

ZIRIDAVA  
STUDIA ARCHAEOLOGICA

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### ZIRIDAVA STUDIA ARCHAEOLOGICA

Any correspondence will be sent to the editor:  
Museum Arad  
Piata George Enescu 1, 310131 Arad, RO  
e-mail: ziridava2012@gmail.com

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# The celebration of Cybele: the festive cycle dedicated to the Great Mother of Gods in the Milesian colonies of the Propontis and Pontus Euxinus

Remus Mihai Feraru

**Abstract:** The study here discusses the festive cycle dedicated to Cybele in the Milesian colonies located on the shores of the Propontis and Pontus Euxinus. Literary sources, epigraphic documents and iconographic representations satisfactorily document the festive cycle dedicated to the Great Mother of Gods worshipped as a deity of field fertility and fruitful nature. The *Metroa* celebrations held in honour of Cybele and Attis have a long continuing tradition, from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC until the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Literary sources and epigraphic documents supply brief information on the various ritual practices specific to the *Metroa* celebration: the ritual vigil (*pannychis*), the ritual bath of the goddess's cult statue (*lavatio*), the procession of the cannophori (15<sup>th</sup> March), the procession of the sacred tree (22<sup>nd</sup> March). During the Roman period, the Great Mother of Gods was honoured in the Milesian colonies according to the Greek tradition.

**Keywords:** Cybele; celebration; ritual practices; sacrifices; Milesian colonies.

The Great Mother Goddess (*Matar*) or the Mountain Mother (*Matar Kubeleya/ Kubileya*) is an ancient deity of Anatolian origin adopted by the Greeks, then by the Romans, under various names, such as *Κυβέλη, Μητήρ* ("Mother"), *Μεγάλη Μητήρ* ("Great Mother"), *Μήτηρ Θεῶν* ("Great Mother of Gods"), *Cybele, Magna Mater* or *Mater Magna Idaea Deum*<sup>1</sup>.

Cybele was of origin from central Asia Minor, more precisely Phrygia, where the goddess is known as *Matar* (the Phrygian counterpart of Greek *Μήτηρ*, "Mother") and *Matar Kubeleya* or *Kubileya* (*Cybelean Mother* or *Mountain Mother*)<sup>2</sup>. In fact, *Κυβέλη*<sup>3</sup>, the Greek name of the Phrygian goddess derives from the Phrygian epithet *Kubeleya*<sup>4</sup>.

Phrygia seems to have been the oldest centre of the cult of Cybele, which was and would remain until the Roman imperial period the main deity of the Phrygian pantheon. Earliest evidence on the cult of the Phrygian Mother dates from early first millennium BC. A *stela* discovered in Ankara, dated to late 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, is one of the earliest anthropomorphic images of the Great Mother. The goddess is rendered standing within a small temple (*naiskos*); she is dressed in a long *chitōn* (tunic) and a *himation* (cloak), holding a lion cub by her chest. She wears a high *polos* (cylindrical hat) on her head (Fig. 3). The image of the goddess standing and flanked by two lions is figured in the niche set up in the rock-carved facade of the votive monument at Arslankaya, dated to the 7<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>5</sup>. The main sanctuary of the Phrygian Mother was located at Pessinonte, in Phrygia, a town lying at the foot of Mount Dindyme, where the Mother of Pessinonte (*Μήτηρ Πεσσινουντίων*) was worshipped. Even after the goddess's statue had been transported to Rome in 204 BC, the sanctuary remained the main place of worship of the Great Mother<sup>6</sup> in this region.

<sup>1</sup> Simon 1997, 744; Belayche 2000, 571; Bøgh 2012, 32 and n. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Bøgh 2007, 306; Borgeaud 1996, 23, 24–25.

<sup>3</sup> The name *Κυβέλη* appears for the first time in Pindar (fr. 80 Maehler), Simon 1997, 744.

<sup>4</sup> Brixhe 1979, 40–45; cf. Laroche 1960, 122 and 127, according to whom the Greek name *Κυβέλη* derives from that of the older Syro-Anatolian goddess *Koubaba* (the great goddess of Karkemish), worshipped throughout the first three centuries of the first millennium BC in northern Syria and southern Anatolia, from where the cult of the goddess spread to Phrygia. Goddess *Koubaba* assimilated a large part of the great local deities of Phrygia, including the Phrygian *Matar Kubeleya* or *Κυβέλη*, adopting the features of the latter. The name *Koubaba* is found in the Grecized form *Κυβήβη* at Hipponax (fr. 127 West) and Herodotus (V, 102, 1). Thus, it is not at all excluded that *Κυβέλη* is an altered form of the name *Κυβήβη*, Lebrun 1994, 154; more recently, see also Munn 2008, 159–164, who finds a possible derivation of name *Koubaba* from the Phrygian adjective *Kubeleya* and thus asserts an existing indirect linguistic kinship between *Koubaba* and the Greek *Κυβέλη*.

<sup>5</sup> Bøgh 2012, 35, 36, fig. 2a, 37, fig. 2b; Borgeaud 1996, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Decharme 1887, 1680a.



Fig. 1. General map of the Greek cities from the shores of the Hellespont and Propontis (*apud* Robu 2012, 195).

Cybele was worshiped as deity of fertility, fecundity and life force. The goddess was the personification of fruitful nature and the “Mistress of animals” inhabiting the forest<sup>7</sup>. That is why Matar *Kubeleya* is often depicted as a wild, uncivilized and even barbarian mountain goddess: a deity celebrated with ecstatic and bloody rituals by delirious worshippers and effeminate, emasculated priests. Also, the Phrygian Mother was worshipped as goddess of power, namely as a protective deity of kings, elites and cities. Cybele’s “mother” status derives from her connection with the king; in other words, the goddess was the protector of the king and state. The latter aspect of the Great Mother takes shape especially during the Lydian rule over Phrygia, sometime between the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and mid 6<sup>th</sup> century BC; during this period, the lion, symbol of royal power and sovereignty in Lydia, would become one of the main attributes of Cybele<sup>8</sup>.

Cybele’s pair was Attis (Ἄττις, Ἄττις, Atys, Attis, Atin) or Papas, whose myth was linked to the cult of the Great Mother. According to the Greek mythological tradition, Attis was son to and/or lover of Cybele or Agdistis, a personification of the Phrygian goddess. The Phrygian version of the myth reports that Attis was the son of Nana, the daughter of river god Sangarios, another personification of the Phrygian goddess. Immediately after birth, Attis is abandoned on the banks of the Sangarios River, but was rescued by a goat which raised him. Young Attis, who was of ravishing beauty, aroused the ardent love of Agdistis, who followed him through forests, aiding his hunt. When Attis wished to marry Midas’s daughter, king of Pessinonte, Agdistis, blinded by jealousy caused Attis to lose his mind and emasculate himself under a pine tree, where he died. Cybele buried him and violets grew from his split blood. Goddess Agdistis obtained Zeus’s approval so that Attis’s body would remain incorruptible<sup>9</sup>. Nonetheless, scholars have not reached consensus on the existence of Attis in Phrygia. E.J. Roller argued that for the lack of iconographic representations of Attis prior to 350 BC and literary sources attesting the cult of Cybele’s acolyte, there was no cult of Attis at least in the Phrygian period of the Great Mother of Gods’s cult<sup>10</sup>. It was not until the Hellenistic period that the cult of Attis would be associated with that of Cybele<sup>11</sup>, of which it would become inseparable in the Roman tradition<sup>12</sup>.

The Phrygian Mother (Matar or Matar *Kubeleya*) was adopted by the Greeks as *Cybele*, *Meter* or *Megale meter*. In her capacity as “Great Mother of Gods” (Μήτηρ Θεῶν), the Great Mother Goddess was assimilated and identified in the Greek world with Titanis Rhea, taking on both the latter’s features and those of Demeter. The Great Mother of Gods is also frequently associated and worshiped together

<sup>7</sup> Ferrari 2003, 258; Commons 1929, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Bøgh 2012, 34–38; Bøgh 2007, 318–319; see also Roller 1999, 111–115.

<sup>9</sup> Pausanias, VII, 17, 10–12; Arnobius, *Adversusnationes*, V, 5–13; other versions of the myth of Attis and Cybele have been conveyed, among others, by Herodotus, (I, 34–45) and Ovid (*Fastae*, IV, 221–244); in this respect see also Ferrari 2003, 123; Vermaseren, De Boer 1986, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Bøgh 2007, 319–320; Roller 1999, 70, 111.

<sup>11</sup> Vermaseren, De Boer 1986, 44.

<sup>12</sup> Ferrari 2003, 123, 258.



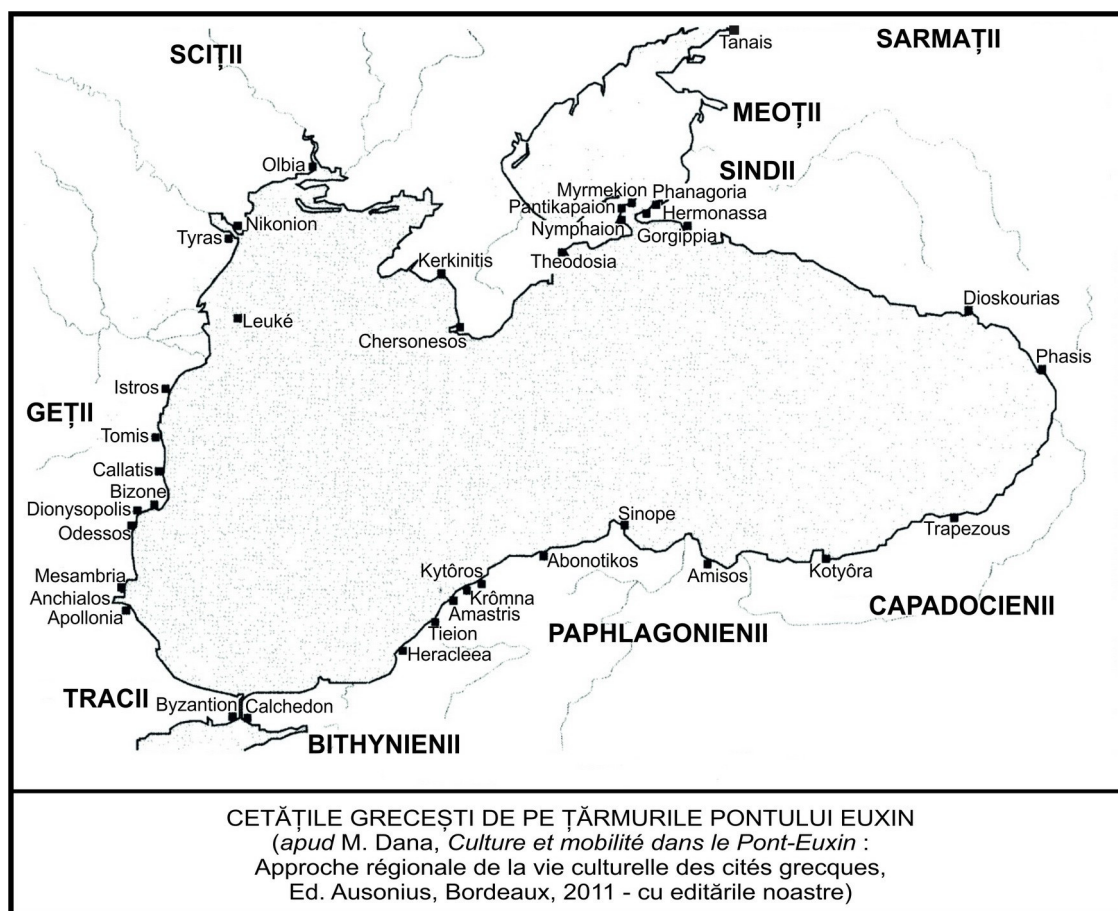


Fig. 2. General map of the Greek cities from the shores of Pontus Euxinus (apud Dana 2011 – with our editing).

with Dionysus, which would lead to the adoption of Dionysian ecstatic rites by the cult of Cybele<sup>13</sup>. Thus, after assuming Rhea's features, the Great Mother of Gods becomes the source of life, the mistress of earth, sky and sea; she also protected the young and decided human destinies<sup>14</sup>. Instead, her paredro, Attis was worshipped as a vegetation deity related to the death and rebirth of nature<sup>15</sup>.

Since the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, the cult of Cybele had spread to the Greek cities on the western coast of Asia Minor, especially in Ionia, from where it was brought by the Greek colonists to the Milesian colonies on the shores of the Propontis and Pontus Euxinus<sup>16</sup> (Fig. 1, 2). Although most votive monuments dedicated to the Great Mother in the Pontic Milesian colonies date from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, her cult has been recorded in Miletus's establishments even since the Archaic period, as suggested by a series of statuettes of Cybele discovered at Apollonia Pontica, Istros and Olbia, dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>17</sup>. Also, a dedication to the Great Mother of Gods engraved on a black-figure vessel discovered at Myrmekion<sup>18</sup>, near Pantikapaion, dated to the last quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, confirms the diffusion of the Phrygian goddess's cult on the northern shore of Pontus Euxinus since the early Archaic period (Fig. 2).



Fig. 3. Stone stela with the statue of the Great Mother of Gods, within a naiskos (Ankara, 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, 111, apud Bøgh 2012, 35).

<sup>13</sup> Bøgh 2007, 307.

<sup>14</sup> Bøgh 2007, 307; Ferrari 2003, 258.

<sup>15</sup> Ferrari 2003, 123 (s.u. Attis).

<sup>16</sup> Graf 1985, 120; Roller 1999, 63–141.

<sup>17</sup> Vianu-Alexandrescu 1980, 262–264.

<sup>18</sup> Vianu-Alexandrescu 1980, 264: “[ἀ]νέθηκεν τῇ Μητρὶ”.

The figurative representations of Cybele that hail from the Pontic Milesian colonies are part of an iconographic type well established in the Greek world since the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC: the goddess is enthroned, dressed in a long *chiton* (tunic) and a *himation* (mantle), holding in her right hand a cup



Fig. 4. Terracotta figurine: Cybele enthroned (Apollonia Pontica, 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, *apud* Chiekova 2019).



