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The Cult of Meter Theon in Pisidian Conana

Abstract: Two altars from Pisidian Conana, dedicated to Meter Theon by the priest Attalos, and to the saviour gods by the priest Titus Aelius Onesimus, prove the existence at Conana of a cult of Meter Theon and the other deities. Both dedications are to be dated to the 2nd or 3rd century AD.

Keywords: Conana; Meter Theon; Cybele; saviour gods; priest; cult.

In July 2013 during the Isparta Archaeological Survey (IAS),¹ in the region of modern Isparta in the village of Gönen (which in antiquity corresponded to the city of Konane/Conana), a local inhabitant² told us about a stone found in an unlicensed excavation area during the hunting season (probably in December or January). He had carried the stone to his own house and put it in the woodshed.

The profiled top of the stone is completely broken, and there is damage below the inscription on the main body; the damage seems to be the work of a pickaxe or a sledge hammer by smugglers. However, the inscription is well preserved. It is very clear and legible. The inscription has seven lines written in ancient Greek on the front side. This altar, datable to the 2nd or 3rd century AD, proves the existence of a cult of Meter Theon (Cybele) on the territory of Conana. The inscription informs us that Attalos, the priest, dedicated a statuette, with an altar and a table to the goddess at his own expense. According to these data it seems that in the field where the stone was found there may have been a temple of the goddess, and that Attalos was its priest for life.

Height: 0.592 m.; width: 0.51 m. (base), 0.44 m. (main body); thickness: 0.37 m.; letter height: 0.025–0.030 m.; interlinear spacing: 0.005 m.

Μητρι Θεῶν ἐπι-
2 κῶν Ἄτταλος
Παπᾶ ἱερεὺς δι-
4 ἄβιου τὸ ἱέρω-
μα σὺν τῷ βωμῷ
6 καὶ τῇ τραπέζῃ
παρ' ἑαυτοῦ ἀνέθηκε.

“Attalos, son of Papas, the priest (of the goddess) for life, dedicated (this) statuette with the altar and the table at his own expense to the listening (goddess) Meter Theon”.



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¹ In 2008, with the support of Süleyman Demirel University, an archaeological survey was initiated by Assoc. Prof. Bilge Hürmüzlü in the district and county of Isparta under the name of Isparta Archaeological Survey (IAS). For recent works on Conana see Hürmüzlü 2010a, 29–31; Hürmüzlü 2010b, 124–126; Hürmüzlü 2011, 163–172.

² I would like to thank Murat Toptaş for informing me about this stone and the details he gave to me. I would also like to thank his lovely mother Hediye Hanım for her kind hospitality. IAS 2013 is supported by TÜBİTAK no 111K376. I would like to thank Bilge Hürmüzlü for supporting me with this project.

Date: 2nd/ 3rd c. AD.

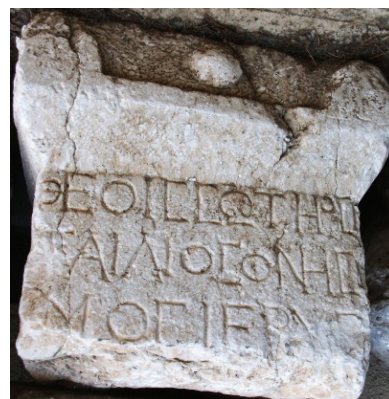
The epithet of Meter Theon (line 1–2: ἐπηκόω) appears in another inscription found in Gönen (Conana) in 2009 during the same survey, this time as an epithet of Zeus (Δι[ῖ] ἐπηκόω).³ This stone is also vital because it informs us that ancient Conana was an important territory of the cult.

Another unpublished votive inscription found in Gönen (Conana) in the construction area of TOKİ (Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı) in 2009 during the same survey indicates that a priest named Titus Aelius Onesimus dedicated something unknown to the saviour gods. The stone is made of white marble and it is broken only at the bottom. There is a disc in a recessed field at the top.

Height: 0.315 m.; width: 0.315 m.; thickness: 0.027 m.; letter height: 0.016–0.035 m.; interlinear spacing: 0.012–0.017 m.

θεοῖς σωτήρσι
 2 Τ(ίτος) Αἴλιος Ὀνήσι-
 μος ἱερεὺς

T(itus) Aelius Onesimus, the priest of ---, (dedicated this) to the saviour gods.



Date: 2nd/ 3rd c. AD.

Line 3: The second E is small and squeezed in between P and Y. In a further line the name of a god or gods was probably mentioned, whom T. Aelius Onesimus served as ἱερεὺς. The man was obviously a Roman citizen and belonged to the elite of Conana.

Onesimus might be a priest for life like Attalos at a temple in Conana. As a priest, Onesimus dedicated this altar or another unknown object to the saviour gods. The saviour gods could be Zeus Epekoos and Meter Theon Epekoos, or other as yet unattested gods/goddesses being worshipped in this territory.

