

The Roman cult of Cybele

by

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## **Introduction: Why I struggled with this topic throughout the year and the Outcome**

This senior project is a look into the Cult of Cybele and the various aspects of Cybele worship in Rome during the 1st century BCE - 1st century CE. The topic of this essay has been a difficult one to tackle for a number of reasons which I will discuss shortly. My experience studying abroad during my junior year forced me to take History Junior Seminar during my last semester, hindering my chances to prepare a substantial topic before the start of my senior year at Purchase College. Furthermore, my ability to continue gathering material was barred due to the library closings that were a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

I believe that, if I had received the training that came with History Junior Seminar, I would have been much more prepared to tackle my topic. My History Junior Seminar course helped me to familiarize myself with the various databases that are offered through the Purchase College library. From this training, I was able to discover databases beyond JSTOR, such as WorldCat and ProQuest. However, I became comfortable using these databases in the second semester of my senior year, which proved to be too late for me. The academic year was coming to an end and my window for research was closing.

Prior to the start of my senior year, I was unaware of how particular my topic should have been. I had initially believed that an essay-style format covering the main historical findings of a broad topic would suffice for a senior project, rather than a research paper exploring a thesis on a specific topic. Because of this, I had neglected to conduct strong research in a particular topic and, instead, made a list of broad topics that I had an interest in learning more about. Had I consulted my professors at Purchase College more regularly throughout my study abroad and taken History Junior Seminar at the appropriate time, I would have been prepared to research on a specific thesis by the end of my junior year.

The libraries in my area, including Purchase College, were forced to close due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This affected my research, for my opportunity to collect new material was hindered. I could no longer borrow texts on the cult of Cybele from Purchase College, nor could I use the interlibrary loan system in order to borrow books on my topic from other universities. This made it more difficult for me to study the findings of other scholars who have worked on gathering research on the cult of Cybele and other mystery religions of Antiquity. This being said, the texts that I did have to refer to supported each other in their content, suggesting that scholars have made a general consensus regarding their knowledge of Cybele.

Most of the authors that I referred to heavily had similar ideas to each other, proving the basics of established scholarship regarding the cult of Cybele. More often than not, I found that the Lynn E. Roller book that I was using referred to ideas from the Philippe Borgeaud book that I had. The Borgeaud text referred to the Maarten J. Vermaseren book that I had and the cycle continued. Discovering this for myself showed me how scholarship on a particular subject builds over time.

Initially, this senior project was supposed to be a focus on the historiography of the Roman cult of Cybele. However, I failed to understand how much more knowledge I would have had to know regarding Roman religion and the culture and religions of Asia Minor in order to have a more firm grasp on the subject. Furthermore, I would have had to have acquired a vast knowledge on Iron Age Mesopotamia and the beginnings of scholarship on the cult of Cybele from the 19th and 20th century regarding in order to better understand my topic. My advisor, Dr. Hallote, does regret allowing me to take on this subject due to its obscure and specialized nature. However, I answered the questions that she posed to me for my senior project to the best of my ability.

While it proved to be challenging, I am happy to present the findings that I have outlined in this senior project. My chance to take History Junior Seminar during my last semester of senior year did help me, regardless of how late I had taken it. It gave me exposure to new methods of research and text-analysis from the assignments that I had completed throughout the course. Furthermore, the guidance given to me by my senior project advisor, Dr. Hallote, helped me find my way throughout this difficult time. I would like to thank her and the History department at Purchase College for giving me the well-rounded education needed to tackle my senior project and my future endeavors in the academic world.

My senior project consists of a series of five main questions given to me by Dr. Hallote which allowed me to explore the Roman cult of Cybele. First, I look into the ancient authors that have written about the cult of Cybele. My research into this showed me that the main writers who wrote substantial works about the cult of Cybele were Dionysios of Halikarnassos, Lucretius, Ovid, Virgil, Catallus, and M. Terentius Varro. The majority of these authors lived in the late 1st century BCE - 1st century CE in Rome. These authors got their information from viewing various Cybele cult practices and then documenting those practices or wrote fiction based on the practices of beliefs of the cult of Cybele. Because the cult of Cybele and Attis was a mystery religion, outsiders were largely unaware of the deeper aspects of cult practice and wrote fiction works on the cult using their own speculation.

Next, I looked into the legends of Cybele and Attis, whose stories were mostly recorded by Ovid, in his work *Fasti*, which was published in 8 CE, as well as the 2nd century CE author Pausanias and the 4th century CE author Arnobius. I focused on the main origin story of Cybele and Attis, in which Attis castrates himself due to his infidelity towards Cybele. I also discussed

the legend of Cybele as a meteorite being brought to the Palatine from Pessinous and briefly discussed the Sibylline Books, which no longer exist, but called for Cybele worship.

I spent a portion of my senior project discussing the Phrygians and what evidence we have to show for Cybele worship starting in Western Anatolia. Here, I talked about how the Anatolian people, who are referred to as the Phrygians by ancient scholars, ranged in different groups of people, from the Muski people to the Lydians, a group of people who eventually invaded western Anatolia. I also discussed authors like Herodotus, a Greek writer of the 5th century BCE, and Pausanias, who place their origin stories of Cybele in Western Anatolia. Finally, I looked at the etymology of the name Cybele and mentioned various artifacts from the excavations of ancient Gordion which apparently represent Cybele.

The bulk of my senior project focuses on the height of the cult of Cybele, which took place during the 1st century CE. I mentioned emperors such as Augustus Caesar and Claudius, figures who lived from the 1st century BCE - 1st century CE who took pride in their devotion to Cybele, or the Magna Mater. I discussed various cult rituals and looked into the archaeology of the Palatine and how it reflected Cybele and Attis' popularity as Roman deities. Finally, I looked into the archaeology of the cult of Cybele that dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. The majority of archaeology that I had founded consisted of terracotta statues and ornaments meant to be hung on the walls of homes. These artifacts were largely found in Italy, however some were also uncovered in France and England.

My main takeaway from this project is that the cult of Cybele is a unique Eastern cult religion from western Anatolia that made its way into the Roman world in order to appease the gods and rid the Italian peninsula of Hannibal and his forces. Understanding the cult of Cybele is important for those with an interest in ancient religions because it gives an example of how a

foreign religion can be Romanized and used to combat a prodigy, or sign of the gods' anger. This cult is important because it gives insight into the world of the mystery religions of antiquity through the ancient authors that have documented it. Furthermore, an interesting point regarding this cult is that scholars speculate to have seen evidence of Cybele worship from various excavations both in Rome and in Turkey, such as the excavation site of Catalhoyuk. If those artifacts consisting of votive statues truly represent Cybele, it is important to know how her worship evolved over time.

**1. Where do we get the information about the cult of Cybele? What ancient authors talk about it; who were they, when and where did they live, and where did they get their information?**

We have the works of many ancient writers at our disposal to see how writers from the 1st century BCE and 1st century CE refer to the cult of Cybele, such as Dionysios of Halikarnassos, Lucretius, Ovid, Virgil, Catallus, and M. Terentius Varro, all writers of the 1st century BCE, as well as Herodotus, a Greek historian of the 5th century BCE, Pausanias, a Greek geographer of the 2nd century CE and Arnobius, a Tunisian Christian apologist from the 3rd century CE. These literary sources prove to be useful to our understanding of the cult of Cybele at its height, for they document various aspects of cult rites held in Rome. I will be referring to these authors in this question as well as questions 3 and 4 of my senior project.

An interesting anecdote from Dionysios of Halikarnassos from circa 23 BCE discusses the contrasting nature of the Cybele cult and how he prefers the Roman traditions linked with the cult as opposed to foreign, and more specifically Phrygian aspects of the cult (Roller, p. 293). Dionysios was a historian who lived in Rome and was able to document the cult from his own personal observations. He states, “So careful is the city (Rome) about religious customs other than its own; so ominously does it regard all unseemly nonsense.” This concept is an interesting point for scholars who would like to understand more closely how different versions of the cult of Cybele meshed over time.

It is the begging of alms, the loud flute hymns and beating of the tympana, and the wearing of the pectoral images that Dionysios disagreed with (Roller, p 293). While the Phrygians who paraded through the Roman streets carry on these apparently negative rites, the praetors worship Cybele properly by holding annual sacrifices and games in accordance to

Roman law. Dionysios even begins his writing by telling how Rome has not emulated the honoring of foreign gods by using foreign customs. It is clear that Dionysios' stance regarding worship is that it be done using Roman standards.

An interesting notion from Dionysios' reflections is his recollection of the apparel of the Phrygian Cybele worshippers. His comments on their intricately patterned garments document the dress of the Phrygian Cybele worshipper of the time. His comment on the pectoral images of the Phrygians prove to be historically accurate, for we have multiple artifacts to attest to this, such as the Anatolian *Bronze Matrix Illustrating Votive Reliefs* dating to the third-second century BCE kept in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which feature various pectoral images, although Roller states that the provenance of these artifacts are unknown (Roller, p. 214). Another artifact which attests to this is the *Statue of a Gallus*, which dates to the second century CE. This statue, which was uncovered in Rome, is a sculptural representation of an *archigallus*, or high priest, wearing an Anatolian pectoral image on the front of his robe.

This being said, not all that Dionysios said may be factual but rather a reaction to a difference of Cybele worship (Roller, p. 296). The Roman version of Cybele worship involved imperial control and a focus on organized ritual, such as the March Festival of Attis. From Dionysios' recounts however, the Anatolian version of Cybele worship proved to be noisy and colorful, with its assertive music and colorful dress. It may be that at this time, Cybele worship meshed in its Roman, Anatolian, and even Greek forms, for Cybele worship could call for both controlled state channels and loud clamor, as seen in Dionysios' account. It depended on the worshipper how to properly honor Cybele.

Another 1st century BCE writer to capture an understanding of Cybele worship in his writings is Lucretius, a Roman poet who captured the form and the emotional content of the



*Megalensia*, a springtime festival of Cybele's cult, by viewing the procession. Lucretius, unlike Dionysios, deeply honored Cybele, referring to her as the "Mother of the gods, the Mother of wild beasts, and our creator" (Roller, p. 297). In one poem in *De rerum natura*, Lucretius compares Cybele to the Earth, stating that she, like mother earth, is suspended in the air. What he means to say is that Cybele is independent of humanity and uses this poem as a metaphor to describe a Roman ritual wherein a statue of Cybele in her lion chariot is carried by the *galli*, eunuch priests of the cult, throughout the city streets (Roller, p. 297).

He continues on to discuss the excitement caused by this parade, as he refers to the Phrygian music played throughout the procession. This music comes from the drums, cymbals, horns, and pipes carried by those marching with Cybele. Finally, Lucretius talks about the armed bands, or *curetes*, that arrive and cause more excitement for the crowd. Lucretius uses much symbolization in his poems, such as referral to Cybele's lions as a wild beast that can be tamed by a nurturing figure and the castrated *galli* as a reminder that those ungrateful to Cybele, the great mother, as well as their own parents, do not deserve children. This then reinforces the familial bonds and honor of the mother that comes with devotion to Cybele and furthermore reinforces the positive values of Roman society (Roller, p. 298). Another symbol in Lucretius' poem to note is his play on the words *Phrygias*, or Phrygian and *fruges*, or fruit, in order to link Cybele's Western Anatolian background to her role as a fertility goddess.

