

MÊN, ATTIS AND MITHRAS IN ASIA MINOR. THE ENRICHMENT OF SPECIFIC FEATURES OF LUNAR-TYPE DEITIES IN THE ANATOLIAN PROVINCES

DE

IULIAN MOGA

KEYWORDS: Lunar Deities, Asia Minor, Anatolia

Having an Indo-Iranian origin, Mên was very popular especially amongst certain different regions belonging to the Oriental Lydia and Phrygia¹. It was considered the master of the animal and vegetal world, a deity of fertility and procreation, the ruler of both the living people and the dead ones². It had thaumaturgic and oracular functions of a chthonian and also of an uranian significance. Its authority was performed not only over the earthly universe but also over the subterranean one³. In most of the cases Mên is represented holding a crescent upon its shoulders – μηνίσκος⁴ – probably because of the confusion between its name and the corresponding Greek word for the Moon and the month⁵. In a similar way, the lunar goddess was also considered in the Roman world the ruler of the monthly cycle⁶. According to another ethymology, the name of the deity could come from the Lydian word for “bright” or “powerful”, which probably facilitated the later syncretic forms of interpreting its attributes⁷. In many cases, the god was considered to be the couple of Attis or it was even identified with the latter⁸.

Its cult is attested during the period of the first four centuries to the remotest regions of Hindukush Mountains, on the territory of the Kushan Empire. Mên appears on a bronze coin dating from the time of the Kushan king called Kanishka, in the 2nd c. A. D. On the obverse of the coin, the king is represented standing in front of an altar and on the reverse the lunar god is carrying a crescent upon its shoulders. In the Kushan pantheon, the selenar deity was named Mao and represented the equivalent of the Microasian Mên. In the above mentioned region we can encounter Mithra (often identified with Apollo or Helios), Sarapis, Herakles, Ahura Mazda and Buddha⁹.

¹ M. Sartre, *L'Asie Mineure et l'Anatolie d'Alexandre à Dioclétien (IV^e s. av. J.-C – III^e s. ap. J.-C.)*, Éd. Armand Colin, Paris, 1995, p. 323.

² R. Turcan, *Culte orientale în lumea romană*, trad. de M. Popescu, Ed. Enciclopedică, București, 1998, p. 83.

³ F. Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, Ernest Leroux, Paris, 1909, p. 93.

⁴ A. Bailly, *Dictionnaire grec-français*, Ed. Hachette, Paris, 1996, p. 1278; H. Lechat, *Meniskos*, in *DAGR* III/2, p. 1718–1720.

⁵ Under the form Μήν the god is mentioned by Lucian of Samosata in *On the Sufferings of Zeus*, 8. In our opinion, it is suggestive that μήν had also the meaning of month, thus corresponding to the Latin word *mensis*; cf. A. Bailly, *op. cit.*, p. 1277.

⁶ Ovidius, *Fasti*, III, 883–884.

⁷ V. Kernbach, *Dictionar de mitologie generală*, Ed. Albatros, București, 1995, p. 357.

⁸ M. Gramatopol, *Men*, in *ECR*, p. 484.

⁹ B. Stawinski, *Kunst der Mittelasiens Kusehan*, VEB E.A. Seemann Verlag, Leipzig, 1978, p. 64–65.

Mên was given the epiclesis of Lydian origin *Túpavvos* – “ruler”, “master” or “tyrant”, and later on – in a period characterized by the scholars as proper to *the second paganism* – he was named *Menotyranus*¹⁰. But on the 4th c. dedications addressed to Attis had also this epiclesis meaning “the ruler of months”¹¹.

