

Religious Excitement in Ancient Anatolia: Cult and Devotional Forms for Solar and Lunar Gods by Iulian Moga. Translated into English by Alina Piftor

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Volume 3, Number 1, 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1107164ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/aestimatio.v3i1.41828>

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Publisher(s)

Institute for Research in Classical Philosophy and Science

ISSN

1549-4470 (print)

1549-4497 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Roller, L. (2022). Review of [Religious Excitement in Ancient Anatolia: Cult and Devotional Forms for Solar and Lunar Gods by Iulian Moga. Translated into English by Alina Piftor]. *Aestimatio*, 3(1), 197–202.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/aestimatio.v3i1.41828>

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Religious Excitement in Ancient Anatolia: Cult and Devotional Forms for Solar and Lunar Gods by Iulian Moga. Translated into English by Alina Piftor

Colloquia Antiqua 23. Leuven: Peeters, 2019. Pp. xxiv + 737. ISBN 978–904293–729–1. Cloth €115.00

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This book is a contribution to the growing body of scholarship on Anatolian cult practice, focusing on the distinctive regional cults that flourished in the interior of Anatolia during the Roman era. The work owes its origins to a doctoral dissertation developed at Alexander Ioan Cuza University in Iași, Romania, and defended at the University of Angers, France. The author's objective is to examine Anatolian cults of the Roman Empire period that use solar and lunar symbolism. The work is divided into two broad sections. The first describes the Anatolian deities that the author identifies as solar and lunar gods and discusses their rituals and the place of their cults in Anatolian society. The second contains a compilation of the literary *testimonia* and epigraphical texts that furnish the primary data for solar and lunar cults in Anatolia.

The first part contains a description of the deities whom Moga classifies as solar and lunar figures. Chapter 1 considers the cults of three universal deities, identified by Moga as Theos Hypsistos, Mithra, and Men. The designation “universal” is appropriate for Theos Hypsistos (the Most High God), since evidence for the worship of this figure is found widely dispersed throughout most regions of Anatolia. The majority of epigraphical documents record dedications simply stating “to the Most High God”, although in several examples the term “Hypsistos” is used as an epithet of Zeus or, in a few cases, Helios. One text, a funerary epigraph, specifically mentions

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Aestimatio ns 3.1 (2022) 197–202

Christ, and another is a dedication to the Most High God and his holy messengers (*angeli*); this could be a Christian or Jewish text. The great majority of the inscriptions that mention Theos Hypsistos are dedications to the deity recording the fulfillment of a vow, while a few are funerary texts.

The discussion of Mithra occupies the largest portion of this chapter. Moga identifies Mithra as a solar god and considers him a significant presence in Anatolian cult. He presents an extensive discussion on the origin and ritual practices of Mithraism within the framework of Iranian cult practice and shows that interest in the Mithra cult first appears in Anatolia through the presence of Achaemenid rulers and settlers following the Persian conquest in the sixth century BC. A scattering of later inscriptional evidence indicates that Mithra continued to attract cult in eastern Anatolia during the Hellenistic and Roman eras, which were probably the survival of Achaemenid practices. Yet, there is little evidence to support the contention that Mithras was a prominent figure in Anatolian cult. In this context, the term “universal” seems inappropriate for Mithra, and it is not clear why the deity warrants such a prominent place in Moga’s study.

With the cult of Men, we are on more secure ground. Men is one of the most widely attested cult figures in western and central Anatolia, especially in Lydia, Phrygia, and Pisidia, where he had a major shrine near Pisidian Antioch. Men regularly appears with a crescent Moon on his shoulders, identifying him as a lunar deity. He was prominent in several aspects of Anatolian cult practice: people called on him to protect crops and farm animals, families regularly invoked his protection for a grave, and he was the object of several of the votive texts known as confession inscriptions, in which an individual confessed his faults and offered amends for transgressions against the deity. Yet, while these qualities of Men may be universal, they are not unique. Other Anatolian deities shared these areas of concern, and it is not always clear why an individual chose to petition Men as opposed to another deity. Despite the use of the Moon in the deity’s iconography, lunar symbolism does not figure prominently in dedications to him.