Another Roman poet who did well to document Cybele worship during the Late Republic era of Rome was Ovid. Ovid was educated in Rome and traveled throughout Athens, Sicily, and Anatolia. In his 8 CE work *Fasti*, Ovid documented Cybele's Roman rituals, the origin of Cybele and her lover Attis, and the legend of Cybele's arrival into Rome (Roller, p. 299). Ovid, like Lucretius, documents the emotional heights of the *Megalensia* in his work by discussing the

thumping of drums by *galli*, although he refers to them as half-men. He then states that Cybele is held up by her comrades through the streets, painting a scene of howling participants.

The Roman poet Virgil does well to place Cybele in the forefront of gods who have brought about the greatness of Rome in his 1st century BCE work, the *Aeneid* (Roller, p. 299). In his work, Cybele acts as the divine power who protects and leads Aeneas to Rome, where his descendants will prosper. She is shown giving signs of a more hopeful future to the Trojans earlier on in the poem through her light on Mount Ida (Roller, p. 300). The poem also depicts Cybele protecting the Trojans from having their ships catch fire in Italy by the Rutuli people.

Perhaps the most significant detail regarding Cybele in the *Aeneid* is that she epitomizes the glorious future of Rome in *Aeneid* 6.784-87. The main idea put forth by Virgil is that Cybele is the natural support of Rome's great hero Aeneas, who was born on Ida. In the Augustan ideology, both Cybele and Aeneas came from Asia Minor and had to come to Rome to fulfill their role in making the great city of Rome (Roller, p. 301).

Another part of the cult of Cybele that is discussed in the *Aeneid* is the perception of *galli* that was held during this time. On the eve of battle, Aeneas and his followers are insulted by being associated with feminine characteristics, as the enemy in the text states, "and befoul his (Aeneas) hair, curled with a hot iron and wetted with myrrh" (*Aeneid* 12.97-100). Turnus the Carthaginian teases Aeneas and his men for frizzing their hair and wearing perfume like *galli*. In another scene, an enemy of Aeneas, Numanus, taunts the Trojans by claiming that they are Phrygian women who would rather make music than fight (Roller, p. 302). Numanus uses the Trojan's Cybele worship against them to symbolize their weakness and effeminacy. From the text, modern scholars can get a sense of the negative attitude held for *galli* by the ancient Mediterranean world.

Another poem that I would like to discuss is Catallus' poem 63, which was written in the 1st century BCE. Catallus lived in Rome during the Late Republic era, much like our previous writers. In his poem regarding Cybele and Attis, we peer into the mind of Attis, who questions himself due to his attraction to Cybele. Scholars have discussed this poem in large detail for its emotional intensity. A popular observation of this poem is that, like Dionysios of Halikarnassos' view, it expresses the desire to separate the bad Phrygian rites from the cult of Cybele and, instead keep the proper Roman rites (Roller, p. 305).

This work is an interesting study for modern scholars as it allows us to view the mindset of Attis from the point of view of 1st century cult followers. Although Attis was attracted to Cybele, her dominant nature as a goddess confused him until he gave part of himself up to her through his castration (Roller, p. 306). Attis' individuality was sacrificed in an act of adoration to Cybele and fears his own actions. From this, we can more clearly see the mindset that people had regarding those who would do the same for Cybele. The struggle for devout worshippers seems to be choosing either not to go against Roman norms and choosing to commit an irreversible act, like castration, in exchange for salvation after death (Roller, p. 307).

A final literary work from Roller that I would like to discuss is the Roman scholar M. Terentius Varro's satire *Eumenides*, which was completed around 70-60 BCE (Roller, p. 308). Varro lived in the Late Republic era of Rome and resided in the Reate area for most of his life. Scholars such as Graillet in 1912 and Wiseman in 1985 have located Varro's story regarding Cybele to have taken place in Rome. In Varro's story, an unnamed protagonist walks past the Metroon on the Palatine when he hears the sounds of cymbals. This peaks his interest and he disguises himself as a *galli* and sneaks inside the temple.

Once inside, the protagonist observes a crowd of *galli* chanting to Cybele in what seems to be a reenactment to a rite associated with the *Megalensia*. The *aedile* among the *galli* is busy placing a crown onto the head of a statue of Cybele and the protagonist stays off to the side, admiring the feminine attire of the *galli* and the purple robe and golden crown of the high priest present. The music of the rite taking place captures the protagonist and he loses sense of awareness until he is noticed and pursued by the *galli*, possibly in an attempt to castrate him.

Although a fictional work, this text is important because it captures the flamboyant dress of the *galli*, the approval of Cybele worship in Rome, and the element of sexual ambiguity tied to the cult (Roller, p. 308). Varro describes the high priests' garb in detail as well as the feminine attire used by the protagonist in order to blend in with the *galli* among him. Presence of an *aedile*, or Roman magistrate, during these *Megalesian* rites proves that these practices adhered to Roman law and were operated by Romans themselves. The element of sexual ambiguity is present in the way in which the protagonist feels attraction to the feminine characteristics of the *galli*. This literary work does well to describe the allure of the cult of Cybele to the Roman male participant, who could allow himself further sexual exploration outside of the Roman standard by way of his membership into the cult (Roller, p. 309).

In actuality, the literary content that we have to document the cult of Cybele during its height of popularity during the 1st century BCE - 1st century CE outnumbers the archeology and artifacts that we have uncovered (Roller, p. 309). It is through works like *Fasti* that we can more closely analyze the rituals and rites within Roman Cybele worship. From writers like Dionysios of Halikarnassos, we can study the blending of Roman, Greek, and Anatolian rites of the cult of Cybele and how the Roman populace felt regarding this. The key aspect to note from these

writers is that they all lived in the Late Republic and most of them lived in Augustan era Rome, proving that the cult of Cybele was indeed popular at this time.

The following Classical period sources show textual evidence about the origins of Cybele worship in Phrygia and I plan to reference these sources again in question 3 of my senior project. Herodotus, the Greek writer of the 5th century BCE, discusses Attis, Cybele's famed lover, in a euhemeristic manner by discussing Atys, son of the Lydian king, Croesus (Gasparro, p. 26). In his work *The Histories*, Herodotus discusses a story in which Atys is killed by the "Phrygian" man Adrastus during a boar hunt. This is meant to recount the story of Attis, who is killed by a boar for his devotion to Cybele in Lydia (Pausanius 7.17.9; Roller, p. 240). Pausanius, in his work, *Descriptions of Greece*, from 170 CE, discusses an origin story of Cybele and uses the Sangarios River for his setting (Roller, p. 240). Pausanius was from the region of Mount Sipylus in western Anatolia, where ancient stories of this region were better recorded. Furthermore, Arnobius, in his work, *Adversus nationes*, from the early 3rd century CE, claims that Cybele was born from the rock Agdos, which is meant to be in Western Anatolia (Borgeaud, p. 44).

In another account from Herodotus, Anacharsis, a Scythian philosopher of the 6th century BCE, is impressed with the cult of Cybele so much that he decides to bring her worship to his homeland (Vermaseren, p. 28). During his travels, Anacharsis reaches Cyzicus in Phrygia, where he finds the Cyzicenes celebrating the feast of Cybele (Vermaseren, p. 28). This account states, "he (Anacharsis) vowed to this same Mother that, if he returned to his own country safe and sound, he would sacrifice to her as he saw the Cyzicenes do, and establish a nightly rite of worship."

## 2. What are the legends about Cyble and her son / Cybele and Attis?

According to Ovid's *Fasti*, the Cult of Cybele and Attis' initial introduction into Rome was called for due to consultation of the Sibylline Books. The strength of the Carthaginian military struck fear in Rome and so, the *duumviri sacris faciundis*, commanded by the Sibylline Books, looked to Cybele, the Anatolian goddess, in the hopes that introduction of Cybele worship would quell the Carthaginian advance. Here, I would like to discuss the 2nd Punic War's effect on Rome and how it brought about Cybele worship into the empire. The legend of the arrival of Cybele into Rome is pertinent to understanding the cults' complex background.

The battle of Cannae of 216 BCE proved to be a stunning blow to the Roman forces (Goldsworthy, p. 184). Although Roman general Gaius Terentius Varro was able to escape, twenty-nine of Rome's military tribunes commanding the army were killed (Goldsworthy, p. 181). This left Rome with less than half their usual amount of military tribunes. Alongside this, eighty men working for the Senate lay dead, as almost a third of Roman senators were killed in Cannae along with the various family members residing with them. It was the civilians, however, who lost generations of family members who were enlisted in the military to Carthaginian might, causing a fear within the Roman populace that Hannibal would wreak havoc in their own territory (Goldsworthy, p. 188).

With the feeling of death imminent among the Roman populace, panic ensued within the capital city (Goldsworthy, p. 188). Although much of the populace were eager to escape, guards were ordered to stop citizens from leaving. As Varro returned to Rome after his defeat at Cannae, restrictions upon public displays of grief were enforced. The people feared that they had wronged their gods, believing that the proper rites to honor and venerate their gods had been neglected. As hysteria broke out amongst the people, two Vestal Virgins were put to death for

breaking their vows (Goldsworthy, p. 194). The city chose Fabius Pictor to travel to the shrine of Apollo at Delphi and request guidance on how to bring an end to the disasters of this war (Goldsworthy, p. 194).

The tides of the war eventually took a turn, as Roman forces defeated the Carthaginians in Spain and even brought the battle to Africa (Goldsworthy, p. 202). This, in turn, forced Hannibal to return. The final battle of Zama ended with a Carthaginian loss and eventual ending of their trade empire within the Mediterranean (Goldsworthy, p. 203). Rome gained Spanish territory and received a large indemnity from Carthage.

While the Second Punic War played out, the Sibylline Books, a collection of Greek texts that were used to research and perform rituals in order to appease the gods, were consulted periodically. In one instance, those following the commands of the books committed a human sacrifice, which was rare in Rome. They buried alive a Greek man and woman and a Gallic man woman under the Forum Boarium, following an ancient rite (Goldsworthy, p. 195). But it was not until 204 BCE that an idol of the goddess Cybele was brought from Asia Minor to Rome. At this point in time, Rome was nearing its last stages of the war and the populace was desperate to find an answer to their hardship by way of religion. From here on, we will focus on the legend of Cybele's arrival into Rome.

As I had mentioned earlier, Roman priests consulted the Sibylline Books because of Hannibal's campaign aimed towards Italy and because of the stresses of the 2nd Punic War. According to the first century BCE Roman historian Livy, the Sibyl's response was that, if a foreign enemy were to enter Italy, it would be expelled if Cybele was brought into Rome (Livy 29.10.4-6; Roller, p 264). Ancient writers such as Cicero, Livy, Diodorus of Halikarnassos, Cassius, and others state that Pessinous in central Anatolia was the home of the black meteorite

that represented Cybele (Roller, p. 264). Records report that this meteorite was said to have fallen from the sky and landed at the shrine of Pessinous.

Ovid recalls the Sibylline Books stating that the Romans had to choose a *vir optimus*, or best man, among them to receive the goddess and so Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica the younger, son of the general Scipio who was killed in Spain in 211 BCE was chosen for the task (Roller, p. 265). Alongside this, Cybele was meant to be received by the best woman of Rome. Most sources state that Claudia Quinta, a Roman matron from a prominent family, was chosen for the task (Roller, p. 265).

