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The Kurul Fortress and the Cult of Kybele as a City Protector¹



S. Yücel ŞENYURT – Atakan AKÇAY²

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The Black Sea region has always been a less known region due to a few archaeological research in comparison to the rest of Anatolia. The main era that uncovered the aforementioned darkness of the Black Sea through written sources was obviously the period of Hellenistic Pontic Kingdom. The Kurul Fortress, is the first example of the excavated fortresses dating back to the reign of Mithradates VI Eupator Dionysos. In the fortress, numerous archaeological data have been revealed under different groups of finds. This paper mainly focuses on the location of Kurul Fortress in the historical geography of the Pontic-eastern Black Sea region, as well as its excavated areas and settlement levels, and the city protectress role of the Mother Goddess through the marble statue unearthed in-situ at the main gate.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Doğu Karadeniz, Pontos, Helenistik Dönem, Kibele, VI. Mithradates

Karadeniz Bölgesi, arkeolojik kazı çalışmalarının ve araştırmaların yetersizliği sebebiyle Anadolu tarihi içerisinde her zaman daha az bilinen bir bölge olmuştur. Karadeniz'deki göreceli bilinmezliğin, yazılı kaynaklar yoluyla en fazla aralandığı dönem ise kuşkusuz Helenistik Çağ'da Pontos Krallığı dönemidir. Kurul Kalesi, Doğu Karadeniz'de bugüne kadar yürütülen en uzun süreli kazı çalışması olmasının yanı sıra VI. Mithradates Eupator Dionysos Dönemine tarihlenen kaleler içerisinde kazı çalışmalarının yapıldığı ilk örnektir.

Kurul Kalesi'nde açığa çıkarılan kale yerleşiminde, farklı buluntu grupları altında değerlendirilen çok sayıda arkeolojik veri tespit edilmiştir. Çeşitli tiplerdeki çanak çömlek buluntuları sayısal anlamda en yoğun grubu oluşturmakla birlikte, sikke buluntuları ve savaş aletlerinin sayıları azımsanamayacak ölçüdedir. Bu çalışmanın konusunu temel olarak, Kurul Kalesi'nin Pontik Doğu Karadeniz bölgesi içindeki tarihi coğrafyası, kazısı yapılan sektörler, tespit edilen yerleşim evreleri ve ana giriş kapısında in-situ olarak tespit edilen mermer heykelin Tanrıların Anası'nın kent koruyucu rolüne katkısı oluşturmaktadır.

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² S. Yücel ŞENYURT, Gazi Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Arkeoloji Bölümü, 06500, Beşevler, ANKARA, senyurt@gazi.edu.tr; Atakan AKÇAY, Gazi Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Arkeoloji Bölümü, 06500, Beşevler, ANKARA, atakanakay@gazi.edu.tr.

The Geographical and Historical Background of Kurul

Located within the borders of the province of Ordu, which is at the intersection of the Central and Eastern parts of the Black Sea Region, the site of Kurul is situated atop (Fig. 1) the Kurul rocks (571 meters) along the Melet (*Melanthios*) river. Connecting the Central Anatolia to the Black Sea coast through Mesudiye, the Melanthios River is the most prominent hallmark in the historical geography of Kurul. Situated about 9 km south of the coast, the fortress (Fig. 1 and 2) is on the peak that overlooks the river valley, modern city of Ordu and the coastline (Şenyurt – Akçay 2016: 223-224).

Since 2010, the excavations at the site are being conducted under the management of Ordu Museum and the scientific direction of S. Yücel Şenyurt. Although some coin samples unearthed so far date back to the 4th century BC, no settlement level of that time span has yet been identified. Nonetheless, it is clear that the peak of the rock has been used as an open-air cult area during the 3-2nd centuries BC (Şenyurt – Akçay 2016: 228-229). The formation of the rock crest into a fortress started from the last quarter of the 2nd century BC. The architectural layout that has been developed in accordance with the form of the main rock, spatial arrangements of the structures, passages between sectors, and the connections of door and corridors are all proof of a systematic and planned structure. It is clear that the geographical and topographical position of the rock was very suitable for the military policy of the Pontic king Mithradates VI (120-63 BC), and that the Kurul Fortress (Fig. 1 and 2) has been made as one of the most important military stations around Ordu¹ during this period. However, the lack of coinage in Cotyora (Ordu) during the reign of Mithradates VI could be explained that it was not a center for the royal administration during his reign (Højte 2009: 99), but apparently functioned as a military post and a cult center (Şenyurt – Akçay 2016).