Fig. 6. Marble *aedicula* with the depiction of the Pontic Great Mother of Gods (Dionysopolis, 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, *apud* Mircheva 2013, 37, fig. 32).

for libations (*fiala* or *patera*) and in her left a tambourine (*tympanon*); her face is framed by two braids that fall on her shoulders and a *polos* (a high, cylindrical cap); rarely, a mural crown adorns her head. The lion, a characteristic element of Cybele's iconography, is represented either lying on the goddess's lap (Fig. 4, 5) or sitting on one side of the throne; sometimes the goddess uses a lion as a feet support. In other cases, Cybele is flanked by two lions<sup>19</sup>. On reliefs, the goddess is often depicted within a small temple (*naiskos*), a miniature model of the grand Anatolian facades (Fig. 6). The figurative representations of the Great Mother of Gods discovered in the Milesian colonies have as their prototype the image of the Phrygian goddess rendered on the facades of the Anatolian votive monuments<sup>20</sup>.

The peak of the Great Mother of Gods' cult is a cycle of festivities, celebrated in honour of the Phrygian goddess at the beginning of spring. Our study focuses on the holidays dedicated to Cybele in the Milesian colonies located on the shores of the Propontis and Pontus Euxinus. The topic needed to be addressed all the more so since, on the one hand, the theme has not been discussed in the academic literature to date; on the other hand, information regarding the cult of the Great Mother of Gods and the Metroa celebrations has been enriched by the discovery of a true epigraphic treasure, as well as some statues and reliefs in a sanctuary of Cybele excavated 2007 at Dionysopolis<sup>21</sup>. More specifically, our study aims to examine the festive cycle dedicated to the Great Mother of Gods in the Milesian colonies starting from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC until the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, ritual practices specific to the Metroa feasts, sacrifices consecrated to the Phrygian Mother as well as the ecstatic music and dance that played a key role in the celebrations and processions occasioned by Cybele's festival. Lastly, we aim to present the cult staff in the service of the Phrygian Mother, as well as the different types of worshippers of the highly popular goddess among the Greek public

communities. Our research is based on the study of epigraphic, literary and archaeological documents, in particular cult statues and bas-reliefs.



Fig. 5. Marble statuette of the Pontic Great Mother of Gods (Dionysopolis, 6<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century BC, *apud* Mircheva 2013, 34, fig. 29).

## 1. Notes on the celebration of Cybele in the Greco-Roman world

Before presenting the evidence regarding the festive cycle dedicated to Cybele in the Milesian colonies as well as the rituals related to the Metroa celebrations, it seems useful to us to provide a number of landmarks regarding the development phases of the festive cycle dedicated to the Phrygian

<sup>19</sup> Bøgh 2007, 307; Borgeaud 1996, 26.

<sup>20</sup> Bøgh 2012, 39–41 and fig. 3a and 3b.

<sup>21</sup> Lazarenko *et al.* 2013, 34–63.

Mother, starting from the introduction of her cult in the Greek world until mid 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, when the Metroa festive cycle appears to have fully crystallized.

The adoption of the cult of the Phrygian Mother by the Greeks involved the celebration of the goddess throughout the Greek world. Unfortunately, literary and epigraphic sources provide limited and topical information regarding the celebration of Metroa holidays and performance of related ritual practices. In this respect, the oldest record is owed to Herodotus, who mentions the rituals and sacrifices performed in honour of the Great Mother of Gods by the Greeks of Cyzicus during a Metroa celebration by early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>22</sup>. Pindarus, who worshipped the Great Mother of Gods at Thebes near his home, mentions the nocturnal rituals performed in honour of the goddess<sup>23</sup>. In fact, except for Herodotus and Pindarus, to whom would add Dionysios of Halicarnassus (60 BC – after 7 BC), and later, Arrian (ca. AD 85/90–175), rituals part of the Metroa festive cycle are described in more detail by Latin (Ovid, Lucretius, Lucan) and particularly Christian authors (Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Firmicus Maternus, Prudentius, Arnobius, Augustine); the last ones denounce the massive attendance of the population or some high-ranking figures' involvement in the ceremonies occasioned by the so-called "Phrygian holidays"<sup>24</sup>.

The cult of the Great Mother of Gods, whose official name was *Mater Magna Idaea Deum* was officially introduced in Rome by the end of the Second Punic War in 204 BC, subsequent to the answer that state authorities had obtained by consulting the Sibylline books: namely, that the goddess's transfer from Pessinonte to Rome would be the only way by which the Romans could be victorious in the Punic Wars. In 191 BC, *Magna Mater* received a temple on the Palatine Hill; on that occasion, the Romans set up the *Megalesia* / *Megalensia*<sup>25</sup> games in honour of the goddess from *Pessinonte*, included in the calendar and reserved to Roman citizens. *Megalensia* were held between April 4 and 10<sup>26</sup>. Thus, ever since her integration into the Roman pantheon, *Magna Mater* was an official goddess; state representatives were closely associated with her cult, in contrast to the situation in Greece, where finds suggest a primarily private worship of Cybele. In Rome, the goddess of Pessinonte enjoyed a particular popularity among laymen, however her worship was most often practiced as part of public processions<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, Cybele was relatively quickly linked to the myth of Aeneas, the "father" of Rome and thus, in fact, associated with the foundation and protection of the entire Roman Empire<sup>28</sup>. Consequently, *Magna Mater* assumed the status of ancestral and tutelary deity of Rome<sup>29</sup>. As her relationship with nature, mountains and countryside considerably diminished, *Magna Mater* became an urban goddess, worshipped as the protector deity of the fortress. In Rome, Cybele was mostly associated with fertility and sexuality. Attis's popularity also increased considerably in the Roman period, Cybele's acolyte being worshipped as a god<sup>30</sup> from mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD onwards.

During the last two centuries of the Roman Republic until the reign of Claudius (AD 41–54), two parallel types of worship coexisted, honouring the Phrygian goddess: an official Roman cult practiced during the public festivities of April (*Megalesia*), celebrated by Roman magistrates and citizens, and a Phrygian cult, practiced on the occasion of March festivities (between 15<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> March), in which Roman citizens were forbidden to participate and which were held by a Phrygian origin priest and priestess, as well as by the *galli*, those worshipers of the goddess who offered her their virility. The key elements of the March celebrations came from ancient rites of Phrygia, and, especially, evidently, Pessinonte, where the Phrygian goddess originated from<sup>31</sup>.

The first known reforms of the cult of *Magna Mater* date under Claudius. Beginning with the reign of this emperor, the Phrygian celebrations of March are listed in Rome's official calendar, adopting, at least partially, Roman forms. The cult of Cybele, thus, acquires a rigorously defined position within

<sup>22</sup> Herodotus, IV, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Pindar, *Pythicae*, III, 77–79.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, II, 4; Prudentius *Peristephanon liber*, X, 154–160: *proceres togatos*.

<sup>25</sup> Titus Livius, *Ab urbe condita*, XXXVI, 36, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Belayche 2000, 571; Borgeaud 1996, 131.

<sup>27</sup> Roller 1999, 279.

<sup>28</sup> Bøgh 2007, 309.

<sup>29</sup> Van Haepere 2011, 470.

<sup>30</sup> Bøgh 2007, 309; Roller 1999, 280; see also van Haepere 2011, 470.

<sup>31</sup> Dionysios of Halicarnassus (1960), II, 19, 3–5; Van Haepere 2011, 469.



the state's religion, with well-defined rituals<sup>32</sup>. Concurrently, the cult of the Great Mother of Gods is officially adopted in both the colonies and municipalities of Italy, as well as in the western provinces of the Empire<sup>33</sup>. Historian Arrian, living in the 2nd century AD, lets us understand that, in his time, rituals of the Metroa festive cycle were performed according to the Phrygian tradition: "Borrowing from other peoples even gods, they (*i.e. the Romans*) honour them as their own. (...). Some rituals are actually *Phrygian*. Indeed, they honour *Phrygian Rhea*, who is of origin from Pessinonte; also, *mourning for Attis after the Phrygian fashion* is also practiced in Rome, while Rhea takes the ritual bath that ends the mourning according to the *Phrygian custom*".<sup>34</sup>

A second phase of Cybele cult's reforms occurs between the reign of Claudius and that of Antoninus Pius (AD 138–161) or towards the end of the latter's reign, when the festive cycle of the Great Mother of Gods had already acquired the structure under which it appears in the Philocalus's calendar<sup>35</sup>. Regardless, by late 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, the festival cycle of the Phrygian goddess was widespread throughout the Empire, including its eastern provinces. The ensemble of the Great Mother of Gods festive cycle appears fully formed only by mid-4<sup>th</sup> century AD, as confirmed by the so-called "Calendar of Philocalus", which provides valuable evidence on the result of the Metroa cultic cycle development during the Empire<sup>36</sup>.

## 2. Evidence on the celebration of Cybele in the Milesian colonies

Over the course of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, the cult of Cybele was introduced in the Milesian colonies of the Propontis and Pontus Euxinus (Fig. 1, 2). The Great Mother of Gods occupies a preeminent place in the pantheons of the Milesian colonies, being worshipped as the deity of field fertility, protector of fortresses, sailors and sea voyages. Literary and especially epigraphic sources provide limited and topical information on the festive cycle dedicated to Cybele in the Milesian colonies. Furthermore, a series of reliefs discovered in most Milesian colonies faithfully illustrate the authentic background of the Metroa celebrations as well as different ritual practices related to the celebration of the Great Mother of Gods. We shall present below the documentation (literary sources, inscriptions, bas-reliefs) regarding the celebration and honouring of the Great Mother of Gods in the Milesian colonies.

### 2.1. Celebration of Cybele at Cyzicus

Literary, epigraphic and archaeological documents (votive reliefs and statues) reveal the pre-eminent place that the cult of the Great Mother of Gods held in the Cyzicus pantheon, as well as in the settlements located in Cyzician territory.

At Cyzicus, the cult of Cybele goes back to the mythical times preceding the foundation of the city. According to the mythological tradition reported by Apollonius of Rhodes, the Argonauts would have established the cult of Mother Dindymene in the fortress of Proconessos (in the Cyzicus region) and on Mount Dindymon/Dindymene, near Cyzicus<sup>37</sup>. At his turn, Pausanias accounts that, during the annexation of the island of Proconessos, around 362/361 BC, the Cyzicians brought the cult statue (*ἄγαλμα*) of Mother Dindymene from Proconessos to Cyzicus<sup>38</sup> (Fig. 1).

In the famous episode about the journey of Scythian Anacharsis preserved in book IV of the *Histories*, Herodotus supplies valuable information about the celebration of Cybele by the Cyzicians. While traveling by sea to Scythia to return home, Anacharsis stops at Cyzicus, where the Cyzicians were just celebrating the Great Mother of Gods. He attends a ritual vigil (*pannychis*) in honour of Cybele; on the occasion, Anacharsis promises the goddess that he will celebrate her if he arrives home

<sup>32</sup> Belayche 2000, 572; Borgeaud 1996, 133.

<sup>33</sup> Von Haepelen 2011, 470–471.

<sup>34</sup> Arrien, *L'art tactique*, (2017), XXXIII, 4: "Οἱ δὲ καὶ θεοὺς αὐτοὺς ἄλλους παρ' ἄλλων λαβόντες ὡς οἰκείους σέβουσιν. (...). Δρᾶται δὲ ἔστιν ἃ καὶ Φρύγια: καὶ γὰρ ἡ Ῥέα αὐτοῖς ἡ Φρύγια τιμᾶται ἐκ Πεσσινοῦντος ἐλθοῦσα, καὶ τὸ πένθος τὸ ἀμφὶ τῷ Ἄττη Φρύγιον ὄν ἐν Ῥώμη πενθεῖται, καὶ τὸ λουτρὸν δ' ἡ Ῥέα, ἀφ' οὗ τοῦ πένθους λήγει, Φρυγῶν νόμῳ λοῦται".

<sup>35</sup> Belayche 2000, 570; Borgeaud 1996, 133.

<sup>36</sup> Borgeaud 1996, 131–135; Fishwick 1966, 193.

<sup>37</sup> Apollonius of Rhodes, I, 1140–1152; according to Strabo (XII, 8, 11), Cybele had a famous sanctuary on Mount Dindymon / Dindyme, near Cyzicus, which had been founded by the Argonauts.

<sup>38</sup> Pausanias, VIII, 46, 4; see also Avram 2014, 227 and n. 4.

safe and sound: “While sailing through Hellespont, [Anacharsis] stopped at Cyzicus. Because he found the Cyzicians holding a grand celebration in honour of the Great Mother of Gods, Anacharsis made a [holy] promise to this goddess, that if he returned home safe and sound, he would also make offerings [according to the same rites and ceremonies] as the Cyzicians did, and he will devote in her honour a [night of] holy vigil<sup>39</sup>. From the information in Herodotus regarding Anacharsis’s journey – who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>40</sup> – it can be inferred that, as early as this century, the Cyzicians very likely celebrated a holiday in honour of the Great Mother of Gods.

A decree from Cyzicus, dated to the 1st century BC, alludes to the *Metrôa* celebration (*Μητρῶα* or *Μητρῶια*) in honour of the Great Mother of Gods worshipped as *Μήτηρ Πλακιανή*<sup>41</sup>, whose cult originated in Plakia, a settlement likely lying east of Cyzicus<sup>42</sup>. Once with the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, the cult of the Great Mother of Gods is attested in Plakia. The head of the goddess is rendered in the obverse of small bronze coins discovered at Plakia, dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC; legends ΠΛΑΚΙΑ, ΠΛΑΚΙ or ΠΛΑ and a lion on the right, or a lion’s head or a bull in motion<sup>43</sup> appear on the reverse of the same coins. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, soon after Plakia was integrated into Cyzician territory<sup>44</sup> (*chôra*), the cult of Meter Plakiane was most likely adopted by the city of Cyzicus<sup>45</sup>.

The Cyzician decree authorizes the cultic staff responsible for the cult of Mother Plakiane to set up a statue in honour of Kleidike, the priestess of the goddess<sup>46</sup>, who donated the sum of 700 staters for holding Meter Plakiane’s festivities. The decree’s texts reports that Kleidike made this donation at the annual meeting of Cybele’s worshippers of 5<sup>th</sup> *Taureon*, which very likely preceded the *Metrôa* festival, celebrated in honour of the Great Mother of Gods in early spring: “The garment makers for Meter Plakiane and the so-called maritime *hieropoioi*, and priestesses found with them [honour] Kleidike, daughter of Asklepiades, priestess of Meter Plakiane and first priestess of Artemis *Mounychia*, who proclaimed and gave them, for the sacred things they performed (*τὰ συντελούμενα ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἱερὰ*) seven hundred staters during the assembly of 5 *Taureon*...”<sup>47</sup>; moreover, the phrase *τὰ συντελούμενα ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἱερὰ* references the *Metrôa*<sup>48</sup> celebration, held at Cyzicus at the beginning of the calendar year, as in the other Milesian colonies: Dionysopolis, Tomis and Istros.

