

Kybele as Kubaba in a Lydo-Phrygian Context

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The Syro-Anatolian goddess Kubaba is among the most enduring cultural features of the ancient Near East and Mediterranean world. Contemporary documents attest her name as far apart in time and space as the Middle Bronze Age Assyrian merchant colony at Kanesh in central Anatolia and Rome in the Age of Augustus. Across this span, Kubaba is named in cuneiform Akkadian and Hittite texts, in hieroglyphic Luwian, and in alphabetic Aramaic, Lydian, Phrygian, Greek and Latin texts. The very scope of this material, spanning such a linguistic, cultural and historical range, constitutes a major challenge to scholars interested in evaluating the cultural contexts that sustained the worship of Kubaba across the centuries. One of the problems that emerges from this long history is how to account for the forms of the name of this goddess in the various languages in which it was spoken. The present paper is devoted to a troublesome aspect of this problem, namely, the relationship between Kubaba and the Greco-Roman Kybele. Aware that others have argued to the contrary, I will argue that Kybele is indeed part of the legacy of Syro-Anatolian Kubaba, and that the transformation of her name finds explanation in the languages of Anatolia, particularly among the Lydians and Phrygians, where Greco-Roman sources place the home of her cult.

The Anatolian linguist Emmanuel Laroche most clearly outlined the evidence for the diachronic study of the cult of Kubaba in a seminal article from 1960, entitled “Koubaba, déesse anatolienne, et le problème des origines de Cybèle.” Laroche argued that “Cybèle,” or Kybele (Greek Κυβέλη) was the descendent of the older Syro-Anatolian Kubaba, whose especial home was at Carchemish in North Syria (see Hawkins 1981). In making this argument, Laroche assumed the identity of Kybele with Kybebe (Κυβήβη), a name that clearly derives from Kubaba. The name of Kybebe is most famously attested by Herodotus, who identifies her as the object of an indigenous cult at Sardis (Herodotus, *Hist.* 5.102.1). Charon of Lampsacus also mentions the cult of Kybebe among the Lydians and Phrygians, and the testimony of these fifth-century authors has been confirmed by Lydian inscriptions from Sardis, which give her name in the phonologically related form, *Kuvav*-.¹ Kybele is also identified with Lydia and Phrygia in fifth-century sources (most notably in Euripides’ *Bacchae*), but the equation between Kybebe and Kybele is not explicitly attested until the late Hellenistic and Roman imperial eras. Strabo, Virgil and Catullus speak of the worship of Kybebe (or *Cybebe* in Latin) and the sacred places of Kybele (Latin *Cybele*) in the landscape of Lydia and Phrygia, suggesting that the names of Kybebe and Kybele were interchangeable.² Later lexicographers explained these names as references to the same divinity.³ Many historians of religion have accepted this equation, and have followed Laroche in identifying both Kybele and Kybebe alike as the descendants of Kubaba.⁴

Since Laroche wrote, the antecedents to Greek Κυβέλη in Old Phrygian inscriptions have become better known through the work of Claude Brixhe. Brixhe has shown that the goddess is most often named in Old Phrygian inscriptions simply as *Matar*, “Mother,” occasionally as *Matar Kubeleya*.⁵ This evidence is consistent with the testimony of classical sources to the Phrygian origin of Kybele, and to her identification with the goddess also called “the Mother,” or most often “the Mother of the Gods” (ἡ Μήτηρ τῶν Θεῶν). But the

Phrygian evidence has seemingly failed to reveal the connection to Kubaba that Laroche expected. Brixhe could find no way to derive the Phrygian name, *Kubeleya*, from Kubaba.

