Appas seems to emphasize the noble Anatolian origins of his family and to exalt, under her own distinctive name, Agdistis, the goddess venerated by his ancestors. In this respect, the inscription constitutes another example of the distinction between Agdistis and Kybele that is also reflected in the mythological narratives.

24. Dedication to Angdissis Bonokiatis⁷⁷

Small stele of Dokimeion marble. It has a relief-decorated tympanum and rounded acroteria. Findspot: Phrygia. Present location: Eskişehir Archaeological Museum, inv. no. A-5-81. Date: ca. 200 CE.

Δαδης Μάρκου

2 Μαληνός Ἀν-

γδισση Βοβο-

4 κιατει εὐχήν.

“Dades of Malos, son of Marcus, (offered) this dedication to Angdissis Bonokiatis”.

As can be understood from the inscription, this dedication too was offered to the Phrygian goddess Angdissis. As noted above, the goddess is most commonly attested in the inscriptions

⁷⁶ SEG 51 no. 1808 bis and no. 2220.

⁷⁷ Frei 1986, 708-717; SEG 36 no. 1201.

of the region under the name Angdistis⁷⁸. It has also been suggested that this object may have belonged to the sanctuary of Agdistis at Midas City/Yazılıkaya⁷⁹. According to Frei, the place-name Μαληνός probably refers to Μαλος, that is, Kilise-Orhaniye, located between Eskişehir and Afyonkarahisar⁸⁰. Frei also considers the possibility that the dedications to Μητήρ Μαληνή, “the Mother of Malos” should be attributed not to the Malos of Galatia, but to a goddess of Phrygian origin⁸¹. The word Bonokiatis, which appears in the inscription as an epithet of Agdistis, is probably either an ethnic adjective derived from the place-name Bonok(e)ia — perhaps the ancient name of Midas Kale — or an epiclesis referring to a cultic community or institution. Frei also offers various interpretations concerning the Phrygian origins of the word. He connects it with the Old Phrygian word “bonok”. According to Frei, the use of Bonokiatei as an epithet constitutes evidence against the commonly accepted semantic interpretation of Old Phrygian “bonok” as “woman”; he therefore also rejects its association with the Indo-European word for “woman” for example Boeotian Greek “bana”. Frei does not, however, arrive at a definitive solution concerning the meaning of the word, although he discusses several possible interpretations. The significance of the object, as in the other examples discussed above, lies in the fact that Agdistis is again the sole recipient of the dedication and even possesses an epithet of her own. She is therefore not syncretized with Meter in this case.

25. Dedication and Statue to Meter Angdisis⁸²

Statue of a very white marble, slightly greyish or bluish in tone, distinctly translucent, and of medium grain. The object is an artificial composite created by forgers through the joining of an unrelated head and body. The statue depicts a female figure seated on a throne between two lions. The entire composition is set upon a broad base, the front face of which bears an inscription⁸³. The statue displays a high level of craftsmanship, reflected in its well-



balanced proportions and in the soft rendering of the drapery folds. Scholars state that, when assessed from an iconographic point of view, this statue can be nothing other than a representation of Kybele. Her garment, seated posture, and the lions are sufficient to reach this conclusion even without the confirmation provided by the inscription. If we set aside the Archaic Period representations (which disappear in the fifth century BCE) as well as distinctive and relatively rare iconographic types, such as Kybele standing, Kybele seated on a lion, or Kybele depicted on a chariot drawn by lions, and instead focus on the most common type of representation, the matter becomes relatively straightforward. In this standard type, Kybele is represented as a cult statue seated on a throne and accompanied by her characteristic

⁷⁸ SEG 29, no. 1205; SEG 30 no. 1843.

⁷⁹ SEG 36, no. 1201.

⁸⁰ See also Strubbe 1975, 241.

⁸¹ Frei 1986, 712 fn. 4.

⁸² Bádenas et al. 1987, 7-19; SEG 37 no. 1168.

⁸³ For details concerning the throne and the lions, see Bádenas et al. 1987, 8.

attributes. These attributes include the lion⁸⁴, the tympanum, the sceptre, and the phiale⁸⁵. In the last third of the fifth century BCE, Agorakritos (or, according to less reliable sources, Pheidias) created the cult statue of Kybele for Athens. It is generally thought that all cult images produced until the end of paganism, and consequently all votive statuettes, that is, more or less faithful copies of these cult images, ultimately derived from this statue⁸⁶. Findspot: The object entered the collection of the Museo Arqueológico Nacional through purchase. Phrygia (?) / Midas City–Yazılıkaya (?). Present location: Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid, inv. no. 1983/55. Date: 150–200 CE. The object is thought to predate the finds from Yazılıkaya⁸⁷.