Marcus Valerius Falto was the ambassador to Pergamon and negotiated the transfer of Cybele (Roller, p. 265). According to Livy, upon the goddess' arrival into Ostia, Scipio Nasica and a group of excited citizens boarded the ship holding the meteorite and turned it over to Claudia Quinta and the women of Rome who brought it to the Temple of Victory on the Palatine (Roller, p. 265). However, Ovid reports a different and more popular account of this event, stating that the ship transporting Cybele was stuck in the sand of the Tiber River. Claudia Quinta, who appealed to Cybele for redemption of her reputation of improper behavior, dislodged the ship by tying her belt to the ship's tow rope and pulling it from the sand. This event proved that Cybele saw Claudia Quinta as innocent, fixing her reputation (Ovid, *Fasti* 4.260; Roller, p. 266).

Ovid's version continues by discussing how the Romans brought Cybele into the city and installed the meteorite on the Palatine in the Temple of Victory (Roller, p. 266). Afterwards, they threw a celebration involving banquets and games. In 191 BCE, Marcus Junius Brutus dedicated a temple to the cult of Cybele, who was called Magna Mater, or great mother, by the Roman populace. These are the basic facts that cover the legend of Cybele's advent into Rome (Roller, p. 266).



Understanding the origins of Cybele worship in Rome, I would like to talk about the origin story of Cybele and Attis, and will begin by discussing the most popular version of their origin story, as recounted by Ovid in *Fasti*. Then I will go on to discuss various other stories relating to the origins of the goddess, with authors like the 2nd century CE Greek geographer Pausanias and the 3rd century CE theologian Arnobius. This work has experienced a wide range of references, for we can see accounts of it referenced by the 3rd century BCE Sicilian poet Theokritos and even further on by the 2nd century CE Assyrian rhetorician Lucian, suggesting that this version of Cybele's origin story has circulated most widely (Roller, p. 241).

In the most popular tale, the goddess Cybele falls in love with a human man named Attis. Some versions of this story claim that he is her son while others state that he is simply a young boy. Every version of this story shows that this love affair did not end well, for Attis is shown as either an unfaithful lover, as stated by Ovid, a Roman poet during the reign of Augustus Caesar, or because he is meant to engage in an arranged marriage with the daughter of the king of Pessinos, as stated by Pausanias and Arnobius (Roller, p. 241). In Ovid's recount of the story, Attis castrates himself, dying of his wounds and proclaiming that his death is deserved due to his unfaithfulness to the goddess. After realizing that her lover has died, Cybele mourns his death and is granted a request by Zeus in which Attis' body is left uncorrupted (Roller, p. 241).

Pausanias was from the region of Mount Siplyos in western Anatolia, where ancient stories of this region were better recorded. In the seventh book of his *Description of Greece* series from 170 C.E., he recounts the origins of Attis. In his recount of the origin story of Cybele and Attis, Zeus impregnates the Earth, producing a monster named Agdistis (Roller, p. 240). The gods cut off the male genitals of the multi-gendered monster and from these severed body parts,

an almond tree springs up and bears ripe fruit. The daughter of the Sangarios River plucks an almond, placing it within the folds of her dress and she becomes pregnant (Roller, p. 240).

She gives birth to a beautiful child, Attis, whom she leaves in the care of a goat. Agdistis falls in love with Attis but he is sent away to Pessinos to marry the daughter of the king there. Agdistis disrupts their wedding and Attis becomes manic, cutting off his genitals, as does the king of Pessinos. After Agdistis repents, Zeus grants a wish stating that Attis' body will never rot or disintegrate.

Arnobius records his version of the story in his *Adversus nationes* between 300 and 310 C.E. In this version, the Mother of the gods is a stone from the same rock from which Deucalion and Pyrrha took the stones which gave birth to humanity after a flood (Borgeaud, p. 44). This rock is meant to be located in Western Anatolia and is named Agdos. Cybele is animated by divine will and Zeus attempts to rape her. Instead, he impregnates the original rock and a violent monster named Agdistis is born (Borgeaud, p. 44).

Dionysos, the god of wine, gets Agdistis drunk and ties his sexual organs to his feet so that when he wakes, he castrates himself (Borgeaud, p. 45). A pomegranate tree springs forth from the bloodshed and the daughter of Sangarios places a pomegranate in the folds of her dress, becoming pregnant. Her father locks her away to punish her but Cybele nourishes her with pomegranates and vegetables. The daughter of Sangarios gives birth to Attis and abandons him, but he is rescued by a man named Phorbas, who raises him on goats' milk. Both Cybele and Agdistis love Attis but King Midas of Pessinos arranges a marriage for Attis and his daughter (Borgeaud, p. 45).

Cybele, followed by Agdistis, disrupt the wedding ceremony and Attis touches Agdistis' flute, driving him insane (Borgeaud, p. 45). He runs off to cut off his genitals under a pine tree,

giving them up to Agdistis (Arnobius, 5.7). Cybele retrieves Attis' genitals after he dies to wash and bury them. Attis' bride Ia covers Attis' chest with soft wool and weeps with Agdistis before finally committing suicide. Cybele takes the pine tree that Attis dies under and circles it while beating her chest but Zeus does not resurrect Attis. Instead, he promises that Attis' body will not decay and that his smallest finger shall remain alive (Borgeaud, p. 46).

This tale of the relationship between Cybele and Attis proves to be the focal point of Cybele and Attis' cult. According to Roller, it attracted the most attention in Mediterranean antiquity due to the sensational nature of the material discussed. Furthermore, it explains the reasoning for the self-castration of priests of Cybele (Roller, p. 240). There are three more stories regarding the relationship between Cybele and Attis that I would like to discuss in an effort to give context to the origins of the cult of the mother goddess.

In one story, Attis is regarded as having no personal attachment to the Cybele (Pausanias 7.17.9; Roller, p. 240). Instead, he has received divine status due to his devotion to Cybele. In essence, his divinity is given to him, not because of any love affair, but rather because he has supported the goddess' cult. In this story, Attis was born in Asia Minor to human parents and was infertile. As an adult, Attis moves from his home to Lydia where he establishes the rites of the Mother. Because he had attracted a large following, Zeus sends a boar to kill him out of jealousy (Roller, p. 240).

Another story similar to this is shown in a commentary of the poet Virgil's *Aeneid* 9.115 of the late 1st century BCE. Roman author Marius Servius Honoratus' Commentary, which dates to the 4th century CE, discusses Attis being pursued by the king of an unnamed city for his beauty (Roller, p. 240). The king tracks Attis down and sexually assaults him. In retaliation, Attis castrates him, but not before getting castrated himself. The attendants of a temple of Cybele

nearby find Attis lying under a pine tree, bleeding out from his wounds. After failing to save him, the attendants set aside an annual period of mourning to him, where they castrate themselves in his memory (Roller, p. 241).

Diodorus of Sicily, an ancient Greek historian from the 1st century BCE, recalls another story focusing on the myth of Attis (Roller, p. 241). This story harkens back to a personal relationship between Cybele and Attis, in which Cybele, as a human, is cast out by her parents. She finds Attis, a handsome shepherd, and falls in love with him. Her parents take her back, but not before Attis impregnates her. Cybele's parents kill Attis and Cybele goes mad, running away to the countryside. After a famine passes, killing Cybele, she is recognized as a goddess and Attis is worshipped alongside her (Roller, p. 241).

This account is interesting, as it gives us a unique origin story for Cybele, in which she is depicted as a human child, coming from two human parents. This personal story between Cybele and Attis is one in which her followers could relate to. The qualities of this story are quite realistic in their essence, much like the realistic and human-like faults of the Greek gods. This may be reflective of Diodorus' religious background as a Greek man whose pantheon is filled with gods who commit the same kinds of lust-driven sins as their followers. Regardless, the characteristics that are presented in this story are clear, family quarrel, forbidden love, murder, and eternal life after death as a worshipped being. Apart from eternal life, worshippers can relate to Cybele, for the aspects of these stories are far too familiar in everyday life.

Here, I would like to discuss the Sibylline Books and their role in the cult of Cybele and Attis. The Sibylline Books were a collection of written Greek oracles that were consulted whenever peculiar circumstances suggesting that the gods were angry, otherwise known as prodigies, occurred (Satterfield 2008, p. 15). These prodigies ranged from the birth of deformed

animals to the military losses of the Roman army. When these prodigies were considered a threat to the Roman state, special priests consulted the Sibylline Books in order to find an appropriate ritual in order to appease the gods.

According to Susan Satterfield, who references Livy, Roman priests in charge of the Sibylline Books, the *duumviri sacris faciundis*, were the only ones allowed access to them, meaning that they were rarely ever published (Satterfield, p. i). In order to further protect these sacred texts, the Sibylline Books were housed in the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus (Satterfield, p. 21). It was in 83 BCE that a fire burned in the temple of the Jupiter Capitolinus, burning the Sibylline Books (Satterfield, p. 172). Dionysius of Halicarnassus (4.62), a Greek historian of the 1st century BCE, notes in his recount of the origin story of the Sibylline Books that they were held in a stone chest in the basement of the Capitoline Temple (Satterfield, p. 21). Dionysius and the Roman scholar Varro of the 1st century BCE give the oldest extant account of the introduction of the Sibylline Books into Rome (Satterfield, p. 19).

According to this account, a woman arrived in Rome with nine books, offering to sell them to Tarquinius Superbus, king of Rome in the 6th century BCE (Satterfield, p. 90). There is no record in this account of the woman explaining the contents of the books. The king refused the woman, who then went off to burn three of her books. Returning again, she sells her books at the same price as before and is sent away. After burning three more books, she returned and offered the remaining three books at the same price. After seeking guidance from his priests, Tarquinius Superbus buys the books and the woman leaves, never to be seen again (Satterfield, p. 90).

Dionysius fails to identify the sibyl who sells the Sibylline Books to Tarquinius Superbus, stating only that she was a foreigner (Satterfield, p. 92). Although Dionysius fails to

identify this woman, many sources, such as the 12th century CE Byzantine poet Tzetzes, the 3rd century CE Roman author Lactantius, and the 7th century CE scholar Isidore of Seville, claim that the origin of the books is Cumae, and that the woman who sold the Sibylline Books is either the Sibyl of Cumae or an assistant of hers (Satterfield p. 92).

These authors also compile a list of the sibyls of this time period, them being the Chaldean, the Libyan, the Delphic, the Cimmerian, the Erythraean, the Samian, the Cumaean, the Hellespontine, the Phrygian, and the Tiburtine Sibyls (Satterfield, p. 91). The purpose of a sibyl in the ancient world was to serve as a prophetess who uttered the prophecies of the gods (Satterfield, p. 17). These sibyls were Greek and thus, the Sibylline Books contained oracles written in Greek.

The Sibylline Books have an important role in the cult of Cybele, for they commanded that her religion be brought to Rome and that she be honored among the Roman gods. As I had stated in previous texts, according to Livy, the Sibylline Books were consulted in 205 BCE due to the major Roman losses of the 2nd Punic War and the frequent showers of stone from the sky (Satterfield, p. 111). Livy reports that the *decemviri* found that, if the Idaean Mother, or Cybele, were brought to Rome, foreign enemies in Italy would be conquered (Livy 29.10.5; Satterfield, p. 111). The Romans introduced Cybele into their city in 204 BCE with the backing of the Delphic Oracle (Satterfield, p. 86).