The inscriptions dedicated to this deity and the literary sources concerning the subject prove a remarkable variety, in which the god is provided with a large number of *toponymic epithets*, thus giving the impression of several local divinities venerated under the same name (Mên Labanes, Mên Axiottenos, Mên Tiamou, Mên Tyrannos etc.). It was widely encountered on the votive inscriptions discovered in Phrygia, Pisidia, the oriental area of Lydia, Athens, Rhodos, Delos, Thassas¹². According to the ancient testimonies, temples dedicated to the lunar god were also erected in the country of Albania in Caucasus¹³. We are informed that Antoninus Caracalla, having established his winter camp in Edessa before starting the campaign against the Parthian kingdom, went in Mesopotamia, at Carrhae, to venerate the local god assimilated with Lunus¹⁴. Aelius Spartianus, the supposed author of the biography, also stated that among the Oriental populations there was the belief that those who denominate the Moon with a feminine name are dominated by the women and, on the contrary, those who believe it to be a god always have precedence over their wives and never get trapped by women's lures¹⁵. Lunus's Mesopotamian temple still existed during the times of the emperor Julianus Apostata¹⁶.

All over the Anatolian world, from Caria to Pontus, under the name of Mên there was venerated a god considered to have a celestial action when helping the plants to grow and assuring the prosperity and reproduction of the cattle and poultry. Nowhere was it more popular than in the countryside, that the peasants invoked it to protect their farms and homeland¹⁷.

Sometimes the god possesses a stronger local particularism as is the case of Mên Pharnakes of Cabeira¹⁸. This city was transformed by Pompeius into a royal residence. Strabon mentioned a little urban settlement called Ameria, situated in the close vicinity of Cabeira, inhabited by persons in the service of the temple. There was also a **saered domain** whose benefits were always destined to the priest. Because of the highest consideration given by the kings to this deity and to the temple, when swearing, the people of the region addressed the formulas “on the king's fortune” or “on Mên of Pharnakes”¹⁹.

The god is quite often attested in the *military environment* but also among the civilians of the Roman colonies in the Asia Minor. A number of inscriptions discovered on the *hieron* situated upon the hill of Kara Kuyu, in the very proximity of the former Roman colony of Pisidian Antioch, were dedicated to Mên Askaenos, which was perceived as a local deity. The epigraphs were discovered during the 1912s campaign of excavations coordinated by W. M. Ramsay²⁰. Maurice Sartre established the connection between the veneration of Mên Askaenos by the Romans of Pisidian Antioch and the credit given to the myth of a hypothetical common origin of the Italian and Anatolian populations – widespread at the very beginning of the Principate – following the legend concerning the Trojan roots of Aeneas and the origins of Rome²¹. It is very suggestive to indicate the fact that of the 28 inscriptions presented by Barbara Levick in her study about the cult of Mên Askaenos in this Roman colony, only two, incomplete, are written in Latin. The first of these two fragments, having irregular frames, represented the deity riding on the back of a **bull**, near a circular altar²². The name of Publ(ius) Kapetolin(us) Stephan(us) appears on the second monument mentioned above. The Hellenised form of Capitolinus cognomina is to be noted. It is likely that the name should have been preceded by the abbreviation L. V. S., which is also encountered on other Latin inscriptions dedicated to Mên. E. N. Lane

¹⁰ R. Turcan, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

¹¹ F. Cumont, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

¹² A. Ferrari, *Dizionario di mitologia greca e latina*, Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, Torino, 2000, p. 458.

¹³ Strabo, *Geographica*, XII, 3, 31.

¹⁴ *SHA, Antoninus Caracallus*, 6.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 7.

¹⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, XXIII, 3.

¹⁷ F. Cumont, *op. cit.*, p. 93, A. Legrand, *Lunus*, in *DAGR*, III/2, p. 1392–1393.

¹⁸ M. Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

¹⁹ Strabo, *op. cit.*, XII, 3, 31.

²⁰ B. Levick, *Dedications to Mên Askaenos*, in *JRS*, 20, 1970, p. 37–50.

²¹ M. Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

²² B. Levick, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

states that this formula could have the meaning *Lunae votum solvit*, the stress falling in this case on the deity the dedication is addressed to. On the contrary, M. Hardy considers that another abbreviation is more suitable in this situation, i.e. *Li(bens) m(erito) M(eni)*²³ the equivalent of the Greek Μηνὶ εὐχῆν, which actually appears on the majority of the inscriptions dedicated to this god in Pisidian Antioch²⁴. The Latin form could be translated as “gladly (dedicated to) Mên, according to the vow”.

