



The Mother of the Gods, Athens, and the Tyranny of Asia: A Study of Sovereignty in Ancient Religion

Mark H. Munn

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Among maternal deities of the Greek pantheon, the Mother of the Gods was a paradox. She is variously described as a devoted mother, a chaste wife, an impassioned lover, and a virgin daughter; she is said to be both foreign and familiar to the Greeks. In this erudite and absorbing study, Mark Munn examines how the cult of Mother of the Gods came from Phrygia and Lydia, where she was the mother of tyrants, to Athens, where she protected the laws of the Athenian democracy. Analyzing the divergence of Greek and Asiatic culture at the beginning of the classical era, Munn describes how Kybebe, the Lydian goddess who signified fertility and sovereignty, assumed a different aspect to the Greeks when Lydia became part of the Persian empire. Conflict and resolution were played out symbolically, he shows, and the goddess of Lydian tyranny was eventually accepted by the Athenians as the Mother of the Gods, and as a symbol of their own sovereignty.

This book elegantly illustrates how ancient divinities were not static types, but rather expressions of cultural systems that responded to historical change. Presenting a new perspective on the context in which the Homeric and Hesiodic epics were composed, Munn traces the transformation of the Asiatic deity who was the goddess of Sacred Marriage among the Assyrians and Babylonians, equivalent to Ishtar. Among the Lydians, she was the bride to tyrants and the mother of tyrants. To the Greeks, she was Aphrodite. An original and compelling consideration of the relations between the Greeks and the dominant powers of western Asia, *The Mother of the Gods, Athens, and the Tyranny of Asia* is the first thorough examination of the way that religious cult practice and thought influenced political activities during and after the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.

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