Ἀπολλώνιος Παπί-
2 ου Μητρὶ Ἀνγδιση
εὐχήν.

“Apollonios, son of Papios, (offered) this dedication to Meter Angdisis”.

This statue, which depicts Kybele seated between two lions, constitutes an important example of the Phrygian Kybele–Agdistis cult, as is indicated by the Greek inscription on its base. The dedicator, Apollonios, was a man bearing a name of Greek origin, while his father probably bore the name Papios, that is, a Hellenized form of the Latin gentilicium Papius.

Bádenas, Elvira and Gago regard the word Agdistis in the inscription as an *epiclesis* (advocación!) of Meter, that is, Kybele, and state that the epigraphic documents attesting this *epiclesis* consist either of altars depicting cult objects associated with the cult of Kybele, such as amphorae, tympana, and similar objects, or, as in the case of the relief preserved in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, refer only to the Attis–Agdistis relationship. According to these scholars, the inscription constitutes an important addition to the group of reliefs, altars, and other inscriptions in which the Mother of the Gods, Meter, is invoked under this “designation!”. In their view, given the material currently available, the statue of Kybele in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid is the only known free-standing statue in which the “*epiclesis*” (advocación!) Angdistis or Angdisis is explicitly attested⁸⁸.

We do not, however, consider it correct to regard Agdistis in this inscription merely as an *epiclesis* of Meter. Here too, as in other inscriptions in which Meter and Agdistis are mentioned together without the conjunction “*kai*” between the two names, even if a syncretic appearance is present, this situation in fact also indicates that Meter and Agdistis were perceived as distinct goddesses. The fact that only Kybele is represented in this object may at first sight point to such syncretism; iconographically, however, the figure reflects not the Hellenic Meter, but the Phrygian goddess Kybele. The editors of SEG also identify it as a dedication to Kybele. Accordingly, the dedicators must essentially have had in mind a Kybele–Agdistis connection here. Nevertheless, under the influence of Hellenization, they also included Meter in the inscription. The presence of the name Agdistis in the inscription, especially when considered together with the statue’s Kybele iconography, should therefore be interpreted as indicating that the name of this deeply rooted Anatolian goddess was preserved and that she was

⁸⁴ Roller 2004, 120; Işık 2008, 36.

⁸⁵ For examples of the iconography of Kybele in Phrygia, see Vermaseren 1987, no. 64–201; for critical remarks, see especially Roller 2004.

⁸⁶ For further details, see Bádenas et al. 1987, 8 ff.; For the iconography of Kybele, see especially Naumann 1983.

⁸⁷ Bádenas et al. 1987, 12.

⁸⁸ Bádenas et al. 1987, 12–13 fn. 8.

“mentioned together with” Meter, that is, that she was regarded as an independent divine being⁸⁹. More importantly, when we take into account the numerous inscriptions discussed above in which Agdistis was worshipped entirely independently of Meter, alone and under her own distinctive name, it would be mistaken to understand this Anatolian goddess simply as an “epiclesis” of Meter.

Conclusion

In this study, an attempt has been made to examine, through selected examples, whether Agdistis in the Phrygian region (whether mentioned together with Meter or not) actually represents Meter, that is, whether there was a direct syncretic relationship between them, or whether she should rather be understood as the local mountain goddess known from early mythological traditions as a hermaphroditic being who was later castrated and thereby became female. According to the epigraphic evidence currently available, the majority of the dedications come from Midas City/Yazılıkaya, where the sanctuary of Agdistis was located. All of the dedicators are male, and in the dedications they generally bear names of either Greek or Anatolian origin, with only a few exceptions, such as Artas of Iranian origin and Numenius of Latin origin. As far as can be seen, priests of Agdistis are mentioned in only a small number of inscriptions from Phrygia (no. 1: Eumenia/priest of Meter Theon Agdistis; no. 9: Midas City-Yazılıkaya/priest of Agdistis). In addition, one inscription (no. 19) probably refers to a sanctuary belonging to Agdistis. Apart from these cases, there is no information concerning any cult organization or the professions of the dedicators, with the exception of the inscription from Eumeneia/Işıklı. Some of the dedications appear to have been offered to Agdistis in connection with the protection of family members, although in most cases the reason for the dedication is not stated. A statuette from Midas City/Yazılıkaya has been interpreted as representing Agdistis or Kybele. Likewise, in an object now in the museum in Madrid, Spain, which is thought possibly to have come from the same site, Kybele is depicted seated on her throne between two lions, while the inscription records a dedication to Meter-Agdistis⁹⁰.

