

**THE GALLAE: TRANSGENDER PRIESTS  
OF ANCIENT GREECE, ROME, AND THE NEAR EAST**

**BY**

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## Introduction

The *gallae* were a group of priests in the cult of Kybele who first appear in classical literature in the late third and early second century BCE. They have attracted the attention of classical scholars by virtue of their unconventional dress, speech, and behavior that was labeled "feminine" by their contemporaries, despite the fact that the *gallae* were born with male genitals. Greek and Roman sources report that the *gallae* ritually transformed their bodies by entering an ecstatic state and severing their own genitals (either the gonads alone, or the genitalia in totality) with a knife, sword, or other sharp object. It is also reported that they wore women's clothing, danced in a "feminine" manner, dressed their hair like women, spoke in a female vocal register, perfumed themselves, and generally behaved in ways associated by their contemporaries with women, and not with men. The *gallae* were marginalized in Greek society and to an even greater degree in the society of Rome because of their gender-variant behavior. Their ecstatic practices were associated with the "barbarian" East, although there is no evidence for the ecstatic practices originating in Phrygia, the original homeland of the goddess Kybele.

There has been an understandable reluctance on the part of many scholars to associate the gender variant behavior of the *gallae* with gender variant identity. Because gender and identity vary so much across cultures, attempts to view the *gallae* through the lens of modern theories about gender

identity have been viewed with suspicion, for fear they may represent an ethnocentric attempt to project gender constructs that are thought to be specific to certain modern cultures, such as transsexuality, upon the societies of the past.

While I acknowledge that it is dangerous to uncritically map psychological models of gender identity from one culture onto another, I also believe that there is something cross-cultural about gender variance. People of many modern cultures, separated from one another geographically, have ways of dealing with people who were gender variant in one way or another. The *hijra* of India are the classic example. The *hijra* have many parallels with the *gallae*. They too serve a powerful goddess, one with many parallels with the goddess Kybele. They are born with bodies usually associated with a male social role (although some are born intersexed, with ambiguous genitalia), but their role as *hijra* more closely resembles that of women in India. They are, however, a special class of women. Their difference gives them both certain powers and certain stigmas. They are associated with prostitution as well as with blessing marriages and newborn babies. Like the *gallae*, many of them have their bodies ritually transformed by castration, although in the case of the *hijra* it is usually a more senior *hijra* who does this for or to the newcomer (Nanda 1998). Other groups of gender variant or gender transformed individuals include the *muxe* of the Yucatan, the various groups of people who are sometimes referred to collectively as "two-spirit" people in different indigenous tribes of North America, the *kurgarru* of ancient Babylonia, and

transsexual people in many parts of the world (primarily industrialized nations). In part because of the widespread occurrence of these and similar phenomena, and in part because of the seemingly innate and unalterable quality of gender identity (Colapinto 2001), gender variance appears to be cross-cultural. In addition, some biologists have offered evidence that there are neurological roots to cross-gender identification (Zhou, J.-N et al. 1997), although their findings are not conclusive due to the low sample size and other methodological concerns.

I have chosen, therefore, to accept as the basis of my model the notion that there is something cross-cultural about gender-variant identification which is common to all these groups, including both modern transsexuals and the ancient *gallae*. I call this cross-gender or gender variant identity that of being "transgender," using a convenient term already current in gender theory. This word was originally coined to refer to people living full-time in a gender role and identity other than that which they were assigned at birth who did not choose to, or were not able to, alter their bodies in order to fit their gender identity. Since then, however, this word has come to be used in parts of the transgender community as a general term for anyone whose gender identity and expression is different than that of their assigned gender, and it is in this sense that I use the term here. I do not use the word "transsexual," although the *gallae* did alter their bodies by the surgical means available to them at the time, because it is terminology invented and controlled by the psychological community. The discipline of psychology is culturally bounded. Their definition of the term

"transsexual" arises out of specific cultural assumptions unique to the culture which gave rise to the field of psychology, and perhaps even to the culture of psychology itself, and is of limited utility in cross-cultural studies. The term transgender, however, at least as I use it here, refers to a general kind of experience which appears to me to be cross-cultural, and which is interpreted in different ways by different cultures. Within a certain cultural worldview, transgender people may be seen as victims of a madness sent by the gods, while within another their difference is seen as the product of anomalous but non-pathological differences in brain structure. Others may construct their differences as a blessing by the divine in order to allow them to be more successful mediators between worlds, and others yet may view them as abominations. The experience of cross-gender or other-gender identification is the commonality, while the meaning of the difference is subject to interpretation.

I view the *gallae*, not as men filling a transgender role, but as transgender people whose role in society has been shaped to fit their nature. I view this process as the result of negotiation between the individual and society, a negotiation which varies in power balance across temporal and cultural axes. In this model, I assume that there is something which is cross-cultural about certain people experiencing a gender identity which is different from that of most other people in their culture who share similar sex characteristics, but that the meaning of this variation is constructed between the individual and their society. How much power the individual has in this negotiation varies greatly depending on the circumstances.

The use of this model in understanding the *gallae* constitutes an experiment of sorts. I believe this model can better help us understand why the *gallae* behaved as they did, as well as why the rest of their society reacted to them with the combination of awe and scorn which colors much of Greek and Roman writings about them.