Furthermore, the Cyzician decree provides brief information about the priestly and cultic staff in the service of the Meter Plakiane’s cult. Thus the so-called *Αἱ συντελοῦσαι τοὺς κόσμους παρὰ τῆς Μητρὸς τῆς Πλακιανῆς* seem to have formed a sort of college of servants of Mother Plakiane, charged with the embellishment of the goddess’s sanctuary and dressing her statue<sup>49</sup>. The *ἱεροποιοί* women, also called *θαλάσσιαι* (“marines”) were likely tasked with the ritual rinsing of the goddess’s statue. At the same time, a college of priestesses (*ἱέρειαι*) served the cult of Meter Plakiane<sup>50</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Herodotus, IV, 76: “Τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ Ἀνάχαρσις (...), πλέων δι’ Ἑλλησπόντου προσίσχει ἐς Κύζικον. Καὶ εὗρε γὰρ τῆς μητρὸς τῶν θεῶν ἀνάγοντας τοὺς Κυζικηνοὺς ὀρθὴν μεγαλοπρεπέως κάρτα, εὗξατο τῆς μητρὸς ὁ Ἀνάχαρσις, ἦν σὺς καὶ ὑγιὴς ἀπονοστήσῃ ἐς ἔωυτοῦ, θύσειν τε κατὰ ταῦτά κατὰ ὥρα τοὺς Κυζικηνοὺς ποιεῦντας καὶ παννυχίδα στησίειν”.

<sup>40</sup> Armstrong 1948, 18, 21.

<sup>41</sup> See CIG 3657 (= RIG, 537) and RIG, 538 which approves the erecting of statues in honour of a priestess of Cybele, Plakiane, Hasluck 1910, 264, no. 8 and 9.

<sup>42</sup> Herodotus (I, 57, 2) implies that Plakia was founded by the Athenians. Based on the information provided by Pomponius Mela (I, 98) and Pliny the Elder (*Historia Naturalis* V, 142), the citadel of Plakia was temporarily located near the present-day Turkish town of Kurşunlu (nearby the northern coast of Anatolia), halfway between the Isthmus of Cyzicus and the mouth of the Rhyndakos River, into the Sea of Marmara, see Avram 2004, 992; Lolling 1882, 152 and n. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Abraham 2004, 992; see also Lolling 1882, 152, n. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Prêteux 2014, 113, n. 46; Avram 2004, 992: “Plakia may have been incorporated into Kyzikos, the end of the local coinage being a *terminus post quem*”.

<sup>45</sup> Hasluck 1910, 216; cf. Lolling 1882, 153, who believes that worship to Meter Plakiane would have been transferred from Plakia to Cyzicus in a very early period, most likely in the first Milesian colonisation stage on the southern shore of the Propontis.

<sup>46</sup> RIG, 537, rr. 2–10.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 10–15: “Αἱ συντελοῦσαι / τοὺς κόσμους παρὰ τῆς Μητρὸς τῆς Πλακιανῆς καὶ ἱεροποιοί αἱ προ-/σαγορευόμεναι θαλάσσιαι καὶ συνοῦσαι μετ’ αὐτῶν ἱέρειαι Κλει-/δίκην Ἀσκληπιάδου ἱερωμένην Μητρὸς τῆς ἐκ Πλακίας καὶ προιερωμένην Ἀρτέμιδος Μουνυχίας ἐπαγγεῖλαμένην καὶ ἐπίδοῦ-/σαν ἑαυταῖς δωρεὰν εἰς τὰ συντελούμενα ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἱερὰ ἐν τῆ / συνόδῳ τοῦ Ταυρεῶνος τῆ πέμπτῃ στατήρας ἑπτακοσίους...”.

<sup>48</sup> Ehrhardt 1983, 121, 416, n. 283 et 284; Bilabel 1920, 78–79 et n. 1; Hasluck 1910, 216–218 et 264, n. 8; cf. Sève 1979, 358, according to whom the ceremony or assembly of 5<sup>th</sup> *Taureon* is identified with the *Metroa* festivity, celebrated in honour of Cybele, see Aussie Lolling 1882, 158.

<sup>49</sup> Sève 1979, 359; Hasluck 1910, 216–217; Lolling 1882, 154.

<sup>50</sup> Hasluck 1910, 217; Lolling 1882, 154.

A series of inscribed votive reliefs discovered at Cyzicus, chronologically framed between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD depicts scenes of sacrifice to Cybele, related to the Metroa ritual practices. A relief carved on a votive *stela*, with a dedication, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC was dedicated to the Great Mother of Gods (*Theos Patroa*) by a certain Pytheas, son of Dionysios, on behalf of himself and his family, as it appears from the dedication engraved on the lower part of the *stela* (Fig. 7). The relief depicts a sacrificial scene. To the left of the scene is figured a procession composed of four worshippers, approaching the altar with hands raised in adoration. A boy at the front of the procession brings a sheep to be sacrificed on the altar. In the background, behind the altar, a tree, likely an oak, is rendered. On the right of the scene, Cybele is represented frontally, enthroned; the goddess is dressed in a long chiton, holding a tambourine (*tympanon*) in the left hand and a phial in the right. She wears a high *polos*<sup>51</sup> on her head (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Votive relief devoted to the Great Mother of Gods (Cyzicus, 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, *apud* Roller 1999, 205, fig. 54).

Another dedicatory Cyzician votive relief consisting of two registers, dated to 46 BC according to the content of the inscription engraved at the base of the monument, was devoted to Mother *Kotiane* (Μήτηρ Κοτιανή)<sup>52</sup>. Epithet *Kotiane* most likely derives from a Thracian origin settlement name<sup>53</sup>. In the upper register (from left to right) of the relief, likely depicting the Great Mother of Gods and her lions, survive only remnants of Cybele's throne, the goddess's feet and lion's paws (Fig. 8). The lower part of the relief, preserved intact, depicts a sacrificial scene; it represents the sacrifice of a ram (*criobolium*). A priestess, followed by a young musician playing a double flute and preceded by a slave carrying the victim (a ram) to the altar, nears an oak on which hang a pair of cymbals. In fact, the Great Mother of Gods's cult is linked to that of trees and plants; many altars are consecrated to the goddess at the base of sacred trees, pines, oaks or cypresses, which bear, like cult statues, the symbolic attributes of the deity<sup>54</sup>. To the right of the scene there is a small altar, behind which is a woman carrying a plate full of offerings on her head (Fig. 8). The inscription carved by the base of the monument records a certain Soterides, who is eunuch priest (*γάλλος*) of the Great Mother of Gods. The inscription text reads that this votive monument, which contains a relief and a dedication, had been devoted to the Great Mother of Gods by Soterides, because, following his prayers, the Phrygian goddess had rescued his friend Marcus Stlaccius from captivity, who had participated in Caesar's campaign against Pompey in Libya and had been taken prisoner<sup>55</sup>.



Fig. 8. Votive relief devoted to the Great Mother of Gods by Soterides (Cyzicus, 46 BC, *apud* Roller 1999, 333, fig. 76).

## 2.2. Celebration of Cybele at Dionysopolis

Our knowledge on the cult of Cybele at Dionysopolis (Fig. 2) was enriched by the discovery in 2007, in the ancient Milesian colony (today Baltchik, in Bulgaria), of an Ionian temple built in the third quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, fairly well preserved, functioning at least until the first quarter

<sup>51</sup> Van Straten 1993, 253; see and Roller 1999, 204 and 205, fig. 54.

<sup>52</sup> Roller 1999, 332 and 333, fig. 76; Van Straten, 1993, 255–256, fig. 17; CCCA I, 94, no. 287; Schwertheim 1978, 810–812, no. II, A3, pl. 192.23; Hasluck 1910, 218; 270, no. IV 3; Froehner 1865, 25–27, no. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Hasluck 1910, 218.

<sup>54</sup> Graillot 1912, 396.

<sup>55</sup> Schwertheim 1978, 810–812, no. II A 3 = *IGRR* IV, 135 = *Syll*<sup>3</sup> 763 = *CIG* II, 5668, rr. 2–9.



of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>56</sup>. The temple had belonged to the Great Mother of Gods worshiped as *Ποντία* (“Navy”), epiclesis associated for the first time with the goddess’s name, which confirms her function as protectress of the city and sailors<sup>57</sup>.

The epigraphic documents discovered in the temple of Cybele at Dionysopolis provide precious evidence on the celebration of the Phrygian goddess in the ancient Milesian colony, and concurrently, complete our information about the *Metroa* festivals celebrated in the Pontus Euxinus. A 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC inscription discovered in the ruins of the Hellenistic temple of Cybele at Dionysopolis attests the feast of *Μητρῶια* celebrated in honour of the Great Mother of Gods on 8 *Tauréōn*: “τὰ Μητρῶια ἅ ἄγει ὁ δῆμος μηνὸς Ταυρεῶνος ὀγδοίῃ”<sup>58</sup>; it can be inferred that *Metrōa* was a spring festival, celebrated in *Taureōn* (April)<sup>59</sup>, the first month of the calendar year in Miletus and its colonies. Thus, at Dionysopolis, the celebration of the Great Mother of Gods as a deity of nature and fertility seems to have been related to the spring equinox<sup>60</sup>.

Two more 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century AD inscriptions discovered at Dionysopolis dedicated to Cybele by her priestesses, mention a series of rituals reserved exclusively to women; according to the inscription texts, these were free women (*πολείτιδες, ὁ πάνδημος τῶν γυναικῶν*). Both epigraphic documents record the tasks of the Mother to the Gods’ priestesses, namely: pick flowers (*τὰ καλὰ ἄνθη*) for the goddess together with citizen women, perform sacrifices and processions (*θυσίαι καὶ πομπαί*) in honour of Cybele, organize lavish celebrations in honour of the goddess and distribute sweets to the members of the city council and the women’s community. One of the epigraphic texts specifies that the priestesses of Cybele performed their duties “according to the ancestral custom” (“*κατ(ὰ) τὸ πάτριον καὶ προγονικόν ἔθος*”), from where we can deduce the old age and wide popularity of the festivities celebrated in honour of the Great Mother of Gods, which were reserved especially for women. Also, the ritual of picking flowers, performed by the priestesses of Cybele together with the goddess’s devotees, could imply that the celebration to which it belonged occurred in early spring<sup>61</sup>; this would fully confirm that the *Metrōa* celebrated in honour of the Great Mother of Gods at Dionysopolis were spring festivals held by the beginning of the calendar year.

At Dionysopolis, festivities dedicated to Cybele had a long tradition, perpetuating from at least the Hellenistic period until the late imperial period. At least this results from two inscriptions dated to the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD; the two epigraphic documents contain the lists of the members of two cult associations that attended the cult of the Great Mother of Gods: the association of the *Neomeniastai* (*νεομηνιασταὶ Μητρὸς Θεῶν Πον[τία]ς*) and that of the so-called *Attises* or *Attiastai* (*Ἄττεις οἱ κἔΑττιαστὲ εἰ αιροδουλοὶ Μη[τρ]ὸς Θεᾶς Ποντίας*), the caretakers of the temple of the Great Mother of Gods from Dionysopolis. Both cult associations are made up exclusively of men and include a number of individuals responsible for organizing the festivities in honour of the Great Mother of Gods, as well as the related sacred banquets; among these stand out the banquet priest (*ἱερεὺς τῆς θύνης* i.e. *θοίνης*), the banquet chairman (*πατὴρ τῆς θύνης = θοίνης*) and a flutist (*αὐλητής*), who usually ensured the musical ambience during the festivities devoted to Cybele<sup>62</sup>.

Two reliefs discovered at Dionysopolis are of relevance for the discussion here. A marble relief incorporated in an *aedicula* discovered in the temple of Cybele at Dionysopolis, dating from the 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, depicts a sacrificial scene in honour of the Great Mother of Gods performed by a priestess of the goddess, named Zouke; the priestess’s name appears in the inscription carved on the lower part of the *aedicula*, on the basis of which the relief was dated. To the left of the scene is represented the enthroned goddess. She wears a long, high waist *chiton* and a *himation* that covers her *polos* and falls on both her shoulders. The goddess holds a *phiale* in the right hand and a tambourine in the left, and a lion cub appears to be lying in her lap. Central to the centre is depicted a sacrificial altar. To the right of the altar is figured the priestess of Cybele, bringing an animal to the altar, likely a ram, to be sacrificed in

<sup>56</sup> Stoyanova 2013, 27, 37, 45.

<sup>57</sup> Sharankov 2013, 52–54.

<sup>58</sup> Sharankov 2013, 50.

<sup>59</sup> For the attestation of the month of *Taureōn* in Dionysopolis see also *IGB*, V, 5011, r. 2–3: “... μηνὸς Ταυρεῶνος εἰκάδι δευ/τέρῃ...” (“... the twenty second day of the month of *Taureōn*”) (dating: before 19 BC).

<sup>60</sup> Sharankov 2013, 50.

<sup>61</sup> Sharankov 2013, 51.

<sup>62</sup> Sharankov 2013, 51, 55, 57.



Fig. 9. Marble *aedicula* with the depiction of the Pontic Great Mother of Gods and her priestess Zouke (Dionysopolis, 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, *apud* Mircheva 2013, 38, fig. 33).

honour of the Great Mother of Gods. The priestess is depicted standing before the goddess. Her right hand is stretched above the altar; she wears a long, high-waist *chiton* and her head is covered with a *himation*<sup>63</sup> (Fig. 9). The depiction of the ram in front of the altar may allude to the ritual of initiation into the mysteries of the Great Mother, whose central element was the sacrifice of a ram (*criobolium*).

A relief carved on the pediment of a marble votive *stela*, dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD depicts Attis as a shepherd leaning



Fig. 10. Representation of Attis on the pediment of a marble *stela* (Dionysopolis, 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, *apud* Sharankov 2013, 58, fig. 48).

on a staff, next to a pine tree and holding a *syrix* in the right hand. To the right of Attis there is a ram, and to the left a dog<sup>64</sup> (Fig. 10). The features of Attis's face and his attributes indicate that the favourite of the Great Mother of Gods was worshipped at Dionysopolis in his Asia Minor appearance<sup>65</sup>.

### 2.3. Celebration of Cybele at Tomis

At Tomis (Fig. 2), the cult of Cybele is well recorded starting with late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>66</sup>. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, Cybele and the Dioscuri were the protective divinities of Tomis, to whom sacrifices were made annually on behalf of the people: "... every year [they] bring offerings for the health of the people, to the Great Mother of Gods and the Dioscuri..."<sup>67</sup>. Equally, the association of Cybele with the Dioscuri is reflected by the Tomitan coins of the imperial period. At Tomis, the Dioscuri were worshiped as protector deities of the city, and their association with Cybele confirms the role of the Great Mother of Gods as a protector of the order, peace and welfare of the civic community<sup>68</sup>.

