The cities on the Western Black Sea Coast, or as the Greeks refer to en aristera tou Pontou, are from north to south Tyras, Istros, Tomis, Callatis, Bizone, Dionysopolis, Odessos, Mesambria and Apollonia. The Ancient Greeks call the western Black Sea Coast “the left side of the Pontos”, en aristera tou Pontou, because it is situated on the left side to the navigators sailing from Aegean to Pontos Euxinios via the Straits. It is a complicated task to draw geographical boundaries in the domain of religious and cultural interrelations: the model of a “regional pantheon” is a modern construct and not historical reality. Nevertheless, in my opinion, this model is a valuable methodological approach for depiction of regional cultural traits. The cults of the colony were connected with the pantheon of its metropolis and the contacts with the local tradition influence the religious sphere. These two aspects enable us to isolate several common characteristics.

Ovid describes in bitter verses the place of his exile Tomis, frozen by eternal winter, wild, and inhabited by ferocious people. He complaints that Greek and Barbarian tongue were mixed; he had even composed a poem in honor of Augustus in Getian language and recited it in public (Ex Ponto, IV, 13). That very characteristic deplored by Ovid, engaged my interest: the existence of a bi-lingual, bi-cultural area on the Thracian coast of Black Sea between 7th and 1st centuries BCE.
Istros is the first settlement on the “left side” of the Pontos Euxeinos, established around 650 BCE. Apollonia Pontica follows, around 610 BCE and Odessos, at the beginning of 6th century BCE. Tyras is founded at the beginning of 6th or at the end of 7th century BCE. All four cities are apoikiai of Miletus. The foundation date of Tomis is subject of controversy, but it was certainly a Milesian settlement. The two Dorian western Pontic colonies are Kallatis and Mesambria. Colonists from Heraclea Pontica, a Megarian colony, founded Kallatis in the second half of the 6th century. According to one version, Calchedonians and Megarians founded Mesambria at the end of 6th century BCE (513 BCE), or, according to another, the apoikoi came from the Megarian cities Byzantion and Kalchedon at the beginning of 5th century BCE (493 BCE). Dionysopolis and Bizone were late establishments, 3rd and 2nd BCE respectively, and the origin of the colonists is uncertain.

The relations—economical, political, demographical, and cultural—between the colonists and the local population represent an important and complex aspect of the phenomenon of the colonization. The names of most of these cities are of Thracian origin: Istros, Tomis, Kallatis, Bizone, Odessos, Mesambria. Thracian settlements existed before the foundation of some of them and a significant stratum of pre-colonial occupation was discovered at Mesambria. The archaeological and epigraphic evidence supports the conclusion that since the foundation of the Greek colonies on the western Black Sea Coast, the peace and the concept of mutual interest prevails in the political relations between the colonists and the Thracians versus the hostilities attested for certain periods. An eloquent example is provided by the excavations of two Thracian necropoleis near Odessos with vestiges of non-interrupted occupation from 7th through 4th century BCE. The foundation of Odessos about 10 km away didn’t disrupt the existence of the local settlement. The discoveries of Greek ceramics there suggest the presence of commercial relations between the Thracians and the colonists. We don’t yet have an exhaustive study concerning the Thracian presence in these cities. It is important to note that a reliable documentation is still lacking and the archeological data, including the onomastic evidence, rarely provide unquestionable proofs as to the “ethnic identity” of the persons.

In the present study I will discuss specifics for the region’s religious choices and will argue that the preference for particular cults was a consequence of an interaction with the Thracian cultural traditions. This feature, in my opinion, is evidenced in two ways: through direct “loans” of local gods and heroes, albeit in a Hellenized form, and through the predominance and the popularity of certain cults versus others.

Θεὸς Μέγας ὁ Ὅδησιτῶν

The most important deity in Odessos, at least since the Hellenistic period, Theos Megas, the Great god is known to us through the coins of the city. In the Roman period the Great God bears the Thracian name Derzalas/Darzalas and his portrait was the dominant type on the coins.