Eventually, the Romans would create a temple for the cult of Cybele, as advised by the Sibylline Books (Satterfield, p. 99). The reason for the indictment of the cult of Cybele into Rome was that the Romans needed a great power to secure victory against the Carthaginians (Satterfield, p. 114). The exotic and eastern practices of the cult quelled the religious thirst of the population and Cybele's foreign aspects proved that the Roman Senate had much power

(Satterfield, p. 115). This power proved to be so much so that they could transport the black meteorite representing Cybele into their city.

In later history, we see the Sibylline Books consulted on a matter regarding Cybele once again. In 38 BCE, a set of prodigies occurred, suggesting that Cybele was displeased with the Romans (Satterfield, p. 200). Due to a set of rituals that the *pontifices* performed, the hut of Romulus burned down. Furthermore, a statue of Virtus, a Roman virtue suggesting valor and excellence, fell to the ground. Finally a group of citizens began to proclaim that Cybele was angry with the Romans (Satterfield, p. 200).

Consultation of the Sibylline Books proved this notion and suggested that the statue of Virtus be cleansed in the sea (Satterfield, p. 201). After this ritual was completed, the statue was returned to its place in Rome four palm trees sprung up around its temple (Satterfield, p. 201). This instance is proof of the standard expiatory usage of the Sibylline Books, especially towards appeasing the goddess Cybele (Satterfield, p. 201). The Sibylline Books were important for the cult of Cybele, for despite the cult having eastern practices considered strange to the Roman people, the *decemviri* saw to it that Cybele and Attis be key figures in Roman religion. This all came to pass under the guidance of the books.

These books, however, are not the same as the Sibylline Oracles, which were works composed by Pagan, Jewish, and Christian authors stemming from the 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE. The Sibylline Oracles are apocalyptic in nature and have no relation to the Sibylline Books belonging to the Roman state (Satterfield 2008, p. 9). They simply show examples of works made by private Sibylline Oracles in the Roman Empire.

**3. Who were the Phrygians - which ancient authors attribute Cybele worship to the Phrygians? Is there any actual archaeological or written historical evidence for this cult from the Iron Age?**

The name of the goddess Cybele, her physical appearance, and the many features of the cult of the mother are distinctive traits of Phrygian culture (Roller, 1999, p. 64). Because of this, it is important to begin analyzing Cybele through the lenses of the Phrygian cult before we examine her role in Rome. The historian Borgeaud of the university of Geneva references Assyrian texts in order to refer to the Muski, the group of people who first established a settlement in the “Phrygian lands.” (Borgeaud, p. 3). The Muski people established a kingdom around the area of Gordion during the middle of the 9th century BCE. Borgeaud cites the 1st century BCE Greek historian Strabo and the 1st century CE Greek philosopher Plutarch to explain that In 695 BCE, they were invaded by the Cimmerians, who then left the land to be taken by the Lydians, who came from Sardis (Borgeaud, p. 3). Finally, in 546 BCE, the Lydian kingdom became a dependent of the Persian empire (Borgeaud, p. 4).

Worship of the mother goddess extended throughout central Anatolia, from the districts around modern Afyon and Kutahya in the west, to the district of ancient Lycia, or modern day Elmali and northwest to the Marmara Sea (Roller, p. 64). We also see Cybele worship in regions in eastern Anatolia in Pteria as well as in the region of ancient Tyana, in southeastern Anatolia (Roller, p. 64). Authors such as Herodotus, Pausanias, and Arnobius recount stories which place Cybele and Attis’ origin in Western Anatolia, the land of the so-called “Phrygians.”

The following Classical period sources, which I am cross referencing from the answer to the first question of my senior project, show textual evidence about the origins of Cybele worship in Phrygia. Herodotus, the Greek writer of the 5th century BCE, discusses Attis in a



euhemeristic manner by discussing Atys, son of the Lydian king, Croesus (Gasparro, p. 26). In his work *The Histories*, Herodotus discusses a story in which Atys is killed by the “Phrygian” man Adrastus during a boar hunt. This is meant to recount the story of Attis, who is killed by a boar for his devotion to Cybele in Lydia (Pausanius 7.17.9; Roller, p. 240). Pausanius, in his work, *Descriptions of Greece*, from 170 CE, discusses an origin story of Cybele and uses the Sangarios River for his setting (Roller, p. 240). Furthermore, Arnobius, in his work, *Adversus nationes*, from the early 3rd century CE, claims that Cybele was born from the rock Agdos, which is meant to be in Western Anatolia (Borgeaud, p. 44).

In another account from Herodotus, Anacharsis, a Scythian philosopher of the 6th century BCE, is impressed with the cult of Cybele so much that he decides to bring her worship to his homeland (Vermaseren, p. 28). During his travels, Anacharsis reaches Cyzicus in Phrygia, where he finds the Cyzicenes celebrating the feast of Cybele (Vermaseren, p. 28). This account states, “he (Anacharsis) vowed to this same Mother that, if he returned to his own country safe and sound, he would sacrifice to her as he saw the Cyzicenes do, and establish a nightly rite of worship.”

Ovid provides evidence to suggest the background to the name *kubileya* in his work *Fasti*. Ovid mentions in this work the Phrygian river Gallos, which he describes as located “between green Cybele and lofty Celaenae.” While it seems here that the name Cybele suggests a location, it is unclear if this location is a city or other geographical feature such as a mountain. Furthermore, Ovid’s geography seems quite vague, as the actual distance from the Gallos and Celaenae is considerable. Because of this, as well as Strabo’s evidence, it seems that any ancient specific location of the topos Kyebelon/Cybele is no longer known to us, if it even existed to begin with.

Another individual who was driven to define the etymology of Kybele was the Byzantine lexicographer Hesychios of the 5th century CE (Roller, p. 67). He stated that the word *kybela* meant “the mountains of Phrygia, and caves and hollow places.” Another historian, Alexander Polyhistor of the 1st century BCE, defines the name to mean “the sacred mountain of the goddess in the *Suda* and the *Etymologicum magnum* (Roller, 1999, p. 68). It is from these citations from Classical literature that the epithet *kubileya* was derived from the name of a natural landscape feature, most likely being a mountain. These written accounts are important, for they are proof that some Classical and Medieval authors believed that Cybele was a prominent figure in Anatolia.

Worship of the mother goddess proved to be quite popular, even if she went under various name changes. For example, we have found evidence of remnants of her Hellenized version, Kybele, in several Greek cities tracing western Anatolia (Roller, p. 64). Of course, we also find artifacts alluding to worship for the goddess in various other cities, although she is not considered to be their main deity and is instead, worshipped among other gods and goddesses (Roller, p. 64). Throughout Western Anatolia, we have some written records to show for Cybele worship.

Compared to the archaeological evidence present, the amount of written material available to us for study is small (Roller, 1999, p. 65). Most of it stems from inscriptions of the rock facades that we have found throughout western Anatolia, as well as some scattered stone monuments throughout the central and eastern zones of Anatolia, and graffiti left on Anatolian pottery. Using the surviving texts of the Phrygian culture, the Phrygian language was part of the Indo-European language family (Roller, p. 65). Regarding the inscriptions on the rock facades that I mentioned above, many of those were discovered to be incised onto cult facades, niches,

altars, or other rock monuments that have special connection to the worship of the goddess. However, it seems all lack objective criteria to allow for dating (Roller, 1999, p. 66).

We have been able to discover the Phrygian name of the goddess through these inscriptions. The name for the Phrygian Cybele is Matar, which has been located ten times in Paleo-Phrygian inscriptions (Roller, p. 66). Finding this name of various cult facades or in cult niches indicates to us the religious significance of this name. Lexical parallels with other Indo-European languages that this name meant *mother*, demonstrating clearly that this Phrygian deity was a mother goddess. We have also seen the name matar being paired with various adjectives, one being *areyastin*, which has an unknown meaning, and the others being *kubileya* or *kubeleya*, which seem to be the origin of the Greek name of the same goddess, Kybele. The inscriptions showing the name *kubileya* suggests that this name was an adjective, presumably a divine epithet and was not an essential part of the goddess' name in Phrygian. (Roller, p. 66).

The mother goddess has been recorded by Roman geographer Strabo with various other toponymic epithets, such as Idaia, Dindymene, Sipylene, Pessinountis, Kybele, and Kybebe (Roller, 1999, p. 67). While the first three names stem from the mountains Idaia, Sipylene, and Dindymon, Pessinountis derives from the city of Pessinous. Furthermore, Kybebe was the Hellenized form of the name of the goddess Kubaba of the Neo-Hittites (Roller, p. 67; Laroche 1960). The cult of Kubaba tended to become conflated with the Phrygian Mother's cult. Judging from this, Strabo implies that the word Kybele was either a specific toponym or an alternative name for the goddess.

Although we have substantial archaeological material related to the cult of Cybele in Phrygia, most of this archaeology is Iron Age and dates mostly to the seventh and sixth centuries BCE. A key point to note regarding the artifacts that we have from this period is that they were

identified by museum personnel a century ago and may not actually represent Cybele at all. This is the main issue regarding the identification of Iron Age artifacts referring to Cybele.

One noteworthy piece that had been uncovered in Salmankoy, near Bogazkoy, Turkey, is a life-size head of a female figure (Roller, p. 75). This figure is wearing a large and multi-tiered headdress. This artifact is named *Head of the Phrygian Mother* and dates to the seventh-sixth century BCE. It is currently held in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara, Turkey (Roller, p. 60, see image credits).



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Another artifact dating from the seventh-sixth century BCE that represents Cybele was found in the dig site of Gordion, Turkey, and is named *Relief of the Phrygian Mother from Gordion* (Roller, p. 76). This relief is a red sandstone body missing a head and lower torso. The relief represents a standing figure whose arms are bent across its body. The long garment that is worn by the relief suggests that the figure is feminine (Roller, p. 75). The right arm of the figure holds a bowl while the left arm holds a bird of prey.

Another artifact found in Gordion shows Cybele in a particular setting (Roller, p. 76, see image credits). The relief is named *Miniature relief of the Phrygian Mother from Gordion* and it

dates to the seventh-sixth century BCE. This relief was found under Tumulus C and is a small limestone slab divided into a horizontal row of panels by vertical strips (Roller, p. 75). On one panel, a bull faces to the right and on another, a woman is standing with arms stretched outward. According to Roller, her garments are standard to that of the other cult reliefs of Cybele, for they are present on the bodies of other figures in the larger cult reliefs found in the area. (Roller, p. 75).



These artifacts are important because they stem from a particular time period, the seventh-sixth century BCE. From this, we can gather when worship of a fertility goddess who may possibly be Cybele was fairly popular in Western Anatolia. The probable depictions of Cybele in these artifacts are key to understanding how the cult of Cybele was viewed in Anatolia. The way in which Cybele was dressed as well indicates a standard form of dress for the followers of the cult of Cybele. The issue regarding the artifacts that I have mentioned is that they lack any inscriptions suggesting that they represent Cybele. This harkens back to my statement regarding the issue with identification of Iron Age Cybele artifacts. As we can see, a problem for scholars is figuring out how to properly fit these Iron Age artifacts possibly representing Cybele into the basics of scholarship for the cult of Cybele.

#### **4. What about the height of the cult of Cybele-1st century CE-how do we know she was being worshipped in Rome then?**

Here, I would like to discuss how Cybele was worshipped at the height of her cults' popularity. In the first century CE, the cult of Cybele took on a major role in the religious Roman world. Augustus Caesar rebuilt the temple of Cybele on the Palatine and made efforts to bring the cult under closer imperial control by putting priests chosen from his *liberti*, his freedmen, in charge of it. (Roller, p. 315). This helped to popularize the cult, for earlier practice had dictated that attendance of Cybele's festivities was limited to freeborn Roman citizens. Caesar embraced the cult of Cybele by Romanizing its rituals.