The second chapter examines deities classified as rider gods, a rather loose category not always connected with solar or lunar deities. Here Moga discusses the divine pair Hosios kai Dikaios (Holy and Just) and Apollo Lairbenos, deities with active cult in Anatolia. Moga also includes the Dioscuri, the divine twins whose cult is particularly prominent in Pisidia. He also briefly mentions Sandon, an older Luwian deity, and Sozon, a figure that can be an independent deity and an epithet of Apollo. Apart from the fact that these figures are sometimes (although not always) shown on horseback,

they seem to have little in common. *Hosios kai Dikaios* and *Apollo Lairbenos* were, like *Men*, the recipients of numerous confession inscriptions. Their cults reveal a strong interest in justice among the local populace, but that feature of Anatolian cult practice receives little attention here.

Moga then turns his attention to female deities. He discusses *Anahita*, a deity of Persian origin whose presence is probably a survival of the first-millennium BC Achaemenid presence in Anatolia. Unlike *Mithra*, *Anahita* was well integrated into Anatolian cult practice and was the recipient of many dedications in *Lydia* and *Phrygia*, both independently and as an epithet of *Artemis*. Another important female figure was *Ma*, a deity of Hittite origin especially prominent in *Cappadocia*. A warrior goddess, *Ma* was adopted into Roman cult practice as *Bellona*, goddess of war. Also included in this category is *Artemis Pergaia*, whose cult was prominent at *Perge*, in *Pamphylia*. The cult of this deity is well documented during the Hellenistic and, especially, the Roman eras, when she was the recipient of generous gifts from prominent local citizens. During the Roman era, the deity's image on coins often appears with a crescent Moon, leading to her inclusion in Moga's category of lunar deities. The connection with the Moon, though, plays little role in dedications to her, and it is more likely that *Artemis Pergaia* was the local manifestation of a powerful female deity widely attested in Anatolia, usually addressed as *Artemis* with an epithet, such as *Artemis Anaitis* (noted above).

In the second part, Moga discusses issues of cult administration. Included here are matters of finances and sources of income for sanctuaries and temple estates as well as financial obligations of cult establishments. Moga also reviews the identity and duties of cult personnel. The information provided is clearly presented and helpful, although the administrative practices he describes would have been applicable to most Anatolian cult centers, not only those for solar and lunar deities. He devotes considerable discussion to the evidence for the *Galli*, priests of the Mother, and other transgender priestly figures. His emphasis on the evidence for their perceived sexual transgressions seems out of place, since the author had previously stated that the Anatolian Mother was not a solar or lunar divinity and would not form a part of his discussion. Temple slaves mentioned in the confession inscriptions dedicated to *Apollo Lairbenos* also receive attention.

The cult dedications often provide information on those who dedicated them. Since most of the dedications come from rural areas, the texts yield interesting insights into the lives of Anatolian peasants. References to foster children (*threptoi*) dedicated to the gods are frequent, suggesting a common

fate of orphans. We also find vivid descriptions of punishments meted out by the gods on the descendants of those who do wrong, whether intentionally or by accident. In addition to individuals, there are dedications from cult associations, with offerings from fishermen, gardeners, and wool workers, among others. Such details offer valuable information about the working-class people of Anatolia, a segment of ancient society that rarely appears in literary sources.

In the third part, Moga takes a broader look at the world of the divine as conceptualized in Roman Anatolia. He reviews the motivations that prompted dedications to solar and lunar gods. Several of these occur widely throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, such as dedications to a deity, whether in the hope of favors in the future or as thanks for prayers already answered, and honorific inscriptions, in which an individual is praised for a generous gift to a deity or community. Others are distinctive to rural Anatolia. Funerary inscriptions not only stress family relationships but also emphasize the need to preserve the sanctity of the tomb by calling down divine wrath on anyone who might disturb it. Another category consists of texts known as confession inscriptions, in which an individual who has experienced illness or loss attributes his suffering to an offense against a deity, confesses his or her wrongdoing, and attempts to make amends. As noted above, such texts form a significant source of evidence for several Anatolian deities.

