

## ASIA MINOR.

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THE first oriental religion adopted by the Romans was that of the goddess of Phrygia, whom the people of Pessinus and Mount Ida worshiped, and who received the name of *Magna Mater deum Idea* in the Occident. Its history in Italy covers six centuries, and we can trace each phase of the transformation that changed it in the course of time from a collection of very primitive nature beliefs into a system of spiritualized mysteries used by some as a weapon against Christianity. We shall now endeavor to outline the successive phases of that slow metamorphosis.

This religion is the only one whose success in the Latin world was caused originally by a mere chance circumstance. In 205 B. C., when Hannibal, vanquished but still threatening, made his last stand in the mountains of Bruttium, repeated torrents of stones frightened the Roman people. When the books were officially consulted in regard to this prodigy they promised that the enemy would be driven from Italy if the Great Mother of Ida could be brought to Rome. Nobody but the Sibyls themselves had the power of averting the evils prophesied by them. They had come to Italy from Asia Minor, and in this critical situation their sacred poem recommended the practice of their native religion as a remedy. In token of his friendship, King Attalus presented the ambassadors of the senate with the black aerolite, supposed to be the abode of the goddess, that this ruler had shortly before transferred from Pessinus to Pergamum. According to the mandate of the oracle the stone was received at Ostia by the best citizen of the land, an honor accorded to Scipio Nasica—and carried by the most esteemed matrons to the Palatine, where, hailed by the cheers of the multitude and surrounded by fumes of incense, it was solemnly installed (Nones of April, 204). This triumphal entry was later glorified by marvelous legends, and the poets told of edifying miracles that

had occurred during Cybele's voyage. In the same year Scipio transferred the seat of war to Africa, and Hannibal, compelled to meet him there, was beaten at Zama. The prediction of the Sibyls had come true and Rome was rid of the long Punic terror. The foreign goddess was honored in recognition of the service she had rendered. A temple was erected to her on the summit of the Palatine, and every year a celebration enhanced by scenic plays, the *ludi Megalenses*, commemorated the date of dedication of the sanctuary and the arrival of the goddess (April 4th-10th).

What was this Asiatic religion that had suddenly been transferred into the heart of Rome by an extraordinary circumstance? Even then it could look back upon a long period of development. It combined beliefs of various origin. It contained primitive usages of the religion of Anatolia, some of which have survived to this day in spite of Christianity and Islam. Like the Kizil-Bash peasants of today, the ancient inhabitants of the peninsula met on the summits of mountains covered with woods no ax had desecrated, and celebrated their festal days.<sup>1</sup> They believed that Cybele resided on the high summits of Ida and Berecynthus, and the perennial pines, in conjunction with the prolific and early maturing almond tree, were the sacred trees of Attis. Besides trees, the country people worshiped stones, rocks or meteors that had fallen from the sky like the one taken from Pessinus to Pergamum and thence to Rome. They also venerated certain animals, especially the most powerful of them all, the lion, who may at one time have been the totem of savage tribes.<sup>2</sup> In mythology as well as in art the lion remained the riding or driving animal of the Great Mother. Their conception of the divinity was indistinct and impersonal. A goddess of the earth, called Mâ or Cybele, was revered as the fecund mother of all things, the "mistress of the wild beasts"<sup>3</sup> that inhabit the woods. A god Attis, or Papas, was regarded as her husband, but the first place in this divine household belonged to the woman, a reminiscence of the period of matriarchy.<sup>4</sup>

When the Phrygians at a very early period came from Thrace and inserted themselves like a wedge in the old Anatolian races, they adopted the vague deities of their new country by identifying them with their own, after the habit of pagan nations. Thus Attis became one with the Dionysus-Sabazius of the conquerors, or at least assumed some of his characteristics. This Thracian Dionysus

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vergil, *Aen.*, IX, 85 f.

<sup>2</sup> S. Reinach, *Mythes, cultes*, I, p. 293.

<sup>3</sup> πότνια θηρῶν.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ramsay, *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia*, I, pp. 7; 94.

was a god of vegetation. Foucart has thus admirably pictured his savage nature: "Wooded summits, deep oak and pine forests, ivy-clad caverns were at all times his favorite haunts. Mortals who were anxious to know the powerful divinity ruling these solitudes had to observe the life of his kingdom, and to guess the god's nature from the phenomena through which he manifested his power. Seeing the creeks descend in noisy foaming cascades, or hearing the roaring of steers in the uplands and the strange sounds of the wind-beaten forests, the Thracians thought they heard the voice and the calls of the lord of that empire, and imagined a god who was fond of extravagant leaps and of wild roaming over the wooded mountains. This conception inspired their religion, for the surest way for mortals to ingratiate themselves with a divinity was to imitate it, and as far as possible to make their lives resemble his. For this reason the Thracians endeavored to attain the divine delirium that transported their Dionysus, and hoped to realize their purpose by following their invisible yet ever-present lord in his chase over the mountains."<sup>5</sup>