In the absence of a phonological explanation of the transformation of the name Κυβήβη into Κυβέλη, the connection between Kubaba of the Bronze and Iron Ages and classical Kybele has been called into question. As Brixhe has observed, Phrygian *Kubeleya* is an attributive adjective modifying *Matar*.⁶ Unlike Kubaba, which is a proper name, *Kubeleya* in Phrygian is an epithet. As to the origin of Phrygian *Kubeleya*, Brixhe has pointed to Greek sources that derive the name of Κυβέλη from a place, most often identified as a mountain or mountains in Phrygia, called Κύβελον or Κυβέλα. Brixhe has postulated that Κύβελον or Κυβέλα derives from a Phrygian word for “mountain,” and that *Matar Kubeleya* is therefore the Phrygian equivalent to the Greek Μητήρ ὀρεία, “Mountain Mother,” which is a well attested appellation of the Mother of the Gods.⁷

The most significant conclusion that Brixhe deduces from this line of analysis is that the name of Κυβέλη in Greek comes from Phrygian, and has nothing to do with the name of Kubaba and its descendant, Κυβήβη at Sardis.⁸ Fritz Graf and Mary Rein have also argued that Phrygian Κυβέλη should be distinguished from Lydian Κυβήβη, largely on the basis of the common identification of Κυβέλη with settings in nature, contrasting with the shrine of Κυβήβη in an urban setting at Sardis.⁹ Most recently, Lynn Roller has drawn attention to details in the iconography as well as the settings of the monuments of the Phrygian Mother and of Kubaba in North Syria that mark distinctions between them (Roller 1994, 66–68 and 1999, 121–41). The fact that the Greeks appear to have regarded Κυβήβη and Κυβέλη, the Phrygian Mother, as one and the same is taken as a sign of insensitivity to distinct, native origins. According to Roller: “The words Κυβήβη (Kybebe) and Κυβέλη (Kybele), while distinctive in their Anatolian languages, are only slightly different in Greek, and the Greeks may well have conflated them” (Roller 1999, 124).

The differences and distinctions seen by these scholars are real, but they are subtle features, and their significance is a matter of interpretation. The single strongest argument for a fundamental difference between the Phrygian deity, *Matar Kubeleya*, and her older, Anatolian counterpart, Kubaba, is the absence of any account of the relationship between their names. If, however, the epithet *Kubeleya* can plausibly be derived from the older name of Kubaba, then the connection between Κυβήβη and Κυβέλη observed in late-classical sources cannot be dismissed, and variations in iconography and cultic topography between Kubaba and Κυβήβη, on the one hand, and the Phrygian goddess on the other, must be explained as developmental variations, not fundamental distinctions. In fact, the present understanding of Anatolian languages allows Κυβέλη to be explained as a development, via Phrygian *Kubeleya*, from the older name of Kubaba. This explanation respects Brixhe’s demonstration that *Kubeleya* is an epithet, and his argument that it refers to topographical features (although not to mountains alone). This explanation also takes into account the fact that the Phrygian language was a relative newcomer to Anatolia, and that the name of an Anatolian deity in Phrygian should reflect inflectional patterns attested among Anatolian languages, such as Lydian and Lycian, and should only secondarily show features imposed on it by speakers of Phrygian. Cultural as well as linguistic connections strongly support the derivation of a divinity known to the Greeks as Kybele from her more ancient forerunner, Kubaba.

The name of Kubaba at Sardis is attested as Κυβήβη by Herodotus, as has been noted above, and occurs in two Lydian inscriptions preserving the root form of her name: *Kuvav-*.¹⁰ These two attested vocalizations indicate that where Lydians pronounced the fricative, *v*, in the name of Kubaba, others pronounced the labial stop, *b*.¹¹ Greek ears, and Phrygian as well, consistently heard a *b* in her name. Inflexions in Lydian and related Anatolian languages will have altered the ending of this name, according to its grammatical use. The genitive in Lydian is formed by an adjectival/genitive suffix, *-li-*, and a similar suffix, *-(ē)li*, is found in other Anatolian languages.¹² The adjectival or genitive form of the name of Kubaba in Lydian would thus, hypothetically, be **Kuvavli-*, pronounced by some as **Kubabli-*. Both Lydian and Lycian show examples of

this suffix attached to the name of divinities to create theophoric names. So from the name of Artemis (which is *Artimus* in Lydian, and *Ertemi* in Lycian) *Artimalis* is attested as a personal name in Lydian, and *Ertimele* in Lycian, meaning “The One of Artemis.”¹³ Likewise, *Bakillis* is attested as the name of a Lydian month, formed from the name of the Lydian god, *Baki-*.¹⁴ The formation of **Kuvavli-*, or **Kubabli-*, would therefore conform to a well-attested pattern for designating a person, place, or thing “of” or “pertaining to Kubaba.”