No epigraphic materials identifying the site's original name have been found in the excavations at Kurul so far. Strabo mentions that Mithradates VI built 75 strongholds in the Pontic Kingdom, particularly during his struggle with the Romans (Strab. XII. 3. 28). However, he only names some of these strongholds: Sinoria, Hydara, and Basgoidariza. It is remarkable that he mentions the area covered with deep valleys and steep cliffs over the Paryadres Mountain Range, which houses the Kurul Fortress on the most favorable area for strongholds along its western limits. During this period, disputes principally with the Kingdom of Bithynia for dividing Cappadocia and the three big battles with Rome, must have made it necessary to build defensive strongholds in the Pontic Kingdom. Apparently, the Kurul rocks with hard-to reach steep peaks is very well vantage point and defensive position to build a fortress dominating the Melanthios river and the hinterland of Cotyora.

¹ Cingirt Kayası is another excavated site which dated to Mithradates VI period in Ordu province, Erol 2013; Erol 2015; Erol 2016.



Fig. 1: The Kurul rocks and the Melet river valley



Fig. 2: The excavated sectors

Strongholds or garrisons such as the Kurul Fortress are generally referred to as “*Phrouria*” (Hansen – Nielsen 2004: 42). *Phrouria* are settlement units different from the Greek poleis that feature various structural groups serving the purposes of surveillance, defense and attack, and of economic functions as well (Nielsen 2002: 50-51, 54). It is also mentioned that governors with administrative roles, possibly bearing the title of *strategos* (commander) or *phrouarchos*, were also in charge of the management of such strongholds



Fig. 3: The stepped tunnel of Kurul

(Højte 2009: 99-100, 102). Those officers were said to live in strongholds where royal treasuries and the royal inventory were being kept. While making mention of Sagylion², one of such strongholds, Strabo (Strab. XII. 3. 38) states that it housed a cistern of abundant water³, but Pompeius ordered the cistern be choked up with rocks after seizing the fortress. The fact that the stepped tunnel (Fig. 3) reaching to the water spring in Kurul was also sealed with a cursory wall after being choked up with rocks and made inconvenient for use suggests that it suffered a similar doom after the Roman invasion.

Strabo (64 BC-24 AD), the famous geographer who lived just after the death of Mithradates VI and the collapse of the Pontic Kingdom, mentions three strongholds along the coastal region around the town of Sidene, which is today within the western part of Ordu (Strab. XII. 3. 16). The first fortress mentioned after Sidene being Pharnakeia (Giresun) (Strab. XII. 3. 17) demonstrates that no stronghold was active within the Cotyora hinterland during the second half of the 1st century BC. The archeological results revealed at Kurul also show that the fortress was abandoned after the defeat by the Romans⁴. This arguably explains why Strabo makes no mention on Kurul Fortress as an active stronghold when he wrote his book.

² While the exact location of Sagylion is unclear, Kale Tepe near the Büyük Kale Village within the borders of Vezirköprü is suggested for its location, Arslan 2007: 19, footnote 71.

³ Von Gaal describes the water structures in these strongholds as *Hydreia*, von Gaal 1967: 506.

⁴ For more information on the historical geography and the inhabitants on the periphery of the Kurul Fortress during the Hellenistic Period see Şenyurt – Akçay 2016.



Fig. 4: The rooms of the eastern terrace of the inner fortress

Excavated Sectors and Architectural Features

The crest of the Kurul rocks has an east-west width of almost 75 meters, and a north-south width of almost 250 meters. There are two sectors on the rocks that gradually rise towards the peak to the south; *Inner Fortress* and the *North Terrace*. The fortress (Fig. 2) is surrounded with a defensive structure encompassing all the relevant parts of the main rock. The local bedrock of Kurul was used as the basic architectural material source both for the foundations of the defensive walls and the other buildings. Soft and easy to chip sandstone blocks with bossage (Fig. 8), which seem to be extracted from nearby sediment beds, were used on the façade of the main gate of the fortress, on the entrance pavements and on the façades of intermediary passages. The second group of raw material in the architecture is the sun-dried mudbricks used on the stone foundations.