Sometimes the god punished those who neglected or disobeyed the given task. An inscription most probably dating from 118–119 A. D. mentioned the harsh punishment given to a godfearer who hadn't observed Mên's indications: “In the year 203, the sixth of the month Artemisios. Since Trophime, the daughter of Artemidoros, the son of Kikinnas, having been asked by the god to fulfil a task, didn't want to accomplish it at once, she was punished by the god by driving her mad. Thus, she addressed to Mother Tarsene, Apollo Tarsios and Mên Artemidoros Axiottenos, the master of Koresa, and the latter ordered me to write on a stela about their vengeance (véμεσις) and to put myself in the service of the gods”²⁵.

Mên is also mentioned among the *forefathers' (national) gods*. This could be demonstrated by the statement πάτριος θεός addressed to him shown on some of the epigraphs discovered on the above mentioned Roman colony²⁶.

Mên is often encountered on the dedications together with other deities, which carry sometimes *similar attributes*. Anytime when Mên is mentioned on an inscription joining another deity, it always takes the second place²⁷. This is the case of a monument dating from 171–172 A. D. where Mên appears in the presence of the Iranian goddess Anahit. The latter deity is to be often encountered on the Microasian dedications having a Hellenized name: Anaïtis. The mentioned inscription was written on a monument erected – through the care of Dionysos, Diodoros and Hermogenes – by a “**sacred association**”. Mên Tiamos and Mên Tyrannos are joined by Zeus Masphalatenos. The latter was probably originally a local deity venerated under the name of the Greek god, a custom which was often appealed in the Asia Minor²⁸.

Two of the dedications of Azita, Mên Tiamos and the Iranian goddess appear as *warrants of the divine justice*, to solve the disputes between the members of the community. Beside the usual invocation addressed to the gods, the custom of laying down the sceptre of the goddess Anahit on the altar was widely spread, a ritual which joined the request addressed to the deity²⁹. On an epigraph dating from 114–115 A. D., Anaïtis and Mên Tiamos are invoked to solve a dispute between the villagers concerning the right of property of some animals: “The Great Mother Anaïtis, mistress of Azita, Mên Tiamos and their powers. As three of the pigs belonging to Demainetos and Papias wandered far away from the fold of Syros, they got mixed with those of Hermogenes' and Apollonios' flock while their slave of five took them to pasture. Hermogenes and Apollonios, the sons of Apollonios, son of Midas, refused to comply with the request of Demainetos and Papias, proving malevolence.

Thus, the sceptre of the goddess and of the master of Tiamos were set down [on the altar]. The goddess consequently tried its powers with those who didn't consented to an agreement. After the death of Hermogenes, his wife, his son and Apollonios, Hermogenes' brother, proved willing to give the animals back. Now we can bear testimony on behalf of her and we venerate her together with our children. On the year 199”³⁰.

The gesture of setting the sceptre on the altar had the significance of bounding by an oath the person proved to be guilty. Those who wished to get rid of the burden imposed by the swear, had to beg “to be released from the sceptre [=the oath]”, as did the descendants of a woman named Tatias – Sokrateia Moschas, Lucundus, and Menekrates – who empoisoned her stepson and proferated injuries on the sanctuary consecrated to the Great Goddess Artemis Anaïtis and Mên Tiamos. After being empoisoned, Lucundus became a lunatic and subsequently died because of that. But the divine punishment stroke Tatias, a fact that astonished her

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 38 and 49–50.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 38–49, under the form mentioned above no. 4, 5, 10, 11; the formula Μηνὶ Ἀσκατηνῶ εὐχῆν is also specified at no. 3, 7, 8, 13, 19, 25, 26, 28.

²⁵ M. Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 326 = *EA*, 22, 1994, no. 57.

²⁶ B. Levick, *op. cit.*, p. 39–47, no. 5, 26. The fragment no. 4 presented in the above mentioned article contains a dedication addressed to Mên by T. Claudius Pasinianus Summarudes.

²⁷ A. Legrand, *op. cit.*, p. 1397.