The final chapter attempts to place the information on Anatolian cult practice into the context of cult practice in the Roman world of the second and third centuries AD. Moga suggests that the emphasis on solar and lunar deities reflects a wider regional approach (he calls it “Graeco-Oriental”) to cult practice, in which abstractions such as *Hosios kai Dikaios* (Holy and Just) existed together with well-established anthropomorphic deities such as Zeus and Apollo. He sees this as part of the universalizing trend present in Neoplatonist philosophy and its efforts to define the essence of the divine. Its positive reception in Anatolia can be seen in documents such as the Oenoanda inscription, which praises one all-knowing deity.¹ The same trend lies behind the frequency of pagan cult dedications among people of the countryside. Although often little educated, the residents of Anatolian farming villages had the means to petition the deity directly and record their communication with a deity through dreams, prophets, and angels.

¹ In Moga’s catalog, the Oenoanda text is 1.7.4. For further discussion of this text, see [Fox 1986](#), 161–171.

In his conclusion, Moga returns to this theme, arguing that the multitude of local Anatolian deities and the large number of local epithets for each deity represent local manifestations of a universal concept of the divine that held power and influenced their lives. He does not directly connect this with the concept of a single god, such as Christianity would present, but his arguments move in that direction.

The foregoing offers a general summary of the content of this rich and detailed book. The book provides a service in gathering a large body of information on the Anatolian religious experience during the Roman imperial era. Perhaps the most valuable contribution of this study is the catalog of inscriptions related to the cult of the deities discussed here. The catalog brings together a large body of data originally published in widely scattered venues and will surely prove useful to future scholars.

At the same time, the author's approach raises several problems. His stated goal is to discuss solar and lunar deities, yet he does not offer a compelling argument as to what made such deities special and what role they played in Anatolian cult. Several of Moga's choices of cult figures included in the study seem rather arbitrary. For example, he gives an extensive discussion of Mithras, despite the fact that there is little evidence to suggest that Mithraism enjoyed a wide following in Anatolia. (In Moga's catalog, there are only 13 dedications to Mithras, compared with 145 dedications to Theos Hypsistos and 164 to Hosios kai Dikaios.) He also devotes considerable attention to Artemis Pergaia because her coin image can include a crescent Moon, yet he ignores many other Anatolian Artemis cults that were probably quite similar but lacked lunar imagery. Moreover, the Anatolian solar and lunar deities that Moga does consider receive much the same type of cult offerings as other divine figures, namely, prayers in fulfillment of a vow, requests for the safety of the petitioner and his or her family and livestock, and prayers for the protection of a tomb. As a result, I was left unconvinced whether solar and lunar deities actually formed a distinctive feature of Anatolian cult practice.

I also felt a sense of missed opportunities. Moga mentions many distinctive features of Anatolian cult practice yet fails to explore them fully. One problematic question is the degree of Hellenization in Anatolian cults. Who are the figures addressed by Greek names, such as Zeus Hypsistos and Artemis Pergaia? Are they equivalent to their Greek counterparts, or do they mask older, pre-Hellenic deities? Why are Greek gods, such as Zeus and Artemis, widely attested in Anatolia, while others, such as Athena and Aphrodite, rarely appear? Why is there such a strong interest in deities connected with

justice, such as Helios, Theos Hypsistos, and Hosios kai Dikaios? These are all large and difficult questions, and probably no one study can tackle them all; but there should be some recognition of the aspects of Anatolian cult practice that set it apart from other regions of the eastern Roman Empire. Even though Moga's study leaves many gaps, it may help frame future dialogue about the religious practices of this fascinating region.

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