In this context, we believe that it may finally be useful to divide the available epigraphic material into four groups:

Examples in which Meter and Agdistis are mentioned together without the conjunction “kai” between them, thereby pointing to a syncretic situation

The Phrygian examples belonging to this group have been discussed above. These inscriptions, of course, appear at first sight to point to an identification between Agdistis and Meter. Although we accept that a syncretic situation is present in these examples, the fact that the names of both goddesses are mentioned also indicates, in our view, that the local population was aware that they were “different” from one another, but that they were brought together because of certain shared characteristics or narratives. For syncretism is the process by which divine figures, cults, or religious conceptions of “different origins” are connected with one another, or regarded as partially or fully identical, through shared functions, similar iconography, local tradition, political needs, or theological interpretation. Accordingly, in inscriptions displaying such a syncretic appearance, it is highly likely that Agdistis was combined with Meter without losing her identity as a local Phrygian mountain goddess—perhaps even in the wild form known from the myths,

⁸⁹ For the view that Agdistis was regarded as an independent divine entity, see Bádenas et al. 1987, 15 fn. 20.

⁹⁰ For archaeological evidence concerning Kybele in Phrygia, see Vermaseren 1987 and Roller 2004.

as a hermaphroditic being who was later castrated. The persistent preservation of Agdistis' Anatolian name even in the Roman Period supports this interpretation. In this respect, inscriptions nos. 11 and 12 from Midas City/Yazılıkaya, which were briefly discussed above, are of particular importance. This is because these inscriptions are dedications offered by the same individual, Hermon, son of Apollonios. In one dedication, Hermon makes an offering only to Thea Agdistis⁹¹, whereas in the other he makes an offering to Meter Theon Agdistis⁹².

We therefore regard Hermon's dedications as important evidence suggesting that, even in cases where the conjunction "kai" is absent between the names Agdistis and Meter (that is, in instances where they are syncretically combined) the two goddesses may in fact have been perceived as distinct from one another. In the final object discussed in this study, no. 25, Meter and Agdistis are likewise syncretically combined, since no conjunction "kai" occurs between the two names. What is noteworthy about this object, however, is that although the inscription mentions the Hellenized Meter together with Agdistis, the goddess represented in the image displays entirely the distinctive iconographic features of Phrygian Kybele. We may therefore assume that, in this object as well, Agdistis' mythological connection with Kybele had not been forgotten and that she was mentioned together with Meter while still retaining her own distinctive characteristics. On the other hand, the number of inscriptions from Phrygia in which Meter and Agdistis are mentioned together in a syncretic manner is quite small when compared with the inscriptions in which Agdistis is mentioned alone or Meter is mentioned alone. As far as we can see, there are five inscriptions of a syncretic character, whereas nineteen inscriptions attest Agdistis independently, without Meter, and all of these come from Midas City/Yazılıkaya. In addition, many inscriptions are also known in which Meter is mentioned independently of Agdistis. In our view, this situation indicates that Agdistis preserved her identity as a local mountain goddess independent of Meter. Inscriptions from outside the region of Phrygia that point to a syncretic relationship between Meter and Agdistis have not been discussed here, since bringing them together would exceed the scope of the present study⁹³.

Examples in which Agdistis is mentioned or represented entirely on her own, that is, independently of Meter and under her own name

Numerous examples of inscriptions from Phrygia belonging to this group have been discussed above, and each inscription has been interpreted in its own context. As far as we can see, nineteen inscriptions are known from the region in which Agdistis is mentioned independently of Meter. Since some of these examples are particularly noteworthy, it is useful to recall them here. One of these is the dedication of Artas, priest of Agdistis, mentioned in inscription no. 9 of the present study. This inscription is important because Agdistis is mentioned alone, independently of Meter—that is, in our view, she appears in her identity as an Anatolian mountain goddess—and because it also points to the existence of a sanctuary belonging to her. In the inscription, Artas is described not as a priest of Meter-Agdistis, but as a priest of Agdistis. Another example is the Agdistis/Kybele (?) statuette, no. 22 in this study. This object, dated to around 550 BCE, is likewise an important example showing how far back the roots of the Agdistis-Kybele cult in the region extend. The statuette has been identified by some modern scholars as Agdistis and by others as Kybele.