²⁸ M. Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 326.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 325, no. 1, 2.

³⁰ L. Robert, *Documents d'Asie Mineure*, École Française d'Athènes, 1987, p. 518 = *EA*, 22, 1994, no. 68.

descendants, who stated that “Gods gave her a punishment which she couldn't get rid of. The very same thing happened to her son Sokrates who, passing in front of the entrance which led to the **sacred wood**, he dropped the hedging knife that he used for the vintage and thus the punishment came within the same day. Great are the gods of Azita!”³¹.

Perhaps the most significant aspect is the mention of the god Mên among the so-called *theoi epekooi* (θεοὶ ἐπηκόωι), a syntagm having the meaning of “the gods who listen to the prayers”³². One of the inscriptions discovered in Pisidian Antioch shows a dedication addressed to Μηνὶ ἐπηκόωζ the god with the usual crescent upon its shoulders riding over a horse or a bull³³. This category was proper to some deities like Asklepios, Hygia³⁴, Telesphoros, Artemis, Aphrodite, Apollo and Hercules/Herakles, usually considered to be “healer” or “saviour” gods³⁵. The epithet *epekooos* was also used when referring to Iahweh. An inscription discovered at Gabbary, Alexandria, which could be most probably dated to 37 B. C. represents the God as θεῶ μεγάλῳ ἐπηκόῳ³⁶. Usually, the epiclesis applied to the deities was associated with the representation of the ears on the monuments signifying the obedience towards the orders given by the gods and also the attention the deities paid to the praises addressed by their devotees. Besides, such a symbol was often connected with Theos Hypsistos, apparently in a Jewish context. This is the case of an inscription discovered at Uzuncaburç, on the territory of the former Cilician *Diocaesarea*³⁷. But Mên was probably considered one of the *healer gods*. We know that at the sanctuary of Mên Caros, situated between Laodicea and Carura, a great school of medicine was established under the guidance of Zeuxis and later of Alexandros Philalethes. The latter was a Greek physician who lived during the reign of Ptolemaios Lagos³⁸. Some connections with divination are not excluded since Macrobius stated that “medicine and divination are related arts, as the physician knows beforehand of the physical state of the organism – whether be it better or worse”³⁹.

An inscription found at Ayasören, near Kulla in Asia Minor contains the elements of identification specific to both Mên and Attis, emphasizing some syncretic tendencies. The monument dates from 235 or 236 A. D. and is similar in many respects to some other dedication at Kulla. The inscription could be translated as following: “To Mên Axiottenos. Tatiane, daughter of Erpos (or Herpos), vowing a bull on behalf of her brothers (or sisters) and being heard, but not being able to pay the bull, asked the god, and he consented to accept the stele. In the year 320, the tenth of the month Panemos”⁴⁰.

The monument has a rounded pediment and a crescent moon is represented in relief on it. Though the stele has an irregular bottom, the inscription appears complete. The relief portrays Mên standing frontally on the left side of the viewer, wearing its usual long tunic, chiton with long sleeves and boots. On the head Mên wears a **Phrygian cap** with its end bowed towards the viewer's left. In its left hand the god holds an indistinct round object, probably a **pine-cone**. At its feet, on both sides, two small lions face the viewer frontally. In the left hand he holds the spear with a large end. The right side of the area of representation is occupied by a humped **bull** with its tail in the air and the face turned toward the viewer, giving an impression of a humorous composition.

Many times Mên was identified with Attis in the hypostasis of a shepherd⁴¹. The god holds a pine-cone in its hand, which represented the immortality. The symbol is also met on the cultual representations of Sabazios and the Great Mother of the Gods. Sometimes Attis appears on the monuments holding a crescent upon its shoulders⁴². The representations of Mên in the region of Pontus prove its identification with Mithra,

³¹ M. Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 325–326 = *EA*, 22, 1994, no. 69. The epigraph dates from 156–157 A. D.

³² B. Levick, *op. cit.*, p. 44–46.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 45, no. 21.

³⁴ *CIL* III, 7740a.