Among speakers of Phrygian, the consonant cluster at the end of **Kubabli-* was probably simplified to **Kuballi-*, and through an attested shift in vowels, **Kuballi-* became **Kubelli-*.¹⁵ This derivation is hypothetical, but it is based on attested forms, and does not require the hypothesis of an unattested lexical item, a Phrygian word for “mountain” (on which, see now Yakubovich 2007, 143). **Kubelli-* is probably the source of the Greek form Κύβελις, said to be an epithet or a name for Rhea, the mother of Zeus, used by Hipponax of Ephesos at the end of the sixth century. Ioannes Tzetzes, who preserves this information, goes on to say that the name comes from the worship of this goddess in a Phrygian town (πόλις) called Κυβέλλα.¹⁶ According to the derivation described here, this town called Κυβέλλα can be understood as “a place of Kubaba.”

Phrygian *Kubeleya* is a further formation from the same derivation. Like the Lydian suffix *-li-*, the Phrygian suffix *-eya* is used to form attributive adjectives.¹⁷ The Phrygian *Kubeleya*, as an epithet modifying *Matar*, “Mother,” can therefore be recognized as a Phrygian adjectival formation on **Kubelli-*, itself an adjectival formation from the name of Kubaba. *Matar Kubeleya* in the Phrygian inscriptions therefore designates “the Mother of the place of Kubaba,” or “the Mother who is identified with the place of Kubaba.” The name of Kubaba can thus be seen to have entered Phrygian as an attributive adjective in a form used in Lydian and in other Anatolian languages. The name *Kubeleya* was used to designate places that were especially associated with Kubaba or, as she was known in Greek, Κυβήβη.

Kybele in Greek might derive from the hypothetical form, **Kubelli-*, in Phrygian. At any rate, this is the probable origin of the attested place name, Κυβέλλα, as noted above. More probably, as Brixhe has argued, Kybele in Greek derives from the attested Phrygian epithet, *Kubeleya*. For this last is identical to Greek Κυβέλεια, attested as a place name (πόλις) in Ionia recorded by Hecataeus of Miletos at the end of the sixth century.¹⁸ This may be the same Κυβέλεια identified by Strabo as a place near Mount Mimas in the territory of Erythrae, a “tall, well-wooded mountain, filled with wild game” (Strabo, *Geog.* 14.1.33), exactly the sort of place associated with the Mother of the Gods, and with Κυβέλη, by Greek sources.

Phrygian *Kubeleya* and Greek Κυβέλεια alike were the names of places, and they were also divine epithets that characterized those places as dear to Kubaba. Greek Κυβέλη can be recognized as the nominalization of an attributive name, Κυβέλεια, just as the deity Βασίλη, attested at Athens and associated with the Ionian heroes, Kodros and Neleus, can be understood as a personification of Βασιλεία, or “sovereignty.”¹⁹ Thus we can recognize Greek Kybele, known also as Μητήρ Κυβέλη, and Phrygian *Matar Kubeleya* both as descendents of Kubaba.