⁹¹ MAMA 6 no. 396, pl. 69; see also, Haspels 1971, 297 no. 7; Vermaseren 1987, no. 156.

⁹² MAMA 6 no. 397, pl. 70; see also, Haspels 1971, 298 no. 8; Vermaseren 1987, no. 157.

⁹³ For examples, see Vermaseren 1987 and Roller 2004.

Since bringing together all comparable examples from outside Phrygia would exceed the scope of the present study, we shall limit ourselves here to a few important cases. One example from outside the Phrygian region in which Agdistis is mentioned only under her own name is the votive inscription from Termessos discussed above, which is thought to have been connected with a sacred area. This dedication was offered to Agdistis alone, and the dedicator also states that he made it “on behalf of his family” (ὕπὲρ τῆς συγγενείας). Agdistis, of Phrygian origin, also comes to the fore in this inscription from the Pisidian region in her own identity, without the Hellenized Meter. Moreover, the dedicator, Logbasis, bears a local Anatolian name, a fact that may be associated with the deep-rooted past of both the cult and the family. At this point, Talloen’s assessment is particularly significant: “In the second century CE, the archaeological and epigraphic material indicates the existence, among local elites, of a tendency to reinforce claims that their cities possessed a glorious past, including in the religious sphere. This turn toward the indigenous past should be understood within the framework of a broader cultural movement that led to archaism in art, literature, and rhetoric and is generally referred to as the ‘Second Sophistic’; this movement created, in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, a cultural atmosphere based on the rediscovery of identity and unity. Accordingly, the fact that Agdistis is mentioned at Termessos without the Hellenized Meter appears to represent a reference to the noble past of the family through a deeply rooted Anatolian goddess, and thus a deliberate choice⁹⁴.

Another inscription from the Pisidian region is likewise among the important examples documenting that Agdistis was worshipped independently of Meter. This object, dated to the Early Roman Imperial Period, was found in the village of Arvalı, southwest of Sagalassos, and was dedicated by a priestess of the goddess. Here again, Agdistis is mentioned alone and as the goddess “who hears prayers”⁹⁵. On the front face of the altar there is a wreath, with a bunch of grapes to its left and three ears of grain to its right. These elements clearly show that Agdistis was worshipped here in her capacity as a goddess of fertility. Moreover, the ancestors of the female dedicator are, interestingly, listed back through three generations. This almost recalls the dedication from Termessos, in which Logbasis offered a dedication to Agdistis on behalf of his “syngeneia”. In accordance with Talloen’s view, this was probably intended to emphasize the noble roots of the family to which the priestess belonged. The attestation of a priestess in the inscription suggests the existence of an organized cult here. For this reason, it is likely that a sanctuary dedicated to Agdistis existed in the rural area around the village of Arvalı. It cannot be determined with certainty, however, whether this sanctuary belonged to the territory of Sagalassos or whether it was an independent local cultic site⁹⁶. Here too, there is no reason not to think of Agdistis as the Phrygian mountain goddess, perhaps even in the form known from the myths as a hermaphroditic being who later became female, since she is mentioned under her own distinctive name and no reference is made alongside her to the Hellenized Meter.

In an inscription from Philadelphia in Lydia, modern Alaşehir, which was briefly discussed above, Agdistis is again mentioned independently of Meter and under her own name, together with various saviour deities, above all Zeus and Hestia. In this inscription, she comes to the fore

⁹⁴ Erten 2025, 165-166.

⁹⁵ Bean 1954, 478 no. 9, 500; *SEG* 14 no. 801; Karayaka 2007, 21 fn. 196; Talloen 2015, 258 fn. 278, 692. For other examples in which Agdistis is mentioned with this epithet, see also, Schwenn 1922, 2295, 30-40.