The *Inner Fortress* (Fig. 2) is composed of the stepped tunnel (Fig. 3), the rock reservoir (so-called cistern), the rock altar (Fig. 5) and its layouts and the stone foundations of the cellars (storage rooms) constituting the fortification complex. The roof tiles and post-holes around the entrance to stepped tunnel⁵ and rock reservoir suggest that they were once roofed. The surface of the main rock in the inner fortress was partially flattened, and the crevices on the main rock were levelled with rubbles and mud filling. The inner walls of the surrounding structure are approximately 1,50 meters wide. The foundations and

⁵ Similar stepped tunnels at Fatsa-Cıngırt Kayası (Erol 2013: 183-185; Erol 2016, Res 12) and Ünye Fortress (Von Gaal 1967: 515) in Ordu province are also dated back to the reign of Mithradates VI.



Fig. 5: *The Rock altar and the open-air cult area*



Fig. 7: *The storage room on the northeastern terrace area*



Fig. 6: *The main gate and adjacent rooms of the city wall*

their exterior surfaces have a smoother workmanship. The walls protrude irregularly in east-west direction depending on the form of the main rock, and these parts contain steps allowing for passage to the cellar rooms below. The external walls of the surrounding structure are not well preserved, and the excavations in this part are not yet fully completed.

The storage rooms within the fortification complex on the east and west terraces of the Inner Fortress (Fig. 4) belong to two architectural phases. The floors of the early architectural phase were created with the flattening of the main rock. The late architectural phase is discernable by roughly built stone walls on the earlier foundations. The burnt mud-brick fragments, carbonized wood remains, hundreds of iron nails and roof tiles scattered around are evidence that the last settlement phase ended by a fire.

The Rock Altar comprises a lump in appearance of the natural summit of the Kurul rocks and the open-air cult area (Fig. 5) located to the south of it. The rock altar is accessible by rock-carved steps from the east side. There are many small-sized niches carved out for offerings on the western facade of the rock altar and a narrow-flattened platform at the bottom of the façade (Şenyurt – Akçay 2016: 240, Lev.2). The deep engraved grooves meandering on the south of the rock altar end in a small, rectangular fluid (possibly blood) catchment reservoir (Fig. 5). A rock-cut base inside the reservoir might possibly be made for a statuette (of Kybele?) once stood there. Three of the unearthed coins belonging to the Prusias II of Bithynia (182-149 BC) (Şenyurt – Akçay 2016: 235-238) from this area, are important as they reflect the earliest dates for the open-air cultic activities even before the rock summit became a fortress. The closest parallel to the open-air cult area of Kurul



Fig. 8: *The main gate and the niche of mother goddess*



Fig. 9: *Mother goddess Kybele of Kırul*

Fortress was detected in the north slope of Fatsa-Cıngırt Kayası⁶. Archaeological investigations conducted in the Giresun Island (Aretias-Khalkeritis) showed that there was an open-air temple in the Classical-Hellenistic period as well. On the eastern shore of the island, there are also libation pits. A second place of worship at the central part of the island, where a stepped altar carved into the main rock, appears as an open-air cult area. All of those features were suggested to support the existence of the Kybele cult in the island (Doksanaltı – Aslan 2012: 220, 223). It is already known that the natural rock altars for the mother goddess is a very common practice in Anatolia (Işık 1999: 3, 17).

The Inner Fortress and the North Terrace are interconnected with a corridor (Fig. 2) that roughly extends on the north-south direction, accessible through steps carved out on the main rock. So far, some parts of this corridor extending from the main gate of the North Terrace to the Inner Fortress have been uncovered. Two architectural periods and three separate entrance complexes were unearthed so far.

The North Terrace has a much wider settlement area. The external walls of the fortification bordering the western part of this terrace are 1.90 meters in thick and constructed from larger stone blocks as compared to the walls of inner rooms. The Hellenistic walling style of the external defensive walls can be compared to the West Defensive Wall of Amisos (Atasoy 1997: 47, Res. 14-16). The rooms attached to inner part (Fig. 2 and 6) of the fortification wall are of two architectural phases. Two of these rooms were unearthed with storage jars (Fig. 7) fixed to the floor (Şenyurt – Akçay 2016: 232-233, Lev.8). The storage room adjacent to the north of the retaining wall at the summit of the Cıngırt Kayası (Erol 2015: 384-385; 2016: 563, Res. 5) can be compared with the Kırul Fortress.