³⁵ S. Sanie, *Culte orientale în Dacia romană*, I, *Culte siriene și palmiriene*, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1981, p. 159.

³⁶ *JIGRE* 13 = *CIJ* II, 1432. P. M. Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 34. In a similar way, a stele discovered at Fayyum dating from 29 B. C. is dedicated to θεῶι μεγάλῳ μεγάλῳ ὑπίστῳ (*JIGRE* 116 = *CIJ* II, 1532).

³⁷ *IC*, 14.

³⁸ Strabo, *op. cit.*, XII, 8, 20.

³⁹ Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, I, 20, 5.

⁴⁰ E. N. Lane, *Three New Inscriptions from Ayasören*, in *Anatolian Studies*, 20, 1970, p. 51–52.

⁴¹ *CCCA* VI, 454; 582.

⁴² R. Turcan, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

thus becoming a god with solar attributes⁴³. The images presented at the end of the column show Attis, Mên, Mithra, and the Dadophores in the hypostasis of shepherds, wearing Oriental costumes with short tunics and the usual Phrygian caps. Mên and Mithra are represented on the back of bulls. Some distinguishable *iconographic similarities* between Mên, Attis and the Dadophores (Caures and Cautopates) can be easily traced though an explicit identification of the former two and the latter is not specified by the written sources⁴⁴. Although, there *may* be a possible influence, especially during the last two centuries of the Principate, between the perception of the specific roles and of the attributes of these characters.

We don't know for sure yet how these mutual influences were reflected in the cultual forms and ceremonies dedicated to these gods during the centuries. However, the iconography reveals some common traits which proves the fact that these motives and symbols had a large acceptance in the Anatolian world. Among the symbols often employed when referring to the gods of Asia Minor we can mention the **pine-cone** (in connection with Attis, Mên, Mithra, and Sabazios), the **bull** (in the cults of Mên, Jupiter Dolichenus⁴⁵, Mithra, Cybele and even of the Hurrite god of the tempest Teshub⁴⁶), the **snake** (Apollo, Aesculapius, Glykon, Mithra, Mên, Artemis of Ephesus a. s. o.), the **cock** (Mên) and the **almond** (of Attis, whose kernel was perceived as the centre of the world).

The first indications concerning the attributes and the perception of the deity show a clear distinction of Mên as a specific lunar-type god. Even the origin name of this divinity, as we stated before, prove its identification with the Moon, being associated to the function of fertility and the nocturnal symbols.

Gilbert Durand, in his study dedicated to the anthropological functions of the imagery tried to decipher the mechanisms of interpreting the psychologic function of imagination. He distinguished two types of deities, as Piganiol realized previously, in relation with the regime of imagery: **a)** gods proper to the diurnal condition, a category which includes the solar-type divinities, the so-called "gods of the heits" (Mithra and Mithra-Helios in the Anatolian area, Theos Hypsistos, the Syrian Baalim, Varuna, Zeus, Uranos, Ahura Mazda a. s. o.) usually having attributes specific to the function of sovereignty⁴⁷; **b)** deities characteristic to the nocturnal condition – generally gods of vegetation whose characteristics belong to the third function, that of fertility. In the latter category we can include Cybele, Artemis, Anahit/Anaïtis, Attis, Adonis, Dionysos, Atargatis, Astarte or Venus *barbata*, which usually possess a double sexuality⁴⁸.

In the first instance, this classification could have successfully been applied to Mên and the other deities mentioned before. But because of the religious syncretisms at the end of the Principate, the situation changed radically: originally being a chthonian god, Mên completed its image borrowing uranian attributes. This metamorphose could be connected with the prominence and the influence exerted by the solar cults and the tendencies to mingle the attributes and functions of the deities and to identify different gods⁴⁹. This process sometimes created confusion as different types of traditions got mixed. These conceptions are to be identified in the works of the contemporary writers or of those belonging to a later period. For example, Apuleius, in a well-known paragraph of his *Metamorphoses* identified Ceres with Venus, Artemis of Ephesus and Proserpine⁵⁰. Aurelius Augustinus, sometimes presenting the previous conceptions of Varro, stated that Magna Mater, Ops, Tellus⁵¹, and Ceres⁵² were actually the same goddess venerated under different names. Macrobius identified Aesculapius, Salus, Hercules/Herakles, Serapis, and Isis with the Sun. He claimed that Adonis, Attis, Osiris, and Horus represented nothing but the solar deity⁵³. He also stated that the Sun, under the name

⁴³ A. Legrand, *op. cit.*, p. 1395.