In the Phrygian religion we find the same beliefs and rites, scarcely modified at all, with the one difference that Attis, the god of vegetation, was united to the goddess of the earth instead of living "in sullen loneliness." When the tempest was beating the forests of the Berecynthus or Ida, it was Cybele traveling about in her car drawn by roaring lions mourning her lover's death. A crowd of worshipers followed her through woods and thickets, mingling their shouts with the shrill sound of flutes, with the dull beat of tambourines, with the rattling of castanets and the dissonance of brass cymbals. Intoxicated with shouting and with the uproar of the instruments, excited by their impetuous advance, breathless and panting, they surrendered to the raptures of a sacred enthusiasm. Catullus has left us a dramatic description of this divine ecstasy.<sup>6</sup>

The religion of Phrygia was perhaps even more violent than that of Thrace. The climate of the Anatolian upland is one of extremes. Its winters are rough, long and cold, the spring rains suddenly develop a vigorous vegetation that is scorched by the hot summer sun. The abrupt contrasts of a nature generous and sterile, radiant and bleak in turn, caused excesses of sadness and joy that were unknown in temperate and smiling regions, where the ground was never buried under snow nor scorched by the sun. The Phryg-

<sup>5</sup> Foucart, "Le culte de Dionysos en Attique," *Extr. Mém. Acad. Inscr.*, XXXVII, 1904, pp. 22 f.

<sup>6</sup> Catullus, LXIII.

ians mourned, the long agony and death of the vegetation, but when the verdure reappeared in March they surrendered to the excitement of a tumultuous joy. In Asia savage rites that had been unknown in Thrace or practiced in milder form expressed the vehemence of those opposing feelings. In the midst of their orgies, and after wild dances, some of the worshipers voluntarily wounded themselves and, becoming intoxicated with the view of the blood, with which they besprinkled their altars, they believed they were uniting themselves with their divinity. Or else, arriving at a paroxysm of frenzy, they sacrificed their virility to the gods as certain Russian dissenters still do today. These men became priests of Cybele and were called Galli. Violent ecstasis was always an endemic disease in Phrygia. As late as the Antonines, montanist prophets that arose in that country attempted to introduce it into Christianity.

All these excessive and degrading demonstrations of an extreme worship must not cause us to slight the power of the feeling that inspired it. The sacred ecstacy, the voluntary mutilations and the eagerly sought sufferings manifested an ardent longing for deliverance from subjection to carnal instincts, and a fervent desire to free the soul from the bonds of matter. The ascetic tendencies went so far as to create a kind of begging monachism—the *metragyrtes*. They also harmonized with some of the ideas of renunciation taught by Greek philosophy, and at an early period Hellenic theologians took an interest in this devotion that attracted and repelled them at the same time. Timotheus the Eumolpid, who was one of the founders of the Alexandrian religion of Serapis, derived the inspiration for his essays on religious reform, among other sources, from the ancient Phrygian myths. Those thinkers undoubtedly succeeded in making the priests of Pessinus themselves admit many speculations quite foreign to the old Anatolian nature worship. The votaries of Cybele began at a very remote period to practise “mysteries”<sup>7</sup> in which the initiates were made acquainted, by degrees, with a wisdom that was always considered divine, but underwent peculiar variations in the course of time.

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Such is the religion which the rough Romans of the Punic wars accepted and adopted. Hidden under theological and cosmological doctrines it contained an ancient stock of very primitive and coarse religious ideas, such as the worship of trees, stones and animals. Besides this superstitious fetichism it involved ceremonies that were both sensual and ribald, including all the wild

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hepding, *Attis*, pp. 177 f.

and mystic rites of the bacchanalia which the public authorities were to prohibit a few years later.

When the senate became better acquainted with the divinity imposed upon it by the Sibyls, it must have been quite embarrassed by the present of King Attalus. The enthusiastic transports and the somber fanaticism of the Phrygian worship contrasted violently with the calm dignity and respectable reserve of the official religion, and excited the minds of the people to a dangerous degree. The emasculated Galli were the objects of contempt and disgust and what in their own eyes was a meritorious act was made a crime punishable by law, at least under the empire.<sup>8</sup> The authorities hesitated between the respect due to the powerful goddess that had delivered Rome from the Carthaginians and the reverence for the *mos maiorum*. They solved the difficulty by completely isolating the new religion in order to prevent its contagion. All citizens were forbidden to join the priesthood of the foreign goddess or to participate in her sacred orgies. The barbarous rites according to which the Great Mother was to be worshiped were performed by Phrygian priests and priestesses. The holidays celebrated in her honor by the entire nation, the *Megalensia*, contained no Oriental feature and were organized in conformity with Roman traditions.

A characteristic anecdote told by Diodorus<sup>9</sup> shows what the public feeling was towards this Asiatic worship at the end of the republic. In Pompey's time a high priest from Pessinus came to Rome, presented himself at the forum in his sacerdotal garb, a golden diadem and a long embroidered robe—and pretending that the statue of his goddess had been profaned demanded public expiation. But a tribune forbade him to wear the royal crown, and the populace rose against him in a mob and compelled him to seek refuge in his house. Although apologies were made later, this story shows how little the people of that period felt the veneration that attached to Cybele and her clergy after a century had passed.