Furthermore, Roman emperor Claudius of the 1st century CE was recorded as a supporter of the cult of Cybele and took pride in his relation to Claudia Quinta, the Roman matron who helped transport the black meteorite representing Cybele from Asia Minor to Rome during the 2nd Punic War. Emperor Claudius admitted Attis into the Roman pantheon and Roman citizens were given permission to participate in his priesthood (Roller, p. 315). From these efforts, the *quindecemviri*, a Roman priestly body, took over the formal administration of Attis' cult. It was also during the reign of Claudius that Attis was given his own festival, the March Festival of Attis, which I will discuss below.

The March Festival of Attis, according to Ovid, consisted of a symbolic representation of Attis' myth. The basic form of this festival emerged in the early Principate as a ritual of mourning for Attis and was then formalized by emperor Claudius, according to P. Lambrechts. The March Festival took at least two centuries to finalize in form, as the only evidence of a fully-developed March festival stems from 354 CE, the mid-fourth century, from a calendar of Filocalus, a Roman stone engraver who worked with epigraphic texts. The festivals belonging to

this are the *Canna Intrat* on March 15, the *Arbor Intrat* on March 22, the *Sanguem* on March 24, the *Hilaria* on March 25, the *Requietio* on March 26, and the *Lavatio* on March 27 (Alvar, p. 286).

The *Canna Intrat* focused on the narrative of Attis being founded by Cybele among the reeds of the river Gallus. The *Arbor Intrat* focused on the death of Attis beneath a pine-tree (Alvar, p. 288-289). In this festival, members of the *collegium dendrophorum* would cut down a pine tree before dawn in a sacred grove, decorating it with woolen ribbons and wreaths of violets. They would carry this tree into the Palatine temple where it would lay to wither. The earliest epigraphic evidence of this ritual dates from April 9, 79 CE in Ostia. This ritual was accompanied by scenes of violent grief, as performed by the worshippers.

The *Sanguinem* festival commemorated the blood that flowed from the wound caused by Attis' self-castration. In this ritual, the *galli* processed through the streets while lacerating their arms with knives and double-axes and lashing themselves with whips knotted with astragali (Alvar, p. 289). This day of the festival was meant to be the day wherein individuals might castrate themselves. The symbolic aim of this ritual was to express the asymmetry of the bond between worshipper and divinity.

The *Hilaria* seems to be the last festival introduced into the sequence, as no reference to it even as late as 136 CE appears (Alvar, p. 291). Some refer to the festival as the ascension of the individual worshipper's soul, whereas others, such as 5th century philosopher Isidorus, claimed that the festival was a matter of being saved from Hades. Iconographic evidence found in Rome in the form of bronze and terracotta statuettes which date roughly to the High Principate at latest represent Attis dancing. Vermaseren argues represents Attis' celebration as he has returned to life. This being said, it is still highly contested as to what the true intention of this

festival was as well as the actual practices done for this festival. Almost nothing is known of the *Requietio* festival (Alvar, p. 291). The final festival held is the *Lavatio*, which I will discuss later on in detail.

I would like to cross-reference my material and use my answer from the first question posed to me by Dr. Hallote in order to assist in my answer to this question. The following paragraphs will consist of the statements that I had originally made regarding the ancient authors who wrote about the cult of Cybele. We have many literary sources at our disposal to see how writers from the 1st century BCE and 1st century CE refer to the cult of Cybele, such as Dionysios of Kalikarnassos, Lucretius, Ovid, Virgil, Catallus, and M. Terentius Varro, all writers of the 1st century BCE. These literary sources prove to be useful to our understanding of the cult of Cybele at its height, for they document various aspects of cult rites held in Rome.

An interesting anecdote from Dionysios of Halikarnassos from circa 23 BCE discusses the contrasting nature of the Cybele cult and how he prefers the Roman traditions linked with the cult as opposed to foreign, and more specifically Phrygian aspects of the cult (Roller, p. 293). Dionysios was a historian who lived in Rome and was able to document the cult from his own personal observations. He states, “So careful is the city (Rome) about religious customs other than its own; so ominously does it regard all unseemly nonsense.” This concept is an interesting point for scholars who would like to understand more closely how different versions of the cult of Cybele meshed over time.

It is the begging of alms, the loud flute hymns and beating of the tympana, and the wearing of the pectoral images that Dionysios disagreed with (Roller, p 293). While the Phrygians who paraded through the Roman streets carry on these apparently negative rites, the praetors worship Cybele properly by holding annual sacrifices and games in accordance to



Roman law. Dionysios even begins his writing by marveling how Rome has not emulated the honoring of foreign gods by using foreign customs. It is clear that Dionysios' stance regarding worship is that it be done using Roman standards.

An interesting notion from Dionysios' reflections is his recollection of the apparel of the Phrygian Cybele worshippers. His comments on their intricately patterned garments document the dress of the Phrygian Cybele worshipper of the time. His comment on the pectoral images of the Phrygians prove to be historically accurate, for we have multiple artifacts to attest to this, such as the Anatolian *Bronze Matrix Illustrating Votive Reliefs* dating to the third-second century BCE kept in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which feature various pectoral images, although Roller states that we are unaware of their provenance (Roller, p. 214). Another artifact which attests to this is the *Statue of a Gallus*, which dates to the second century CE. This statue, found by archaeologists in 1960, was uncovered in Rome and is a sculptural representation of an *archigallus*, or high priest, wearing an Anatolian pectoral image on the front of his robe (Roller, p. 295).

This being said, not all that Dionysios said may be factual but rather a reaction to a difference of Cybele worship (Roller, p. 296). The Roman version of Cybele worship involved imperial control and a focus on organized ritual, such as the March Festival of Attis. According to Dionysios, however, the Anatolian version of Cybele worship proved to be noisy and colorful, with its assertive music and colorful dress. It may be that at this time, Cybele worship, in its Roman, Anatolian, and even Greek forms, blended, and the Roman cult of Cybele utilized characteristics of the cult from all three cultures. Cybele worship could call for both controlled Roman state channels and loud clamor and noisy Phrygian instruments.

Another 1st century BCE writer to capture an understanding of contemporary Cybele worship in his writings is Lucretius, a Roman poet who captured the form and the emotional content of the *Megalensia* by viewing the procession. Lucretius, unlike Dionysios, deeply honored Cybele, referring to her as the “Mother of the gods, the Mother of wild beasts, and our creator” (Roller, p. 297). In one poem in *De rerum natura*, Lucretius compares Cybele to the Earth, stating that she, like mother earth, is suspended in the air. What he means to say is that Cybele is independent of humanity and uses this poem as a metaphor to describe a Roman ritual wherein a statue of Cybele in her lion chariot is carried by the *galli*, eunuch priests of the cult, throughout the city streets (Roller, p. 297).

He continues on to discuss the excitement caused by this parade, as he refers to the Phrygian music played throughout the procession. This music comes from the drums, cymbals, horns, and pipes carried by those marching with Cybele. Finally, Lucretius talks about the armed bands, or *curetes*, that arrive and cause more excitement for the crowd. Lucretius uses much symbolization in his poems, such as referral to Cybele’s lions as a wild beast that can be tamed by a nurturing figure and the castrated *galli* as a reminder that those ungrateful to Cybele, the great mother, as well as their own parents, do not deserve children. This then reinforces the familial bonds and honor of the mother that comes with devotion to Cybele and furthermore reinforces the positive values of Roman society (Roller, p. 298). Another symbol in Lucretius’ poem to note is his play on the words *Phrygias*, or Phrygian and *fruges*, or fruit, in order to link Cybele’s Western Anatolian background to her role as a fertility goddess.

Another Roman poet who did well to document Cybele worship during the Late Republic era of Rome and was Ovid. Ovid was educated in Rome and traveled throughout Athens, Sicily, and Anatolia. In his 8 CE work *Fasti*, Ovid documented Cybele’s Roman rituals, the origin of

Cybele and her lover Attis, and the legend of Cybele's arrival into Rome (Roller, p. 299). Ovid, like Lucretius, documents the emotional heights of the *Megalensia* in his work by discussing the thumping of drums by *galli*, although he refers to them as half-men. He then states that Cybele is held up by her comrades through the streets, painting a scene of howling participants.

The Roman poet Virgil does well to place Cybele in the forefront of gods who have brought about the greatness of Rome in his 1st century BCE work, the *Aeneid* (Roller, p. 299). In his work, Cybele acts as the divine power who protects and leads Aeneas to Rome, where his descendants will prosper. She is shown giving signs of a more hopeful future to the Trojans earlier on in the poem through her light on Mount Ida (Roller, p. 300). The poem also depicts Cybele protecting the Trojans from having their ships catch fire in Italy by the Rutuli people.

Perhaps the most significant detail regarding Cybele in the *Aeneid* is that she epitomizes the glorious future of Rome in *Aeneid* 6.784-87. The main idea put forth by Virgil is that Cybele is the natural support of Rome's great hero Aeneas, who was born on Ida. In the Augustan ideology, both Cybele and Aeneas came from Asia Minor and had to come to Rome to fulfill their role in making the great city of Rome (Roller, p. 301).

Another part of the cult of Cybele that is discussed in the *Aeneid* is the perception of *galli* that was held during this time. On the eve of battle, Aeneas and his followers are insulted by being associated with feminine characteristics, as the enemy in the text states, "and befoul his (Aeneas) hair, curled with a hot iron and wetted with myrrh" (*Aeneid* 12.97-100). Turnus the Carthaginian teases Aeneas and his men for frizzing their hair and wearing perfume like *galli*. In another scene, an enemy of Aeneas, Numanus, taunts the Trojans by claiming that they are Phrygian women who would rather make music than fight (Roller, p. 302). Numanus uses the Trojan's Cybele worship against them to symbolize their weakness and effeminacy. From the

text, modern scholars can get a sense of the negative attitude held for *galli* by the ancient Mediterranean world.

Another poem that I would like to discuss is Catallus' poem 63, which was written in the 1st century BCE. Catallus lived in Rome during the Late Republic era, much like our previous writers. In his poem regarding Cybele and Attis, we peer into the mind of Attis, who questions himself due to his attraction to Cybele. Scholars have discussed this poem in large detail for its emotional intensity. A popular observation of this poem is that, like Dionysios of Halikarnassos' view, it expresses the desire to separate the bad Phrygian rites from the cult of Cybele and, instead keep the proper Roman rites (Roller, p. 305).

According to Roller, this work is an interesting study for modern scholars as it allows us to view the mindset of Attis from the point of view of 1st century cult followers. Although Attis was attracted to Cybele, her dominant nature as a goddess confused him until he gave part of himself up to her through his castration (Roller, p. 306). Attis' individuality was sacrificed in an act of adoration to Cybele and fears his own actions. From this, we can more clearly see the mindset that people had regarding those who would do the same for Cybele. The struggle for devout worshippers seems to be choosing either not to go against Roman norms and choosing to commit an irreversible act, like castration, in exchange for salvation after death.

