In the mythical and ritual traditions about Attis\textsuperscript{1}, death is a central theme that accompanies and characterises him from the very earliest documentation to the very latest modifications. This theme, however, appears formulated in different ways with different implications, at the levels of both myth and ritual, depending on the period and the place of worship. Accordingly, it will not be unproductive to recapitulate some of the salient aspects that have emerged from our research in connection with the theme of death.

With regard to the Anatolian evidence, the oldest archaeological sources substantiate an association between the Great Mother and places of burial. The extremely meagre epigraphic documentation in old Phrygian on the term “Attis”, however, indicates that he was connected with the royal family and perhaps even the king himself, who was involved in religious contexts that are not always clear, although in some cases he is obviously linked to a funerary setting.

In this particular perspective we may remember that the version of the myth as recorded by Diodorus Siculus\textsuperscript{2} sets Attis within a dynastic struggle that ends with the institution of a grave cult. This cult has been shown to have similarities and a continuity with the royal Anatolian model and in particular with royal Hittite funerals. These funerals, it will be remembered, mark the transition of the king (and queen) from the human to the “divine” dimension. Dead kings, in fact, were accorded a cult modelled on the cult of deities in the temples. Their mausoleums, the “Houses of Stone”, are buildings that are

\textsuperscript{1}This chapter is a longer, revised version of my contribution (Lancellotti 2001) published in the volume about dying and disappearing deities in ancient Mediterranean traditions edited by P. Xella (Xella 2001).

\textsuperscript{2}Diod. Sic., III 58, 1 – 59, 8.
able to maintain themselves and provide independently for the permanent cult of the dead. The account given in Diodorus Siculus seems to refer specifically to the foundation of this type of building in Pessinous. Attis would appear to be, in fact, an ancient member of the royal clan for whom there was a cult similar to the cult reserved for dead monarchs in the Hittite period.

The “Lydian” version of the Attis myth, where the youth is killed by a boar, that seems to be a revised form of an older “hunting myth”, also seems to be connected with this “royal” ideology, as ancient Near Eastern parallels indicate.

The fall of the Phrygian monarchy led to a transformation of the political situation which the religious institutions also had to take into account. The centre of Pessinous, at least from the 3rd cent. BCE, seems to be a “temple-state” governed by a priestly caste. A new dynastic model founded a priestly theocracy, although it had strong continuity with the preceding funereal cult.

Whereas in the version in Diodorus Siculus and the “Lydian” version, the death of Attis gives rise exclusively to a funereal cult, although we have no information on what happened to him afterwards, in the “Phrygian” version there is instead a sequel to his unfortunate experience. After death, the body of Attis is preserved intact (Pausanias), to which is added the movement of his little finger and the growth of his hair (Arnobius). However, all this should not be interpreted as indicating his presumed “resurrection”. In the myth, the preservation of his body is considered precisely as the opposite of resurrection, which is explicitly denied him by Zeus. The death of Attis is the very nucleus of the cult itself: he must die and his death guarantees him relocation to the other dimension from which, though transformed and indeed precisely because he is transformed, he can

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3 Scholars had interpreted the preservation of the finger and its movement in various ways: for a review of the different opinions cf. Borgeaud 1996, pp. 82-84. In particular, it is worth remembering the proposal of seeing here a connection between the finger and the phallus (among the most recent studies cf. Vermaseren 1977 and Haas 1982). Burkert quotes the cases of Orestes’ grave, the Attis myth and other ancient and medieval tales, maintaining that “it is tempting to connect finger sacrifice with castration” (Burkert 1996, p. 50-51). Recalling Frazer’s interpretation of the grave, where Orestes’ finger was buried as a substitute for the hero’s person, Borgeaud deems the case of Attis to be “analogue, mais inverse: seul le doigt échappe à la mort du corps; il représente donc Attis vivant” (Borgeaud 1996, p. 847). As for me, I accept this statement, but on condition that the survival of Attis is located in the Netherworld, and not in this world.