

CYBELE AND ATTIS

Sixth Century B.C. Greek Hymn entitled "Hymn to the Mother of the Gods": "She delights in the clangor of castanets and drums, the roar of flutes, the clamoring of wolves and bright-eyed lions."

The Greek "Mother of the Gods," sometimes called "Cybele", is really a Phrygian goddess, transported from Central Anatolia through the Ionian coast and into Greece during the sixth century B.C. In Phrygia she was known as Matar Kubileya, that is, "Mother of the Mountains." The name Cybele must come from Kubileya. In Greece she was the Mother of the Gods, in Rome she was Magna Mater, the Great Mother. Cybele may have some connection to Asherah, the Hebrew divinity who had Adonai (Lord) as her consort, but whom the Hebrews rejected as a real divinity after the 10th Century B.C. It is certain that Adonai and Attis share etymological origins, as does Aphrodite's consort, Adonis. The ancients believed that this Cybele was the same goddess as the Hittite goddess Kubaba or Kubebe, but we now know that they were wrong. However, some of Kubebe's attributes, such as a mirror that she holds to express her femininity, are not part of the iconography of Cybele.

But Matar Kubileya, Cybele, in Phrygia, is not about femininity and beauty and softness, but about status and power. Her iconography shows her controlling wild animals, seated on a throne, a tall crown on her head - not carrying out mother activities at all. Rarely do we see her feminine qualities stressed, nor does she fit into the conventional female roles of reproduction and nurturing. She rarely appears with child and is not connected to childbirth. She had a position of power over the environment, providing a safe haven for people, and in this sense mothers them, like a bird taking its babies under its wings. Later, though, the Greeks would worship her in private ceremonies as a protector of mothers, and so THEN she might be seen holding a child.

Cybele is worshiped through ecstatic activity. The Greeks always recognized that there is an irrational quality to the divine contact. And, all the ecstatic activity and raucous music and dancing emphasizes life and vigor and sexuality and produces an altered mental state which gets you into contact with that power in the universe that the Great Mother of all things, including the gods, represents. She is, after all, the goddess of the wild places and the countryside, so it is only natural that she should require wildness in her worshipers. Her priests were eunuchs, and became known among the Greeks as Galli, but the reasons are not clear. There is some evidence that the people from Galatia had become prominent in her cult in Phrygia, and so the term grew out of that connection. Magna Mater's cult was one of the most prevalent and popular in ancient times. The castration of these priests represents the priests devotion to the mother goddess, their fidelity to her, and their adherence to a strict moral code of chastity. This may be repugnant to us, but even early Christian theologians advocated this, and many practiced it, to show their total devotion to God. There is some evidence, though, that the priesthood and the castration attached to it became a kind of club for transsexuals to join: it gave them a kind of status in society, including power (from being a devotee of a powerful goddess) and the right to engage in outrageous behavior with impunity - they could dress, talk, and act in a way that many would think shameful, and then just claim they were working for the goddess.

Attis was a Greek creation. He appears consistently as a kind of shepherd figure wearing what the Greeks conceived of as Oriental (Persian, Trojan) clothes, and so he appears to have been a

kind of nature boy who accompanies Cybele. He appears to be modeled on the pattern of Greek myths where the powerful goddess destroys her lover, like Aphrodite destroys Adonis. In some depictions of Attis he appears to be an intercessor, a go-between for the human worshiper. He is the ultimate worshiper and petitioner.

For the worship of Attis at Rome with its added soteriological aspect (that is, it has an element of salvation in it), along with the taurobolium, you must read sections III and IV of the following:

[Link to Attis at Rome](#)