Kept closely under control, the Phrygian worship led an obscure existence until the establishment of the empire. That closed the first period of its history at Rome. It attracted attention only on certain holidays, when its priests marched the streets in procession, dressed in motley costumes, loaded with heavy jewelry, and beating tambourines. On those days the senate granted them the right to go from house to house to collect funds for their temples. The remainder of the year they confined themselves to the sacred enclosure of the Palatine, celebrating foreign ceremonies in a for-

<sup>8</sup> Dig., XLVIII, 8, 4, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Diodorus, XXXVI, 6.

eign language. They aroused so little notice during this period that almost nothing is known of their practices or of their creed. It has even been maintained that Attis was not worshiped together with his companion, the Great Mother, during the times of the republic, but this is undoubtedly wrong, because the two persons of this divine couple must have been as inseparable in the ritual as they were in the myths.<sup>10</sup>

But the Phrygian religion kept alive in spite of police surveillance, in spite of precautions and prejudices; a breach had been made in the cracked wall of the old Roman principles, through which the entire Orient finally gained ingress.

Directly after the fall of the republic a second divinity from Asia Minor, closely related to the Great Mother, became established in the capital. During the wars against Mithridates the Roman soldiers learned to revere Mâ, the great goddess of the two Comanas, who was worshiped by a whole people of hierodules in the ravines of the Taurus and along the banks of the Iris. Like Cybele she was an ancient Anatolian divinity and personified fertile nature. Her worship, however, had not felt the influence of Thrace, but rather that of the Semites and the Persians,<sup>11</sup> like the entire religion of Cappadocia. It is certain that she was identical with the Anâhita of the Mazdeans, who was of much the same nature.

The rites of her cult were even more sanguinary and savage than those of Pessinus, and she had assumed or preserved a warlike character that gave her a resemblance to the Italian Bellona. The dictator Sulla, to whom this invincible goddess of combats had appeared in a dream, was prompted by his superstition to introduce her worship into Rome. The terrible ceremonies connected with it produced a deep impression. Clad in black robes, her "fanatics," as they were called, would turn round and round to the sound of drums and trumpets, with their long, loose hair streaming, and when vertigo seized them and a state of anæsthesia was attained, they would strike their arms and bodies great blows with swords and axes. The view of the running blood excited them, and they besprinkled the statue of the goddess and her votaries with it, or even drank it. Finally a prophetic delirium would overcome them, and they foretold the future.

This ferocious worship aroused curiosity at first, but it never gained great consideration. It appears that the Cappadocian Bellona joined the number of divinities that were subordinated to the *Magna*

<sup>10</sup> Hepding, *Attis*, p. 142.

<sup>11</sup> This point will be developed in a later article on Persia.

*Mater* and, as the texts put it, became her follower (*pedisequa*).<sup>12</sup> The brief popularity enjoyed by this exotic *Mâ* at the beginning of our era shows, nevertheless, the growing influence of the Orient, and of the religions of Asia Minor in particular.

After the establishment of the empire the apprehensive distrust in which the worship of Cybele and Attis had been held gave way to marked favor and the original restrictions were withdrawn. Thereafter Roman citizens were chosen for *archigalli*, and the holidays of the Phrygian deities were solemnly and officially celebrated in Italy with even more pomp than had been displayed at Pessinus.

According to Johannes Lydus, the Emperor Claudius was the author of this change. Doubts have been expressed as to the correctness of the statement made by this second rate compiler, and it has been claimed that the transformation in question took place under the Antonines. This is erroneous. The testimony of inscriptions corroborates that of the Byzantine writer.<sup>13</sup> In spite of his love of archaism, it was Claudius who permitted this innovation to be made, and we believe that we can divine the motives of his action.

Under his predecessor, Caligula, the worship of Isis had been authorized after a long resistance. Its stirring festivities and imposing processions gained considerable popularity. This competition must have been disastrous to the priests of the *Magna Mater*, who were secluded in their temple on the Palatine, and Caligula's successor could not but grant to the Phrygian goddess, so long established in the city, the favor accorded the Egyptian divinity who had been admitted into Rome but very recently. In this way Claudius prevented too great an ascendancy in Italy of this second stranger and supplied a distributary to the current of popular superstition. Isis must have been held under great suspicion by a ruler who clung to old national institutions.<sup>14</sup>

The emperor Claudius introduced a new cycle of holidays that were celebrated from March 15th to March 27th, the beginning of spring, at the time of the revival of vegetation, personified in Attis. The various acts of this grand mystic drama are tolerably well known. The prelude was a procession of *cannophores* or reed-bearers on the fifteenth; undoubtedly they commemorated Cybele's discovery of Attis, who, according to the legends, had been exposed while a child on the banks of the Sangarius, the largest river of Phrygia, or else this ceremony may have been the transformation of an ancient phallegory intended to guarantee the fertility of the

<sup>12</sup> Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, pp. 263 f.