The Kırul Fortress with its extraordinary topographic features and related architectural character can not be compared in detail to the famous ancient sites such as Trapezos, Kerasos (Giresun Kalesi), Oinoe (Ünye Kalesi) and Amisos (Samsun- Toraman Tepe) due to lack of archaeological excavations. Cıngırt Kayası (near Fatsa-Ordu) at the west and Aretias-Khalkeritis Island (Giresun Adası) at the east, where systematic excavations were recently being conducted allowe little possibility of comparison because of heavy damages on their Hellenistic levels in the later periods. Other excavated Pontic sites such as Ama-seia, Komana (Tokat-Gümenek), Sinope, Amastris, Tios and Herakleia Pontika submit also limited information on their Hellenistic period architectural remains inasmuch as either excavation soundings could not reached that levels or buildings of later periods mutilated them.

Each of strongholds on the Pontic geography, as Strabo mentioned 75 of them (Strab. XII. 3. 28), should have distinct and peculiar architectural plannings relevant to form of high rock ridges. Together with the general features such as building technics and material,

⁶ The sacrificial pits and grooves for blood flow in Cıngırt Kayası (Erol 2015: 388) indicate that the natural cliffs are used as open-air cultic areas.



Fig. 10: The marble statue of Kybele



Fig. 11: Details from marble statue of Kybele

defensive and dwelling layouts and the cultic arrangements of Kybele unearthed at Kurul can be the benchmarks for architectural comparison.

The Main Gate and the Statue of Mother Goddess

The *Main Gate* was uncovered on the western part of the north terrace. The gate (Fig. 2 and 8) is accessible over the western slope of the settlement via steps carved out on the main rock. Five or six rows of large stone blocks of the walls and gate wings at the entrance were preserved in-situ. Properly isodomic placement of large-sized stone blocks of the walls at the doorway reflects the architectural tradition of the Hellenistic period. Similar architectural practices have also been identified in the Hellenistic period structures of Cingirt Kayası (Erol 2016: 562, Res. 3) and Aretias Island (Doksanaltı – Aslan 2012: 227).

The façade of the main gate is walled with well made bossaged sandstones (Fig. 8) interlocked with lead clamps. The gate wings have base plinths projecting an image of “elephant legs”. Sandstone slabs were used on the flooring at the vestibule, and a monoblock basalt stone bordered the entrance. Two large basalt blocks were also vertically placed

on the both sides of the inner wall of the vestibule approximately 4x4.5 meters in size. Although the passage from this platform to the inner parts of the fortress is not fully excavated yet, the four steps unearthed lead upward, toward the the inner part of the fortress.

No stone pavement has been found yet on the floor of the vestibule, which serves as a reception place for coming. The northern and eastern walls of the vestibule is mud-plastered with partly preserved whitewashes, and a narrow podium carved out on the main rock stretched out all along the bottom of the northern wall. Across to this podium, inside the southern wall, a marble statue representing the Kybele sitting on her throne was found *in-situ* within a niche of 0.95 meters wide and 0.90 meters deep (Fig. 9). On both sides of this niche, sandstone-carved columns (Fig. 9) with capitals ornamented with plant motifs were applied. Bonded to the wall by iron and lead locks, these columns created a virtual image of a temple façade (*naiskos*) for the goddess sitting on her throne. Unfortunately, no architectural elements evidencing of a roof and a pediment for the niche were found as it was expected.

The statue (Fig. 9-11), the throne with backrest attached to the back wall of the niche and the throne base were carved out of white, high-quality marble. The statue and the entire vestibule area were apparently largely affected by a heavy fire associated with the last moments of the settlement caused possibly by the attacks of Roman archers. The arms of the statue were displaced from the shoulders and fell onto the floor of the niche (Fig. 9). Fire, collapse of upper walls and moisture caused also some other damages on the head, neck, left foot and body of the statue.