Silver tetradrachms of Odessos from 2nd century BCE present the portrait of a bearded god, with a ribbon in the hair, on the reverse—the God is standing, clad in a long chiton, turned to the left, holding a patera in his folded right hand and a cornucopia in his left hand. On his right side is the legend: ΘΕΟΥ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ and on his left side, the ethnikon: ὍΔΗΣΙΤῳΝ, under him is the name of the magistrate responsible for the coinage, ΚΥΡΣΑ.²

A different image of the God appears on bronze coins of Odessos from 4th century BCE: on the obverse is present a portrait identified by some numismatists as Apollo and by others as an anonymous Goddess, peer of the Great god; on the reverse the Great God is half-laying on a kline, with naked torso, holding a cornucopia in his folded left hand.³

On coins of Gordian the portrait of the god is facing the portrait of the emperor, on the obverse is presented a corona donatica with the name of the penteteric festival consecrated to Darzalas: Darzaleia.⁴ The

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⁴ Pick, B., Regling, K., op. cit. supra n. 2, n° 2370-2372, Pl. V, 3.
Great God Darzalas had at Odessos a temple for which a neokoros, elected by the Boule and the Demos of the city, was taking care.\(^5\)

Among the monuments related to the cult of the Great God, a group of reliefs comes from sites more than 100 km away from the Black Sea Coast, the territory included between Nicopolis ad Istrum and Markianopolis in Moesia Inferior. On a marble plaque with dedication to God Darzalas, is engraved an image closely resembling the one on the coins of Odessos: a bearded God standing and clad in a long chiton, holding in his right hand a *patera* over a blazing altar, and in his left hand, a cornucopia:\(^6\)

\[
\begin{align*}
|\text{Κ}ιριώ \text{ Δαρζαλα Τουρβων} & | \\
|\text{βου(λευτής) εὐχαριστήριν ἀνέθ-} & | \\
|\text{έκεν}. & |
\end{align*}
\]

To Lord Darzalas, Tourbo, *bouleutes*, dedicated as thank-offering.

Another relief with the Thracian Horseman bears the following dedication:\(^7\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Θεῳ ἐπηκόῳ Δερζεὶ Αἴλιος Διογ-} & | \\
|\text{νης ἵππικος εὐξάμενος ἀνέθηκα}. & |
\end{align*}
\]

To god Derzis who gives ear (to prayers), I, the *eques* Aelius Diogenes, offered while making a vow.

A bearded Horseman with a cornucopia is figured on a third relief from the same region: his horse is charging against an altar and his dog is chasing a boar.\(^8\)

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\(^5\) *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria Repertae I*, Ed. by G. Mihailov, Sofia 1970\(^2\), 230 bis*: ...εω...(/

\(^6\) *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria Repertae II*, ed. by G. Mihailov, Sofia 1958, 768.


\(^8\) Gocheva, Z. und Oppermann, M. (*op. cit. supra n. 7*), 1, 379 (3\(^{rd}\) century AD).
The specific figure of *Theos Megas* in Odessos is subject to many interpretations. There is however an aspect on which the different interpretations agree: the chthonic character of the deity, as expressed by the iconographic type of its images.9

In the heart of the debate remains the question of the origin—Greek, Thracian or product of syncretism—of this chthonic cult.

Pick supposes that the designation *Theos Megas* is a euphemic name given to the “Herrscher der Unterwelt”, the Greek Pluto. This supposition is supported by the iconographical type known from coins of Odessos, presenting the divinity laying on a *kline*, position typical for the representations of chthonic divinities, while his attribute, the cornucopia, characterizes these divinities as givers of fertility. Pick associates *Theos Megas* with the anonymous Theos from Eleusis and identifies the portrait of the Goddess on the 4th century bronze coins of Odessos with the Eleusinian Thea, whose image we see on the relief of Lysimachides discovered at the *Plutonion* in Eleusis.10 On the right side of the relief of Lysimachides (4th century BCE) are represented, within the iconographic pattern of funerary banquet, Theos and Thea as identified by inscriptions.