<sup>13</sup> Hepding, *Attis*, p. 142.

<sup>14</sup> Tacitus, *Annales*, XI, 15.

fields.<sup>15</sup> The ceremonies proper began with the equinox. A pine was felled and transferred to the temple of the Palatine by a brotherhood that owed to this function its name of "tree-bearers" (*dendrophores*). Wrapped like a corpse in woolen bands and garlands of violets, this pine represented Attis dead. This god was originally only the spirit of the plants, and the honors given to the "March-tree"<sup>16</sup> in front of the imperial palace perpetuated a very ancient agrarian rite of the Phrygian peasants. The next day was a day of sadness and abstinence on which the believers fasted and mourned the defunct god. The twenty-fourth bore the significant name of *Sanguis* in the calendars. We know that it was the celebration of the funeral of Attis, whose manes were appeased by means of libations of blood, as was done for any mortal. Mingling their piercing cries with the shrill sound of flutes, the Galli flagellated themselves and cut their flesh, and neophytes performed the supreme sacrifice with the aid of a sharp stone, being insensible to pain in their frenzy.<sup>17</sup> Then followed a mysterious vigil during which the mystic was supposed to be united as a new Attis with the great goddess.<sup>18</sup> On March 26th there was a sudden transition from the shouts of despair to a delirious jubilation, the "Hilaria." With springtime Attis awoke from his sleep of death, and the joy created by his resurrection burst out in wild merry-making, wanton masquerades, and luxurious banquets. After twenty-four hours of an indispensable rest (*Requietio*), the festivities wound up, on the twenty-seventh, with a long and gorgeous procession through the streets of Rome and surrounding country districts. Under a constant rain of flowers the silver statue of Cybele was taken to the river Almo and bathed and purified according to an ancient rite (*Lavatio*.)

The worship of the mother of the gods had penetrated into the Hellenic countries long before it was received at Rome, but in Greece it assumed a peculiar form and lost most of its barbarous character. The Greek mind felt an unconquerable aversion to the dubious nature of Attis. The *Magna Mater*, who is thoroughly different from her Hellenized sister, penetrated into all Latin provinces and imposed herself upon them with the Roman religion. This was the case in Spain, Brittany, the Danubian countries, Africa and especially in Gaul.<sup>19</sup> As late as the fourth century the car of the goddess drawn by steers was led in great state through the fields

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Showerman, *Classical Journal*, II (1906), p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, II, pp. 130 f.

<sup>17</sup> Hepding, *Attis*, p. 160.

<sup>18</sup> Hepding, *Attis*, p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Drexler in Roscher, *Lexikon*, s. v. "Meter," col. 918 f.



and vineyards of Autun in order to stimulate their fertility.<sup>20</sup> In the provinces the *dendrophores*, who carried the sacred pine in the spring festivities, formed associations recognized by the state. These associations had charge of the work of our modern fire departments, besides their religious mission. In case of necessity these woodcutters and carpenters, who knew how to fell the divine tree of Attis, were also able to cut down the timbers of burning buildings. All over the empire religion and the brotherhoods connected with it were under the high supervision of the quindecimvirs of the capital, who gave the priests their insignia. The sacerdotal hierarchy and the rights granted to the priesthood and believers were minutely defined in a series of senate decrees. These Phrygian divinities who had achieved full naturalization and had been placed on the official list of gods, were adopted by the populations of the Occident as Roman gods together with the rest. This propagation was clearly different from that of any other Oriental religion, for here the action of the government aided the tendencies that attracted the devout masses to these Asiatic divinities.

This popular zeal was the result of various causes. Ancient authors describe the impression produced upon the masses by those magnificent processions in which Cybele passed along on her car, preceded by musicians playing captivating melodies, by priests wearing gorgeous costumes covered with amulets, and by the long line of votaries and members of the fraternities, all barefoot and wearing their insignia. All this, however, created only a fleeting and exterior impression upon the neophyte, but as soon as he entered the temple a deeper sensation took hold of him. He heard the pathetic story of the goddess seeking the body of her lover cut down in the prime of his life like the grass of the fields. He saw the bloody funeral services in which the cruel death of the young man was mourned, and heard the joyful hymns of triumph, and the gay songs that greeted his return to life. By a skillfully arranged gradation of feelings the onlookers were uplifted to a state of rapturous ecstasy. Feminine devotion in particular found encouragement and enjoyment in these ceremonies, and the Great Mother, the fecund and generous goddess, was always especially worshiped by the women.