Some present-day transsexual women have begun to identify with the *gallae* and see their own experience reflected in that of these ancient people. They have done research of their own and are presenting a view of the *gallae* that is different from, but not incompatible with, that put forward by classicists. Greco-Roman historians control the scholarly dialogue on this subject without taking into account the opinions of marginalized groups whose unique perspectives may offer much insight into this otherwise obscure subject. As a student of anthropology I have great concern for multivocality and making sure the voices of marginalized groups are represented. This thesis is, therefore, also an experiment which aims to see in what ways the insights of transsexual and transgender people can be integrated with the scholarly opinion, and how this changes our understanding of the *gallae*.

I choose to use the term *gallae* for the subject of my study rather than the more commonly-accepted masculine forms *galloi* in the Greek and *galli* in Latin. I do this because, viewed from within the model I propose, the feminine form is the only appropriate choice. I propose to view the *gallae* as sharing a common experience with transsexual women. It is incorrect to refer to a transsexual woman by male pronouns or terms of address, because the role she takes in

society is a female one. It would be intellectually dishonest of me to assert that the *gallae* share commonalities with transsexual women and then to apply a different standard of description for them. The term *gallae*, though rarely used, is not unknown in ancient literature, and is not a modern neologism. Finally, I claim membership in the transgender community as well as that of academia. This is the way I balance my responsibility to behave as an academic, which requires that I be explicit about my biases, and to avoid behavior which would seem disloyal to my other community. If I were to claim membership in the transgender community and simultaneously use terminology which is seen as oppressive in that community in order to present myself as an "unbiased" academic, I would be guilty of duplicity. Such behavior would harm my relationship with both communities.

Some further discussion of terminology may be useful here. The word "transsexual" as used here refers to people in the modern world who undergo or seek to undergo surgical or hormonal procedures to alter their sex characteristics because of a persistent feeling of identification as a person of a different gender than that their genitalia would suggest at birth. "Transsexual woman" is a transsexual person who identifies and lives as a woman despite having been born with genitalia usually associated with a male identity.

"Transgender behavior" refers to any kind of gender crossing activity.

"Transgender person" as used here refers to any person whose gender identity does not match the gender they were assigned on the basis of their genitalia at birth. "Gender variance" is the status of not fitting comfortably within the gender



categories most widely accepted in one's own society, either inwardly or outwardly. Gender variance is understood to be separate from sexual orientation or sexual practices, although sexual practice may be seen in some societies as a kind of gender variance. Sexual orientation, simply put, has to do with to whom one is sexually attracted, while gender identity has to do with who one feels oneself to be.

Female pronouns are used for transgender or transsexual people who identify themselves as women, and male pronouns for transgender or transsexual people who identify themselves as men. Use of this terminology, with the exception of pronoun usage, is not intended to follow or set a cross-disciplinary standard.

I will begin by surveying the textual and material evidence from ancient Greece, Rome, and the Near East as it pertains to the *gallae* and the cult of the goddess variously known as Matar, Meter, Kybele, and Cybele, among other titles and names. Then I will explore theoretical concerns in greater depth, including a discussion of how the model I propose changes my view of the available evidence. Finally, I will close with a discussion of the model's strengths and weaknesses as well as its implications for future study.

## **The History of the Goddess and her *Gallae***

In this chapter I aim to survey the evidence pertaining to the Phrygian goddess whom the *gallae* served. I will do this roughly chronologically for the material evidence. I believe the textual material, however, is better presented with a more thematic structure. I consider the material in a fairly neutral manner at first, in order to give the reader the most thorough background possible before I begin my analysis. I give only such analysis and commentary as I feel is helpful in understanding the material and its context. In Chapter 2 I will consider how this material fits and how it challenges the model I propose.

### **Phrygian Origins**

In tracking the change over time in the different strains of worship of the Meter Kybele complex, it is helpful to begin with a survey of the Near Eastern goddesses who seem to have contributed to her later Greek and Roman incarnations. First of these is the Phrygian Matar, also called Matar Kubileya. She herself was influenced by Phrygia's Hittite, Neo-Hittite, and Urartian neighbors and predecessors. The sacred mountain from which Matar Kubileya takes her common epithet (*kubileya*: of the mountain) is a very prevalent Hittite motif, as is the bird of prey which is the Phrygian goddess' chief animal companion, and the emphasis on sacred springs, particularly underground ones, as sites of worship (Roller 1999: 42-44). The Phrygians took certain

details of the goddess' costume from the Neo-Hittite goddess Kybele, along with her very rare association with lions or composite creatures with leonine attributes (1999: 44-53). The Urartians, an eastern Anatolian civilization which was closely related to the Hittites and the Hurrians, also seem to have placed great emphasis on the sacredness of mountains. Some details of Urartian monuments are also replicated in the sculptural representation of the Phrygian goddess, such as the use of freestanding stelae in front of niches carved in rock, and the use of images of the goddess in tombs and funerary monuments (1999: 53-61). The Phrygians had close political relationships with the Neo-Hittites and the Urartians, and other influences on cult practices not attested in material culture are likely.

The Phrygian goddess is not the only one to have influenced the Greek cult of Kybele. First, a strong tradition of a Mother Goddess existed already in Greece, before Matar Kubileya became naturalized. Noel Robertson (1996: 239-304) associates the evidence of Meter Theion with a native Greek tradition dating back into prehistory. His conclusion, that Meter Kybele did not come from Phrygia but instead arose entirely from this native Greek tradition, is unproven, but he correctly points out that the native traditions of the Meter Theion were an identifiable influence on the goddess worshipped in Greece in Classical and Hellenistic times. Another goddess who influenced the Greek conception of Meter Kybele is Agdistis/Angdistis, whose worship is attested in Phrygia, particularly at Pessinus, and in other parts of the Mediterranean.