⁴⁴ F. Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*, II, H. Lamertin, Bruxelles, 1896, no. 27, 54, 286, 291, 313, 314, 322. The main differences between Attis and the Dadophores are specified by Cumont: a) the latter always have the torches in their hands; b) Cautes and Cautopates are all the times presented as immobile, having their feet in a crossed position; c) the Phrygian cap of Attis is sometimes provided with stars (p. 437).

⁴⁵ S. Sanie, *op. cit.*, p. 62, 69, 76–77.

⁴⁶ C. Daniel, *Gândirea hittită în texte*, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1986, p. 109, 114–115.

⁴⁷ G. Durand, *Structurile antropologice ale imaginarului*, Ed. Univers Enciclopedic, București, 2000, p. 135–149.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 284–294.

⁴⁹ F. Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, Leroux, Paris, 1909, p. 1–30.

⁵⁰ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, XI.

⁵¹ Aurelius Augustinus, *De civitate Dei*, VII, 24.

⁵² *Ibidem*, VII, 16.

⁵³ Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, I, 20–21.

of Attis, is endowed with a flute and a rod, the latter proving its power to command everything in the world⁵⁴. And the examples could go on.

In the case of Mên, his functions and attributes were multiplied. He was considered one of the *saviour gods* (Σωτήρες) as it is proved by a votive stele dedicated to Μηνὶ Σωτῆρι καὶ Πλουτοδώτη. This dedication could be translated as following “(Dedicated to) Mên the Saviour and the Giver of Wealth”⁵⁵. The stele, dated in the 2nd or the 3rd c. represents a typical example of the syncretic phenomena of the epoch. Thus, Mên gains not only the traditional lunar attributes, but he also became a solar deity, a ruler (*Tyrannos*) of the celestial cycles and a giver of wealth and prosperity⁵⁶. This monument was alleged to be found in Attica but certainly brought from Asia Minor. Unlike other representations, the god is not wearing the usual Phrygian cap but a solar crown, with the sun and the crescent symbols in the centre. The curious composition presented on the votive stele is formed by a sort of ballance made of two-headed snake, each head being crowned by a crescent. The scales are composed of the attributes of Fortune (*cornucopia*), having a serpent on it, and of Hercules (club and bow). The attributes of Vulcan (the tongs), of Venus (the mirror) and of Nemesis (the wheel) are also present. In the centre of the image, supporting the ballance, there is a large bull's head with two solar disks and two crescents upon it, having a large eye surmounted by a crescent. The two pairs of torches that flank the representations are set upon a bull's and a goat's head, the symbols of Demeter's and Eleusinian mysteries. M. Rostovtzeff states that the four signs of the Zodiac situated at the bottom of the votive stele symbolise the four seasons as following: *Virgo* (Autumn), *Capricorn* (Winter), *Aries* (late Spring), and *Lion* (Summer).

In order to conclude, we would find appropriate to emphasize that just like Attis, Osiris, and Mithra, the Phrygian Mên is not only a saviour god, but a *triumphant god*, which descend into the Inferno to fight the hostile forces and ultimately to manage to reborn in a new life: “When the quarter of the Moon comes into sight, the god inaugurates its mission, he fights against the demons of the darkness which had devorated the former moon, its father. It reigns in its glorious splendour during the full Moon's time, it is devorated and beaten by the evil beast, descends for three days into the Inferno and finally triumphantly resurrects”⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, I, 21, 9.

⁵⁵ M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1926, p. 237.

⁵⁶ A. Legrand, *op. cit.*, p. 1395.

⁵⁷ G. Durand, *op. cit.*, p. 304.