Imperial date epigraphic documents supply indirect evidence on the celebration of Cybele at Tomis. During the Principate, the Great Mother of Gods had an official cult served by priestesses and members of cult associations, as well as a fairly large number of believers. The priestesses of Cybele belonged to the elites of the city, as is the case of a certain Sossia Africana, the daughter of C. Iulius Africanus and wife of the Roman veteran Quietus, who had served as the agoranomos of the city. It is assumed that the family of Sossia Africana was of Roman origin and belonged to the aristocratic elite of Tomis. In her capacity of priestess of Cybele, Sossia Africana was distinguished by her generosity towards both city and sanctuary of the Great Mother of Gods; in appreciation, the Council and People's Assembly of Tomis erected her an inscribed statue<sup>69</sup>.

Around AD 199–201, the association of the dendrophori (*δενδροφόροι* – "bearers of the [sacred] tree"), under the patronage of Cybele, placed a dedication to emperor Septimius Severus, his family and the governor of Moesia inferior<sup>70</sup>. The name of the members of this association dedicated to the

<sup>63</sup> Mircheva 2013, 38.

<sup>64</sup> Mircheva 2013, 40, 57–58 and fig. 48.

<sup>65</sup> Mircheva 2013, 40 and n. 75.

<sup>66</sup> Chiekova 2008, 130; Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 90, no. 41.

<sup>67</sup> *ISM* II, 2 b = Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 90–91, no. 42, r. 36–38: "... καθ' ἑκά[σ]-/τον ἐνιαυτὸν θύουσιν ὑπὲρ τῆ[ς] τοῦ δήμου σωτηρία[ς] / Μητρι Θεῶν καὶ Διοσκόροις...".

<sup>68</sup> Chiekova 2019, 108.

<sup>69</sup> *ISM* II, 72 (38) = Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 92, no. 46 (date: the 2nd century AD); for the family of Sossia Africana, see also *ISM* 71 (37); Ruscu 2014, 143–144.

<sup>70</sup> *ISM* II, 83(49).



cult of the Great Mother of Gods derives from that of the ritual of carrying the sacred tree during a religious procession (*δενδροφορία*); this procession was held on March 22<sup>nd</sup> (the day of the spring equinox), on the occasion of the festivity in honour of Cybele and Attis. During the procession, the dendrophori carried the sacred tree that symbolized the death of Attis<sup>71</sup>, Cybele's acolyte. Attis was a deity of vegetation associated with the death and resurrection of nature<sup>72</sup>.

The Tomis inscription provides information about the internal organization of the dendrophori association, whose magistrates are mentioned in the order of the importance of their functions. In the first column, which contains only two male names, appear: a priest of the association (*ἱερεὺς Πωλλίων Πωλλίωνος*, I r. 15), the chairman of the dendrophori (*πατὴρ δενδροφόρων*, I r. 16), two *archidendrophoroi*, "the greatest of the dendrophori" (*ἀρχιδενδροφόροι* I r. 16–17). By the beginning of the second column, two women names appear: "mother of the dendrophoroi" (*μήτηρ δενδροφόρων*, II, r. 14) and "the great rod bearer" (*ἀρχιραβδουχῖσα*, II, r. 16–17), which G. Tocilescu and R. Cagnat identify, yet without arguments, with *princeps cannophorum*<sup>73</sup>. To the same *collegium dendrophorum* very likely also belonged C. Antonius Eutyches *archidendrophorus*, who makes a dedication to Attis, the paredros of the Phrygian goddess<sup>74</sup>.

Another inscription dated to late 2<sup>nd</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD found at Mihail Kogălniceanu, a settlement located on the territory of Tomis, records a Metroa cult association (*sacratus domus* or *δοῦμος*<sup>75</sup>) led by a man (*Aurelius Valeria [nu] s father dumi*) and a woman [*Fl (avia?) Nona mater dumi*] who, on behalf of the members of the association, dedicate an altar with a votive inscription to their tutelary deity: "--- of Augustus, Aurelius Valeria[nu]s, father of the college, and Flavia Nona, mother of the college have donated and dedicated [this monument] to the worshippers of the college, by the care of the standard bearer Dionysius"<sup>76</sup>.

Last but not least, a series of statuettes of Cybele with interchangeable heads, dated to the Hellenistic era, were discovered at Tomis, Callatis and Istros; these statuettes were made to be used during the holidays celebrated in honour of the Great Mother of Gods, however their production ceased in the Roman period<sup>77</sup>.

## 2.4. Celebration of Cybele at Istros

At Istros (Fig. 2), the cult of Cybele had been practiced since the Archaic period, as suggested by several terracotta statuettes of the Phrygian goddess discovered in the city by the shore of Sinoe lagoon, dating from late 6<sup>th</sup> century – early 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, and respectively early and late 5<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>78</sup>. In fact, the local production of these statuettes continued at Istros throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods<sup>79</sup>. According to M. Alexandrescu-Vianu, these *tronans* type statuettes of Cybele belong to the series of archaic statuettes from Asia Minor, the Ionian circle<sup>80</sup>. With the exception of these statuettes of the Phrygian goddess dating from the 6<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century BC, all other documents recording the cult of the Great Mother of Gods date from the Hellenistic period. Also, coins with the image of the goddess emerge only in the Roman period. A building discovered in "sector X" of the city, dated around 200 BC, has been identified as a possible sanctuary of Cybele<sup>81</sup>. In the sanctuary of Demeter at Nuntași, located

<sup>71</sup> Attis was a young shepherd from Phrygia, whose myth is linked to the eastern cult of Cybele. Attis was the son of Nana, one of the personifications of the Mother of the Gods in Phrygia, Ferrari 2003, 123 (s.u. *Attis*); for the attributes of the dendrophori, see Ferrari 2003, 279 (s.u. *Dendrofor*).

<sup>72</sup> Ferrari 2003, 123.

<sup>73</sup> Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 94.

<sup>74</sup> *ISM* II, 119 (4) = Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 92–93, no. 47 (dating: 2nd century AD); see also Ruscu 2014, 139.

<sup>75</sup> From R. Vulpe's perspective, the term *dumus* is the Latin transcription of the Greek *δοῦμος*, which means *college*, being synonymous with *thiasos*, see *ISM* II, p. 189; Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 149–150; cf. Pippidi 1967, 226–228 who believes that the tutelary deity of the cult association called *dumus*, in the inscription discovered at Mihail Kogălniceanu, was rather the Iranian goddess Anaitis.

<sup>76</sup> *ISM* II, 160 (45) = Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 78–80, no. 14: "--- Aug(usti) Aur(elius) Valeria-/ [nu]s pater dumi / et Fl (avia?) Nona ma-/ter dumi, sacratis dum(i) T / [cur(ante)?] Dionus(io?) vix(illario) / d(ederunt) d(edicaverunt)".

<sup>77</sup> Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 137, 150.

<sup>78</sup> Coja / Dupont 1979, 49, no. 58; Alexandrescu-Vianu 1990, 221; Alexandrescu-Vianu 1999, 41 and n. 127; Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 99–100, no. 58.

<sup>79</sup> Ruscu 2014, 142, n. 26 and 27 with bibliographical references.

<sup>80</sup> Alexandrescu-Vianu 1999, 41 et n. 127.

<sup>81</sup> Domăneanțu 2003–2005, 96–100.

in the *chora* of Istros (4<sup>th</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century BC), Cybele appears as *parhedros* of the main deity<sup>82</sup>. As mentioned above, the statuettes with interchangeable heads discovered at Istros, dated to the Hellenistic period, were likely carried during the procession, when the Great Mother of Gods<sup>83</sup> was celebrated.

Only during the imperial period, the official cult of Cybele is attested at Istros by the honorary decree in honour of Aba, daughter of Hekataios (second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD); this decree references the celebrations in honour of the Great Mother of Gods by Aba, daughter of Hekataios. During her investiture as priestess of goddess Cybele, Aba holds processions, religious sacrifices and feasts: "... and firstly, without delay, offering the gods the first processions, sacrifices and prayers, she celebrated the beginning of the year with feasts and rich meals..."<sup>84</sup>. There is no doubt that these ceremonies took place at Istros during the celebrations dedicated to the Great Mother of Gods, held with great emphasis by early spring (between March 15<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>), period of time that coincided with the beginning of the Histrian year<sup>85</sup>. In other words, the festivities dedicated to Cybele were celebrated at Istros in *Taureon* (April-May), the first month of the calendar year. An additional argument is the fact that Cybele was a chthonian deity closely related to agriculture, being celebrated at the beginning of spring<sup>86</sup>. The processions mentioned in the decree (τὰς πρώτας προσόδους) were the first, in chronological order, held at the beginning of the year<sup>87</sup>.

## 2.5. The celebration of Cybele at Olbia

The Histories of Herodotus are the only literary source that provides valuable information regarding the celebration of Cybele at Olbia (Fig. 2). The establishment of a holiday in honour of the Great Mother of Gods in the city by the banks of the Bug is linked to the name of Scythian Anacharsis. According to Herodotus, after attending a ritual vigil (*pannychis*) in Cybele's honour held at Cyzicus, Anacharsis promises the goddess that he would celebrate her upon his return to his homeland. After reaching Olbia, Anacharsis keeps his promise; he sets up a cult in honour of the Great Mother of Gods outside the city, in a wooded region called *Hylaia*, located on the left bank of the Borysthenes River (in the northwest of present-day Crimean peninsula), where, in fact, also lies the goddess's sanctuary<sup>88</sup>. Also, Scythian Anacharsis celebrates Cybele according to specific rituals: "When he arrived in Scythia, went deep into the so-called Hylaia, a Scythian land located near the "Achilles Path", forested entirely with trees of all kinds, thus entering the heartland of the forest, Anacharsis fulfilled the entire celebration ritual in honour of the goddess, holding a tambourine in his hand and small statues hanging [on his chest]"<sup>89</sup>. Anacharsis was killed by the Scythian king Santos, who, like all Scythians, disliked foreign religious traditions and ritual practices<sup>90</sup>. The episode reported by Herodotus could certainly contain some truth, if Anacharsis's journey to Cyzicus episode, which is markedly anecdotal<sup>91</sup>, is removed. Those who had introduced the cult of Cybele in Olbia would have been either merchants (*ἔμποροι*) from Cyzicus, who frequently traded at Olbia and who could have spread the statues (*ἀγάλματα*) that depicted the goddess, or citizens from the Pontic cities who travelled to Cyzicus<sup>92</sup>. Regardless, the cult of the Phrygian goddess was practiced at Olbia since the Archaic period, as indicated by a terracotta statuette of the Great Mother of Gods dated by late 6<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>93</sup>.

<sup>82</sup> Abraham 2001, 547.

<sup>83</sup> Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 150.

<sup>84</sup> *ISM*, I 57, rr. 22–24: "... πρώτον μὲν εὐθὺς τὰς πρώτας / προσόδους καὶ θυσίας καὶ εὐχὰς τοῖς θεοῖς ποιου/μένη τὴν τοῦ ἔτους ἀρχὴν μετ' εὐφροσύνης καὶ εὐ/ωχίας μεγαλοπρεποῦς ἐποιήσατο...".

<sup>85</sup> Celebrations in honour of Cybele were held in Rome and other Greek citadels, where the cult of the goddess spread, between March 15<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, see Ferrari 2003, 258–259 (s.u. *Cybele*).

<sup>86</sup> Popescu 1960, 283.

<sup>87</sup> Popescu 1960, 283.

<sup>88</sup> For the location of the Hylaia region and the location of the altars of the Great Mother of Gods, of the river god Borysthenes and Herakles, see *IGDOP* 24, r. 7–8, with comments by L. Dubois on pp. 60–61. In a dedication to Cybele, discovered at Olbia, the goddess is called "mistress of Hylaia", *IGDOP* 61; see also *IGDOP*, 129–131, no. 81 and 82.

<sup>89</sup> Herodotus, IV, 76, 14–16: "Ὡς δὲ ἀπίκετο ἐς τὴν Σκυθικὴν καταδὺς ἐς τὴν καλομένην Ὑλαίην (ἣ δ' ἔστι μὲν παρὰ τὸν Ἀχιλλήιον δρόμον, τυγχάνει δὲ πᾶσα εὐοῦσα δενδρέων παντοίων πλήη), ἐς ταύτην δὴ καταδὺς ὁ Ἀνάχαρις τὴν ὀρτὴν ἐπετέλεε πᾶσαν τῇ θεῷ, τύμπανον τε ἔχων καὶ ἐκδησάμενος ἀγάλματα".

<sup>90</sup> Herodotus, IV, 76, 15–20.

<sup>91</sup> Roller 1999, 128, 156, n. 39.

<sup>92</sup> Abraham 2014, 227.

<sup>93</sup> Vianu-Alexandrescu 1980, 264.

From Herodotus' account, one may infer that the statuettes hanging on Anacharsis' chest represented Cybele and her acolyte, Attis. Cybele was celebrated with a ritual dominated by percussion music and ecstatic dances, as Herodotus himself says. One of the percussion instruments used during the celebrations dedicated to the Mother of Gods was the tympanon (τύμπανον) or tambourine, originating from Phrygia. The instrument is held with one hand, usually the right, by one handle, at chest or head level<sup>94</sup>.

### 3. The *Metrôa* celebration dedicated to Cybele and Attis

Literary sources and epigraphic and archaeological documents allow us to infer the existence of a long tradition of Metroa celebrations (*Μητρῶα* or *Μητρῶια*) in the Milesian colonies, continued since the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC until the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. The name of the festival dedicated to Cybele (*Μητρῶα*), similarly to that of the worship place of the Phrygian goddess (τὸ *Μητρῶον* [*ἱερὸν*]), derive from the Greek name of the Great Mother of Gods, *Μήτηρ* (the equivalent of Phrygian *Matar*)<sup>95</sup>.