The tresses apart of hair are depicted falling down on to the shoulder of the goddess. Although some similar examples of the statue (Johnston 1996: 102; Vermaseren 1987: pl. 1.2) wear polos, the Kybele of Kurul is bareheaded. Eyes with a faraway look, slightly smiling face, and balanced features of the statue are of superior workmanship (Fig. 10). The goddess wears a *chiton* falling onto her feet and *himation* with a thick knot draping from her lap down onto her left foot (Fig. 9-11). It is in evidence that the collar goes down to the breasts, and the thick sash right below the breasts, pleats on the belly, the legs and the feet have distinct curves. The tiptoes of the sandals-wearing right foot are visible, while the left foot being unprotected. The backrest of the throne (Fig. 10 and 11) attached to the back wall of the niche is divided into seven parts square in form, arranged horizontally in groups of two at the lower rows and three on the upper row. The side cords and dimpling of the cushion of the goddess are the other details of fine workmanship and aesthetics⁷.

Together with the marble statue, the three terracotta mold-made Kybele figurines (Fig. 12) were unearthed in pieces in the fill of the two-room unit neighboring the north of the main gate. The other attributes of the goddess on these figurines which were lacking on the marble statue demonstrate explicitly an important cult of Kybele at Kurul. Two

⁷ Because of the conservation and restoration process was not completed, the more comprehensive evaluations on the iconographic and stylistic details of the statue will be the subject of a future article.



Fig. 12: The mold-made terracotta figurines of Kybele from Kurul

of these figurines seem to be formed in the same mould, while the other is bigger in size. The terracotta figurines depicting the Kybele (Fig. 12) seated on her throne with an *anthemion* to the right wear mural crowns rendering the goddess's role as the protector of cities (Johnston 1996: 102; Erol 2006: 179, fig.11). She holds a *tympanum* (a tambourine or drum) in her left hand, and a *patera* in her right hand extending to the armrest of the throne, and steps onto a lion. The inner room of the unit also includes a terracotta bust of Dionysos⁸ (Fig. 13). It is very well known that Dionysos was the close companion of Kybele in ecstatic rituals (Roller 1999: 176; Vassileva 2001: 52, 53). All of the terracotta findings discovered together in the two-room unit may associated with an ecstatic ritual was performed at Kurul, especially around the gate area.

The Goddess Kybele, Protector of the City, Gates and the City Walls

The marble statue of Kybele, unearthed *in-situ* inside the niche (Fig. 9) constructed in the southern wall of the main gate at fortress, is a pivotal find for the archaeology of Anatolia and the Black Sea Region. As the most significant and earliest goddess of Anatolia

(Tüfekçi-Sivas 2000: 335), it is basically known to be a goddess of fertility for thousands of years, and is associated with other cults of ancient Near East as well. Together with its in-situ position and some attributes, the Kybele of Kurul is a remarkable and genuine example reflecting the goddess as the protector of the city, gates and the city walls.

The mother goddess was described as Kubaba in the Late Hittite culture in the first millennium BC, and as Matar-Kubileya in the Phrygian culture (Albright 1928-29: 229-231; Laroche 1960: 115-119; Naumann 1983: 18; Mellink 1983: 358-359; Rein 1996: 224; Işık 1999: 2, 7; Erol 2006: 173-175; Bøgh 2007: 305; Dexter 2009: 53, 57, 64; Dönmez 2014; Akçay 2015). Even though some scholars agree on the resemblance of the role of Kubaba and Matar-Kubileya, some researchers suggest that the two goddesses were essentially different from one another (Roller 1999: 45-53).

Though a mother goddess with a particular name is yet unknown during the Early Phrygian Period (950-800 BC), it is stated that "Matar" was mentioned in the inscriptions dated to the Middle Phrygian Period (800-550 BC) along with "Kybeleia", meaning "mountain" (Roller 2007: 142; Dexter 2009: 58). The name of the goddess was transferred to the Greek language as "Meter" (Roller 1999: 68; Bøgh 2007: 306), and the Greek name "Kybele" and the Latin name "Cybele" were used in the later periods (Roller 1999: 122, 244; Bøgh 2007: 307-309; Dexter 2009: 61-63). The goddess is the only divinity depicted in human form in the Phrygian culture (Naumann 1983: 36; Işık 1999: 15; Roller 2007: 141; Bøgh 2012: 34).