A final literary work that I would like to discuss is the Roman scholar M. Terentius Varro's satire *Eumenides*, which was completed around 70-60 BCE (Roller, p. 308). Varro lived in the Late Republic era of Rome and resided in the Reate area for most of his life. Scholars such as Graillet in 1912 and Wiseman in 1985 have located Varro's story regarding Cybele to have taken place in Rome. In Varro's story, an unnamed protagonist walks past the Metroon on the

Palatine when he hears the sounds of cymbals. This peaks his interest and he disguises himself as a *galli* and sneaks inside the temple.

Once inside, the protagonist observes a crowd of *galli* chanting to Cybele in what seems to be a reenactment to a rite associated with the *Megalensia*. The *aedile* among the *galli* is busy placing a crown onto the head of a statue of Cybele and the protagonist stays off to the side, admiring the feminine attire of the *galli* and the purple robe and golden crown of the high priest present. The music of the rite taking place captures the protagonist and he loses sense of awareness until he is noticed and pursued by the *galli*, possibly in an attempt to castrate him.

Although a fictional work, this text is important because it captures the flamboyant dress of the *galli*, the approval of Cybele worship in Rome, and the element of sexual ambiguity tied to the cult (Roller, p. 308). Varro describes the high priests' garb in detail as well as the feminine attire used by the protagonist in order to blend in with the *galli* among him. Presence of an *aedile*, or Roman magistrate, during these *Megalesian* rites proves that these practices adhered to Roman law and were operated by Romans themselves. The element of sexual ambiguity is present in the way in which the protagonist feels attraction to the feminine characteristics of the *galli*. This literary work does well to describe the allure of the cult of Cybele to the Roman male participant, who could allow himself further sexual exploration outside of the Roman standard by way of his membership into the cult (Roller, p. 309).

In actuality, the literary content that we have to document the cult of Cybele during its height of popularity during the 1st century BCE - 1st century CE outnumbers the archeology and artifacts that we have uncovered (Roller, p. 309). It is through works like *Fasti* that we can more closely analyze the rituals and rites within Roman Cybele worship. From writers like Dionysios of Halikarnassos, we can study the blending of Roman, Greek, and Anatolian rites of the cult of

Cybele and how the Roman populace felt regarding this. The key aspect to note from these writers is that they all lived in the Late Republic and most of them lived in Augustan era Rome, proving that the cult of Cybele was indeed popular at this time. This being said, let us look at the Roman archaeology that we have present.

As I have said before in question 2 of my senior project, the Sibylline Books were consulted in 205 BCE, stating that Cybele, who the Romans referred to as the *Magna Mater*, or “Great Mother,” was needed in order for Rome to win the second Punic War (Livy 29. 10. 4-6). Several prodigies occurred in Italy, them being Hannibal’s presence (*Cicero, De harus. Res.* 13.27: Silius Italicus 17. 1-47), and frequent rain showers from the sky (Roller, p. 264). The worship of the Magna Mater would result in the expulsion of any foreign enemy in Rome. According to Roman statesman Cicero of the 1st century BCE, the Magna Mater brought relief back to the city (*Cicero, De harus. Resp.* 13.27).

We can use the excavations from the site of the principal shrine of the Magna Mater in Rome in order to understand her worship and value in the Roman world (Pensabene 1985b: p. 179). This temple, the Magna Mater temple, dates to the Late second-first century BCE and is placed on the Palatine Hill. It is near the early Republican *Scalae Caci*, the temple of Victory, and possibly the *Auguratorium*. Its placement is of importance, as its positioning in the heart of Rome and its close proximity to other venerable Republican monuments speaks to the high value that the Romans saw in this cult.

This temple was standard in regard to Roman temple building and consisted of a *cella* and *pronaos*. It was built on a high platform having six columns placed across its front entrance. Although we are unsure of the first design of this temples’ columns, recent excavation proves that the second design of this temple was built in the Corinthian order (Pensabene 1988, p. 58).

Still standing is the platform of the cult statue, together with evidence of a narrow opening, suggesting that there was access to stairways leading to a series of rooms. I have discussed this temple before in a previous section utilizing Vermaseren's work, in which I discussed the Metroon on the Palatine dedicated to Cybele.

This temple was complete in its creation by 191 BCE and was rebuilt after 111 BCE due to a fire. According to Pensabene, the treatment of the area in front of the temple consisted of a staircase leading down from the temple podium to a large paved piazza. This then led to a street at the foot of the Palatine. A large fountain with a basin stood at the foot of this staircase and was assumed to be used for various rites of the cult (Pensabene 1985b, 183-84).

These frontal features of the temple all play an important part in the ritual aspects of the cult, as the steps themselves formed a structure representing the cavea of a theater, which was used by people to watch the *Ludi Megalenses*, a festival held in April in dedication to Cybele. The festival consisted of dramatic performances and contests held annually in the piazza (Dionysus Hal. 2.19.2-5; Livy 36.36. 3-5; Cicero, *De harus. Res.* 11.22, 12.24; Valerius Maximus 2.4.3). The provision for a nearby water source may have reflected the need to wash the image of the goddess during the *Lavatio*, which took place on March 27 and was part of a week's worth of veneration towards Cybele in late March (Ovid, *Fasti* 4. 339-40). In this ritual, which is estimated to have begun during the reign of Augustus in the 1st century BCE - 1st century CE, the sacred stone of Cybele, along with various sacred instruments, were brought to the Almo River to be washed by a red-robed priest (Alvar 2008, p. 286-287). This is important because it shows how rituals of the cult of Cybele evolved over time in Rome.

Further excavations into the site have revealed large deposits of terracotta figurines, which reflects more about the practices of the cult of Cybele. These figures date to a period

between 191 and 111 BCE (Pensabene 1982, p. 86). One certain figure that was uncovered features a head from a terracotta figurine of Cybele. It was located in a votive deposit on the Palatine near the temple of Cybele and is now held in the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Another uncovered figurine represents Attis and is currently housed in the same place.

The majority of figurines that have been uncovered have some direct reference to the cult of Cybele and are heavily detailed, ranging from eleven representations of Cybele herself, three of Dionysos' heads, and ninety-four images of Attis, proving Attis' essential part of Cybele's cult in Rome, in comparison to his lesser importance to Cybele's cults in the eastern Mediterranean region. In addition to this are a dozen or more terracotta depicting the glans penis, which are now housed in the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, along with terracotta images of evergreen cones. The images that we have of Cybele as a terracotta figure follow her standard Hellenistic iconography, depicting herself as seated and draped, and either flanked by two lions or with one lion on her lap. Further representations of Cybele show her wearing a headdress like a mural crown, symbolizing her status as a protector of the city (Pensabene 1982, p. 86).

It is from these findings that we can deduce what matters seemed important to cult worshippers. The votive terracotta that have been uncovered add further information on cult rites and attitudes that characterized the cult. The various animal figurines have different meaning for the cult, as the lion figurines signify Cybele's right to rule and tame wild beasts of the world, while other animals found possibly symbolize sacrificial victims (Roller. p. 277). Recovered masks and dancing figures seem to symbolize the *Ludi Megalenses* and various sexual imagery allude to nurturing, human sexual generation, reproduction, and fertility, key aspects of Cybele.



With all this information present, the Palatine provides much material to demonstrate that the specific Roman rituals held to honor the goddess were taking place from the cult's inception. We see this in the space created for the *Ludi Megalenses*, described above, showing that the original temple complex was designed to accommodate them. These games were first held in 194 BCE and became an annual festival of theatrical entertainment (Livy 34. 54-3). Another key aspect of the Palatine that proves Cybele worship is the water source utilized for the *Lavatio*, another key ritual of the cult of Cybele. These archaeological findings prove that the Romans wished to make Cybele into a Roman deity, as her temple was placed in the heart of the city's religious life (Roller, p. 279).

I would like to begin the discussion of Cybele's Romanization by utilizing Jaime Alvar's *Romanising Oriental Gods* to explain the various ritual systems pertaining to the cult of Cybele. Firstly, I will discuss the method of emasculation, as practiced by the cult of Cybele. The self-gelding of the *galli*, or castrated priests of Cybele, along with the *taurobolium*, have attracted the most scholarly attention for their violent nature. The nature of *galli* emasculation is contested. As reported by Philippe Borgeaud, total ablation, or the removal of the testes, scrotum, and penis was a common practice for the *galli* (Borgeaud 2004, p. 43). However, Alvar argues that it is improbable that individuals would voluntarily undergo a process with such a high mortality rate.

Regardless, the *galli* did perform self-castration and wore clothes meant for women. It was their self-castigation and self-laceration that caught the attention of the Roman populace (Cf. Blansdorf 2005, p. 674). The way in which *galli* were meant to perform self-castration was to fall under a frenzy and mimic Attis' castration. There was the possibility of total ablation, for practitioners such as Aulus Cornelius Celsus, a 1st century CE medical writer, would have been perfectly capable of performing operations like this on willing participants (*Med.* 7.19) .

However, the general consensus among modern day scholars regarding standards of castration for the *galli* was that they only had to castrate the testicles and scrotum (Alvar, p. 250).

The *galli* formed a specialized group, in which the self-gelding of the members were rewarded by their control over the cult. It was the excision of their genitals that reflected as a sign of their exclusive devotion to the cult of the mother, Cybele. The renunciation of their physical integrity involved renunciation of their ‘proper’ place in the social order of the Roman world (Alvar, p. 256). In the eyes of the Romans, the *gallus* was understood as a slave due to the mutilation of their body.

This action done by the *galli* was an attempt to mimic the castration done by Attis in the origin story of Cybele and Attis, in which Attis castrates himself out of guilt due to his infidelity to the goddess Cybele. It is after this that Zeus, under the influence of Cybele, makes it so that Attis’ body would never decay. Total devotion to Cybele was worthwhile to the *gallus*, for there was a promise of life after death. This factor was unique to the cult of Cybele and inspired a following of individuals who hoped to resurrect after death or live eternally, just as Attis did.

Moving on to the etymology of the term *Gallus*, A.H. Sayce, a scholar of the 19th century, argued that the word itself derives from the Hittite *iskallis*. It is believed that this word is a loan word and possibly comes from lyrics made for a song from Asia Minor, where the cult originated. The usual explanation used regarding the name “galli” is that this name derived from the river on whose banks Attis emasculated himself (Cf *Appendix proverbium* 1. 67 (CPG 1 p. 389).

Next, I would like to explain the *taurobolium*, the other most striking ritual component of Cybele’s cult. According to Christian poet Prudentius in his work ‘On the Martyrs’ Crowns,’ completed in 400 CE, a high priest, or *summus sacerdos*, descends into a pit so that he may

receive the consecration, or *consecradus* (Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 10.1011-50). This priest is wearing full ceremonials, as his head and temples are decorated with woolen fillets and ribbons, and he wears a golden crown on top of his head and a silken toga. Over the pit is a wooden platform and the blood of a bull, which had been killed by a sacred spear (*venabulum*), is meant to drip through holes drilled in the boards.

The priest engages in *linguam rigat*, wherein he lifts up his face and licks up the blood. The animal is then dragged away and the priest presents himself to a crowd (*pontifex visu horridus*) and the crowd hails and worships him (*adorant eminus*). An imaginative drawing of this shower bath was done by Dutch Scholar K.H.E. de Jong and has been reprinted in Maarten J. Vermaseren's *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult*. The *criobolium* is a similar process, except that a ram was sacrificed instead of a bull, which was a cheaper option. Regardless of the choice of animal, the sacramental element was the ritual handling of the animal's severed scrotum, or *vires*, which referred to Attis' castration (Borgeaud 2004, p. 110-19).