⁹⁶ Vermaseren 1987, no. 761.

as the sacred protector and mistress of the “oikos”⁹⁷. The inscription is dated to the first century BCE and records the regulations of a family cult founded by Dionysios. According to these regulations, everyone in the group was to be under the protection of Agdistis. According to Roller, the association of the Phrygian Agdistis with morally proper behaviour is noteworthy, and this text is also one of the earliest documents attesting the goddess’ later “saviour” character. Roller points out that, in the inscription, the Phrygian Mother Goddess is addressed not as Matar, but by the local name used by the people in Phrygia. Roller thus expresses the view that Agdistis was a name of Matar⁹⁸. Here, however, neither Matar nor the Hellenized Meter is mentioned. There is therefore no reason not to regard the goddess in the inscription as Agdistis in her original form, namely as the local Phrygian mountain goddess, perhaps even in the form known from the myths as a hermaphroditic being who later became female. If the inhabitants of Philadelphia had wished to refer to the Mother Goddess in her Hellenized form, they could perfectly well have designated her simply by her own name, that is, as Meter, as is the case in many other examples.

In this context, a votive inscription on a stele dated to the fourth century BCE and found in Piraeus, in which Agdistis is represented together with Attis, is, in our view, of considerable importance⁹⁹. On this stele, Attis is depicted seated, while Agdistis stands opposite him; the inscription explicitly states: “Timothea dedicated this to Angdistis and Attis on behalf of her children, in accordance with a command”. The importance of this object lies both in the fact that Agdistis is represented visually and in the fact that, in the inscription, she is addressed not as Meter or Kybele, but by her own distinctive name. In other words, in this object Agdistis is both represented independently of Meter and addressed solely by her own name. Roller also drew attention to this fact, although she again interpreted it as evidence that Agdistis was a “special name” of Meter in Anatolia¹⁰⁰. In our view, however, the representation of Attis and Agdistis facing one another in this object constitutes a direct and explicit reference to the myths of Attis and to the narratives concerning Agdistis within them. Accordingly, the Agdistis named in the inscription does not, in our opinion, represent Meter. Rather, the figure encountered here should be understood as the Phrygian mountain goddess Agdistis: a castrated hermaphroditic being who fell in love with Attis and subsequently caused him to go mad and castrate himself. If the dedicators had intended to refer to the Hellenized Meter or the Phrygian Kybele, one would expect the inscription to mention those names rather than Agdistis.

Inscriptions in which Agdistis and Meter are mentioned side by side with the conjunction “kai” between them, or objects in which the two are represented as distinct goddesses within the same work

We have not yet encountered an example of this type in the region of Phrygia. One of the important documents belonging to this group, however, is an inscription from Iconium, modern Konya, in the region of Lycaonia¹⁰¹. The inscription points to distinct divine beings, since they are mentioned separately as “Agdistis and Meter Boethene and Meter Theon” with the conjunction “kai” used between the names. According to some scholars, the most likely explanation is that we are dealing here with a very archaic divine figure. This goddess possessed

⁹⁷ Vermaseren 1987, no. 489; Stowers 1998, 293 ff.; Roller 2004, 193-195.

⁹⁸ Roller 2004, 194, fn. 28.

⁹⁹ Chiai 2020, 236 fn. 740.

¹⁰⁰ Roller 2004, 365 fn. 149.

¹⁰¹ MAMA 8 no. 297; Vermaseren 1987, no. 777; Röhr 2009, 202 no. 343.

an independent identity in a particular region and during a particular period, but later merged with a goddess of the type represented by Kybele because of similarities in cult and function¹⁰². According to Röhr, in this official inscription Agdistis, Meter Boethene, and Meter Theon are invoked not as one, but as three different manifestations of the “Phrygian Mother Goddess”; the inscription thus documents that Anatolian divine beings continued to retain their importance under Roman rule. In our view, however, Agdistis is here once again deliberately distinguished from the Hellenized Meter and probably preserves her identity as an Anatolian mountain goddess with a deeply rooted cult. The fact that the inscription is dated to the reign of Hadrian or to a period after it is particularly noteworthy, since it shows that belief in Agdistis, as a product of local Anatolian religious traditions, continued to survive even at a relatively late date.