The material culture relating to Matar in Phrygia is datable at least back

to the late eighth or early seventh century BCE. Although a mid-eighth century Phrygian shrine built over the site of an older Hittite temple housed several votive figurines which are probably related to the cult of Matar, including rough human figures and birds of prey (Roller 1999: 78-79, 81, 83), the earliest material which actually depicts the goddess includes two figurines from Bayandir and sculptural reliefs at Etlik and Bahçelievler. These two sets of items are interesting enough to be discussed separately and at length.

The Bayandir figurines are said to date from the late eighth to early seventh century, and include an ivory figurine of a female in the goddess' characteristic dress holding two children, and a silver figurine in clothing similar to that worn by the goddess, lacking breasts and hips and without a beard. The latter has mature features, unlike other beardless but not female-appearing figures associated with the goddess in Phrygia, which are commonly identified as depicting young males. The figurine also depicts an unusual hairstyle, in which the hair falls in long ringlets in front of the ears, but is shaven in the back, and a distinctive position of the hands, clasped at center front just above the waist. Beardless mature male figurines are uncommon in Near Eastern and Anatolian cults. The valuable material, the distinctive hairstyle, hand position, and costume, and perhaps the solemn expression of the face seem to indicate that the person depicted is a priestly figure, probably one of some rank (Roller 1999: 105). Gender variance is indicated by the mix of male and female signifiers, and lack of some signifiers which might be expected. The mode of dress appears female when compared with other figurines of the culture and

approximate time period; in fact, it is very similar to that worn by the goddess in some of her iconography. Female signifiers missing are breasts and hips. Male signifiers present include the features and the body shape and shape of the lower arm. The lack of a beard, as mentioned, represents lack of a prominent male signifier for this region. This is the only compelling evidence for a group of gender variant priests in Phrygia, but this evidence seems to show significant differences from the *gallae* who appear in Greece. No signs of ecstasis or marginality are present. The priestly figure holds no instruments and is posed in a quiet standing position with a solemn expression, much different from the wildness with which Greek *gallae* are charged.

The sculptural relief at Etlik shows Neo-Hittite stylistic influences. It depicts a part-lion, part-human composite figure along with that of the goddess; such composite figures are common in Neo-Hittite art. The chimera also holds up a winged sun, a prevalent Neo-Hittite motif (Roller 1999: 74). The Bahçelievler relief appears to be part of a series of reliefs which show varying degrees of Neo-Hittite and Assyrianizing influences (1999: 82-83). While Neo-Hittite contact ended in the seventh century, certain stylistic influences continued, such as similarities in headdresses and the prominence of lions and birds of prey (1999: 44-53). While these influences are not profound enough to indicate that the cult derived a significant portion of its ideology from the Neo-Hittites, Machteld Mellink has suggested that late eighth century contact with Neo-Hittite court sculpture may have led the Phrygians to develop iconography for their already-prominent goddess for the first time (Roller 1999: 83, after

Mellink 1983).

Midas City, in western Phrygia, is rich in material evidence for the worship of Kybele and the history of civilization in Phrygia. It is named for a monument called the Midas Monument, which bears a religious inscription dedicated to a king, who is named Midas in the text. This is probably the historical Midas we know as a ruler of Phrygia in the late eighth and early seventh centuries BCE, at the height of Phrygia's influence (1999: 69-70). This inscription occurs along with several graffiti bearing the name Matar (1999: 69-70). In and around the rest of the city there are several other monuments, stepped altars, stone facades, and cult reliefs dedicated to Matar (1999: 84-100). One motif common to Midas City but unusual elsewhere depicts two human figures of indeterminate sex placed side by side, who could represent two attendants of the goddess (1999: 96).

At Gordion, a number of votive figurines and reliefs have been found which can be dated to between 700 BCE to the mid-sixth century. Several of these are smaller figurines depicting the goddess herself, which may have represented a less elite, household form of the goddess's cult (1999: 75). Other figurines may represent attendants. These figures have no beards, no headdress, and no veil, and have bare chests; their anatomy and garb suggest that they probably represent beardless young men. The motif of a young, beardless male attendant also occurs at Boğazköy (mid to late sixth century), and may indicate one such person was part of the goddess's traditional retinue (1999: 77).

In the late sixth century, the iconography of Meter, which had changed little since the end of contact with the Neo-Hittites, began to shift again. Seated figures appeared, which had been previously unknown in Phrygia but which were seen in contemporaneous Greek iconography of Kybele. One figure wears a garment which looks much like the Greek *chiton*, while others hold lions or hares in their laps. Lynn Roller identifies a pattern of stronger Greek influence in western Phrygia, closer to Greece proper, just as one might expect if knowledge and use of Greek forms were radiating eastward. The trend continued to strengthen during the Alexandrian period until Greek-style iconography had completely replaced the native Phrygian forms (1999: 107-108).

### **Greek Emergence**

In the meantime, in the Greek world, Meter began to be depicted in small votive offerings, reliefs, and statuettes. The earliest examples are the most Anatolian in style, and occur primarily in the Greek settlements on the western edge of Phrygia (Roller 1999: 125). The *naiskos* type of relief, in which the goddess stands within a representation of a building, can be considered characteristic of depictions of Meter and is derived from her Phrygian representations (1999: 126). A collection of probably sixth century *naiskos* votives from Miletos are interesting in that the architectural features surrounding the goddess figure are a Phrygian allusion, while the costume and accessories of the goddess herself are clearly Hellenic (1999: 126-7).