Moreover, people founded great hopes on the pious practice of this religion. Like the Thracians the Phrygians began very early to believe in the immortality of the soul. Just as Attis died and came to life again every year, these believers were to be born to a new life after their death. One of the sacred hymns said: "Take

<sup>20</sup> Gregory of Tours, *De glor. confess.*, c. 76.

courage, oh mystics, because the god is saved; and for you also will come salvation from your trials.”<sup>21</sup> Even the funeral ceremonies were affected by the strength of that belief. In some cities, especially at Amphipolis in Macedonia, graves have been found adorned with earthenware statuettes representing the shepherd Attis;<sup>22</sup> and even in Germany the gravestones are frequently decorated with figures of young men in Oriental costume, leaning dejectedly upon a kotted stick (*pedum*), which represented the same Attis. We are ignorant of the conception of immortality held by the Oriental disciples of the Phrygian priests. Maybe, like the votaries of Sabazius, they believed that the blessed ones were permitted to participate with Hermes Psychopompos in a great celestial feast, for which they were prepared by the sacred repasts of the mysteries.<sup>23</sup>

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Another agent in favor of this imported religion was, as we have stated above, the fact of its official recognition. This placed it in a privileged position among Oriental religions, at least at the beginning of the imperial regime. It enjoyed a toleration that was neither precarious nor limited; it was not subjected to arbitrary police measures nor to coercion on the part of magistrates; its fraternities were not continually threatened with dissolution, nor its priests with expulsion. It was publicly authorized and endowed, its holidays were marked in the calendars of the pontiffs, its associations of dendrophores were organs of municipal life in Italy and in the provinces, and had a corporate entity.

Therefore it is not surprising that other foreign religions, after being transferred to Rome, sought to avert the dangers of an illicit existence by an alliance with the Great Mother. The religion of the latter frequently consented to agreements and compromises, from which it gained in reality as much as it gave up. In exchange for material advantages it acquired complete moral authority over the gods that accepted its protection. Thus Cybele and Attis absorbed a majority of the divinities from Asia Minor that had crossed the Ionian Sea. Their clergy undoubtedly intended to establish a religion complex enough to enable the emigrants from every part of the vast peninsula, slaves, merchants, soldiers, functionaries, scholars, in short, people of all classes of society, to find their national and favorite devotions in it. As a matter of fact no

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Hepding, *Attis*, p. 167.

<sup>22</sup> Perdrizet, *Bull. corr. hell.*, XIX (1905), pp. 534 f.

<sup>23</sup> Hepding, *Attis*, p. 263.

other Anatolian god could maintain his independence side by side with the deities of Pessinus.<sup>24</sup>

We do not know the internal development of the Phrygian mysteries sufficiently to give details of the addition of each individual part. But we can prove that in the course of time certain religions were added to the one that had been practised in the temple of the Palatine ever since the republic.

In the inscriptions of the fourth century, Attis bears the cognomen of *menotyranus*. At that time this name was undoubtedly understood to mean "lord of the months," because Attis represented the sun who entered a new sign of the zodiac every month.<sup>25</sup> But that was not the original meaning of the term. "*Mèn tyrannus*" appears with quite a different meaning in many inscriptions found in Asia Minor. *Tyrannos*,\* "lord," is a word taken by the Greeks from the Lydian, and the honorable title of "tyrant" was given to Mèn, an old barbarian divinity worshiped by all Phrygia and surrounding regions.<sup>26</sup> The Anatolian tribes from Caria to the remotest mountains of Pontus worshiped a lunar god under that name who was supposed to rule not only the heavens but also the underworld, because the moon was frequently brought into connection with the somber kingdom of the dead. The growth of plants and the increase of cattle and poultry were ascribed to his celestial influence, and the villagers invoked his protection for their farms and their district. They also placed their rural burial grounds under the safeguard of this king of shadows. No god enjoyed greater popularity in the country districts.

This powerful divinity penetrated into Greece at an early period. Among the mixed populations of the Aegean seaports, in the Piræus, at Rhodes, Delos and Thasos, religious associations for his worship were founded. In Attica the presence of the cult can be traced back to the fourth century, and its monuments rival those of Cybele in number and variety. In the Latin Occident, however, no trace of it can be found, because it had been absorbed by the worship of the *Magna Mater*. In Asia itself, Attis and Mèn were sometimes considered identical, and this involved the Roman world in a complete confusion of those two persons, who in reality were very different. A marble statue discovered at Ostia represents Attis holding the lunar crescent, which was the characteristic emblem of Mèn. His assimilation to the "tyrant" of the infernal regions trans-

<sup>24</sup> Pauly—Wissowa, *Realenc.*, s. v., and *Suppl.* I, col. 258.

<sup>25</sup> *Invictus* is the characteristic epithet applied to solar divinities.

<sup>26</sup> Pendrizet, "Mèn," *Bull. corr. hell.*, XX, col. 2687 f.

\* *Τύραννος*.

formed the shepherd of Ida into a master of the underworld, an office that he combined with his former one as author of resurrection.