Scholars generally believe that the first Metroac *taurobolia* were performed under Roman emperor Antonius Pius, who ruled in the second century CE. In fact, the earliest surviving epigraphic evidence of this relates to a sacrifice which took place in 160 CE at the goddess' behest for Antonius Pius, his children and the *colonia* Claudia Lugdunensis at the *vaticanum*, or altar. (Alvar, p. 265). This type of sacrifice was utilized by relatively wealthy municipal figures to combine public and private concerns (Borgeaud, 2004, p. 92). A person who undertook a *taurobolium* for the benefit of the state after obtaining permission from the local *archigallus* could be excused from the responsibility of looking after the affairs of minors and certain categories of women, a duty known as *tutores* (Alvar, p. 265).

Currently, we possess at least eighty-five taurobolic altars from the 220-year period AD 160-c. 350, suggesting that many wealthy freedmen in Rome were prepared to use this ritual from the cult of Cybele as a means of demonstrating that their private religious feelings did not exclude a concern for the well-being of the state (Alvar, p.268). Performing a *taurobolium* was expensive, as a full-grown bull, the preparation of a feast, payment for a stone and the stone-mason, and obtaining permission to erect an altar were all factors into the utilization of the ritual process. Those who could afford gestures such as these had a deep interest in divine support for the social order that maintained their property and security, their marriages, and their access to municipal honors.

In terms of Initiation, those hoping to join the cult of Cybele were symbolically placed in a tomb (Alvar, p. 276). Sallustius, a 4th century Roman writer, affirms that those who had simulated their deaths in a tomb drank milk as if they were reborn. This being said, scholars debate whether this type of ritual was the only one practiced for initiates. It is most likely that initiations such as these developed only in the second century CE (Borgeaud 2004, p. 114-6). A report, brought by Clement of Alexandria, a second-third century Theologian, cited in Chap. 2.1.b states a more detailed account of initiation, that the initiate ate from a tambourine, drunk from a cymbal, had carried sacred vessels, and had pushed past the curtain of a marriage chamber.

Alvar suggests that, after a meal, the initiate proceeds to a sacred chamber where the hierogamy, or union with the goddess, was performed (Burkert 1987; Alvar, p. 280). From this point on, the initiate would be truly initiated and had access to the secrets of the cult. It was the most devoted of worshippers who sacrificed their genitals in order to appease Cybele and this ritual would have most likely taken place on March 24, the *dies sanguinis*. Reward for this act

was entry into the group of the *galli*. Other speculation suggests that members confirmed their initiation by way of the *taurobolium* or *criobolium*. It was through fulfillment of these demands that the worshipper helped ensure that Cybele would bestow her blessings upon him- or herself, and upon the Roman Empire (Alvar, p. 281).

Finally, I would like to discuss a key festival associated with the cult of Cybele, the *Megalensia*, which occurred From April 4-10. This festival was founded in commemoration of Cybele's arrival into Rome in 204 BCE, and was reinstated by Augustus (Alvar, p.282). This festival, like the March Festival of Attis, raised the issue of defining what a worshipper of this cult did, as processions within public festivals permitted a wide range of participations as well as a need for commitment. However, being that the cult of Cybele was a mystery cult, it was only members of the cult who knew specifically how these festival practices truly took place. Not even ancient writers who documented the cult of Cybele were fully aware of the rites that took place unless they were a full-fledged member of the cult.

The *Megalensia* was organized by the curule aediles and became an important part of aristocratic competition for social capital, as they provided an institutionalized opportunity for *congiaria* and extravagant display (Scullard 1973, p. 24). For example, Julius Caesar attracted notice through his financing of the *Megalensia* in 65 BCE. Dramatic performances were introduced in 194 and were staged in two wooden theatres in the center of Rome, with at least one theatre directly facing the temple of Cybele on the Palatine (Livy 34.54.3; Alvar, p. 283).

These performances included dances performed by the *ballatores Cybelae*. Special rules, such as the exclusion of slaves, were attached to these performances and a procession in which the sacred stone and a statue of Cybele were paraded through a circus. While the populous threw

copper and silver coins as well as roses into the street, paving the way for Cybele with a joyful color, *galli* were permitted to collect the money that spectators chose to toss.

**5. Archaeological evidence for the cult of Cybele - what artifacts have you found that are attributed to Cybele worship that date to the 1st or 2nd century CE? Where are they from, and what makes scholars relate them to Cybele?**

I would like to begin my view into Roman Cybele worship by looking at various artifacts dedicated to Cybele and Attis that have been uncovered. Firstly, I would like to refer to the book, *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World*, by Joscelyn Godwin, to document various Roman Cybele artifacts that we have at our disposal. The first artifact that I would like to discuss has been named the *Dying Attis* by scholars, and is a relief dating to the second century BCE (Godwin, 1981, p. 116). According to James Bromwich in his 1996 work *The Roman Remains of Southern France: A Guidebook*, this relief was found in a ruined house within the dig site Glanum in France. This house was called The House of Atys, which houses cult dedications made for Cybele. This relief is now kept in a museum at St. Remy-de-Provence (Godwin, p. 116, see image credits).



This relief allows scholars to study the death scene of Attis more closely. Judging by the details present in the relief, scholars see location, as suggested by the trees and river present in the scene. Furthermore, they can see what kind of man Attis was meant to be from the items he

has strewn around him. The relief depicts Attis as a shepherd boy with his staff and rucksack of belongings. Being that the origin story of Cybele and Attis served as a popular aspect of the cult, finding depictions of that story in a French ruin proves its massive influence. A relief like this proves that a following for Cybele existed far beyond the Mediterranean world and stretched into various areas in Western Europe conquered by the Roman Empire, such as modern day France.

In this relief, Attis is lying between a cypress tree and a palm tree near the banks of the river Gallos, near Pessinous in ancient Anatolia. He is shown dying and is meant to be thought of as calling out to Cybele, his lover. His panpipes and various other belongings are strewn all around him and he clutches his wound, crying out for Cybele's help, much like Jesus Christ on Golgotha. Of course, worshippers of the Cult of Cybele know that this is not where Attis' story ends, as the legend states that Cybele resurrects him and they are reunited (Godwin, 1981, p. 116).

The next artifact that I will discuss is a wall-painting from Pompeii that scholars have named *Procession in Honour of Cybele* (Godwin, 1981, p. 115). This painting is dated to roughly the first century CE and is kept in the Via dell' Abbondanza in Pompeii, Italy. It was found in an excavation in 1911 in Pompeii inside the Taberna delle quattro divinità or House of Venus and the Four Gods (Godwin, p. 115, see image credits).





An artifact like this proves to be important for scholars because it gives them an understanding of the various methods in which Cybele was worshipped. An artifact like this is useful because it gives a deeper understanding of the various rituals made in dedication to Cybele and its location suggests that the villa in which it was housed followed by Cybele or at least people who recognized her divine status. The key point of this artifact's use is its visual element; this is a painting, giving scholars a better visual understanding of a particular ritual used to venerate the goddess Cybele. The painting depicts Cybele in her classic pose on a throne flanked by two lions, a common representation of Cybele in Rome and in western Anatolia. This in itself is a perfect indicator that the goddess here is Cybele. With all this being said, the *Procession in Honour of Cybele* painting is a useful object for scholars to more deeply study the practices of the cult of Cybele.

In this painting, a procession honoring the goddess Cybele is shown, as we see worshippers with musical instruments and libation bowls present, alongside a figure on a throne with two seated lions, most likely a Cybele portrayal. The scene is meant to show one station among a series of stations on a prescribed route on which worshippers follow to revere Cybele. On this route, worshippers would carry an image or other object representing Cybele's spiritual power in order to sanctify and benefit themselves. This procession would happen annually and was dedicated to Cybele's entry into Rome (Godwin, 1981, p. 115).

The next few artifacts are further representations of Attis, who is famed to be Cybele's lover in the lore of the cult of Cybele. His representation in artwork is important, as it reflects how the average worshipper was meant to revere Attis. The first artifact among these is called *Pensive Attis* by scholars.

This artifact is a wall-painting dating to the first century CE and was found in the House of Pinarius Cerealis in Pompeii, Italy (Godwin, 1981, p. 116). In this painting, we see Attis, dressed as a young shepherd, holding a knife. He stands at the top of a staircase in between the arches of a complex and is accompanied by Cupid, who begins to run away, horrified at the idea of what Attis may do with the knife.

In this painting, Attis is contemplating on how to castrate himself, a key element of Cybele's origin story. His legs are crossed, possibly referring to his oncoming death, for his leg formation mirrors *Cautopates*, a figure of the cult of Mithras who was generally depicted with crossed legs and represented death and the setting of the sun. There seems to be a linking of the two figures in regards to their stance and the notion of death (Godwin, p. 116).

Attis' knife is sickle-shaped, reminding viewers of Cybele's moon powers and ability to drive mortals to lunacy. This gives scholars the sense that Attis has succumbed to madness and does not act on his own accord. The scene itself probably depicts a scene from a stage-play showing at the time, for the origin story of Cybele and Attis was a popular subject in theater at the time (Godwin, 1981, p. 116). This is a useful piece of information, as it gives scholars a sense of when the Cult of Cybele and Attis rose in popularity. If records of stage-plays of the origins of Cybele and Attis generally come from one or two main centuries, it is safe to assume that the cult of Cybele and Attis was not some obscure cult during this time, but rather a popular choice of faith.

The next artifact that I would like to discuss is named *Transfigured Attis*, and is a statue that was found in Ostia, Italy, and is housed in the Museo Laterano of the Vatican (Godwin, 1981, p. 116). This statue dates to the second century CE and depicts Attis in a more regal stance. On his head is what seems to be a crown, accompanied by shooting solar rays. The Attis

in this artwork has already been resurrected from death after having committed the act of self-castration. Because of this, Attis is portrayed as serene and kingly, for he has been released from the longing of worldly pleasures and the miseries that come with them. Supporting his elbow is the river Gallos in the form of a wise and old god, possibly to suggest the Attis himself has achieved the same god-like status. Furthermore, Attis' body is given feminine characteristics, suggesting that he has elevated from the worldly concepts of sex and gender, becoming an androgynous deity (Godwin, 1981, p. 117, see image credits).



An artifact like this is useful for scholars because it gives an idea of what happens to devout worshippers of Cybele and Attis in the afterlife. Worship of the goddess Cybele was beneficial, as it had the promise of life after death. This notion is depicted in the origin story of Attis and Cybele, for after Attis dies, his corpse refrains from decay. Those who worshipped Cybele hoped for the same fate and this artifact presumably shows the way in which worshippers hoped to be and live in the afterlife, as Attis is shown to be triumphant and free from pain.

The final work that I will discuss which represents Attis without Cybele is a bronze statuette from the Louvre in Paris, France called *Dancing Attis* (Godwin, 1981, p. 118). This statuette shows Attis as a young boy dancing. Although we are unaware of the date, the subject is clear; Attis' expression shows no fear but takes on a rather confident appearance as he reaches up to the sky. His clothes are Western Anatolian in design and are left unbuttoned from thighs to belly, showing no sign of castration. This Attis symbolizes an already reborn Attis, one who has gone through castration, death, and has now been resurrected by Cybele and is free from the sufferings that come with sexuality. Attis has "become as a little child" and inherits the kingdom of heaven, representing to worshippers that, if they were to be inducted into the cult, they too could be free to dance before the gods in spiritual ecstasy and holy love (Godwin, 1981, p. 118, see image credits).