In the mid-sixth century BCE, seated figures of Meter, often associated

with lions, became common. These were perhaps modeled on other seated figures from Dindyma (1999: 132), and spread quickly throughout Greece, Lydia, and Italy (1999: 133-4). The lion motif which became characteristic of Meter's iconography at this time may have been influenced by the Potnia Theron, Mistress of Beasts, an older motif common in Greece in the early Iron Age and greatly influenced by imagery from the Near East, particularly Assyria and Cyprus (1999: 135). Only at Arslankaya in southwest Phrygia are the lions prominent in a non-hellenized Phrygian depiction of Matar; elsewhere, birds of prey are her more common attribute.

Another new aspect of the iconography of Meter is her *tympanum*, a shallow frame drum held in one hand and beaten with the other. The *tympanum* was common in ritual use in the Near East, in Assyria and on Cyprus and in southeastern Anatolia in Neo-Hittite contexts. There is currently no evidence for its use in Phrygia. In Hittite texts, however, its use was associated in some instances with ecstatic behavior, self-wounding, and ritual transgender behavior. The *tympanum* is found depicted in statuary from all over the Near East, almost always held and played by a young woman. It never appears in Phrygian iconography of Matar, nor do we know of it playing any part in the Phrygian Mother's rites, although some possible evidence is obscured due to the extremely limited amount of Phrygian texts which can be deciphered. Lynn Roller suggests that the *tympanum* was added to Meter's rites by the Greeks, who conflated its use with her cult due to its Oriental origins, the goddess's marginal status, and the *tympanum*'s ecstatic character (Roller 1999: 137). It is



at this time that it becomes one of Meter's most characteristic images.

One important early Greek image of Meter appears at Daskalopetra on Chios, late sixth or early fifth century BCE. This may be the earliest surviving Greek cult image of Meter, as opposed to a votive offering. The goddess is seated, possibly with a lion in her lap, in a niche framed by pillars in imitation of a building (1999: 138). There is also a bench alongside the monument where votive offerings may have been placed. The shrine is located near a spring in a rural area.

Meter officially moved into the Greek cities in the early fifth century, by which time her name had become Kybele, taken from her Phrygian epithet *kubileya* (1999: 44, 69). At this time, the new Metröon was built for her in the *agora* at the center of Athens. Prior to this, textual and archaeological evidence tells us her worship took place in the old Bouleterion which housed Athens' legal records (Vermaseren 1977: 32-33). This marks a significant change in Kybele's status. From this time forward she is a goddess of the *polis*, not of the wilderness with which she was so frequently associated. Although the quality of "wildness" remained one of her major characteristics, she was also associated with the protection of cities, and worshipped primarily within them.

Once Kybele had entered the cities, examples of material culture related to her worship increased in frequency. The statue of her in the Metröon, though it no longer exists, spawned many small copies which were used as votive offerings, of which hundreds survive (Roller 1999: 145-6). From this mass production it seems clear that this particular representation, attributed to

Pheidias or Agorakritikos (1999: 145), had a widespread and lasting influence on Kybele's standard iconography for the next several hundred years. The standard type produced by this cult statue and its imitations represents the goddess seated, her throne supported by two lions, one seated on each side, with the goddess holding a *tympanum* in her right hand. She is dressed in a Greek *chiton* with a *himation* across her lap.

### **Early Texts**

Among the earliest textual sources for the worship of Meter is the fourteenth Homeric Hymn, which Roller points out should probably be dated to the late sixth century BCE. Other Homeric Hymns appear to date earlier, and this one, unlike many of the others, seems not to have been intended as part of a longer piece, but to be complete in itself (Roller 1999: 123).

Many of the Homeric Hymns were probably written as preludes to longer works. They are in dactylic hexameter, the meter which is characteristic of epic poetry. Some scholars suppose that they were recited at festivals in honor of the gods to whom the Hymns were addressed (*OCD* 1999: 736); since competitions were often a part of such festivals, they may have been part of oratory competition.

This short hymn runs as follows:

*To the Mother of the Gods  
Of the Mother of all Gods and all human beings,  
sing to me, clear-toned Muse, the daughter of Great Zeus,  
the resounding of rattles and tympana and the roar of flutes*

*please her, and clamor of wolves and flashing-eyed lions,  
the echoing mountains and the wooded valleys.  
And thus rejoice, you and all goddesses who join together in song.  
(Translation mine)*

While Rhea is also addressed as Meter, the features cited have never been characteristic of Rhea, and are typical of the Greek cult of Meter Kybele from the late sixth century onward (Roller 1999: 123). This hymn asserts that Kybele is the mother of all gods and all mortals, but this need not be in the personal sense. Another (possibly older) Homeric Hymn, Hymn 30, names Ge or Earth as the "mother of all, eldest of beings". The image of Meter Kybele in this text is one of great power and authority, and is particularly associated with wildness, both wild clamoring music used in her rites and the wild places outside of the lands which have been tamed and settled by humans. In Hymn 30, by way of contrast, Ge is associated with "fruitful land laden with corn, pastures covered with cattle, and... house filled with good things" and "orderly cities" "great riches and wealth" and obedient women and plentiful and happy children. Meter Kybele, unlike other goddesses in the Greek pantheon who can be referred to as "mother," does not often have the role of representing motherhood or fertility as such.