A second title that was given to him reveals another influence. A certain Roman inscription is dedicated to Attis the Supreme.<sup>27</sup>† This epithet is very significant. In Asia Minor "Hypsistus" was the appellation used to designate the god of Israel.<sup>28</sup> A number of pagan thiasoi had arisen who though not exactly submitting to the practice of the synagogue yet worshiped none but the Most High, the Supreme God, the Eternal God, God the Creator, to whom every mortal owed service. These must have been the attributes ascribed to Cybele's companion by the author of the inscription, because the verse continues:‡ "To thee, who containest and maintainest all things."<sup>29</sup> Must we then believe that Hebraic monotheism had some influence upon the mysteries of the Great Mother? This is not at all improbable. We know that numerous Jewish colonies were established in Phrygia by the Seleucides, and that these expatriated Jews agreed to certain compromises in order to conciliate their hereditary faith with that of the pagans in whose midst they lived. It is also possible that the clergy of Pessinus suffered the ascendancy of the Biblical theology. Under the empire Attis and Cybele became the "almighty gods" (*omnipotentes*) *par excellence*, and it is easy to see in this new conception a leaning upon Semitic or Christian doctrines, more probably upon Semitic ones.<sup>30</sup>

The question we shall take up now is a very difficult one, namely, the influence of Judaism upon the mysteries during the Alexandrian period and at the beginning of the empire. Many scholars have endeavored to define the influence exercised by the pagan beliefs on those of the Jews; it has been shown how the Israelitic monotheism became Hellenized at Alexandria and how the Jewish propaganda attracted proselytes who revered the one God, without, however, observing all the prescriptions of the Mosaic law. But no successful researches have been made to ascertain how far paganism was modified through an infiltration of Biblical ideas. Such a modification must necessarily have taken place to some extent. A great number of Jewish colonies were scattered everywhere on the Mediterranean, and these were long animated with such an

<sup>27</sup> Inscr. graec., XIV, 1018.

<sup>28</sup> Schürer, *Sitzungsber. Akad. Berlin*, XIII (1897), pp. 200 f.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Zozimus, IV, 3, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Henri Graillot, "Les dieux Tout-puissants, Cybèle et Attis," *Revue archéol.*, I (1904), pp. 331 f.

† "Ἄττει ὑψίστω.

‡ καὶ συνέχοντι τὸ πᾶν.

ardent spirit of proselytism that they were bound to impose some of their conceptions on the pagans that surrounded them. The magical texts which are almost the only original literary documents of paganism we possess, clearly reveal this mixture of Israelitic theology with that of other peoples. In them we frequently find names like Iao (Yahveh), Sabaoth, or the names of angels side by side with those of Egyptian or Greek divinities. Especially in Asia Minor, where the Israelites formed a considerable and influential element of the population, an intermingling of the old native traditions and the religion of the strangers from the other side of the Taurus must have occurred.

This mixture certainly took place in the mysteries of Sabazius, the Phrygian Jupiter or Dionysus.<sup>31</sup> They were very similar to those of Attis, with whom he was frequently confounded. By means of an audacious etymology that dates back to the Hellenistic period, this old Thraco-Phrygian divinity has been identified with "Yahveh Zebaoth," the Biblical "Lord of Hosts." The corresponding expression\*\* in the Septuagint has been regarded as the equivalent of the *kurios Sabazios*†† of the barbarians. The latter was worshiped as the supreme, almighty and holy Lord. In the light of a new interpretation the purifications practised in the mysteries were believed to wipe out the hereditary impurity of a guilty ancestor who had aroused the wrath of heaven against his posterity, much as the original sin with which Adam's disobedience had stained the human race was to be wiped out. The custom observed by the votaries of Sabazius of dedicating votive hands which made the liturgic sign of benediction with the first three fingers extended (the *benedictio latina* of the church) was probably taken from the ritual of the Semitic temples through the agency of the Jews. The initiates believed, again like the Jews, that after death their good angel (*angelus bonus*) would lead them to the banquet of the eternally happy, and the everlasting joys of these banquets were anticipated on earth by the liturgic repasts. This celestial feast can be seen in a fresco painting on the grave of a priest of Sabazius called Vincentius, who was buried in the Christian catacomb of Prætextatus, a strange fact for which no satisfactory explanation has as yet been furnished. Undoubtedly he belonged to a Jewish-pagan sect that admitted neophytes of every race to its mystic ceremonies. In fact, the church itself formed a kind of

<sup>31</sup> Cumont, *Comptes Rendus Acad. Inscr.*, Feb. 9, 1906, pp. 63 f.

\*\* κύριος Σαβαώθ.

†† κύριος Σαβάζιος.

secret society sprung from the synagogue but distinct from it, in which Gentiles and children of Israel joined in a common adoration.

If it is a fact, then, that Judaism influenced the worship of Sabazius, it is very probable that it influenced the cult of Cybele also, although in this case the influence cannot be discerned with the same degree of certainty. The religion of the Great Mother did not receive rejuvenating germs from Palestine only, but it was greatly changed after the gods of more distant Persia came and joined it. In the ancient religion of the Achemenides, Mithra, the genius of light, was coupled with Anâhita, the goddess of the fertilizing waters. In Asia Minor the latter was assimilated with the fecund Great Mother, worshiped all over the peninsula,<sup>32</sup> and when at the end of the first century of our era the mysteries of Mithra spread over the Latin provinces, its votaries built their sacred crypts in the shadow of the temples of the *Magna Mater*.