The earliest occurrence of the name Kubaba is in the cuneiform tablets of the period of the Assyrian Trade Colonies in Anatolia (Laroche 1960: 115-116). Kubaba is mentioned also in the documents from Boğazköy, which points that this goddess had entered into the Hittite pantheon, possibly following the conquest of Carchemish (Dexter 2009: 55). As the mountain goddess (Işık 1999: 2), the protector goddess of the city and the queen of the city; the goddess gained significance in the Neo-Hittite city of Carchemish (Laroche 1960: 120; Hawkins 1981: 147-163). On the inscription from Niğde-Bulgarmagden, in the Land of Tabal, Kubaba is mentioned together with the Luwian storm god Tarhunzas, in connection with fertility and abundance (Hawkins 2000: 521-525, X45). That inscription also names Kubaba as the protector of the rock monument (Akçay 2015: 53).

The semi-ionic idols unearthed in the Iron Age settlements in Central Anatolia are associated with the goddess in the character of protector of the city, gates and the city walls. Semi-ionic idols resembling the goddess were also unearthed in Boğazköy-Büyük-kale⁹ (Neve 1982: 153, abb. 79; Bittel 1983: 204-205, pl.104; Naumann 1983: pl. 9a) and Yozgat-Kerkenes Dağ (Summers – Summers 2012: 171, Fig.9) and in the Phrygian capital city of Gordion (Roller 2012: 222). Twelve semi-ionic idols unearthed in

⁸ For similar examples of Dionysos Botrys see Summerer 1999: 40-43, Taf. 3, Pl 9.

⁹ At the Ia level of Büyükkale-Boğazköy (6th century BC), in the contexts related to the gate, a Kybele statue was also recovered along with a semi-ionic idol, Neve 1982: 153.



Fig. 13: Terracotta figurine of Dionysos Botrys from Kurul

Gordion-Yassihöyük citadel were interpreted as protective elements associated with the city walls (Roller 2012: 225). The semi-ionic idol from Boğazköy-Büyükale was also considered to be a protective element related to the city walls due to its finding context associated to the defensive walls (Bittel 1983: 204; Nauman 1983: 93). Another semi-ionic idol unearthed at the Cappadocia Gate area of Kerkenes Dağ was suggested as divine protector of the city gate (Summers and Summers 2012: 176). The semi-ionic idol found in the ruins of the right tower of the city gate of Ovaören-Yassihöyük is also another evidential example which explains the protective role of the semi-ionic idols (Akçay 2015).

It has been suggested that the cult of the mother goddess transmitted to the northern and western coasts of the Black Sea started with the colonization movements in the 7th and 6th centuries BC, and spread to the sites such as Perinthos, Salmydessos, Apollonia, Histria and Olbia (Johnston 1996: 101). The naiskoi of 6th century BC from Apollonia and Olbia are associated with the cult of the mother goddess representing a city protector and a goddess of power (Boğh 2012: 38-39, Figure 3a). The name Kybêbôs (Kubhbôs) occurred on some kylikes dating to the Archaic Period during the archaeological rescue excavations in Samsun-Kurupelit was suggested to be the earliest appearance the name of Kybele in Anatolian Black Sea Region (Summerer 2014: 203). Another data showing the cult of mother goddess in Pontos Region is the rock relief in Kazankaya canyon (Çorum). The relief on the rock overlooking the river was associated with either the cult of Kybele (Atalay and Ertekin 1986: 24) or Anaitis (Summerer 2006: 26) in Pontos Region and dated to the Hellenistic period.

The city protector role of the goddess (Roller 1999: 207, 276, 284, 310, 316; Erol 2006; Boğh 2012) is also referred in some inscriptions of the Pontic Kingdom (Rusyaeva 1992: 144-148). Particularly the inscription found in Olbia, dating back to 78/77 BC, mentions the Mother of the Gods in relation with the city walls (Krapivina – Diatroptov 2005: 168-171). Numerous pieces of marble and limestone statues of the mother goddess dating back to the Hellenistic Period were recovered from Olbia (Rusyaeva 1992:

146). The remains of another important temple of the mother goddess was unearthed in 2007 in the city of Dionysopolis at the Balchik coasts of Bulgaria. Many statues depicting the mother goddess sitting on the throne and in various positions were discovered in the temple of the mother goddess of Dionysopolis (Lazarenko et al. 2013).