Hemberg supposes that Theos Megas in Odessos was one of *Theoi Megaloi* from Samothrace.11 This hypothesis however is weakened by the fact that the Great Gods of Samothrace possess their own important worship in Odessos and in most of the western Pontic cities. J. Zelazowski sees Theos Megas as a deity created in the Hellenistic period, similar to Sarapis.12

In my view, the dominating position of *Theos Megas* in the pantheon of Odessos suggests ancient roots, although any attestation before 4th century BCE is lacking, which provides the strongest argument in favor of late creation of his cult. It is plausible that *Theos Megas* is a god with chthonic functions and this explains the analogy with Pluto, Sarapis and the Thracian Horseman. On the other hand, the anonymity expressed by the name *Theos Megas*, too common and widespread, suggest identification with the Gods of Samothrace. In my opinion, *Theos Megas*

9 A more detailed discussion on the subject will offer the chapter *Theos Megas* in Chiekova, D., *Cultes et vie religieuse des cités grecques du Pont Gauche* (VIIe–Ier s. av. J.-C.), Peter Lang, 2008.
was by origin a local divinity, adopted by the Greeks at their arrival. He probably occupied a secondary position in the pantheon of the city in the Classic period when the patron deity, likewise the other Milesian colonies, was most likely Apollo. Then only in the Hellenistic period Theos Megas became the City God. At that moment, at latest, this local divinity will be worshipped as Theos Megas and will adopt the iconographical traits of the Greek chthonic divinities. Nonetheless, I would not assume that only at that time Theos Megas was created or introduced. The presence of the *ethnikon*, *Odessitôn*, next to his image on the silver tetradrachms of Odessos portrays Theos Megas as the patron deity of Odessos and a similar importance points toward a cult with ancient roots. Similar emissions consecrated to a divinity and with *ethnikon* are known for Illion–to Athena Illias, for Maroneia–to Dionysus, for Thasos–to Heracles Soter, all ancestral cults in these cities.\(^{13}\)

It is more difficult to explain why in the course of the Hellenistic period this cult became important. I am inclined to believe that it was at the outcome of a military crisis. With use of little imagination, I would even see in this “apparition” of the Great God in Odessos a story of theophania similar to the story of Phosphoros’ *epiphania* at Byzantium during the siege of the city by Phillip II.\(^ {14}\)

**The Thracian Horseman**

The western Black Sea cities and mainly their *chora* have provided a considerable number of monuments of the Thracian Horseman: around 300 to date. The majority of these monuments are dated to the Roman period, and only few to Hellenistic times (3rd-2nd centuries BCE). The vestiges of at least 10 sanctuaries of the Thracian Horseman have been identified in the region.


I will not discuss in the following pages the complex problem of the origin and the nature of the Horseman, which would require a thorough examination of vast material. I will summarize the iconographic particularities of his monuments.

The reliefs of the Horseman can be divided in two functional groups, votive and funerary, which are united by an iconographic pattern embracing several variants. The main elements are: the Horseman is hunting or coming back from hunt; usually he carries a spear in his hand; he is accompanied sometimes by a dog and the hunted animal is generally a boar. The representation is limited on the right side by a tree with an intertwined snake and/or by an altar. On several monuments the Horseman is moving toward a female figure, whose hand is raised in a gesture of benediction or salutation, or she is holding a *patera*. Sometimes the female figures are three—the three Nymphs.  

In the dedications on some monuments, the divinity is referred to as "Ἡρως (latin Heron), or Ἐρως "Ἡρως or Κύριος. Sometimes the deity is identified with Greek divinities, like Apollo, Zeus, Sarapis, etc. Often the Horseman is worshipped with Thracian epithets: Karabasmos, Perko, Karsenos, Mursine, Manimadzos, etc.

It is very likely that the cult of the Horseman is related to the status and the ideology of the Thracian kingship. The Thracian dynasts appear as horsemen on numerous monuments of Thracian toreutics and on monetary emissions of the Odryssian kings.  