Everywhere in the empire the two religions lived in intimate communion. By ingratiating themselves with the Phrygian priests, the priests of Mithra obtained the support of an official institution and shared in the protection granted by the state. Moreover, men alone could participate in the secret ceremonies of the Persian liturgy, at least in the Occident. Other mysteries, to which women could be admitted, had therefore to be added in order to complete them, and so the mysteries of Cybele received the wives and daughters of the Mithraists.

This union had even more important consequences for the old religion of Pessinus than the partial infusion of Judaic beliefs had had. Its theology gained a deeper meaning and an elevation hitherto unknown, after it had adopted some of the conceptions of Mazdaism.

The introduction of the taurobolium in the ritual of the *Magna Mater*, where it appeared after the middle of the first century, was probably connected with this transformation. We know the nature of this sacrifice, of which Prudentius gives a stirring description based on personal recollection of the proceeding. On an open platform a steer was killed, and the blood dropped down upon the mystic, who was standing in an excavation below. "Through the thousand crevices of the wood," says the poet, "the bloody dew runs down into the pit. The neophyte receives the falling drops on his head, clothes and body. He leans backward to have his cheeks, his ears, his lips and his nostrils wetted; he pours the liquid over his eyes, and does not even spare his palate, for he moistens his tongue

<sup>32</sup> Cumont, *Mon. myst. Mithra*, I, pp. 333 f.

with blood and drinks it eagerly." <sup>33</sup> After submitting to this repulsive sprinkling he offered himself to the veneration of the crowd. They believed that he was purified of his faults, and had become the equal of the deity through this red baptism.

Although the origin of this sacrifice that took place in the mysteries of Cybele at Rome is as yet shrouded in obscurity, recent discoveries enable us to trace back very closely the various phases of its development. In accordance with a custom prevalent in the entire Orient at the beginning of history, the Anatolian lords were fond of pursuing and lassoing wild buffalos, which they afterwards sacrificed to the gods. Beasts caught during a hunt were immolated, and frequently also prisoners of war. Gradually the savagery of this primitive rite was modified until finally nothing but a circus play was left. During the Alexandrian period people were satisfied with organizing a *corrida* in the arena, in the course of which the victim intended for immolation was seized. This is the proper meaning of the terms *taurobolium* and *criobolium*, †† which had long been enigmas, <sup>34</sup> and which denoted the act of catching a steer or a ram by means of a hurled weapon, probably the thong of a lasso. Without doubt even this act was finally reduced to a mere sham under the Roman empire, but the weapon with which the animal was slain always remained a hunting weapon, a sacred boar spear. <sup>35</sup>

The ideas on which the immolation was based were originally just as barbarous as the sacrifice itself. It is a matter of general belief among savage peoples that one acquires the qualities of an enemy slain in battle or of a beast killed in the chase by drinking or washing in the blood, or by eating some of the viscera of the body. The blood especially has often been considered as the seat of vital energy. By moistening his body with the blood of the slaughtered steer, the neophyte believed that he was transfusing the strength of the formidable beast into his own limbs.

This naive and purely material conception was soon modified and refined. The Thracians brought into Phrygia, and the Persian magi into Cappadocia, the fast spreading belief in the immortality of mankind. Under their influence, especially under that of Mazdaism, which made the mythical steer the author of creation and of resurrection, the old savage practice assumed a more spiritual and more elevated meaning. By complying with it, people no longer thought they were acquiring the buffalo's strength: the blood, as

<sup>33</sup> Prudentius, *Peristeph.*, X, 1011 f.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Schröder, *Athen. Mitt.*, 1904, pp. 152 f.

<sup>35</sup> Prudentius, *Peristeph.*, 1027.

†† *ταυροβόλιον, κριοβόλιον.*

the principle of life, was no longer supposed to renew physical energy, but to cause a temporary or even an eternal rebirth of the soul. The descent into the pit was regarded as burial, a melancholy dirge accompanied the burial of the old man who had died. When he emerged purified of all his crimes by the sprinkling of blood and raised to a new life, he was regarded as the equal of a god, and the crowd worshiped him from a respectful distance.<sup>36</sup>

The vogue obtained in the Roman empire by the practice of this repugnant rite can only be explained by the extraordinary power ascribed to it. He who submitted to it was *in aceternum renatus*,<sup>37</sup> according to the inscriptions.

We could also outline the transformation of other Phrygian ceremonies, of which the spirit and sometimes the letter slowly changed under the influence of more advanced moral ideas. This is true of the sacred feasts attended by the initiates. One of the few liturgic formulas antiquity has left us refers to these Phrygian banquets. One hymn says: "I have eaten from the tambourine, I have drunk from the cymbal, I have become a mystic of Attis." The banquet, which is found in several Oriental religions, was sometimes simply the external sign indicating that the votaries of the same divinity formed one large family. Admitted to the sacred table, the neophyte was received as the guest of the community and became a brother among brothers. The religious bond of the thiasus or *sodalitium* took the place of the natural relationship of the family, the *gens* or the clan, just as the foreign religion replaced the worship of the domestic hearth.