Another important example from Lycaonia, this time from the settlement of Zizima/Sızma, is a votive inscription in which Agdistis and Meter are clearly presented as two distinct divine beings¹⁰³. The inscription records dedications to Apollo Sozon, Agdistis Epekoos, Helios, and Meter Zizimene. What is particularly noteworthy, however, is that these deities are mentioned and represented separately on the four different faces of the object. Accordingly, in this inscription Agdistis, bearing the epithet “who hears prayers” is clearly distinguished from Meter Zizimene, the powerful local goddess of the region, and is presented as an independent divine being. Even more interesting is the fact that on the side bearing the name of Agdistis there is a relief of a horseman facing left, whereas on the side bearing the name of Meter Zizimene there is a depiction of a goddess seated on a throne, though without lions. In other words, Agdistis and the Hellenized Meter are distinguished both in the inscription and in their visual representation. On the other hand, the question also arises whether the horseman relief on the side of Agdistis might be interpreted as an allusion to her hermaphroditic form before castration. Furthermore, if we recall the example of Meter Tetrprosopos discussed at the beginning, it is also possible to compare this situation with the representation of local goddesses as separate figures and with their designation as Tetrprosopos, that is, as the “four-faced Meter”.

Another example comes from the region of Lydia. In an inscription found at Sardis, the temple personnel of Zeus are prohibited from participating in the cults of Sabazios, Angdistis, and Ma. Ma was a goddess with deep-rooted worship in Anatolia; her cult was particularly strong in the surroundings of Comana in Cappadocia and Comana in Pontus¹⁰⁴. Many scholars have accepted that Ma, the powerful goddess of Comana in Cappadocia, represents another version of the Anatolian Great Mother Goddess¹⁰⁵. In this respect, she possesses the character of a mother goddess; yet, like Kybele, she is not limited solely to fertility or abundance. She was also conceived as a martial, protective, and victory-bringing goddess¹⁰⁶. Accordingly, this inscription constitutes an important example among the inscriptions in which Agdistis and another Mother Goddess are explicitly distinguished by means of the conjunction “kai”, thereby indicating that

¹⁰² Bádenas et al. 1987, 14 fn. 16.

¹⁰³ SEG 6 no. 392; Vermaseren 1987, no. 786; Röhr 2009, 203 no. 345. For the epiclases of Meter in Lycaonia, see Rehrenböck 2004, 443-453; for the cult of Meter in Lycaonia, see also, Röhr 2009, 218-237; for a new inscription (Meter Theon), see Öztürk, Baz & Uğuz 2025, 23-24 fn. 7.

¹⁰⁴ Baz 2007, 146-149; 2009, 65-69.

¹⁰⁵ Hartmann 1928, 82; Mutlu 2016, 311.

¹⁰⁶ On the various attributes of the goddess Ma, together with the relevant bibliography, see also, Erten 2025, 161.

they were perceived as independent from one another¹⁰⁷.

Inscriptions in which Meter is mentioned alone, that is, without Agdistis alongside her

Alongside the numerous inscriptions in which the Anatolian goddess Agdistis is mentioned alone, the Hellenized Meter is likewise attested in many inscriptions without Agdistis appearing alongside her. The number of such examples, from both Phrygia and regions outside Phrygia, is quite substantial. Accordingly, collecting these examples would exceed the scope of the present study¹⁰⁸. What may be said in relation to such examples, for the purposes of the present study, is that the absence of Agdistis from the numerous inscriptions in which Meter is mentioned only under her own name or with her epithets in fact supports our view that the two were regarded as distinct and independent goddesses even in the Roman period. In an inscription from Nakoleia, for example, the settlers make a dedication to Meter Kybele¹⁰⁹. This shows that dedicators could identify Meter with Agdistis when they wished, and at other times with the local Mother Goddess Kybele.

In conclusion, all these examples shed light on the colourful religious beliefs of people in antiquity during the Roman Period. They indicate that worshippers were aware of the distinctions between Meter, Kybele, and Agdistis; that at times they syncretized them while preserving their distinctive names; and that, more often, they worshipped them as entirely independent goddesses, thereby preserving ancient Anatolian religious traditions even in the Roman Period.

¹⁰⁷ Chiai 2020, 146.

¹⁰⁸ For various examples, see Vermaseren 1987 and Roller 2004; For examples from Pisidia, see also, Karayaka 2007, 22.

¹⁰⁹ Vermaseren 1987, no. 178.

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* Abbreviations of epigraphical editions and reference works follow the "Liste des abréviations des éditions et ouvrages de référence pour l'épigraphie grecque alphabétique (GrEpiAbbr – Version 03, Septembre 2024)" developed by the Association Internationale d'Épigraphie Grecque et Latine.

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