The eponymous hero Melsas

In Mesambria was worshipped a hero Melsas, who was in all probability of local origin. The evidence of his worship is mainly numismatic: a portrait of a hero with a Corinthian helmet appears on the earliest coins of the city in 5th century BCE. The helmet appears separately on coins and on reliefs. The origin of the city’s name is found in Strabo and in lexicographic texts as well as in an epitaph from 2nd century AD:

εἴτα Μεσημβρία Μεγαρέων ἄποικος· πρότερον δὲ Μενεβρία, οἶον Μένα πόλις, τοῦ κτίσαντος Μένα καλουμένου, τῆς δὲ πόλεως βρίας καλουμένης θρακιστὶ.

Then Mesembria, a colony of the Megarians, formerly called ‘Menembria’ that is, “city of Menas”, because the name of its founder was Menas, while ‘bria’ is the word for city in the Thracian language. (Strabo 7, 6, 1)

Μεσημβρία· πόλις ποντική. Νικόλαος πέμπτων ἐκλήθη ἀπὸ Μέλας βριαν γὰρ τὴν πόλιν φασὶ Θράκες, ὡς οὖν Σηλημβρία ἢ τοῦ Σήλους πόλις, Πολτυμβρία ἢ Πόλτυος [πόλις], οὕτω Μεσημβρία ἢ Μέλας πόλις, καὶ διὰ τὸ εὐφωνότερον λέγεται Μεσημβρία.

Mesembria: pontic city. Nicolaus (Damascenus) in book fifth (says): it is named after Melsa, for Thracians call the city ‘bria’. As Selymbria is ‘city of Selys’, Poltymbria is ‘city of Poltys’, thus Mesembria is ‘city of Melsas’, and for better resonance is pronounced Mesembria. (Steph. Byz. s.v. (= FGrHist 2 A 90 F 43 [45]))

Ἐνθάδε ἐγώ κεῖμε Ἐκάτηθεος ὡς ἐσορᾶς. ἢμιν τὸ πάλαι βροτός, νῦν δὲ ἀθάνατος καὶ ἀγήρως.
Ｉουλία Νεικίου θυγάτηρ μεγαλήτορος ἀνδρός, Μεσεμβρία (sic) δὲ μν (sic) πατρὶς ἀπὸ [Μ?]έλσα καὶ Μρία.
ζῆσασα ἔτη ὅσα μοι στήλη κατέχει τρὶς πέντε δὲ [ἐ]κόσι καὶ δέκα πέντε. Εὐπορεῖτε, παροδίται.

I rest here, Hecate the goddess, as you see. Before I was mortal, now I am immortal and undecaying, Ioulia, daughter of Nikios, the greathearted man; my fatherland is Mesembria, name formed from Melsa and bria. I lived as many years as the stele shows: 3 times 25 and 15. May you prosper, passers-by. (Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae I, 345)

A marble relief from Mesambria presents a scene of sacrifice led by the main magistrates of Mesambria, the six strategoi, end of 2nd-beginning of 3rd centuries B.C.: on a second plan, on the left edge is depicted an altar on which is positioned a Corinthian helmet; another helmet is depicted right to the small naiskos. The helmet on the altar is the symbol of the eponymous hero Melsas and emblem of the city.17

The adoption of local hero cults can be seen in terms of appropriation or adaptation to the sacred heritage of the new homeland.

Apollo and Dionysus

Another mode of interaction with the local religious traditions is perceptible in the popularity of certain cults versus other, although the latter were central to the metropolis. In the pantheons of the Greek cities on the Thracian coast of Pontos Euxeinos two divinities occupy a noticeably dominant position: Apollo and Dionysus.