Brixhe, Graf, Roller and others, are justified in seeing the Phrygian *Matar Kubeleya* as a distinctive expression of divinity, linked as she is with sacred places in the landscape, and especially mountains. But there is no justification for dissociating her ancestry from Kubaba, or in separating her from Kybebe at Sardis. Greek and Latin authors link Kybele and Kybebe, and the present argument demonstrates that this connection has a plausible linguistic basis. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Greek and Latin authors frequently refer to the Mother of the Gods, to Kybele, and even to Kybebe, as both Lydian and Phrygian, as if one ethnic identity were equivalent to the other. The reason for this, I believe, is that the chief monuments of the Phrygian Mother are products of the era of the Lydian Empire in western Anatolia. While Kybebe was honored at her urban shrine at Sardis, the seat of Lydian sovereignty, she was also honored at the *Kubeleya*, the “place(s) of Kubaba,” which were distributed over the land that the Lydians ruled. In both cases, the goddess signifies sovereignty.

This is clearly the case with the most famous of the Phrygian monuments associated with the Phrygian Mother, the rock-cut facade in the Phrygian highlands known as the “Midas Monument.” As is the case with other such facades, the “Midas Monument” honored the Phrygian Mother, whose name, *Matar*, appears in inscriptions within the central niche, where a statue of the goddess once stood. This monument to the Mother was also a monument to kingship, for the Phrygian inscription over the top of the facade records a dedication by Ates to Midas, who is given the titles *Wanax* and *Lawag-e>tas* (to render these titles in Hellenized forms). Although some scholars have maintained that the Midas Monument was contemporary to the historical Midas, at the turn of the eighth to the seventh century, the preponderance of scholarly opinion now regards it to be a century or more later in date. The thorough study of this and related monuments in the Phrygian highlands by Susanne Berndt-Ersöz (2006a, see especially 126–34) confirms that the Midas Monument is a product of the mid-sixth century, in the time of Croesus. It was therefore most likely a posthumous monument to a heroized Midas, regarded as a paradigm of kingship by the Mermnad Lydians. The dedicator, Ates, bears a dynastic Lydian name, and most probably was none other than the Atys, son of Croesus, known from Herodotus.²⁰ The Phrygian Mother, whose statue stood within this monument, appeared to her worshipers as the agent of sovereignty, offering the kingship once held by Midas to a later generation of rulers. From this context we may recognize how the Greeks became familiar with Kybebe, a goddess of the Phrygians and the Lydians, and how they understood her to be the same as the goddess known from her many sacred places, called *Kubeleya*. To the Lydians and the Phrygians in the era of Mermnad tyranny, Kybebe was the ultimate source of all of the good things that came from perfect kingship. To the later Greeks, after the fall of Croesus and the manifest failure of the Lydian paradigm of kingship, she was abstracted from tyranny and became known, from the landmarks associated with her, as Kybele, the “Great Mother of Gods and Men.”²¹