Like the cult of Zeus, the cult of Meter Theon (Cybele) was significant in Anatolia, particularly in western and northwestern Asia Minor.⁴ It is very well known that Zeus and Cybele were both worshipped in Phrygia and Pisidia, as demonstrated by many inscriptions.⁵ Although the literary sources are virtually silent about Pisidian Conana, the second century geographer Claudius Ptolemaeus places the town under the rubric of Phrygian Pisidia along with Pisidian Seleucia (Seleucia Sidera), Antiocheia, Palaion Beudos, Baris, Lusinia, and Cormasa.⁶ This categorization suggests that the town at one time belonged to Phrygia or had a strong Phrygian element, but was later classified with Pisidia.⁷ So it is very clear that this Pisidian town, Conana, could have been influenced by the local gods or goddesses of Phrygia, and thus it is very normal to have a temple or shrine in Conana dedicated to Zeus or Meter Theon

³ Iversen 2012, 112, no 6: Ἀλέξανδρος Ἀρ^υ τέμωνος Δι[ῖ] ἐπηκόω εὐχήν. He dates the inscription to the 2nd/4th century AD. The title ἐπηκόος is attested for many gods, see Weinreich 1912, 1–62.

⁴ Katsari et al. 2012, 39.

⁵ MAMA 5 Lists, Note: 188, 1 [2/5]: ἀγαθῇ τύχη | Διῖ Βροντῶντι ἐπη|κόω θεῶ Δαδάς Δαμῆ | σὺν τοῖς τέκνοις Ὀνησίμῳ καὶ Διομῆ | καὶ Χρυσίῳ ὑπὲρ τῶν | [ῖ]δίων εὐχήν ἀνέστησαν; MAMA 5 Lists, Note: 188, 1 [2/9]: Διῖ ἐξ Αὐλῆς ἐπηκόω θεῶ | οἱ Παπᾶ καὶ Γαῖου | κληρονόμ<ο> | ὑπὲρ Ἀσκληπιάδου τοῦ Δαμῆ υἱοῦ εὐχήν | τήνδε ἀνέστησαν | δόντες καὶ τεμένους | ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τῷ θεῶ | καὶ τῇ κόμη Ἀττικᾶς | .β καὶ ῖ | εἵνεκα εἰλωα ἔχιν τὸν | θεόν. ἔτους σξγ'; MAMA 9, 65: Μητρὶ | θεῶν τὸ θύρωμα; SEG 40, 1181: Φλαμινία Πρόκιλλα | Γαῖου Ποντίου Ἀπολλ[ῖ]ναρίου γυνὴ Μητρὶ | θεῶν εὐχήν; Ramsay, Cities and Bishoprics 337, 173: Μητρὶ θεῶν | Κοτῆς Καλλικλέους | ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων ἀνέθηκεν.

⁶ Ptol., Geogr. 5.5.4–5.5.5: Πόλεις δὲ εἰσιν ἐν τῇ ἐπαρχίᾳ μεσόγειοι: Φρυγίας μὲν Πισιδίας, Σελεύχεια Πισιδίας, Ἀντιόχεια, Παλαιὸν Βεῦδος, Βάρις, Κονάνη, Λυσινία, Κόρμασα; Iversen 2010, 173.

⁷ Iversen 2010, 173.

(Cybele), the most honored god and goddess of Phrygia,⁸ with the same or different epithets being used there.⁹ It seems very likely that these hypotheses will be confirmed when an excavation takes place in this territory in the forthcoming years.

Abbreviated Literature

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Özet

Antik Conana Kentinde Meter Theon Kültü

Antik Conana kentinden çıkan ve birincisi Attalos adlı bir rahip tarafından Meter Theon'a (Tanrıların Anası), diğeri ise Titus Aelius Onesimus adlı bir rahip tarafından kurtarıcı tanrılara adanmış iki yeni adak yazıtı, Pisidia bölgesinde bulunan Conana antik kentinde bir zamanlar Ana Tanrıça ve başka tanrılara/ tanrıçalara ait bir kült olduğunu kanıtlamaktadır. Harf karakterleri doğrultusunda İ.S. 2. veya 3. yüzyıla tarihlenen yazıtların çevrisi şöyledir:

1) *Papas'ın oğlu, ömür boyu (tanrıçanın) rahibi Attalos, (bu) heykelciği, sunağıyla ve (yemek) masasıyla birlikte kendi kesesinden (yaptırıp), (yakarışları) duyan tanrıların anasına (Meter Theon'a) adadı.*

2) *Filanca tanrının rahibi Titus Aelius Onesimus, (bunu?) kurtarıcı tanrılara (adadı).*

Anahtar Sözcükler: Conana; Meter Theon; Kybele; kurtarıcı tanrılar; rahip; kült.

⁸ Roller, Cybele 1.

⁹ SEG 38, 1310: ἀγαθῆι τύχηι | Διομάς καὶ Εὐτύχηις λατύποι | [M]ητρι θεῶν Φοίβω τ' ὀσίω καὶ Μηνι δικαίω | ὀφθαλμῶ τε Δίκης δικαιοφροσύνης | {δικαιοφροσύνης} χάριν ἄνδρες {vac.} | Σακλεανοὶ σωτήρησι θεοῖς {vac.} ὀσίως ἀνέθηκαν.