Sometimes other effects were expected of the food eaten in common. When the flesh of some animal supposed to be of a divine nature was eaten, the votary believed that he became identified with the god and that he shared in his substance and qualities. In the beginning the Phrygian priests probably attributed the first of these two meanings to their barbarous communions.<sup>38</sup> Towards the end of the empire, moral ideas were particularly connected with the assimilation of sacred liquor and meats taken from the tambourine and cymbal of Attis. They became the staff of the spiritual life and were to sustain the votary in his trials; at that period he considered the gods as especially "the guardians of his soul and thoughts."<sup>39</sup>

As we see, every modification of the conception of the world and of man in the society of the empire had its reflection in the doc-

<sup>36</sup> Hepding, *Attis*, pp. 196 f.

<sup>38</sup> Hepding, *Attis*, pp. 186 f.

<sup>37</sup> Dessau, *Inscrip. sel.*, 4152.

<sup>39</sup> CII, VI, 499.



trine of the mysteries. Even the conception of the old deities of Pessinus was constantly changing. When astrology and the Semitic religions caused the establishment of a solar henotheism as the leading religion at Rome, Attis was considered as the sun, "the shepherd of the twinkling stars." He was identified with Adonis, Bacchus, Pan, Osiris and Mithra; he was made a "polymorphous"<sup>40</sup> being in which all celestial powers manifested themselves in turn; a *pantheos* who wore the crown of rays and the lunar crescent at the same time, and whose various emblems expressed an infinite multiplicity of functions.

When neoplatonism was triumphing, the Phrygian fable became the traditional mould into which subtle exegetists boldly poured their philosophic speculations on the creative and stimulating forces that were the principles of all material forms, and on the deliverance of the divine soul that was submerged in the corruption of this earthly world. In his hazy oration on the Mother of the Gods, Julian lost all notion of reality on account of his excessive use of allegory and was swept away by an extravagant symbolism.<sup>41</sup>

Any religion as susceptible to outside influences as this one was bound to yield to the ascendancy of Christianity. From the explicit testimony of ecclesiastical writers we know that attempts were made to oppose the Phrygian mysteries to those of the church. It was maintained that the sanguinary purification imparted by the taurobolium was more efficacious than baptism. The food that was taken during the mystic feasts was likened to the bread and wine of the communion; the Mother of the gods was undoubtedly placed above the Mother of God, whose son also had risen again. A Christian author, writing at Rome about the year 375, furnishes some remarkable information on this subject. As we have seen, a mournful ceremony was celebrated on March 24th, the *dies sanguinis*, in the course of which the Galli shed their blood and sometimes mutilated themselves in commemoration of the wound that had caused Attis's death, ascribing an expiatory and atoning power to the blood thus shed. The pagans claimed that the church had copied their most sacred rites by placing her Holy Week at the vernal equinox in commemoration of the sacrifice of the cross on which the divine Lamb, according to the church, had redeemed the human race. Indignant at these blasphemous pretensions, St. Augustine tells of having known a priest of Cybele who kept saying: *Et ipse Pileatus chris-*

<sup>40</sup> Hippolytus, *Refut. haeres.*, V, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Julianus, *Or.*, V.

*tianus est*—"and even the god with the Phrygian cap [i. e., Attis] is a Christian."<sup>42</sup>

But all efforts to maintain a barbarian religion stricken with moral decadence were in vain. On the very spot on which the last taurobolia took place at the end of the fourth century, in the *Phrygianum*, stands today the basilica of the Vatican.

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There is no Oriental religion whose progressive evolution we could follow at Rome so closely as the cult of Cybele and Attis, none that shows so plainly one of the reasons that caused their common decay and disappearance. They all dated back to a remote period of barbarism, and from that savage past they inherited a number of myths the odium of which could be masked but not eradicated by philosophical symbolism, and practices whose fundamental coarseness had survived from a period of rude nature worship, and could never be completely disguised by means of mystic interpretations. Never was the lack of harmony greater between the moralizing tendencies of theologians and the cruel shamelessness of tradition. A god held up as the august lord of the universe was the pitiful and abject hero of an obscene love affair; the taurobolium, performed to satisfy man's most exalted aspirations for spiritual purification and immortality, looked like a shower bath of blood and recalled cannibalistic orgies. The men of letters and senators attending those mysteries saw them performed by painted eunuchs, ill reputed for their infamous morals, who went through dizzy dances similar to those of the dancing dervishes and the Aissaouas. We can imagine the repugnance these ceremonies caused in everybody whose judgment had not been destroyed by a fanatical devotion. Of no other pagan superstition do the Christian polemicists speak with such profound contempt, and there is undoubtedly a reason for their attitude. But they were in a more fortunate position than their pagan antagonists; their doctrine was not burdened with barbarous traditions dating back to times of savagery; and all the ignominies that stained the old Phrygian religion must not prejudice us against it nor cause us to slight the long continued efforts that were made to refine it gradually and to mould it into a form that would fulfil the new demands of morality and enable it to follow the laborious march of Roman society on the road of religious progress.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Frazer, *Osiris, Attis, Adonis*, 1907, pp. 256 f.