Similar to the previous artifact, this statuette depicts Attis in his state after death. This artifact is yet again an example of the notion of life after death. Scholars can use artifacts like these to understand the desire for one to worship Cybele and Attis as well as the way in which

Attis was used as a main figure of the cult. Scholars can determine that Attis serves as an example for worshippers and especially for the *galli* who castrate themselves in order to mimic Attis.

Another artifact that I have found is currently kept in the British Museum in London and features Cybele on a Roman coin dating from the second century CE. This coin is titled *Cybele riding a Lion* (Godwin, 1981, p. 114). The British Museum does not have on record where this coin was uncovered. This work is described as tying in the Zodiac, a concept belonging to Astrology, with Cybele worship. In the coin, Cybele's characteristic of domination over the king of beasts is presented, as she is shown riding a lion in the act of leaping into the sky. This picture is meant to mirror the idea that, "as Virgo follows Leo in the Zodiac, so the power of the universe represented by the Lion is harnessed and tamed by the Virgin goddess of nature, who in turn gives birth to all living creatures" (Godwin, 1981, p. 114).

An artifact like this Roman coin is important for scholars because it gives an idea of how the Romans considered Cybele and Attis. The imagery of the female being riding on a lion is a clear sign that this being is Cybele. It would be important for scholars to note that Cybele became such an important deity in the second century that she was featured on various Roman coins. Although the Romans had an abundance of deities to choose, Cybele was the goddess present on this coin.

Next, I would like to talk about another artifact kept in the British Museum. The artifact, *Mother Goddess with Twins*, is a Terracotta statue dating to circa 300 CE. This artifact, according to the British Museum, was uncovered in the British town of Welwyn. Much like the vast amount of art created in dedication to Roman Catholicism, the ancient world experienced mass-production of Terracotta statues designed to be used as votive objects for the home. This

particular statue shows Cybele holding two children in a motherly embrace, for she herself is a major mother goddess of the ancient world. We can see this kind of reverence for a mother goddess when we analyze other divine feminine figures, such as Isis, Astarte, and even the Virgin Mary. The symbolization that this statue presents is that these mother goddess represent the idea that we live in a living universe of beings who have others under their care. In this sense, no living creature is alone and every living creature can become a kind of mother when given the opportunity to do so (Godwin 1981, p. 114).

With this artifact, scholars can presume that it was not uncommon to keep a terracotta of a goddess like Cybele in ones' home. Devout worshippers of the cult of Cybele who could afford to have a physical representation of Cybele most likely purchased terracotta like this one to remind them of their faith. The imagery depicted in this terracotta suggests the motherly nature of the goddess and even more so, the influence of feminine or motherly characteristics on the followers of Cybele.

The final Roman artifact of Cybele worship shown in *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World* that I will discuss is the *Ascension of Attis and Cybele*, a fourth century CE silver dish that, according to Ruth E. Leader-Newby, was found in a Roman cemetery in Parabiago and is now housed in the Castello Sforzesco in Milan, Italy (Godwin, p. 118). This artifact differs from the others mentioned in that it dates to a much later time. On this silver dish, Cybele and her newly resurrected son-lover, Attis, are depicted on a chariot accompanied by four lions as well as three *Corybantes*. They are ascending into Heaven, which is depicted in the form of chariots of the Sun and Moon, with the Morning and Evening Stars. Below the chariot of Cybele and Attis are all the creations that Attis has left behind, such as rivers and oceans in the form of gods,

fruitful Tellus, and the various Seasons, depicted as miniature beings holding objects to represent the changing of the weather (Godwin, p. 119, see image credits).



According to Roman emperor Julian in his *Oration to the Mother of the gods*, Attis is the lowest of the gods, explaining why his works are kept on the earth, whereas the higher gods create on ideal planes, above the earth. The *Corybantes* escort Cybele and Attis into Heaven as they are the highest forces in rank below the gods, and carry a tradition of protecting youthful gods. The possible meaning behind this work is the representation of the periodic destruction and creation of civilizations, as shown by Attis leaving his work to enjoy the new pleasures of heaven. Furthermore, on the right of this dish, we see Atlas sinking, suggesting a new cycle taking place in the world. Godwin states “the alternate solidification and dissolution of worlds is an eternal cycle.” He refers to the Serpent of Time depicted on the right of the dish, who winds around the obelisk, suggesting the passing of time (Godwin, 1981, p. 119).

This silver dish is a useful artifact because it, along like the *Transfigured Attis* statue and the *Dancing Attis* statuette, depicts Attis in a transfigured state. Here, Attis ascends with Cybele, his lover, into Heaven, where they will live a new life as gods. An artifact like this gives scholars an understanding of the way in which Cybele worshippers may imagine themselves finding life after death through the worship of Cybele. It is not common to find a religion like this that promises such a positive afterlife and so the incentive to worship Cybele is strong.

These artifacts come from a timeframe ranging between the 2nd century BCE to the fourth century CE. The majority of the artifacts come from the 1st and 2nd centuries CE specifically, suggesting to us that the cult of Cybele was probably quite popular during this time. These artifacts range in subject matter, from fictitious works to religious symbolization. While the artifacts come in the form of wall paintings and statues, other artifacts, like the Roman coin of *Cybele riding a Lion*, feature Cybele on objects used for much more secular components of Roman life and society, such as commerce. It is interesting to see this and speculate how aspects of Cybele and Attis were represented in different areas of Roman culture, from secular to religious.

Next, I would like to use the book *Cybele and Attis* by Maarten J. Vermaseren, a Dutch historian, to discuss various buildings made in dedication to the cult of Cybele in Rome. Firstly, I would like to talk about the Metroon on the Palatine, a temple constructed by censors M. Livius Salinator and C. Claudius Nero (Vermaseren, 1977, p. 41). Thirteen years after Cybele's entry into Rome, the Metroon was completed and dedicated by the praetor M. Junius Brutus on April 10, 191 BCE as a location to house the black meteorite meant to represent Cybele. This temple was an important addition to the Palatine, for it gave a home to Cybele, who was meant to bring victory to Rome during the 2nd Punic War.



Annual celebrations for Cybele, which we discussed when analyzing the *Procession in Honour of Cybele* in my section of cult artifacts, took place at this particular temple. Although this building was celebrated regularly, various disasters have broken it down so much so that scarcely anything is left of this building today, as reported by recent excavations done by Pietro Romanelli in 1951 (Vermaseren, 1977, p. 41).

As reported by the Roman historian Valerius Maximus, the foundation of the Metroon was destroyed by fire a hundred years after its inauguration (Vermaseren, 1977, p. 41). While the foundation was destroyed, the statue of Claudia Quinta was left unscathed. Q. Caecilius Metellus Numidicus rebuilt the temple around 110-109 BCE and, after another fire, the emperor Augustus restored the Metroon again, proudly stating, "I have rebuilt the temple of the Great Mother on the Palatine," for Augustus liked the idea of preserving anything linking the Romans to the Trojans. We can see the temple of Cybele depicted on a relief in the Villa Medici. This relief dates from the time of emperor Claudius (pl. 32) and is a fragment of an Ara Pietatis on the Via Lata.

Depicted is the front of the temple, which is decorated with statues of shield-bearing *kouretes*, figures usually shown accompanying Cybele (Vermaseren, 1977, p. 43). A figure of Cybele is not shown but the mother goddess is instead symbolized by a throne on which a crown is placed. A lion stands on each corner of the throne and two figures stand on each side of the throne, one holding a tambourine. With this relief, the Claudii family hoped to give off a sense of deep interest and reverence for the cult of Cybele.

If one were to visit the Palatine today in an effort to see the remnants of the Metroon, one would see a high podium that is split apart by a holm-oak (Vermaseren 1977, p. 43). The columns in this area have all collapsed and the remnants of the drums are ranged on one side. A marble statue of Cybele the goddess sitting on a throne flanked by two lions remains.

Furthermore, some altars are left standing and nearby, remnants of a visible theatre used mainly for the *Megalensia* are present (Vermaseren, p. 43).

Although excavation of this temple has been taking place since 1872, no physical evidence of the black meteorite of Cybele has been found (Vermaseren, 1977, p. 43). However, the 1952 excavations have cleared some confusion regarding the figure Attis. While it was assumed that Attis, the Phrygian shepherd was not worshipped alongside Cybele until the first century A.D., Pietro Romanelli discovered a great number of terracotta (pl. 34) of Attis which date from the first century B.C. These terracotta show Attis playing a pipe, sitting on a mountain in winter, and riding on a ram. This then makes it clear that Attis did experience earlier worship (Vermaseren, 1977, p. 43).

Nearby the Palatine, a house which belonged to a man named Manius Publicius Hilarus was excavated in 1889 (Vermaseren, 1977 p. 43). This building was erected during the reign of emperor Marcus Aurelius and, upon excavating the site, a self-portrait of Hilarus was uncovered. After close analysis, it was found that his name and the names of his sons Magnus and Harmonianus link to Cybele, as some refer to the Hilaria festivities associated with Cybele, and of her title as Magna Mater. Further analysis suggests that this home also held regular meetings for the college of the tree-bearers, or *dendraphori*, who cut pine trees every year in dedication to Attis and bore parts of those trees in an annual procession to the Palatine (Vermaseren, 1977, p. 44).

Within the home, we see twelve steps leading down into the atrium of the home and most of the homes' walls are left intact. Further in the home is a brickwork base with a tablet dedicated to Silvanus, the god of the pine-wood and on the floor of the atrium, a mosaic showing the Evil Eye, or malocchio, being pierced by an arrow and attacked by animals, is present. An

owl rests above the eye, as if to symbolize protection. Next is an entrance into a larger hall whose door bears the inscription, “*intranibus hic deos propitios et Basilic[ae] Hilarianae,*” meaning “for those who here approach the propitious gods and those of the Basilica Hilariana.” Next to this is a well and a pedestal of a statue of Hilarus, no doubt erected by the collegium of the tree-bearers of Cybele and Attis (Vermaseren, 1977, p. 44).

The large hall has a black and white mosaic showing geometrical motifs, with a rectangular basin in the center (Vermaseren, 1977, p. 45). We do not yet know the purpose of this, as excavation of the great hall was eventually discontinued. Another building that we have which was made in dedication to Cybele is displayed on a relief of the Haterii family. This building is a small and round temple which existed during the time of Domitian and restored by empress Faustina’s husband, emperor Antoninus Pius, in 142 A.D. It was located in the Via Sacra in the Forum Romanum, which was close to the Arch of Titus.

## Image Bibliography

*Ascension of Attis and Cybele*, Silver dish from Parabiago, fourth century AD., Castello Sforzesco, Milan.

*Dancing Attis*, Bronze statuette, date unknown, Louvre, Paris.

*Dying Attis*, Relief from Glanum, second century BC., France, St Remy-de-Provence, Museum.

*Head of the Phrygian Mother*, from Salmankoy, Seventh-sixth century BC., Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara, Turkey.

*Miniature relief of the Phrygian Mother from Gordion*, Tumulus C., Seventh-sixth century BC., Gordion Excavation Project, Turkey.

*Procession in Honour of Cybele*, Wall-painting in the Via dell' Abbondanza, c. first century AD., Pompeii.

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