#### 3.1. The time when the *Metrôa* were celebrated

The *Μητρῶα* festival in honor of Cybele and Attis began every year on the eve of the vernal equinox. The *metrôa* coincided with the return of spring, as Attis, whose sacred drama the festival reproduced, embodied the dying and reviving vegetation. To the inhabitants of the Greek cities, whose main occupation was agriculture, spring was the sacred time of the year. With the coming of spring, the religious year opened, identified with the solar year. The celebrations in honour of the Great Mother of Gods and especially her acolyte would have commemorated both the end of a year and the beginning of a new year. At Dionysopolis, *Metrôa* was a spring festival held on 8 *Taureôn* (April–May), the first month of the calendar year. In fact, the ritual of picking flowers recorded by two inscriptions dedicated to Cybele discovered at Dionysopolis was closely related to *Metrôa*, suggesting that this celebration was very likely held at the beginning of spring<sup>96</sup>. Concurrently, evidence provided by the epigraphic documents discovered at Istros confirms that *Metrôa* was celebrated by the start of the calendar year, which coincided with the beginning of spring<sup>97</sup>. This is confirmed by the calendar of Philocalus, which establishes the Metroa celebrations in Rome between March 15<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>; moreover, these, celebrated in Rome according to the Phrygian tradition, were doubled by the *Megalesia* dedicated to Magna Mater, occurring between April 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> and reserved exclusively to Roman citizens.

#### 3.2. Ritual practices specific to the *Metrôa* celebration

The calendar called “of Philocalus”, concerning year AD 354, presents the complete and definitive scenario of the Metroa liturgical cycle. This calendar records the names and sequence of rituals related to the festivities of the Great Mother of Gods held with great emphasis in Rome between March 15<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, as follows: *Id. March.* (March 15<sup>th</sup>): *Canna entered* / *XI K. Apr.* (March 22<sup>nd</sup>): *Arbor intrat.* / *IX K. Apr.* (March 24<sup>th</sup>): *Sanguem.* / *VIII K. Apr.* (March 25<sup>th</sup>): *Hilaria.* / *VII K. Apr.* (March 27<sup>th</sup>): *Requ<i>etio.* / *VI K. Apr.* (March 27<sup>th</sup>): *Lavatio*<sup>98</sup>.

On March 15<sup>th</sup> (“reed admission day”), the “reed procession” (*cannophoria*) took place, commemorating the find by the Great Mother of Gods of child Attis exposed on the banks of river Gallos or Sangarios<sup>99</sup>. On this day, the college of the *cannophori* (“reed bearers”) performed the ritual of “reed entry” (*Canna intrat*), meant to ensure the fertility of fields. Originally, this reed ceremony was undoubtedly only one of the many magical rituals performed to evoke fruitful rain<sup>100</sup>. Another ritual performed on March 15<sup>th</sup> references Cybele's function as a deity of land fertility. According to John the Lydian, then “a six-year-old bull was sacrificed for the good of the farmed lands [or mountain pastures]

<sup>94</sup> Molina 2014, 51.

<sup>95</sup> Chantraine 1974, 698 (s.u. *Μήτηρ*).

<sup>96</sup> Sharankov 2013, 50–51.

<sup>97</sup> Popescu 1960, 283.

<sup>98</sup> *CIL* I, 2, p. 260; the *initium Caiani* ritual mentioned on March 28<sup>th</sup> does not seem to have been part of this Metroa ritual cycle, see Borgeaud 1996, 219, n. 5; Fishwick 1966, 193–194.

<sup>99</sup> Julian 1913, 165 B et 180 A; Saloustios, *De diis et mundo*, 1960, IV. River Gallos or Sangarios flowed past Pessinonte in Phrygia, where the main sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods was located, see Ferrari 2003, 258.

<sup>100</sup> Graillot 1912, 118.

under the direction of the *archiereus* and the can(n)ephors of the Mother<sup>101</sup>. The so-called *archiereus* is identified by many researchers with *archigallus*, the high priest of the cult of the Great Mother of Gods, who sacrifices a bull for the fertility of crops or highland pastures with the participation of the college of cannophori<sup>102</sup>. The procession of the reed (*cannophoria*) or of the cannophors is a ritual set up only during the reign of Antoninus Pius, without being previously recorded<sup>103</sup>. This procession links the birth and infancy of Attis to the spring festivals' cycle.

As for the cannophori, they are attested in Italy only by a limited number of inscriptions<sup>104</sup>. Their existence was assumed in Tomis by G. Tocilescu and R. Cagnat; the two scholars identify *ἀρχιραβδουχῖσα* ('greatest of rod-bearers')<sup>105</sup>, part of the Tomis dendrophori association, with *princeps cannophorum*, without yet providing arguments in support of their hypothesis<sup>106</sup>.

The processions mentioned in the decree of Aba, daughter of Hekataios (τὰς πρώτας προσόδους) from Istros, first among the ceremonies in chronological order held at the beginning of the year<sup>107</sup> must have been related to the main moments of the Metroa festivities celebrated between March 15<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, when Cybele and her acolyte, Attis, were publicly honoured by the Histrian community. The Metroa celebrations from Istros likely commenced on March 15<sup>th</sup> with the procession of the cannophori to the temple of the Great Mother and continued during the following days with the procession of the sacred tree (March 22<sup>nd</sup>), and ended on March 27<sup>th</sup> with the cleansing ritual of the goddess's cult statue (*lavatio*)<sup>108</sup>. In fact, a series of statuettes of the Great Mother of Gods with interchangeable heads, dated to the Hellenistic period discovered at Tomis and Istros were very likely used as cult statues during the Metroa celebrations, being carried in processions celebrating Cybele and Attis; these statues confirm that Metroa festivities were held in Tomis and Istros even since the Hellenistic period<sup>109</sup>.

On March 22<sup>nd</sup> (the day of the vernal equinox), after seven days of chastity and abstinence, occurred the procession of the tree or more precisely, pine tree (*δενδροφορία*) commemorating the death of Attis under a pine tree. On the occasion, the members of the brotherhood of *dendrophori* performed the ritual of "tree entering" (*Arbor intrat*): the dendrophori (the tree-bearers) carried the sacred tree – a pine trunk – in the procession, which they deposited in a tomb located inside the temple of Cybele. This pine trunk symbolized the emasculation and death of Attis, who, according to myth, had sacrificed his virility and perished under a pine tree. From his blood spread on the ground rose violets, which surrounded the tree with a flowery girdle. Cybele had woven them into a wreath on the young man's body. Afterwards, the goddess carried Attis' body into her cave, where she unleashed her inconsolable grief. It was also said that, after having buried Attis, the Great Mother of Gods embellished the pine tree under which he had perished with violets, flowers of split blood, only to later carry it into her cave and forever dedicate it to her cult<sup>110</sup>. According to another version of the myth, Attis himself had metamorphosed into a pine tree<sup>111</sup>, and the pine procession represents the funeral procession of Attis, the tree spirit. The pine is identical with the god; in it resides "a divine power, present and majestic"<sup>112</sup>.

<sup>101</sup> John Lydus., *De mensibus*, IV, 49: "Ἱεράτευον δὲ καὶ ταῦρον ἐξέτη ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσιν ἀγρῶν, ἠγουμένου τοῦ ἀρχιερέως καὶ τῶν κανηφόρων τῆς Μητρός".

<sup>102</sup> Mekacher 2005, 98; Borgeaud 1996, 219; Sanders 1972, coll. 1012; Graillot 1912, 118 and n. 4; 230.

<sup>103</sup> Such a dating of the "reed procession" is dependent on the hypothesis that the *taurobolium* ceremony would have emerged under Antoninus Pius, namely towards 160 AD; at the same time, such dating is based on the idea that Attis, the pair (*parhedros*) of the Mother of Gods, started to be adored as god towards mid 2nd century AD. New finds and research yet evidence these two innovations could both date from Claudius's reign, in this regard see Van Haepelen 2011, 470, 473; Borgeaud 1996, 133; Fishwick 1966, 200–202.

<sup>104</sup> Regarding the cannophori recorded especially at Ostia, Hordone, Locri and Milan, see Fishwick 1966, 195–196, 198, n. 19.

<sup>105</sup> *ISM* II, 83(49), col. II, r. 16–17.

<sup>106</sup> Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 94.

<sup>107</sup> *ISM*, I 57, rr. 22–24.

<sup>108</sup> Popescu 1960, 283; see also Popescu 1954, 461–462.

<sup>109</sup> Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 137, 150.

<sup>110</sup> Arnobius 1871, V, 7 and XIV, 16, 17.

<sup>111</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* X, 103–105: "... et succincta comas hirsutaque vertice pinus, / grata deum matri; siquidem Cybeleius Attis / exuit hac hominem truncoque induruit illo".

<sup>112</sup> Arnobius 1871, V, 17: "Cur ad ultimum pinus ipsa paulo ante in dumis inertissimum nutans lignum mox ut aliquod *praesens atque augustissimum numen* deum matris constituatur in sedibus?".



The dendrophori cut the pine tree from a forest devoted to the Great Mother of Gods, keeping some of its branches<sup>113</sup>. The tree trunk, symbolizing Attis, was wrapped in wool stripes and decorated with violet garlands<sup>114</sup>. The god's attributes, the staff, syrinx, tambourine, cymbals and the double flute were hung from the pine branches. Midway the tree was attached the image of Attis<sup>115</sup>. According to John the Lydian, the dendrophoria had been established by emperor Claudius, most likely when he had formalized the March holidays in honour of the Great Mother of Gods<sup>116</sup>. Two inscriptions from Dionysopolis dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD record among the duties of Cybele priestesses that of gathering flowers for the goddess, which may allude to the tradition of embellishing the pine trunk with flowers, symbolizing Attis, which the dendrophori carried in procession on March 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Also, still emperor Claudius had set up the college of the dendrophori; this is proven by the fact that the dendrophori in Rome celebrated the “birthday” (*natalis*) of their college on August 1<sup>st</sup>, not coincidentally, the emperor's birthday<sup>117</sup>. Colleges of dendrophori are well recorded by epigraphic documents in the Roman empire, almost exclusively in towns with the status of *colonia* or *municipium*, where, generally, traces of the *Magna Mater* cult have been identified. Exceptions concern, among other cities, Tomis and Nicopolis ad Istrum in Moesia inferior<sup>118</sup>. At Tomis is recorded a college of dendrophori, very likely in charge of performing the “tree entry” ritual (*Arbor intrat*) of March 22<sup>nd</sup>, related to the cycle of March holidays in honour of the Great Mother of Gods and her paredros, Attis<sup>119</sup>. The establishment of the association of dendrophori from Tomis is likely related to the reorganization of the cult of Cybele by emperor Claudius.

The significance of the two rituals performed on March 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> (“the entry of the reed” and “the entry of the tree”) would be the following: in winter time, the living forces of nature, the spirit of vegetation were concentrated in reed and especially in pine; in them the principle of life was to be sought in order to be spread by means of sacrifice and thus kindle the fecundity of the earth. It was noted that the performance of the two rituals was entrusted to the associations of cannophori and dendrophori, state recognized, and not to the galli. The two processions, of the reed and of the tree, do not, however, seem to have had an equivalent in earlier manifestations of the cult of the Great Mother of Gods; they were created during the empire. Hence, these could be “Roman creations according to Phrygian fashion”<sup>120</sup>.

On March 24<sup>th</sup>, the funeral of Attis was celebrated. This day, also called the blood day (*Sanguis*) evokes the pain caused by the emasculation of Attis and his demise. The blood day is the mourning culmination of Attis. On this day, blood sacrifices constitute the key element of worship actions<sup>121</sup>. Concurrently, the blood day is marked by the castration ritual of the priests of the Great Mother of Gods (*galli*)<sup>122</sup> or their self-flagellation<sup>123</sup>. In an infernal noise of whistles, cymbals and tambourines, the priests performed frantic dances, scourged themselves and slashed their arms with knives, while the novices fulfilled the supreme sacrifice of manhood<sup>124</sup>. The practice of self-castration, which seems

<sup>113</sup> Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionum*, XXVII, 1: “In sacris Frygiis, quae Matris Deum dicunt, per annos singulos arbor pinea caeditur et in media arbore simulacrum iuvenis subligatur”.

<sup>114</sup> Arnobius V, 17: “Quid enim sibi vult illa pinus, quam semper statutis diebus in deum matris intromittitis sanctuario? nonne illius similitudo est arboris, sub qua sibi furens manus et infelix adolescentulus intulit et quam genetrix divum in solatium sui vulneris consecravit? quid lanarum vellera, quibus arboribus conligatis et circumvoluitis stipitem? (...) quid compta violaceis coronis et redimiti arboris ramuli?”.

<sup>115</sup> Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionum*, XXVII, 1.

<sup>116</sup> Joannes Lydus, *De mensibus*, IV, 59 (41).

<sup>117</sup> Van Haepelen 2012, 48.

<sup>118</sup> Van Haepelen 2012, 49.

<sup>119</sup> *ISM* II, 83(49) (AD 199–201).

<sup>120</sup> Van Haepelen 2019, 49.

<sup>121</sup> Graillot 1912, 126–127.

<sup>122</sup> On the castration of the *galli* during the day of the blood (*dies sanguinis*) see Julian 1913, 8 (5), 9 (168c/169); Ovid, *Amores*, 2, 13, 17–18; Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautiques* 8, 239–242; Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, I, 13; Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, X, 1059–1076; Augustinus, *De civitate Dei*, II, 7, 6, 7, 4; Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionum*, III, 1; Servius, *Commentaire sur l'Enéide* IX, 115.

<sup>123</sup> On the self-flagellation of the *galli* see Seneca, *Agamemnon*, 689; Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, I, 13; Prudentius, *Peristephanon* X, 1059–1076; Arnobius, *Adversus nationes*, 5, 17, 1; Seneca, *Epistulae*, 108, 7; *Vita beata*, 13, 3.

<sup>124</sup> Graillot 1912, 126–129.

to have been limited to this “day of blood” was continued throughout the imperial period<sup>125</sup>; this practice is perceived by some late authors, mostly Christians, as a kind of consecration of the *galli* to the Great Mother of Gods<sup>126</sup>.

After these blood rituals were completed, the last act of Attis’s funerals took place, the burial. The pine – Attis was lowered into the tomb of the temple, where it remained until the following year<sup>127</sup>. At nightfall began the great ritual vigil of Attis (*pannychis*), whose painful death was mourned by the women gathered around the deceased god<sup>128</sup>. The same all-night vigil is very likely reported by Herodotus as one of the main rituals of the Cyzicus Metroa festival of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC; “the father of history” evokes the conversion, during a *pannychis*, of Scythian Anarchasis, who will become, at the cost of his life, a missionary of Cybele in his homeland<sup>129</sup>.

On March 25<sup>th</sup>, *Hilaria* celebrating the resurrection of Attis and rebirth of nature was held. *Hilaria* was the celebration of the sun and spring<sup>130</sup>. Originally, it was not included in Cybele’s festive cycle, being introduced in the Roman calendar most likely in the 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>131</sup>.