### **Emergence of the *Gallae***

The first Greek reference to a figure like that of the *gallae* occurs in the early fourth century. Antiphanes, a fourth century comic poet, contrasted the *metragyrtes*, whom he depicted as dishonorable, with the torch-bearer, whom

he considered honorable (Antiphanes fr. 154). Many sources criticize the *metragerytes* for con artistry, unhellenic behavior, and parasitical poverty, such criticisms as are often laid at the feet of itinerant religious figures who live on charity (a character familiar from Antiphanes, Athenaios, Aristotle, and Plutarch). The only criticism which could point to gender variant behavior, however, is the insinuation that a *metragerytes* could pass as a nurse (τροφός, which could be either masculine or feminine, but is more commonly used in the feminine; τροφεύς is the more common masculine form) for children in order to gain a household's confidence (Athenaios 6.226d, quoting Antiphanes).

It is not until the late third and early second century BCE that the word *galla* appears in Greek literature, in epigrams. These tell the story of a *galla* who, wandering the wilderness or taking shelter in a cave, is attacked by a lion. The *galla* uses the *tympanum* and ritual dance to frighten the lion away. In thanks to Meter Kybele, the *galla* then donates robes and a lock of hair, the *tympanum*, or a votive image of a lion (Roller 1999: 229). These epigrams refer to the *galla* as a eunuch and use the masculine grammatical structures. The *gallae* and the *metragerytes* of earlier literature can be seen to be connected, at least in the mind of the epigrammatist, since in one of these epigrams the term *metragerytes* is used in place of *galla*. In the Byzantine period, the two terms were still being identified with one another: the *Lexicon* of Photios quotes Kratinus: "The Ionians called them *metragerytes* but *galloi* now they are called." (Pachis 1996: 195)

It is not known where the word *galla* comes from. One common

explanation is that it comes from the river Gallos in Anatolia, or from the Galati who settled along it. Some Galati were active in the shrine at Pessinus. If this is the case, then referring to the gender transgressive priests of Meter as *gallae* would have emphasized their Phrygian origins (Roller 1999: 229). This is the explanation advanced by many Greek and Roman writers, such as Kallimachos (in Pliny's *Natural History*, 31.5.9) and Ovid (*Fasti*, 4.361-66). Eugene Lane offers a different argument, however, one which has both the river Gallos and the *gallae* themselves taking the name from the Gauls who settled there (Lane 1996: 117-33).

### **Echoes of Sumer**

One alternative explanation for the origin of the word *galla* arises from its similarity to the Sumerian GALA (all caps indicates linguistic reconstruction from the Sumerian). Patrick Taylor, in his unpublished paper "The GALA and the Gallos," identifies some curious parallels between the *gallae* of Kybele and the GALA of Inanna, along with a possible route of transmission from Mesopotamia to Anatolia.

A. H. Sayce was the first to propose a connection between the *gallae*, gender variant priests of Meter, and the GALA, gender-variant priests of Inanna. Although the GALA do not seem to alter their genitals (at least not universally), other significant parallels appear. The GALA are gender-variant figures in a whole category of gender-variant temple personnel which also includes the *assinu*, *kulufu*, *pili-pili*, and *kurgarru*. This poem in honor of Inanna describes

the "head overturning" ritual by which the *pili-pili* and *kurgarru* are initiated:

*Inanna*  
*dressing a maiden*  
*within the women's rooms*  
*embraces with full heart*  
*the young girl's handsome (manly) bearing*  
*the maid a woman evilly spurned*  
*taunted to her face*  
*sways beneath the wrath*  
*thrown on her everywhere*  
*her only path a wanderer*  
*in dim and lonely streets*  
*her only rest a narrow spot*  
*in the jostling marketplace*  
*where from a nearby window*  
*a mother holds a child*  
*and stares*  
*this dreadful state the Lady would undo*  
*take this scourge from her burdened flesh*  
*over the maiden's head*  
*she makes a sign of prayer*  
*hands then folded at her nose*  
*she declares her manly/woman*  
*in sacred rite she takes the broach*  
*which pins a woman's robe*  
*breaks the needle, silver thin*  
*consecrates the maiden's heart as male*  
*gives to her a mace*  
*for this one dear to her*  
*she shifts a god's curse*  
*a blight reversed*  
*out of nothing shapes*  
*what has never been*  
*her sharp wit splits the door*  
*where cleverness resides*  
*and there reveals what lives inside...*  
*a man*  
*one who spurned her*  
*she calls by name*  
*makes him join*  
*woman*  
*breaks his mace*  
*gives to him the broach*

*which pins a woman's robe  
these two she changed  
renamed  
reed marsh woman, reed marsh man  
ordained sacred attendants  
of ecstasy and trance  
the head-overtumed pili-pili  
the chief hero kurgarra  
enter ecstatic trance  
they weep, they wail  
they weary and wear out  
singing songs to quell a god's rage (Meador 2000: 123-4)*

The GALA, also known as the GALA-TUR, sang their laments on behalf of the goddess Inanna in the dialect *eme-sal*, which was usually used to render the speech of female divinities. It seems that the function of the GALA was to represent the goddess and give voice to her negative emotions on her behalf, much like the *gallae* did during the mourning for Attis. In their lamentation songs, the GALA used a drum not unlike the *tympanum* used by the *gallae* (Taylor 2005). They also carry knives (Meador 2000: 164) which may be involved in self-cutting rituals like those of the *gallae* which led up to the cutting of the genitals. The GALA were also portrayed as engaging in anal sex with males. In Sumerian, GALA is written with the logograms for penis + anus (Taylor 2005). There are even similar stories about the GALA and the *gallae*, as in the following proverb, which is paralleled by a common theme in Hellenistic epigrams which will be discussed a little later on.