NOTES

- 1 Charon of Lampsacus, *FGrHist* 262 F 5 = Photius s.v. Κύβητος. For the Lydian inscriptions, see Gusmani (1969).
- 2 Strabo, *Geog.* 10.3.12, 15. Virgil, *Aen.* 3.111 refers to *Mater Cybeli*, using *Cybelus* as a place name (cf. 11.768); at 10.220–33, Virgil names the goddess Kybebe ... *Genetrix*. Catullus 63 alternates between *Cybebe* (63.9, 20, 35, 84, and 91: *Dea magna, dea Cybebe, dea domina Dindymi*) and *Cybele* (63.12, 68, 76).
- 3 Hesychius s.vv. Κυβήβη, Κύβητος; Photius, *Lexicon* s.v. Κυβήτος; *Etymologicum Gudianum* s.v. Κυβήβη. These testimonia are usefully collected by Santoro (1973, 154–57).
- 4 So Fauth (1969, col. 383); Vermaseren (1977, 21–24); Diakonoff (1977); Burkert (1979, 102–5; 1985, 177–78).
- 5 Brixhe (1979), who notes the alternate spellings, *Kubileya* and *Kubeleya*.
- 6 Brixhe (1979). See also Brixhe and Lejeune (1984, 1, 45–47 no. W-04, and 62–68 no. B-01).
- 7 Brixhe (1979, 43–45), followed by Zgusta (1982), Gusmani (1980–1986, 68–69), Innocente (1995, 216), and Roller (1999, 66–69, 125, and 171). For the Phrygian antecedent to the Greek “Mountain Mother,” see now Yakubovich (2007, 143), who identifies Phrygian *areyasti-*, attested as another epithet of *Matar*, as a derivation from Luwian **areyatti-*, “mountain.” (I thank Ilya Yakubovich for bringing this identification to my attention.)
- 8 Brixhe (1979, 45), concludes that his deductions “excluent que Kubaba et Κυβέλη dérivent d’un même thème ou que le second soit issu d’une altération du premier.”
- 9 Graf (1984, 119; from a paper delivered in 1979); Rein (1993, 10–18; 1996).
- 10 One text, Gusmani (1964, 252, no. 4a line 4), names Kybebe as one of three deities protecting a tomb from desecration (for corrected readings see Gusmani 1975, 266–67); the second text, Gusmani (1980–1986, no. 72; see Gusmani 1969) is a graffito on a potsherd partially preserving her name. For the most likely readings of these texts, see Gusmani 1969, and 1980–1986, 68 (revising an earlier reading in Gusmani 1964, 156).
- 11 Melchert (1994, 128–29; 2003, 175–77), summarizes phonological characteristics of first-millennium Anatolian languages. Gusmani (1964, 31–32) demonstrates the not infrequent alternation of labials, *b*, *v*, and *f*, in Lydian.
- 12 On Lydian *-li-*, See Gusmani (1964, 36; 1980–1986, 71); Heubeck (1969, 416–17); Georgiev (1981, 209; 1984, 9–10, and 34

- n. 13). The possessive suffix *-(ē)li* is common to Carian, Lycian, Luwian, Lydian, and Etruscan; see Georgiev (1981, 211; 1984, 8–9) and Melchert (2003, 195).
- 13 Lydian *Artimalis*: Gusmani (1964, 63). Lycian *Erttimeli* and Ἀρτεμῆλις; Laroche, in Metzger (1979, 58 and 114). Cf. Heubeck (1959, 21–23); Georgiev (1984, 9–10).
- 14 Gusmani (1964, 74). Cf. Greek Βάχχιος as a personal name, and Βακχιών as an Ionian month; see Trümper (1997, 57, 60, 64–65).
- 15 The consonant cluster *-vl-* or *-bl-* is not attested in surviving Old Phrygian texts, and may have been avoided in Phrygian. Brixhe (1994, 175–76), notices the tendency for Phrygian to adopt personal names from the Hittite/Luwian languages that Phrygian speakers came into contact with, yielding irregular nominal morphologies. Gusmani (1976, 79), discusses the vocalic phonology in the shift *â > η*. The Lydian vocalic phonology is preserved in the earliest Greek text to name Kybele, a graffito on a sherd from Epizephyrian Locri, in southern Italy, probably dating to the early-sixth century. It reads: [τᾱ]ς Κυβάλας (“... of Kubala,” using koppa instead of kappa). See Guarducci (1970); the sherd is illustrated in a line drawing in Vermaseren (1977, 23, fig. 12).
- 16 Hipponax fr. 156 (West = 121 Bergk), cited in Santoro (1973, 155).
- 17 On the Phrygian adjectival or attributive suffix *-eyo/a* used in name formations, see Brixhe 1979, 43 n. 32; Neumann (1988, 7–8, 21).
- 18 Hecataeus, *FGrHist* 1 F 230 (from Stephanus of Byzantium, s.v. Κυβέλαια).
- 19 On Basile and the shrine she shared with Kodros and Neleus, see *IG I³* 84, and Plato, *Charmides* 153A.
- 20 As argued by Berndt-Ersöz (2006a, 130, and 2006b).
- 21 The interpretation outlined here of the Phrygian Mother as a symbol of sovereignty is presented in greater detail in chapters 2 through 4 of Munn (2006). I would like to thank H. Craig Melchert for his advice on many of the linguistic points covered in this paper, without, however, implying that he is responsible for how I have used his advice.

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