A festive day of rest (*Requietio*) divide the *Hilariae* from the celebration of the Bath (*Lavatio*) of the Great Mother of Gods, whose central cultic act was the ritual bath of the goddess’s cult statue. Integrated in the public calendar very likely under Claudius, the *lavatio* ritual ends the Phrygian holidays in March, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of this month<sup>132</sup>. Likely of Oriental origin, *lavatio* is recorded both at Pessinonte and Ankyra (Asia Minor) and at Rome, consisting in immersing the cult statue of Cybele, either in a river, as at Pessinonte or in a spring pool or pond, as at Ankyra<sup>133</sup>; in Rome, the goddess’s statue was bathed in river Almo, a tributary of the Tiber<sup>134</sup>. In the capital of the empire, this ritual (*lavatio*) replaces the foreign ritual of bathing the cult statue with a Roman ceremony celebrating the miraculous arrival of the Great Mother of Gods on the banks of river Almo<sup>135</sup>.

The ritual of the sacred bath was purifying, symbolizing the cleansing of the Great Mother of Gods – responsible at the same time for the spilt blood and the death of her mutilated young lover – from any dirt “in order to restore balance to her divine action disturbed by mourning”<sup>136</sup>. At the same time, the ritual bath of Cybele’s statue was interpreted as an agrarian ritual meant to conjure rain<sup>137</sup>.

The 1<sup>st</sup> century BC Cyzician decree honouring Kleidike, priestess of the Great Mother of Gods in Plakiane hints to the ritual bathing of the goddess’s cult statue; at Cyzicus, this ritual occurred on the seashore, implied by epithet *θαλάσσιαι* (‘marine’) ascribed to the servants of the Great Mother of Gods, who, together with her priestesses were in charge of performing the ritual bath of her cult statue<sup>138</sup>. Apparently, the bathing (*lavatio*) of the sacred statue was associated with clothing rituals to renew the goddess’s garments and ornaments; at least this may be inferred from the text of the same Cyzician decree in honour of Kleidike, the priestess of Plakiane Great Mother of Gods, which mentions a sort of college of Plakiane Mother servants, likely charged with the manufacture of ritual garments and ornaments for the cult statue of the Phrygian goddess (*αἱ συντελοῦσαι τοὺς κόσμους παρὰ τῆ Μητρὶ τῆ Πλακιανῆ*)<sup>139</sup>. An additional argument in this regard is that term *κόσμος* is frequently used to designate the ornaments and garments worn by the statue of the deity or kept in

<sup>125</sup> Sanders 1972, coll. 1003–1005.

<sup>126</sup> Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, X, 1076; Aurelius Victor, *Caes.*, 23, 2; Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, VII, 26; see also Sanders 1972, col. 1005.

<sup>127</sup> This ceremony was called *katabasis*, which can only mean descent into the grave see Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1, 21,10.

<sup>128</sup> Diodorus Siculus III, 59, 7.

<sup>129</sup> Herodotus, IV, 76.

<sup>130</sup> Graillot 1912, 131–134.

<sup>131</sup> Borgeaud 1996, 134.

<sup>132</sup> Van Haepere 2011, 480.

<sup>133</sup> Graillot 1912, 137.

<sup>134</sup> This ritual was already known to Ovid (*Fastes*, IV, 183–185) and practiced even since the Augustan era. Ammianus Marcellinus (XXIII, 3, 7) presents it as an ancient ritual, which might mean that it existed until the introduction of the cult of the Great Mother of Gods in Rome.

<sup>135</sup> Ovid, *Fastes*, 337–346; Belayche 2000, 572; see also Borgeaud 1996, 98–99; Graillot 1912, 137.

<sup>136</sup> Borgeaud 1996, 132.

<sup>137</sup> Graillot 1912, 136.

<sup>138</sup> *RIG* 537, rr. 2–10; see also Graillot 1912, 137.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* l. 10–11; see Aussie Sève 1979, 359; Hasluck 1910, 216–217; Lolling 1882, 154.

its sanctuary<sup>140</sup>. Just as water would regenerate the statue of the goddess by washing off its dirt, the replacement of her sacred garments would renew her in both appearance and power<sup>141</sup>.

### 3.3. Sacrifices dedicated to the Great Mother of Gods

Blood sacrifices are central to cult actions completed during the festivities related to the funerals of Attis on March 24<sup>th</sup>. The blood feast or day evoked the pain caused by the emasculation of Attis and his demise. Each of Cybele's worshipers offered her their own blood by self-flagellation. This bloody ceremony occurred in the sacred precinct, around the altars and divine tree, in the presence of the grieving Great Mother. It was presided by the *archigall*, who self-flagellates first, devoting his blood as an "offering" to the goddess. More precisely, the priest was the chosen victim who took upon himself the collective redemption; his sacrifice was expiatory, purifying all present believers from impurities and expiating their sins<sup>142</sup>.

Human blood offerings were often only the prelude to an even more pleasing sacrifice to Cybele and Attis, namely the self-castration of the novices, who sacrificed their virility on the altar of Attis. After the voluntary self-castration that signified the supreme degree of Phrygian purification, achieving the perfect communion between man and deity, the neophytes became priests of Cybele<sup>143</sup>.

Apart from these blood offerings, the sacrifice of a ram (*criobolium*) or a bull (*taurobolium*) represented the central element of an initiation ritual into the mysteries of the Great Mother of Gods; more precisely, the term *criobolium* designates a sacrifice similar to *taurobolium*, but the victim is in this case a ram. The lower register of a Cyzician votive relief dated to 46 BC depicts the sacrifice of a ram (*criobolium*), the favourite sacrifice of Attis. In fact, the ram sacrifice was especially addressed to Cybele's favourite (Fig. 7). A relief from Dionysopolis depicts the sacrifice of a ram as well: the priestess of Cybele is depicted bringing an animal to the altar, probably a ram to be sacrificed in honour of the Great Mother of Gods.

Most scholars believe that the *taurobolium* ritual had been established under Antoninus Pius. In fact, the first documentary attestation of this ritual is from AD 160<sup>144</sup>. Françoise van Haepere maintains, based on numerous recent finds, that *taurobolium* had been set up during the reign of Claudius, thus formalizing the Phrygian festivals of the Great Mother of Gods<sup>145</sup>. Regardless, once these were established at Rome (during the rule of Claudius or Antoninus Pius) until late 4<sup>th</sup> century, all *taurobolia* and *criobolia* records belong to the cult of the Great Mother of Gods and Attis<sup>146</sup>. The *taurobolium* would diffuse from Italy and especially Rome and Ostia to Western Europe (Gallia, Spain, Germany) as well as to North Africa and Eastern Europe (Dalmatia, Athens)<sup>147</sup>.

*Taurobolium* was an initiation ritual into the mysteries of Cybele, consisting in the sacrifice of a bull placed on a grate over a pit into which the novice entered; splattered by the blood of the sacrificed animal, he identified himself with the deity<sup>148</sup>. This practice, the sacrifice of a bull whose testicles were offered to the deity, has been interpreted as a substitution ritual for the castration reserved to the *galli*; the ritual was accessible to ordinary believers, allowing them to be initiated into the mysteries of the Great Mother of Gods and avoid castration<sup>149</sup>.

However, epigraphic documents attest that *taurobolia* were performed especially for the emperor's health (*pro salutis imperatoris*) and the empire's prosperity<sup>150</sup>; remaining linked to the emperor's health, the *taurobolium* would have been increasingly assimilated, in the late period, to a ritual of personal initiation, equalling a mystical resurrection<sup>151</sup>. *Taurobolia* of public character are mentioned in a series of inscriptions, which begin with a dedication to the health of the emperor, his family and

<sup>140</sup> Kauffmann-Samaras, Szabados 2005, 428.

<sup>141</sup> Kauffmann-Samaras, Szabados 2005, 430.

<sup>142</sup> Graillot 1912, 127–128.

<sup>143</sup> Graillot 1912, 128–129.

<sup>144</sup> *CIL* XIII, 1751 (Lyon).

<sup>145</sup> Van Haepere 2011, 470.

<sup>146</sup> Duthoy 1969, 5–57.

<sup>147</sup> Borgeaud 1996, 158; Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 151.

<sup>148</sup> Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 1006–1050; Commons 1929, 106.

<sup>149</sup> Borgeaud 1996, 164–165; Graillot 1912, 156.

<sup>150</sup> Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 151.

<sup>151</sup> Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 58; see Sfameni Gasparro 2006, 202.

house, as well as the senate, and end with the proclamation of a *taurobolium* or *criobolium* that had been completed. This dedication type appears in an inscription from Tomis dated to AD 199–201; it is a dedication of the dendrophori association from Tomis, dedicated to emperor Septimius Severus, his family and the governor of Moesia inferior, Ovinius Tertullus, in gratitude for the gift made to the association under Cybele's patronage<sup>152</sup>; unfortunately, the final text of the inscription, which likely contained the proclamation of the sacrifice of a bull (*taurobolium*) did not survive. A votive monument with a dedication honouring emperors Septimius Severus and Caracalla was discovered at Odessos; the dedication to the two emperors, as well as the fragmentarily preserved relief on the votive monument, which depicts a lion with its paw resting on a ram's head, are suggestive of a possible *criobolium* in honour of Septimius Severus and Caracalla<sup>153</sup>. A similar relief is preserved on the pediment of the marble *stela* discovered at Istros, which contains the decree in honour of the high priestess of Cybele, Aba, daughter of Hekataios. The relief depicts Cybele enthroned flanked by two lions; the lion to the right rests its paw on a bull's head, suggesting a *taurobolium* completed during Aba's investiture as priestess of the Great Mother of Gods<sup>154</sup>.

Religious ceremonies dedicated to Cybele likely ended with a sacred banquet. Among the members of the cult associations of the Great Mother of Gods at Dionysopolis, dated to the first half of the 3rd century, count the priest and the banquet chairman (*ιερεὺς τῆς θοίνης* and *πατὴρ τῆς θοίνης*), which suggests that ceremonies occasioned by the celebration of the Great Mother of Gods also included lavish meals attended by the goddess's devotees<sup>155</sup>.

### 3.4. Music in the Metroa cult

Music and ecstatic dance played a fundamental role in the celebrations and processions occasioned by the celebration of the Great Mother of Gods. It is therefore not at all surprising to find musicians attached to the cult of this goddess, be it flautists (men, it seems), instrumentalists on tambourines and cymbals or even *hymnologists* who composed the verses of sacred hymns<sup>156</sup>. Ritual actions and Metroa hymns were accompanied by instrumental music. Three musical instruments were used in the Metroa cult: the double flute, cymbals and the tambourine.

The Phrygian flute (*αὐλός* or *tibia phrygia*) used for a long time in the Greek world under the name *ἔλυμος*, peaks during the early empire due to the development of the cult of Cybele. The *aulos* was not at all suitable to other uses than religious. It was reserved for the cults of Dionysus, Rhea and Cybele<sup>157</sup>. The Phrygian flute is a double-reed blowing instrument consisting of two different pipes. One of its pipes is rectilinear and of constant section; the other (basically the left pipe) comprises two sections: first straight and cylindrical, ending in a bent part in the shape of a conical pavilion made of a cattle horn, whose acoustic consequence was downplaying the harshness of the timbre; the curved pipe was held with the left hand<sup>158</sup> (Fig. 11).

The internal diameter of the pipes of the Phrygian flute was much smaller than in other flutes, which sounded more serious, even hoarse and gloomy<sup>159</sup>. For this reason, its blast was suitable for mourning scenes, while the bloody mutilations of March 24<sup>th</sup> occurred on the tunes of the same Phrygian *aulos*<sup>160</sup>. The sound of the Phrygian flute could be heard, without exception, in all ceremonies of the cult of Cybele, be it processions or sacrifices. The most important ritual of public worship, the sacrifice, traditionally started with the

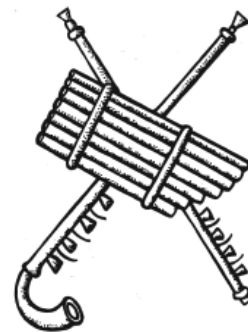


Fig. 11. *Syrinx* and the Phrygian flute, Rome, AD 295, *apud* Bélis 1986, 23, fig. 1.

<sup>152</sup> ISM II, 83(49), rr. 1–12.

<sup>153</sup> Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 81–82, no. 19; 151.

<sup>154</sup> Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 104, 151.

<sup>155</sup> Sharankov 2013, 51, 55, 57.

<sup>156</sup> Graillot 1912, 254–255.

<sup>157</sup> Bélis 1986, 21, 30, 36.

<sup>158</sup> Bélis 1986, 22; Vendries 2005, 401; Vendries 2001, 204, fig. 5.

<sup>159</sup> Bélis 1986, 27, 30.

<sup>160</sup> Graillot 1912, 256–257.



sound the flute. The role of flutist, directly linked to the priest, was always held by a man. Besides, the flautist was the single specialized musician, given that flute playing required specific apprenticeship and proficient music knowledge<sup>161</sup>.

A young musician playing a double flute is figured on the lower register of a relief from Cyzicus (Fig. 8). Through members the two Metroa cult associations attested at Dionysopolis in the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD is mentioned a flutist (*αύλητής*) too; a certain Aurelius Hermes (*Αύρ. Ἐρμῆς αὐλητής*), who likely ensured the musical ambience during the processions held during the celebrations dedicated to the Great Mother of Gods<sup>162</sup>. In fact, the name of flautist Aurelius Hermes appears third on the lists of members of the two cult associations<sup>163</sup>, which underlines that his presence was indispensable during the performance of the rituals related to the Metroa celebrations of Dionysopolis.

The cymbal and tambourine belong to the class of percussion instruments. Brass cymbals were deemed Phrygian invention; they were, it was said, “under the tutelage” of the Great Mother of Gods<sup>164</sup>. This ancient musical instrument consisted of two brass plates that were struck against each other, producing a loud and vibrant sound. In religious iconography, cymbals are an attribute of Attis and the Corybantes<sup>165</sup>. A pair of cymbals hangs from the branches of an oak tree figured on a Metroa relief from Cyzicus (Fig. 8). The Greeks were aware of the ritual use of the cymbal before the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. It was believed that cymbal clinking warded off evil spirits; therefore, these were ascribed a purification and sanctification attribute. In Roman times, the cymbal retained its liturgical role. It was played during Metroa sacrifices. The cymbals resounded throughout the mourning over the course of the feasts of the Great Mother of Gods in March.