*Sumerian Proverbs 2. 101 ed. Alster 1997 (in Taylor 2005)  
gala-e ur-mah-e edin-na ù-mu-ni-in-te  
še-en-du èrim( ?)ki ká dinana-še  
ur-šika-da-ra  
šeš-zu edin-na ta-àm mu-un-na-ak-e-še*

*A lamentation priest, after he had met a lion in the desert, said,  
"Let him come! In the town... at Inanna's gate,  
oh dog, chased away with potsherds,  
what is your brother doing in the desert?"*

Walter Burkert revived the idea that the GALA were connected with the *gallae* in 1979, but until recently almost no evidence was available to trace the connection, if there was one. Taylor proposes that the vector of transmission may be the Luwian people, neighbors of the Hittites whose rituals, particularly those at the cult centers Lallupiya and Istanuwia, parallel those of the *gallae*.

A straightforward transmission from Sumerian to Phrygian by means of Akkadian seems unlikely. We have no evidence of a word similar to GALA or *galla* present in Phrygian. Akkadian, the most likely link, would have changed the initial voiced guttural to an unvoiced k (Taylor 2005). Yet Taylor proposes a cultic continuity between the Luwians of the Bronze Age and the Iron Age Phrygians.

Texts hint tantalizingly at a ritual of eating or drinking from the ritual *tympanum* or *kymbalon* in the cult of Kybele. The evidence for this is rather late, from the writings of Clement of Alexandria (late 2nd c. CE) and Firmicus Maternus (fourth c. CE).

Clement of Alexandria (*Protreptica* 2, Taylor 2005):

*When I set forth the symbols (sacred token phrases) of initiation into these mysteries (of Cybele and Attis) to the advantage (of my argument), I know that they will provoke laughter even though you do not want to laugh at the exposure (of your rites): "I ate from the tympanon-drum, I drank from the cymbal, I carried the sacred dish. I went behind the curtain of the nuptial bed."*



Firmicus Maternus (*De errore profanarum religionum* 18.1, Taylor 2005):

*There is a certain temple where, in order to be admitted into the inner parts, a person... says: "I have eaten from the tympanon-drum, I have drunk from the cymbal, I have learned the secrets of the religion"*

Christian writers had a certain agenda which motivated them to portray the rituals of their rival cults in detail, but this same agenda was likely to cause distortion of their portrayals. Although Clement of Alexandria is anxious to make the *symbolon* of Kybele seem ridiculous even to insiders, if the ritual phrases were pure invention he could have come up with something more risible than eating and drinking from musical instruments. It is also telling that Firmicus, in giving the Greek phrases, uses different terms than Clement, for example using βέβρωκα instead of εἶφαγω. This indicates that Firmicus is not citing Clement directly, which lends credence to the sources having a basis in actual practice.

The gesture of drinking from drum or cymbal is found in Hittite practices, as well, in the ritual of the men of Lallupiya. Lallupiya is one of the cult centers of the people known as Luwians, a group who inhabited western Anatolia in the Bronze Age (Melchert 2003: 239, 44-54). The Catalog of Hittite Texts fragment 771 describes the men of Lallupiya drinking from the *dudupal*, a musical instrument believed to be similar to the *tympanum*. The participants sing during the ritual. Then, the cupbearer fills the drum and gives it to the head of the men

of Lallupiya, who "sings opposite him like a woman in the same way." (Taylor 2005)

Other parallels between the Luwians and the cult of Kybele are a common association with the river Sangarios (Taylor 2005) and ritual self-cutting and bloodletting, piercing among the Luwians at the festival of Istanuwa (a cult center near Lallupiya) and cutting among the *gallae* (Taylor 2005).

One challenge to this proposed continuity is that the *tympanum*, which is an important link between the practice of the *gallae* and the Istanuwian rituals, seems to have been a Greek addition to the cult, since as Roller points out there is no material evidence for its use in a ritual context in Phrygia. It is possible that the *tympanum* and the associated ecstatic rituals came to be associated with the cult of Phrygia later, perhaps through Iron Age Greek contact with the Lycians, whose language was derived from Luwian and who may have had ritual continuity with them. It would not be unlikely that the Greeks could have conflated Lycian and Phrygian rituals. There may also be some reason for the absence of the *tympanum* in surviving Phrygian cult representations other than the absence of its use.

### **Roman Naturalization**

In the Roman Empire, the material culture of the cult of Kybele (or Magna Mater as the Romans more frequently called her) is much more abundant than in Greece or the Near East. Mater's cult had been familiar in certain parts of Italy and the provinces since the mid-sixth century (Roller 1999: 281), but in 204

BCE members of the Roman elite brought the cult into Rome officially, making it a part of state religious practice (Livy 29.14.10-14). In so doing, they precipitated some changes in cult iconography and material culture.

