

Phrygia

Practices

The people of Phrygia lived in the area of modern day Turkey. The legend of King Midas stems from an actual king who ruled in Phrygia.

Three types of burial were found in Phrygia. They correspond to different periods and different social levels. The first two types, tumulus (a mound of earth and stones raised over a grave) and rock-cut tombs, imply that the deceased was wealthy. Though few examples have been found, the third type was cremation, which could have been used by poorer persons.¹ Few funerary objects have been found with the burials.

The remains of the burial of King Midas have been found. The remains of the body were dressed in a bronze-studded leather outfit and laid out in state on a thick pile of dyed textiles inside a unique log coffin. The coffin was accompanied by 14 wood furniture pieces often intricately inlaid. Most likely these tables were used for a funerary banquet that had been recreated in the tomb. Besides the tables were found 150 bronze drinking vessels, 3 large vats or cauldrons used to serve the beverage and three jars which once had contained food.² Modern analysis shows that a stew made of lentils, barbecued lamb or and imported olive oil was served. The beverage was a brew of wine and beer mixed with mead.³

Many other tombs have been found in the same area. All show the presence of a door, real or merely represented.

Deities and Important Concepts

- Cybele / Matar
The "Great Mother" / "Mountain Mother". A mother goddess, goddess of the mountains and of wild nature. She was a mediator between the "boundaries of the known and unknown:" the civilized and the wild, the worlds of the living and the dead.⁴ She welcomes the dead to her earthly breast.⁵
- Sabazios
A sky and father god, depicted on horseback. There is evidence of early conflict between his followers and the indigenous mother goddess Cybele. However a compromise similar to the other mythic adjustments throughout Aegean culture seems to have been reached and both gods thus honored.⁶
- Attis (or Atys)
Mythical consort of Cybele. As he was about to be married, his hermaphroditic parent Agdistis struck him with frenzy so that he castrated himself and died. He was fundamentally a vegetation god and his death reflects the death of the fruits of the earth, which die in winter only to rise again in the spring.⁷

Modern Adaptations

- Hold a feast serving Mediterranean Lamb and Lentil Stew. You can find recipes for this on the web.
- Drink a small toast to the deceased using a mixture of beer and wine. Note: This may not taste good and some people report getting worse hang overs so keep the amount really small.

¹ "Funerary Use." Phrygians.com. N.p., n.d. Web. 4 July 2013. <http://phrygians.org/funerary.html>

² McGovern, Patrick E. "The Funerary Banquet of King Midas." N.p., n.d. Web. 6 July 2013. <http://www.penn.museum/documents/publications/expedition/PDFs/42-1/The%20Funerary.pdf>

³ Rosof, Libby. "A Phrygian Feast Fit for King Midas." Penn: University of Pennsylvania. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 July 2013. <http://www.upenn.edu/pennnews/current/node/1057>

⁴ "Cybele." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 04 July 2013. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cybele#Anatolia>

⁵ "Religion in Phrygia – Cybele.&rduo; Phrygians N.p., n.d. Web. 04 July 2013. <http://phrygians.org/religion.htm>

⁶ "Sabazios." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 19 June 2013. Web. 04 July 2013. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabazio>

⁷ "Attis (Phrygian Deity)." Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d. Web. 04 July 2013. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/42255/Attis>

- Have each person get a stone, tell a quick memory of the deceased and place the stone on top of the coffin. You can also have a later memorial after the person is buried so that the stones are on top of the grave, but check with the funeral home to clear this.
- Invoke Matar to open the door to the afterlife and welcome the deceased.
- Invoke Attis as a reminder that that which dies shall rise again, though it be in a different form.
- Place a picture of a door either on the coffin or cremation urn. Explain that the door reminds us that we can always 'visit' the deceased in our memories.

Sample Readings

Very few examples of Phrygian text survive. The writings we do have are found on rock cuts, seals and graffiti. The following text is an example of a translation of such a text.

Protective curse⁸

Whoever brings damage to this ossuary/skeleton of him, let him be damned by Attis

Resources

No one resource provided a good overview of Phrygian funeral rites. I recommend looking at the footnotes for resources.

⁸ "Palaeolexicon – Phrygian." Palaeolexicon – Phrygian. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 July 2013.
http://www.palaeolexicon.com/default.aspx?static=14&Language_ID=2