The various epithets with which Apollo was invoked and worshipped in these cities are eloquent for the Milesian and the Megarian heritage respectively. On the other hand, the cult of Dionysus was brought along from the mother cities by the first colonists. In this my opinion diverges from the view of Bilabel expressed in his Die

ionische Kolonisation, who believes that Dionysus was a Thracian deity worshipped in the Pontic colonies. However, I interpret the importance and the popularity of Apollo and Dionysus in the pantheon of the western Black sea cities also as a consequence of interaction with local religious values.

The existence of solar cult among the Thracians is related by various ancient sources and is discussed by scholars of the Thracian religion. Jordanes, the 6th century AD author of a History of the Goths reports that Philip II had undertaken a siege of Odessos, during which the priests of the city, referred to as the “priests Goths”, opened the gates and came out clad in white dresses and, with citharas in the hands, with music accompany the prayers to their gods. Astounded and fascinated, the Macedonian army had stopped before those unarmed people.

The historical method of Jordanes is marked by an archaizing tendency and he incorrectly assimilates the Goths with the former inhabitants north and west of the Black Sea, with the Thracian tribe Getae in particular. His objective is to add glare and ancientness to the history of Goths and the name by which his work is known is Getica instead of Gothica. Taking into account this aspect doesn’t make the story on the Priests of Odessos easier to interpret. I refer to this narrative preserved in a rather late source, not as an authentic report of a real

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19 Cf. e.g. Soph. Tereus, frg. 582 Lloyd-Jones: “Ἡλιός, φιλίπποις Ὀρμηζὶ πρέσβιστον σέλας.
20 Iord. Get. X 65:“-qua tempestate Dio storico dicente Philippus inopia pecuniae passus, Odysseanum Moesiae civitatem instructis copiis vastare deliberat, quae tunc propter vicinam Thomes Gothis erat subiecta. unde et sacerdotes Gothorum illi qui pio vocabantur subito patefactis portis cum citharis et vestibus candidis obviam egressi patriis diis, ut sibi propiiii Macedonas repellenter, voce supplici modulantes, quos Macedones sic fiducialiter sibi occurrere contentes stupisceret et, si dici fas est, ab inermibus terrentur armati. nec mora soluta acie quam ad bellandum construxerant, non tantum ab urbis excidio abstinuerunt, verum etiam et quos foris fuerant iure bellii adepti, reddiderunt, foedusque initio ad sua reversi sunt.”
incident but in order to evoke ideas and motifs associating it with the Apollonian mythological cycle: with the Apollonian bard Amphion who builds the walls of Thebes by the music of his flute and the magic power of Orpheus, also an Apollonian devotee, to subordinate with his songs the whole nature. Moreover, the existence of music of ‘Apollonian’ type among the Getae is mentioned by Theopompos in a fragment, quoted by Athenaeus. The uncertainties surrounding the passage of Jordanes are abundant, but its overall message is in perfect conformity with the evidence of the importance of Apollo in the western Black Sea cities. The reference to the Getae confirms the existence of synergy between the traditions brought along by the colonists and the religious context in the new homeland.

Another important testimony for my argument comes from Anchialos, a phrourion of the Milesian Apollonia. Apollonios son of Eptaikenthios, strategos of Anchialos, dedicates an altar to Apollo Karsenos in the reign of the Thracian king Rhoemetalkas II (19 BCE-26 BCE):

I. Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae I , 378:

[’Απόλλωνι Καρσενωι θε-
[ωι μεγά]λωι ευξάμενος
[καὶ ἐπιτ]υχὼν τὸν βωμὸν
[ἀνέθηκε] Ἀπολλώνιος
[Επταικ]ενθοι βιζυμόν
[στρατη]γος Ἀγχιάλου
[καὶ Σελ]λητικῆς καὶ Ρυσι-
[κῆς ὑπὲρ τε ἐσεύτου καὶ
[γυναικ]ῶς Λεοντοῦς καὶ
[τέκνων] ἐπὶ Ρουμηταλκοῦ
[Θρακῶν] βασιλέως.