Although most Roman sources say the cult was imported from Pessinus, then in territory controlled by the Galatians, Roller has advanced a persuasive argument that the cult of Meter as it took root in Rome came from Pergamon, not Pessinus. The Pergamene region includes Mount Ida, near Troy, an important site in Rome's legendary history. A frequent Roman epithet of the goddess, Magna Mater Idaea, also points to this region. Excavations at the Roman temple of the goddess uncovered ninety-four images of Attis as compared to eleven of the goddess herself (Roller 1999: 275); Attis is an important figure in the Hellenized cult at Pergamon, but unknown at Pessinus or any other Phrygian shrine until the Roman conquest of the region (1999: 278). Other figurines included those of pine cones, representative of the pines on Mount Ida, which were also not part of the goddess's Phrygian or Greek iconography (1999: 276, 279). Representations of the goddess depicted her wearing a mural crown, a feature of the goddess at Pergamon (1999: 276, 278).

The location of the official temple of Magna Mater in Rome was on the southwest slope of the Palatine hill, a place of honor in the heart of Rome. The temple was simple in design and of a standard Roman layout, with a central temple area and an open courtyard with six columns across the front (1999: 272-4). In front of the temple, steps led down to a lower courtyard, where a fountain stood which probably served the purpose of washing the statue of the

goddess (1999: 274).

The Romans introduced several new strains into the cult of Kybele. Previously, the worship of Kybele, for all that she was called a Mother goddess, was unconnected with fertility. Statues of her with children are rare. In Rome, however, she became associated with fertility, abundance, and sexuality in a way previously unknown in her cult. Iconography of human sexual organs as well as baskets of fruit, embracing lovers, and Attises portrayed with robes drawn away to reveal genitalia are common in the Roman cult where they would not have been associated with Kybele's worship elsewhere (1999: 277-8). That this aspect of the Magna Mater's cult is particularly Roman stands in sharp relief against the criticisms of Latin literary commentators on the sexually profligate reputation of the *gallae*. The rites of the *gallae* were decried for being shamefully sexual in nature, and for being too foreign and un-Roman, although the sexual overtones of the cult were a part of its uniquely Roman character (1999: 280).

Roman law limited who could become a *galla*, and restricted the rights of the *gallae*. One case is known of a slave who became a *galla* and was exiled from Rome; in another case, a *galla* named Genucius was denied inheritance on the grounds that *gallae* were neither men nor women, and only men and women could inherit property. Genucius was not permitted to speak in self-defense, on the grounds that the voice and presence of a *galla* would pollute the court (1999: 292).

Another addition to the cult of Mater was that of the *archigallus*. The

*archigallus* was a cult figure with a significant amount of power who had a position of authority over the *gallae*. It does not appear to have been a necessity for the *archigallus* to have been castrated; in fact, sculptures of *archigalli* (Vermaseren fig 66-8) emphasize certain masculine facial features which would have been softened by castration. After Claudian's time, the *archigallus* was a citizen of some influence in Roman society, and would not have been permitted to be "gallicized." In the late Roman Empire, the *archigallus* seems to represent an outsider whose task it was to oversee the activities of a group of which he was not a part.

### **Attis**

Attis was a common Phrygian name used for kings, householders, and priests of Mater. It later became the title for an important priest of Kybele (1999: 244-5). When the cult moved into Greece, however, the Greeks made "Attis" into the semidivine consort of Kybele, and reinterpreted representations of Attises, whether kings or priests, as representations of this mythical character.

The Kybele-Attis myth is preserved by classical authors in many forms, each attempting to offer, through the tale of Attis' self-castration and death, an explanation for why the *gallae* transformed their bodies. Roller identifies three general versions of the myth which contradict one another, and are reiterated in their variations in other classical texts. The first two are presented by Pausanias, the third by Diodorus.

The first myth provided by Pausanias (Pausanias 7.17.9) is called here

the Hermesianax version, after the epigrammatist to whom the story is attributed in Pausanias' text. In the Hermesianax version of the myth, Attis is a human being, a devotee of the goddess, who travels to Lydia to teach the Lydians to worship the goddess with her Phrygian rites. Attis' subsequent death and that of several of Attis' followers is caused by a boar sent by Zeus. In this version, Attis is οὐ τεκνοποιὸς ὑπὸ τῆς μητρὸς τεχθεΐη: not fertile from birth.

The second account, also given by Pausanias (7.17.10-12) and by Ovid (*Fasti* 4.221-44) and Arnobius (*Ad. Nat.* 5.5-7), tells of a passionate love affair between the goddess Kybele and the mortal Attis. Attis' love is taken from Kybele either by Attis' willing infidelity or a forced marriage. Because of his regret over his actions or Kybele's divine wrath, Attis goes mad and self-castrates, and dies as a result. Kybele grieves for Attis, and Zeus grants that the youth's body should never decay. The *gallae* practice this self-castration in Attis' memory when they mourn their prototype's death.

The third account is given by Diodorus (Diodorus 3.58-9), and is unique in that it represents both Kybele and Attis as human beings. In this account, Kybele is exposed by her parents, but survives, falls in love with Attis, and becomes pregnant. Her family eventually recognizes her and takes her back, but when they learn she is pregnant, they kill Attis. Kybele goes mad with grief and is eventually recognized as a divine being, and worshipped along with her lover.

The Hermesianax version best fits with the material evidence of the cult in Phrygia, where Attis is not a divine figure but an authority in the cult. There

are many possible interpretations of "not able to have children from birth," ranging from a lack of any attraction toward women to congenital sterility. Similar phrases ("impotent," "infertile") are used by some *hijra*, for example, to describe circumstances such as a lack of attraction toward women with subsequent removal of the genitals (Nanda 1998).