Although there are many metroons and cult places of mother goddess in western Anatolia in Hellenistic period (Roller 1999: 199), the architectural remains of a sanctuary and a life-size marble statue of Meter (Roller 1999: 207, Fig. 55) depicting the city protector role of the goddess was found near the main gate leading to the upper city at Pergamon. The similarities of the locations of the sanctuaries near the city gates and the marble statues of Meter sitting on the throne represent the close connections between Pergamon and Kurul Fortress.¹⁰



Fig. 14: The coins related with marble statue of Kybele

Conclusion

The topographic position and the cultic arrangements of the Kurul Fortress has similar traits with some other sites where the mother goddess cult was practiced¹¹. In this context, the rock summit that stands out with its dominant position to its surrounding geography and the marble statue of Kybele found in-situ at the main gate of the fortress are the property of Kurul keeping its military and cultic function together. Especially the coins revealed at the open-air cult area (Rock Altar), dated back to the first half of the second century BC, show that the cult function at Kurul may have started earlier than the period of Mithradates VI (Şenyurt – Akçay 2016: 229).

The finds uncovered in the niche and under the marble throne base of the goddess are extremely important in terms of dating and cult practices. The bronze coins in the niche, the arrowheads of various typologies, the lead weights and the phalanx bones¹² are

¹⁰ When considering the control of the Mithradates VI over Pergamon, this relationship could be understood better.

¹¹ Steep slope area to the northern part of the “Küçük Kale” in Kaunos seems to be selected intentionally for Demeter sanctuary because of its dominating landscape, Diler 2017: 171-172; Doyran 2017: 4, Res. 1. Another similar site is Mamurt Kale located on a mountain (Yunt Dağı) top near Pergamon and has the most important Pergamene sanctuary of Meter (Meter Aspendene) in Hellenistic period, Roller 1999: 209-210; Üreten 2006.

¹² It is worth mentioning that the pig phalanges were found during the excavations in the Demeter sanctuary

the last offerings presented to the goddess. However, the bronze coins, arrowheads and phalanx bones put under the throne base were the first offerings to the statue. All of the coins founded in niche, on the goddess skirt (Fig. 14.1) and under throne base (Fig. 14.2) are dated last phase of Mithradates VI Eupator. For the dating of coins which belongs to Amisos mint, F. de. Callataj (Callataj 2007: 282) suggests 90-85 BC and SNG BM Black Sea suggests 85-65 BC (SNG BM Black Sea 1993: Plate XLIV). These dates are the most important references for the time placing the Kybele statue and the time span for her worship in Kurul Fortress.

The archaeological materials and written sources indicates the existence of various cults originated from Anatolia, Iran and Greece in the Pontic Kingdom. Even though these cults are parts of the ideological propaganda of the royal family¹³, they were eventually embraced, gaining local characteristics to the Pontic geography. The Pontic kings, based on the idea that religious authority would strengthen the political power, cared about the cults related to the military matters, such as battle, victory, army and heroic deed, attributed with rebirth or immortality. It is considered that this new religious ideology came into prominence, particularly within the frame of unification policy of Mithradates VI pretending to be the savior of the Greeks and to unite and put all cities in Anatolia and the Black Sea under a single authority (Saprykin 2009: 249-255). Accordingly, Mithradates VI preferred Dionysos, the son of Zeus, who is worshipped both in Anatolia and the Greek world, as his personal god (Arslan 2007: 125; Saprykin 2009: 250-251).

During the reign of Mithradates VI, Hellenic elements became more important in the deification of the king, especially in the eyes of the ancient Greek people. As a result of this propaganda, Zeus, Ares, Perseus, Apollon, Athena, and Heracles, along with Dionysos, were also venerated during the reign of Mithradates VI. The coins found in the Kurul excavations¹⁴ equally demonstrate the cults surrounding these gods. Kybele, the Mother Goddess of Anatolian origin, was apparently worshipped as the protector of cities, city walls, and power in the Pontic world and this rare discovery attest to a particular conceptualization of a deity of Anatolian origin in the area. The on-going research at the Kurul Fortress, Ordu will no doubt continue to make significant contributions to the archaeology of Anatolia and the Pontic region.

in Caunus, Alpagut 2017. If the phalanges from Kurul belong to pigs, symbolizing fertility in the ancient cults will come to light after zooarchaeological investigations completed.

¹³ Mithradates VI claims his paternal ancestor to be Kyros, the Persian King, and his maternal ancestor to be Alexander and Seleukos I Nikator, Arslan 2007: 123.

¹⁴ For detailed review about the coin findings from Kurul Fortress, see the article by Şenyurt – Akçay 2016: 235-238, Lev. 12.

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