Apollonios son of Heptaikenthos, from Bizye, strategos of Anchialos and of Selletica, and of Rysica, dedicated the altar to the great god Apollo Karsenos, since his prayer was

21 Theop. FGrHist 2 B 115 F 216 (244) (= Athen. XIV 24, p. 627 D-E): Ἦποτομος δ᾽ ἐν τεσσαρακοστῇ ἐκτῆ τῶν Ἰστορίων Ἰτέαι, φησι, κιθάρας ἑχοντες καὶ κιθαρίζοντες τὰς ἐπικηρυκείας ποιοῦσιν.

heard, for him, his wife Leont o and his kids, during the reign of Rhoemetalkas, the Thracian king.

Apollonios son of Eptaikenthos, a Thracian by origin, according to his patronymic, strategos of Anchialos, is known from two other monuments: one comes from Byzie and bears a dedication to Apollo Paktyenos and a second is a statue of Apollo Kitharedes.\(^\text{22}\)

I would like to draw attention to the local epithets Karsenos and Pactyenos and to the fact that the statue of Apollo Citharedes was dedicated in a sanctuary of the Thracian Horseman. It is obvious in my view that Apollonios has been a devotee to a Thracian solar deity identified with Apollo.

The importance of the worship of Apollo in the western Pontic cities is evidenced as well through the fact that the most popular divinity in Thrace, the Thracian Horseman, usually named in different regions of the country after various Greek deities, in the monuments from the Black Sea shore was almost exclusively named (assimilated to) Apollo; a Thracian epithet accompanies sometimes the God’s name. On one relief, the Horseman is holding the attribute of Apollo, the lyre.\(^\text{23}\)

As a last observation, which seems to support my argument, I will evoke the central position of Apollo in the Megarian colonies on the Thracian coast of Black Sea, Kallatis and Mesambria, versus much lesser importance in the Megarian cities on the northern and southern shore, that is Chersonesos Taurikos and Heraclea Pontica.

It is important to emphasize that the current documentation, epigraphic and numismatic, illustrates in a significant way that Dionysus and especially Dionysus Bacchos was worshiped in all cities in Thrace.

Lucian, in his treatise *On the Dance* presents eloquently the prevalence of the bacthic cult in the Ionian and Pontic cities.

\[\text{μεν γε Βακχικη όρχησις ἐν Ἰωνία μάλιστα καὶ ἐν Πόντῳ σπουδαζομένη, καίτοι σατύρικη ούσα, οὕτω κεχείρωται τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς ἐκεῖ ὡστε κατὰ τὸν τεταγμένον ἑκαστὸν καιρόν, ἀπάντων ἐπιλαβόμενοι}\]


Bacchic dance, which is especially favored in Ionia and in Pontus, though bawdy (satyrike), has so engrossed the people there that all of them at the appointed time forget everything else and sit watching Titans, Corybants, Satyrs and ox herds (boukoloi) all day long. And those who perform these dances are the best born and the first people in each of the cities. So far from feeling embarrassment, they take great pride in the matter, more even than in their high birth, public services, and their ancestral reputations.”

This passage raises the question what did Lucian meant by the geographical term “Pontos”?

C. P. Jones illustrated convincingly the rapport between the description by Lucian of the Dionysiac celebrations and an epitaph of 155 BCE for a Dionysiac dancer at Amastris. Jones points out similarity regarding several aspects: the extract of Lucian and the inscription evoke a dance of a specific type, a ‘bacchic dance’, carried out not by professional dancers but by people of noble origin like the late young man Aemilianus, member probably of a Dionysiac association:

“Ετος μὲν ἦν τριακοστὸν ἡδη μοι τὸδε, ἐθηκε δ' Αἰμιλιανὸν δυναμ' μοι πατήρ, ὃν ἔθρεψε Γέμινος, εἰς ἀνήρ τῶν εὐγενῶν' παρ' ἐμπύροις δὲ κόμων Εὐίω θεῷ τριετῆρι τελετῆν μυστικῶς ἀνήγαγον. κτλ.