The hand drum (*τύμπανον*) also called tambourine, like the cymbal, belongs to the category of musical percussion instruments. This instrument is always the attribute of the Great Mother of the Gods<sup>166</sup>. In fact, according to Varro – quoted by Saint Augustine – who reviews the attributes of the Great Mother, the tambourine symbolizes the earth disc<sup>167</sup>. Like the cymbals, the tympanum most likely originated from Phrygia<sup>168</sup>; this instrument consists of a small wooden ring on which a “membrane of dried animal skin” is stretched<sup>169</sup>. The tambourine had to have two membranes, each set on either parts of the instrument. According to contemporary classifications, this instrument may be included among drums with frameworks, because iconographic works describe an instrument depth that was lower or equal with the membrane radius<sup>170</sup>. The tambourine is held with one hand, the right in general, by a handle “at chest or head level”<sup>171</sup>.

Tambourine use by Greeks and later the Romans, is linked to fertility rituals dedicated to Cybele<sup>172</sup>. Its common use in rituals dedicated to the Great Mother of Gods throughout the Greco-Roman period is reflected in religious iconography, where the Phrygian goddess is depicted in most cases holding a tambourine<sup>173</sup>. (Fig. 4, 5, 6)

The field of percussion instruments was one of the rare specialties in which women could stand out and in which they could assert themselves. The predominance of women in this field can be explained by the “rather little enhancing” role of these instruments. Indeed, cymbals and the tambourine did not require a true apprenticeship and specific musical skills, unlike the flute, the most

<sup>161</sup> Vendries 2001, 210; see Aussie Vendries 2005, 415; Graillet 1912, 257.

<sup>162</sup> Sharankov 2013, 55, 57.

<sup>163</sup> Sharankov 2013, 57; flautist Aurelius Hermes appears both on the list of members of the *Neomeniastai* association (*Αύρ. Ἐρμῆς αὐλητής*), as well as on that of the members of the association of *Attiaistai* (*Ἐρμῆς εἰαιρόδ[ου]λος Μητρος θεᾶς Ποντία[ς] αὐλητής*).

<sup>164</sup> See Graillet 1912, 257, with bibliographical references from n. 4.

<sup>165</sup> Graillet 1912, 257.

<sup>166</sup> *Hymns Orphici* XIII, 3 et XXVI, 11: The mother of gods is goddess *τυμπανόδουπος* (“around whom drums sound”) or *τυμπανοτερπής* (“who loves the sound of drum”); Catullus, *Attis*, 9: “Tympanum tuum, Cybele, tua, mater, initia”; Virgil, *Aeneis*, IX, 619: “tympana... Matris Idaeae”; Martianus Capella II, 170: “tympana Cybeleia”.

<sup>167</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, VII, 24; see also, Isid., *Etymologiae*, VIII, 11, 61 (387).

<sup>168</sup> Graillet 1912, 258–259.

<sup>169</sup> Molina 2014, 51; regarding the making of tambourines see Vendries 2001, 204–205 et n. 29; Graillet 1912, 259.

<sup>170</sup> Molina 2014, 51.

<sup>171</sup> Molina 2014, 51.

<sup>172</sup> Molina 2014, 57.

<sup>173</sup> Simon 1997, 759–760, fig. 95–98.

important instrument in the religious field, which required specific apprenticeship and advanced music knowledge<sup>174</sup>.

The seven-pipe syrinx or “Pan’s flute” (Fig. 11) is another musical instrument that appears only on a relief from Dionysopolis dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD; Attis is represented on the relief in question *holding a syrinx in his right hand* (Fig. 10). However, this instrument, which is par excellence the attribute of Attis, appears only to evoke the presence of the Great Mother of Gods’s acolyte, introduced in the Metroa cult once with the reign of Claudius. The ritual use of the syrinx in Metroa ceremonies is actually uncertain. The syrinx, as attribute of Attis, evokes both the use of reeds (ubiquitous in Attis’s myth) and the emasculation episode; moreover, it was established that this blowing instrument has close ties, from Antiquity to the present day, with the castration theme<sup>175</sup>.

The Latin writers (Lucretius, Catullus, Ovid or Seneca) provide brief literary descriptions on the music that all these instruments, together, could produce. Such descriptions emphasize the tumultuous aspect and noise this music made. More precisely, the flute, cymbals and tambourines produce a loud and ecstatic music in rhythm with the advance of the Great Mother of Gods’s procession, whose goal would be pursuit of ecstasy and trance due to musical excitement.

Lucretius evokes the procession held during the holidays in honour of the Phrygian goddess. The ecstatic and bloody procession of the *galli* crossed the great Greek cities, escorting the chariot of Cybele to the sounds of a bizarre music highlighted by the inflections of the Phrygian flute: “swollen tambourines rumble under the beat of the palms, concave cymbals rustle around the statue (of the deity), trumpets spread the menace of their harsh song and the Phrygian rhythm of the flute throws delirium into the hearts”<sup>176</sup>. Despite the frenzy unleashed among the crowds, the music identifies with the ritual it accompanies and gives it a solemn character<sup>177</sup>. Hymns sung to this musical background likely evoked the myth of Cybele and Attis in terms of suffering, sexuality, pain, castration and blood; these hymns are the expression of the fervour animating the attendees, associated with a frantic musical rhythm to the crowd, yet austere and solemn for the cult actors.

In book IV of his *Histories*, Herodotus accounts that Scythian Anacharsis had celebrated Cybele at Olbia in a ritual setting dominated by the sound of tambourines: “(...) Anacharsis kept all the order of the celebration in honour of the goddess, holding a tambourine in his hand and small statues hanging [on his chest]<sup>178</sup>. In fact, Herodotus reports for the first time the ritual use of the tambourine. A series of statues originating from Apollonia Pontica, Odessos, Dionysopolis, Tomis and Istros render the Great Mother of Gods holding a tympanum in the left hand<sup>179</sup>.

#### 4. The cult staff and worshippers of the Great Mother of Gods

The festive cycle devoted to the Great Mother of the Gods from the Milesian colonies required a considerable cultic staff, as the epigraphic documents analysed above show. The inscriptions provide a series of brief information on the priests of the Great Mother of Gods, as well as the various cultic colleges and associations intimately linked with the cult of the Phrygian goddess; their members have well-defined duties that they exercise during various rituals related to the festivities in honour of Cybele. Also, since music played a key role in the celebrations of the Great Mother of Gods, it is not at all surprising that musicians were linked to the cult of this goddess.

<sup>174</sup> Vendries 2005, 415; Vendries 2001, 210; Sales 2007, 58.

<sup>175</sup> Vendries 2001, 206 and n. 36 and 37 with comments and bibliographic references.

<sup>176</sup> Lucretius, II, 618–620: “...tympana tenta tonant palmis et cymbala circum concaua, raucisonoque minantur cornua cantu, et phrygio stimulat numero caua tibia mentis”.

<sup>177</sup> Péché 2011, 313.

<sup>178</sup> Herodotus, IV, 76, 14–16: “(...) ἐς ταύτην δὴ καταδύς ὁ Ἀνάχαρσις τὴν ὀρθὴν ἐπέτελεε πᾶσαν τῇ θεῷ, τύμπανον τε ἔχων καὶ ἐκδησάμενος ἀγάλματα”.

<sup>179</sup> Chiekova 2008, 138, no. 2 (Istros, 4<sup>th</sup> century BC), no. 3 (Istros, second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC); 139, no. 9 (Istros), no. 10 (Istros, 1<sup>st</sup> century BC or imperial era), no. 11 (Istros, 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century AD); 139–140, no. 12 (Hellenistic or imperial era); 140, no. 17a (Istros, 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC); 141, no. 18a (Istros, 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC); 141–142, no. 20, (Tomis, Hellenistic era); 142, no. 21, (Tomis, Hellenistic era), no. 22 (Tomis, Hellenistic era); 142, no. 24, (Tomis, 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD); 143, no. 30 (Odessos, Hellenistic era); 144, no. 32 and 33 (Odessos); 145, no. 36 (Apollonia, last quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC); 147, no. 52 (Dionysopolis, Roman date); a series of statuettes and reliefs discovered in the ruins of the Hellenistic temple of Cybele at Dionysopolis depict the Great Mother of Gods holding a tympanum in her left hand, see Mircheva 2013, 34, fig. 29; 37, fig. 32; 38, fig. 33 and 34.

Phrygian priests responsible for the cult of the Great Mother were known as *Γάλλοι* or *Galli*. According to the classical authors, the so-called *Galli* derive their name from a sacred river in Phrygia, the *Gallos*, flowing by Pessinonte, where an aniconic representation of Cybele was worshipped. Mythological tradition establishes a close connection between the *Galli* and the cult of Attis, the paretros of the Great Mother of Gods. According to tradition, orgiastic practices occurred on the banks of river Gallos, and neophytes emasculated themselves, imitating Attis, Cybele's lover<sup>180</sup>. This type of practices accompanied by frantic dancing and self-flagellation was the essential element of the cult actions performed on the day of blood (*dies sanguinis*). These orgiastic practices culminated in the ritual castration of the fanatic neophytes that sealed their entry, as priests (*galli*), into the service of the Great Mother of Gods.

Literary sources and especially epigraphic documents supply some information about the Metroa clergy of Cyzicus. In this sense, the oldest record is due to Herodotus, who mentions the holy statues of Cybele and her acolyte Attis hanging around the necks of the Great Mother of Gods' priests. However, he seems to ignore the *Galli* and ritual castration<sup>181</sup>. Yet, from a Greek native of Asia Minor and such a curious traveller, this silence is astonishing.

An inscribed votive relief from Cyzicus dedicated to the Great Mother of Gods and dated to 46 BC attests to a certain Soterides, who is eunuch priest (*gallus*) of the Phrygian goddess. From the inscription text we learn that Soterides consecrated a votive relief to Cybele as a sign of gratitude, since, following his prayers, the Great Mother had rescued from captivity his friend Marcus Stlaccius who had sailed to Libya as a member of the contingent sent by Cyzicus to aid Caesar in his war against rival Pompey, and who had been taken prisoner: "(...) (I) Soterides, priest (*gallos*) of Mother *Kotiane*, begged the Queen Mother for my friend Marcus Stlaccius, son of Marcus, who, (...), had taken part, in a four-decked ship, in the Libyan campaign, together with the auxiliary army sent to emperor Gaius Julius Caesar, son of Gaius; [I prayed] that he would be saved, as he had been taken prisoner in Libya and from there, taken into captivity<sup>182</sup>. Concurrently, the inscription lets us understand that priest Soterides practiced the art of divination which involved direct relationship with the deity and the revelation of reality through dreams; the goddess conveys to Soterides in a dream that his friend Marcus, who had been a prisoner, had escaped safe and sound: "And when the goddess appeared to me in a dream and told me that indeed Marcus had been taken prisoner, but that he had already saved himself, pacifying his enemies timely, I raised this *stela* in honour of the Great Mother as proof of my gratitude"<sup>183</sup>.

Among the members of two cult associations from Dionysopolis of the first half of the 3rd century AD, responsible for organizing the feasts in honour of the Great Mother of Gods and related banquets, two priests stand out; a certain Pythokles, the son of Attas, who is priest of the banquet (*ιερεὺς τῆς θοίνης*)<sup>184</sup> and Marcus Aurelius Koures, son of Hestiaios, priest of the Pontic Great Mother of Gods bearing the title of *ιερεὺς Μητρὸς Θεᾶς Ποντίας*<sup>185</sup>.

In the Milesian colonies, the priesthood of the Great Mother of Gods is equally ensured by free women. At Cyzicus, a group of priestesses (*ιέρειαι*) serve the cult of Meter Plakiane<sup>186</sup>. At Dionysopolis, the cult of the Great Mother is served by priestesses, as can be seen from two inscriptions of the 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD record their tasks, namely: pick flowers for the goddess together with citizen women,

<sup>180</sup> Graillot 1912, 289–290.

<sup>181</sup> Herodotus, IV, 76; cf. Dionysios of Halicarnassus (1960), II, 19, 3–5: "However, a Phrygian priest and a Phrygian priestess ensure her cult. They, according to tradition, cross the whole city in procession, following the goddess, carrying images [of gods: Cybele and Attis] on their chests and shaking their tambourines, while those who accompany them play the Great Mothers' sacred songs on flute".

<sup>182</sup> *CIG* II, 5668 = *Syll<sup>3</sup>* 763 = *IGRR* IV, 135, rr. 2–9: "(...) Σωτηρίδης Γάλλος εὐξάμενος Μητρὶ Κοτ[ιανῆ] / [ὕ]περ τοῦ ἰδίου συμβίου Μάρκου Στακκίου Μάρ[κου] υ[ιοῦ] τοῦ στρατευσαμένου ἐν τῇ ἔξαποστ[αλείσῃ] / [συ]νμαχία εἰς Λιβύην, (...), / τῷ αὐτοκράτορι Γαῖῳ [Ιουλίῳ Γαῖ]-/ου υἱεῖ Καίσαρι, ἐν νηὶ τετρήσει, σωθ[ῆ]ναι ὄν ἀίχμα-/[λ]ωτισθέντα ἐκ Λιβύης καὶ ἀπαχθέν[τα εἰς δουλεί]-/αν (...);"; see also Roller 1999, 332–333; Straten 1993, 255–256 and fig. 17; Schwertheim 1978, 810–812; Froehner 1865, 25–26, no. 10.

<sup>183</sup> *IGC* II, 5668, rr. 9–13: "(...) καὶ τῆς θεᾶς εἰπάσης μοι κατ' [ὄναρ ἐπιφανείσης], / [ὄ]τι ἤχημαλώτισται Μάρκος, ἀλ[λ'] ὅτι ἤδη σέσωσται τοῦς] / [πολεμίους καθ]ηδύνων ἐπικα[ρίως, Μητρὶ Μεγάλῃ τῆν] / [στήλην εὐχαριστῶν ἀνέθηκα]"; see Graillot 1912, 307–308.

<sup>184</sup> Sharankov 2013, 55.

<sup>185</sup> Sharankov 2013, 57.

<sup>186</sup> Michel, *RIG* 537, l. 4; Hasluck 1910, 217; Graillot 1912, 399; Lolling 1882, 154; Sève 1979, 358.

perform sacrifices and processions in honour of Cybele, organize lavish feasts in honour of the goddess and distribute sweets to the members of the city council and the women's community. One of the epigraphic texts specifies that Cybele's priestesses performed their duties, "according to the ancestral custom"<sup>187</sup>. One of Cybele's priestesses named Zouke figures in a sacrificial scene; Zouke is depicted bringing an animal to the altar, likely a ram, for sacrifice to the Phrygian goddess<sup>188</sup> (Fig. 9). At Istros, a wealthy woman, Aba, daughter of Hekataios assumes the priesthood of Cybele. In this capacity, Aba proves her zeal and magnanimity towards the deity by holding processions, sacrifices and banquets during the Metroa celebrations by the beginning of spring<sup>189</sup>. At Tomis, the priesthood of the Great Mother of Gods was taken over sometime in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD by Sossia Africana, the daughter of Caius Iulius Africanus, who, thanks to her wealth, surpassed the achievements of the priestesses before her; among other things, Sossia adorned the shrine or cult statue of the goddess with an *ex voto* in gold: "To the Good Fortune! The council and people of metropolis Tomis, for Sossia Africana, the wife of Quietus, who was a priestess of the Great Mother of Gods [and] as a [true] daughter of C. Iulius Africanus surpassed her predecessors [in priesthood] and completed the goddess's ornaments with golden offerings – as sign of appreciation"<sup>190</sup>. In appreciation, the Council and People's Assembly of Tomis dedicated an inscribed statue to Sossia Africana.

The priestesses' role seems to be much more important in the mysteries of the Phrygian goddess, namely in the initiation of neophytes, than in public worship. In principle, the latter led preparatory exercises for the initiation of neophytes; they likely also preside over some initiation ceremonies themselves. Also, the priestesses perform the most secret and intimate services of the cult, preparing the sacred seat for the "enthronement" ceremony of the mystics, the last initiation phase or setting up the funeral bed of Attis, after death, and hierogamic, after resurrection<sup>191</sup>.

It may be noted that all priestesses of the Great Mother of Gods mentioned in the inscriptions analyzed above are free women. The public authorities of the Greek cities granted these wealthy women the priesthood of the Great Mother of Gods in the hope they would become the benefactors of the Phrygian goddess and her sanctuary.

Apart from priests and priestesses, the cult staff of the Great Mother of Gods includes several categories of servants grouped in a sort of colleges. Thus, the so-called *αἱ συντελοῦσαι τοὺς κόσμους παρὰ τῆ Μητρὶ τῆ Πλακιανῆ* seem to have formed a college of servants in the service of Mother Plakiane of Cyzicus, responsible for making ritual garments and ornaments for the goddess's cult statue, as well as decorating it. Given that dressing and decorating the cult statue of the Great Mother is a ritual specific to the Metroa cult, the existence of this college is indispensable<sup>192</sup>. Another college at Cyzicus in the service of the Great Mother of Gods consisted of the so-called *ιεροποιοὶ θαλάσσιαι*, women most likely charged with the ritual cleansing of the cult statue of Mother Plakiane.

Among the servants of the Phrygian goddess from Dionysopolis there is a certain Pietralis, son of Silanos, who serves as the bearer of the sacred image of the Great Mother of Gods (*theophoros*) during the processions and presides the banquet held during the celebrations dedicated to the goddess.

At Tomis, the college of dendrophori is attested, whose function was to carry the sacred tree that embodied Attis in the procession, when the Metroa festival was celebrated by early spring.

Musicians, especially the flutist (*αὐλητής*), instrumentalists and tambourine and cymbal players were attached to the cult of the Great Mother of Gods. Herodotus reports for the first time in Cyzicus the ritual use of the tambourine<sup>193</sup>. A flutist (*auletes*) figures among the members of two religious associations from Dionysopolis<sup>194</sup>.

<sup>187</sup> Sharankov 2013, 51.

<sup>188</sup> Sharankov 2013, 30, 36, 38, fig. 33; 50 and n. 106.

<sup>189</sup> *ISM I*, 57, l. 22–24.

<sup>190</sup> *ISM II* 72(38): Ἀγαθῆι τύχηι / Ἡ βουλή καὶ ὁ δῆμος / τῆς μητροπόλεως / Τόμεως Σοσσίαν Ἀ-/φρικανὰν γυναῖκα / Κυήτου ἱερασαμέ-/νιν Μητρὶ Θεῶν / θυγατέρα Γ(αῖου) Ἰουλίου Ἀ-/φρικανοῦ ὑπερβα-/λομένην τὰς πρὸ ἐ-/αυτῆς καὶ ἐπικοσμή-/σασαν τὴν θεὸν ἀνα-/θήμασιν χρυσέοις / τεμῆς χάριν.

<sup>191</sup> Graillot 1912, 252–253.

<sup>192</sup> At Delos, the so-called *κοσμοῦσαι* are women in the service of Hera. At Ephesus, among the servants of Artemis are women – *κοσμήτριαι*. In Isiac cults, the so-called *hierostoles* and *stolistai* (*στολισται*) are charged not only to watch over the sacred attire, but even to adorn the deity, see Kauffmann-Samaras, Szabados 2005, 429.

<sup>193</sup> Hdt. IV, 76.

<sup>194</sup> Sharankov 2013, 55, 57.



The musical instruments used in the Metroa cult (the double flute, cymbals and the tambourine) figure in iconographic representations (statues, bas-reliefs) discovered in several Milesian colonies. A young musician playing a double-flute is rendered on a bas-relief from Cyzicus, depicting a sacrificial scene<sup>195</sup>. On the same bas-relief is represented an oak tree of which hangs a pair of cymbals<sup>196</sup> (Fig. 8). A series of statuettes and reliefs discovered at Apollonia Pontica, Odessos, Dionysopolis and Istros portray the Great Mother of Gods holding a tympanum in the left hand (Fig. 4, 5, 6).

Given that Cybele was a female deity, women made up the vast majority of the goddess's worshippers. At Cyzicus, Dionysopolis, Tomis and Istros, the cult staff of the Great Mother of the Gods was recruited, with a few exceptions, among free women. Two 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD inscriptions from Dionysopolis mention a number of rituals reserved exclusively to free women.

The role of women presiding cultic associations dedicated to female deities is well known almost everywhere in the Greek world. For instance, an inscription from Tomis attests, along with a *πατήρ*, a *μήτηρ δενδροφόρων* named Nanas, at the head of the association of “bearers of the sacred tree” of Attis<sup>197</sup>. It may be noted that Nanas is a woman's name of Asian origin spread especially in Phrygia, Cilicia and Isauria<sup>198</sup>; this name is theophoric and not accidental since, according to mythological tradition, Nana, whose son was Attis, was a personification of the Great Mother of Gods<sup>199</sup> in Phrygia. Another inscription found at Mihail Kogălniceanu, a settlement located within the territory of Tomis, records a Metroa cult association (*sacratus domus* or *δοῦμος*) led by a man (*Aurelius Valeria[nu]s pater dum(i)*) and a woman [*Fl(avia?) Nona mater dum(i)*] who, on behalf of the members of the association, dedicate an altar with a votive inscription to the tutelary deity: “– of Augustus, Aurelius Valeria[nu]s, father of the college, and Flavia Nona, mother of the college donated and dedicated [this monument] to the worshippers of the college, by the care of the standard bearer Dionysius”<sup>200</sup>.

## Conclusions

Literary sources, epigraphic documents and iconographic representations satisfactorily document the festive cycle dedicated to the Great Mother of Gods in the Milesian colonies of Propontis and Pontus Euxinus. The Metroa (*Metroa*) festivities in honour of Cybele and Attis have a long tradition in the Milesian colonies, perpetuating since the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC until the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Cybele's festive cycle, spreading in the Milesian colonies once with the cult of the Great Mother of Gods, retains its Phrygian features. In the Milesian colonies, *Metroa* was a spring festivity that celebrated the Phrygian goddess as the deity of field fertility and fruitful nature. The Great Mother of Gods was celebrated, as in Phrygia, by early spring (in March or April).

The analysed documents record the dynamics of Cybele's festive cycle throughout the Greco-Roman period and, respectively, the changes suffered by different ritual practices. Literary sources and epigraphic documents supply brief information on the various ritual practices specific to the *Metroa* celebration, namely the ritual vigil (*pannychis*) and the ritual bath of the goddess's cult statue (*lavatio*). These very old rituals are attested in Cyzicus in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC and, respectively, by late Hellenistic era; they would perpetuate until the Roman period, being attested in Istros in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. The inscriptions and iconographic documents from Dionysopolis, Tomis and Istros, of Roman date, allude to the procession of the *cannophori* (March 15<sup>th</sup>) and of the sacred tree (March 22<sup>nd</sup>); these two processions do not seem to have had an equivalent in previous manifestations of the Great Mother of Gods' cult, being established in Roman times. However, the Great Mother of Gods was honoured in the Roman period in the Milesian colonies according to Greek traditions. At least, this results from the set up after Greek model of the *dendrophori* association in Tomis, dated by early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

If in Greek times, the worship and celebration of Cybele was primarily of private nature, during

<sup>195</sup> Froehner 1883, 26.

<sup>196</sup> Froehner 1883, 26.

<sup>197</sup> *ISM II*, 83(49) = Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 93–95, no. 48, col. II, r. 13–14: Νάνας Θεάδωνος μήτηρ δενδροφόρων; Ruscu 2014, 139. Chiekova 2008, 132–133.

<sup>198</sup> Ruscu 139 et n. 5.

<sup>199</sup> Ferrari 2003, 123 (su. *Attis*).

<sup>200</sup> *ISM II*, 160(45): «--- Aug(usti) Aur(elius) Valeria-/ [nu]s pater dum(i) / et Fl(avia?) Nona ma/-ter dum(i), sacratis dum(i) T / [cur(ante?)] Dionus(io?) vix(illario) / d(ederunt) d(edicaverunt) ».

the imperial period, these were practiced as part of public processions. The festive cycle dedicated to the Great Mother of Gods required considerable cultic staff. Unlike the Latin West, where the cult staff was generally limited to elements indispensable to the cult, in the Greek world, it remained numerous. Since Cybele was a female deity, women made up the vast majority of the goddess's worshippers. In Cyzicus, Dionysopolis, Tomis and Istros, the cult staff of the Great Mother of Gods was, with few exceptions, recruited from among free women.

**Remus Mihai Feraru**

West University, Timisoara

Timișoara, RO

remusferaru@yahoo.fr

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# Abbreviations

AB	Analele Banatului, I-IV 1928–1931; S.N. I 1981-, The Museum of Banat/The National Museum of Banat, Timișoara.
ACTA	Yearbook of the Székely Museum in Csík and the Székely National Museum, Miercurea Ciuc – Sepsiszentgyörgy.
ActaArchHung	Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, Budapest.
AÉ	Archaeologiai Értesítő, Budapest.
Acta Historica	Acta Universitatis Szegediensis (Szeged).
ArchHung	Archaeologia Hungarica.
ArhMed	Arheologia Medievală.
AM	Mitteilungen des Kaiserlich Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung (Athenische Mitteilungen), Athen, (1876-).
AMM	Acta Moldaviae Meridionalis (Vaslui).
AMN	Acta Musei Napocensis, The National History Museum of Transylvania, Cluj – Napoca.
AMP	Acta Musei Porolisensis, County History and Art Museum of Zalău.
ArhMold	Arheologia Moldovei, Iași.
BCH	Bulletin de Correspondence Hellénique, Paris, 1 (1877-).
BerRGK	Berichte der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission. Roman-Germanic Commission. Frankfurt am Main.
EphNap	Ephemeris Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca.
CCA	Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România, Ministry of Culture.
CCCA I	M. J. Vermaseren, Corpus cultus Cybelae Attidisque (CCCA), I. Asia Minor, Leiden, New York, København, Köln, 1987.
CIG	Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum, I-IV, (ed. A. Boeckh), Berlin, 1828–1877.
CIL	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, consilio et auctoritate Academiae litterarum regiae Borussicae editum. (1863-).
Dacia	Dacia. Recherches et découvertes archéologiques en Roumanie, S.V. I-XII; N.S. Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne, I. 1957 și urm., Vasile Pârvan Institute of Archaeology, Bucharest.
DAGR	Dictionnaire des Antiquités grecques et romaines, I-X, sous la direction de Ch. Daremberg et E. Saglio, Paris, 1877–1929.
DolgSzeged	Dolgozatok a Szegedi Josef Tudományegyetem Archaeologiai Interzetbol (I, 1925...XIX, 1943).
IGB V	Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae, (ed. Georgi Mihailov), vol. V: Supplementum, addenda et corrigenda. Sofia, 1997.
IGDOP	Inscriptions grecques dialectales d'Olbia du Pont, (ed. L. Dubois), Genève, 1996.
IGRR IV	Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes, IV (ed. G. Lafaye), Paris, 1927.
ISM I, II	Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris – Inscrupțiile din Scythia Minor, I: Histria și împrejurimile (ed. D. M. Pippidi), Bucharest, 1983; II: Tomis și teritoriul său, (ed. Iorgu Stoian), Bucharest, 1987.
LIMC	Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, I–VIII + index vol., (eds. J. Ch. Balty, E. Berger, J. Boardman, Ph. Bruneau, F. Canciani, L. Kahil, V. Lambrinoudakis, E. Simon), Zürich, München, Düsseldorf, 1981–1999.
LSJ	Liddell H. G., Scott R., Jones H. S., A Greek-English Lexicon, with a revised supplement. Oxford, 1996.
MAA	Monumenta Avarorum Archaeologica.
OM	<i>Orbis Mediaevalis</i> .
PBF	Prähistorische Bronzefunde, München.

RA	Revue Archéologique, Paris (1844-).
RAC	Rivista di archeologia cristiana, Rome (1924-).
RevBistr	Revista Bistriței, Bistrița-Năsăud Museum Complex, Bistrița.
RH	Revue historique, Paris, (1876-).
RIG	Recueil d'inscriptions grecques, par Ch. Michel, Bruxelles, 1900.
Sargetia	Sargetia. Acta Musei Devensis, Deva.
SCIV(A)	Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche, tom 1–25, Bucharest, 1950–1974; începând din 1974 (tom 25): Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie, Bucharest.
SCN	Studii și Cercetări de Numismatică, Bucharest.
SEG	Supplementum epigraphicum graecum, Lugdunum Batavorum, Leiden, 1923–1971; Alphen aan den Rijn 1979–1980; Amsterdam, 1979–2005; Boston, 2006-.
StCl	Studii Clasice, Bucharest.
Syll <sup>3</sup>	Sylloge inscriptionum Graecarum, (3rd edition), (ed. W. Dittenberger), 1915–1924.
Terra Sebus	Terra Sebus, Sebeș.
ThesCRA	Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum, I–V + index vol., (eds. J. Ch. Balty, J. Boardman, Ph. Bruneau, R. G. A. Buxton, G. Camporeale, F. Canciani, F. Graf, T. Hölscher, V. Lambrinoudakis, E. Simon), Basel, Los Angeles, (2004–2006).
UPA	Universitätsforschungen zur Prähistorischen Archäologie, Institut für Ur-und Frühgeschichte der Universität Kiel.
ZSA	Ziridava. Studia Archaeologica, Arad Museum, Cluj-Napoca.