(SEG XXXV, 1327)

This was now my thirtieth year, and my father gave me the name Aemilianus, and Geminus brought me up, a man of noble birth. Amid incense-vessels (?) I led the revel for the biennial god Euhios, (and led) the rite in mystic fashion, etc.

Regarding the term "Pontos" used by Lucian, Jones supposes that it initially refers to the Roman province of the same name, but could include cities of Paphlagonia like Amastris as well. It seems to me, however, considering the epigraphic data revealing the range of Bacchic celebrations and the presence of Dionysiac associations in the Greek cities on the western and northern coasts of the Pontos Euxinus, that the term Pontos employed by Lucian covers all areas surrounding the Black Sea.

I would like to draw attention in particular to the term *empyra*. Jones proposes to translate *empyra* in the epitaph of Aemilianus as “incense-vessels”, since the meaning of offerings, intended to be burned, is not likely. Jones evokes the occurrence of the same term in a 2nd century BCE inscription from Sardis transmitting a prohibition from 4th century BCE to the priests of Ahura Mazda to take part in the mysteries of Sabazios, Angdistis and Ma. F. Sokolowski interprets *empyra* of Sardis as “recipients of incense”, while L. Robert proposes “victims intended to be burned.” A. Fol saw in *empyra* “different sacred objects carried around in fire”. The author evokes a parallel with the modern folk festival of St Constantin and St Helene in Agia Eleni in Thrace and the dance on ember, where the participants carry various sacred objects. This last interpretation is most convincing for me.

In connection with Dionysus and the fire rites, an epigram from Tomis reveals the epiclesis *Pyribromos* of Dionysus and suggests in particular that rituals related to fire have been performed in this western pontic city. The dedication presents the devotees of Dionysus organized in a *thiasos* named after a woman Paso, its founder or priestess:

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 Αγνόν ύπὲρ θιάσων πυρίβρομέ σοι τὸ [δ ἀγαλμα]
dωρον ύπὸ σφετέρας πασεν ἐργαίας
[μ]υστικῶν ἐμ βακχοίσι λαχών στέφος . . .
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25 *SEG* XXIX, 1205, 1. 8-10.
In the name of the hallowed thiasos, to you, Roaring with fire, he offered from his own atelier, after obtaining the wreath of mystes among the bacchants, Someone son of Parmis, performing an ancient ritual. And you, Bull-horned, receive the oeuvre of Hermagenes’ hand and grant salvation to the sacred thiasos of Paso.

In my view, the epiclesis Puribomos ‘Roaring with fire’ echoes the fact that rites related to fire formed part of the Dionysiac celebrations in Tomis. This indication offers a link with the term empyra in the epitaph from Amastris and with the passage of Lucian and seems to complement my interpretation that the term Pontos Lucian includes the western Pontic shore as well.

The worship of Dionysus incontestably formed part of the heritage of Miletus and Megara. However, it seems to me that local religious traditions were particularly favorable to the prominence in these colonies of the bacchic Greek worship, closely related to them.

The popularity of Kybele

Another indication of contact with the Thracian religion I would see in the popularity of Kybele in the western Pontic cities attested to since the Archaic period. Again, this importance can be explained at least on two levels. On the one hand, it is a sign of the place occupied by the Anatolian traditions in the religious sphere of these cities. On the other hand, I am inclined to assign the popularity of the Great Anatolian Mother to the worship of a Great Goddess Mother by the Thracians.28

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A group of monuments with the Thracian Horseman offers support to this suggestion, where the goddess in front of the hero resembles Kybele but must be interpreted, most likely, as the Thracian Goddess which representation adopts the iconographic type of Kybele. 29

There are without a doubt numerous features and aspects in the religious tradition of these cities, which I didn’t include in the present discussion. My goal was not to exhaust the subject but to call attention to the richness of their cultural legacy. In my view, the Greek inhabitants of the cities en aristera tou Pontou, remaining faithful to the ancestral nomoi inherited by the metropolis, were in the same time able to embrace religious values of their “Barbarian” neighbors.