Pausanias describes his second account as "the current view" and "the local legend" (Pausanias 7.17.10), by which he means the second century CE Greek interpretation (Roller 1999: 257). It presents Kybele and Attis in a more negative light, laying particular emphasis on the violence of cutting off the genitals and the injustice of the "punishment" (i.e. madness and loss of the genitals) as compared to the "crime" (infidelity in Ovid, an arranged marriage in Pausanias).

The Diodorus account represents a rationalizing strain of interpretation, an attempt to explain the myth of Kybele and Attis without the necessity of divine beings. This perspective recurs in Diodorus' work; he also explains a few instances of "prodigies" as biological anomalies for which medical science of the time had the answers (Brisson 2002: 32-36).

### **Lucian: Ethnographic Satire**

Little is known of the life of Lucianus of Samosata, who was born in approximately 120 CE. His work is often satirical or ironic in intent. His native language was probably Aramaic. Much of his work defies classification, such as a number of literary dialogues which blend comedy and literary philosophy to

create comic prose dialogue apparently not quite like any other literature of his time (*OCD* 886-7).

*De Dea Syria* examines the Syrian goddess and the practices of her worship, through the eyes of a purportedly Assyrian ethnographer writing in the tradition of Herodotus. This has led to many problems of interpretation. J. L. Lightfoot's *Lucian: On the Syrian Goddess* offers a richer perspective than some past interpretations, which would either take *De Dea Syria* in complete earnest, or write off every assertion in the text as another example of Lucian's famous satire. Lightfoot argues that it is not the content of *DDS* which is satirical, but the tone. In her view, Lucian is taking a genuine experience of the Syrian goddess's worship and passing it through a mock Herodotean filter. The end product, then, can be screened for satirical pokes at Herodotus and the tradition of ethnographical writing which follows him. What remains can be taken seriously, albeit critically, as textual evidence towards reconstruction of Atargatis' worship.

Atargatis is identified with Rhea in the text, as Kybele usually is. Tamara Green describes Atargatis as a goddess worshipped in many forms across the Near East, including in Hierapolis, where her local form was that of Hellenized Kybele (Green 1996: 95). The worship of Atargatis has close parallels with that of Kybele, a fact which did not escape classical authors, who often identified the two. One of the most striking parallels is that both goddesses are served by *gallae*.

The primary subject of *DDS* is not the *gallae*, nor the worship of Atargatis, but the Syrian city called Hierapolis. To cover the entire text, which is not long,



takes a book on the scale of Lightfoot's excellent treatment, and I will avoid an attempt to reproduce her work on an inferior scale. Only those sections which deal specifically with the *gallae* are highlighted here.

Lucian advances two origin stories for the tradition of the *gallae* at Hierapolis. In the first, Attis, here a Lydian priest of Kybele (or Rhea in this text), having been castrated by the goddess for no reason which is stated in this context, settles in Hierapolis because the rites and mysteries he proposes to teach are not welcomed east of the Euphrates. Here he builds the temple to Kybele/Rhea. Lucian offers in evidence the parallels between the two goddesses, including the twin lions, the *tympanum*, and the mural crown, as well as the *gallae* in the temple who are castrated for Kybele's sake and in imitation of Attis. Lucian claims not to find this persuasive, since he has heard another explanation for the castration of the *gallae* which he calls more plausible.

His preferred explanation results from the foundation of the second temple, supposedly by Stratonice, wife of the Syrian king. She was commanded in a dream by Hera (Atargatis) to build, or rebuild, the temple, and her husband sent his dearest friend, Combabos, along as an escort. Combabos, no doubt having read Herodotus himself, suspected this would turn out badly, and castrated himself as a precaution. To ensure his safety beyond doubt, he left his severed testicles in a sealed coffer with his unwitting friend. Needless to say, Stratonice grew enamored of him and made advances, which he refused. According to Lucian, Stratonice was at first enraged by his refusal, but when he

informed her of his condition, she took it in good graces and instead became a friendly companion to him. Lucian offers this as an example for why *gallae* are often beloved of women and this is not considered dishonorable, at least in Hierapolis. This, however, was noted by spies of her husband, who was on the point of executing Combabos when the accused had the presence of mind to ask for the coffer where he left his genitalia. The king regretted his error and conferred upon Combabos great honors and gifts, of which Lucian says "there was no one in Syria like Combabos in wisdom and in good fortune," very probably with some irony. In order to connect Combabos with the *gallae*, Lucian asserts that he returned to the temple, where a bronze statue was erected of him, and his closest friends (except, presumably, the Syrian king) castrated themselves out of sympathy for him. As an alternative explanation, Lucian says that perhaps Hera (that is, Atargatis) put it into their minds to do it. The *gallae* now wear female clothing because Combabos attracted a would-be lover who killed herself when she learned he was castrated, and in order to prevent any further such disaster, he resolved to wear women's clothing from that point on. Of course, his friends followed suit.

It is in mockery of Herodotus' style that Lucian puts forward this lengthy and improbable tale as the more persuasive of the two. This is not, however, entirely a creation of Lucian's own, for remarkably similar tales appear in Persia, Turkestan and India (Lightfoot 385-387), notably in connection with the *hijra*. Since the other tales also often culminate in the dedication of a new building project, it seems likely that the story became attached to the temple at

Hierapolis in the same way that it became attached to these other places (Lightfoot 388).

Lucian also describes the Dies Sanguinae, the ritual in which new *gallae* were initiated. During this festival, he says, in the midst of music, a madness spreads, and people who only intended to be spectators suddenly throw off their clothing and let out a wild cry, coming to the center of the crowd and picking up a sword which apparently stands there for this purpose. The *gallae*-to-be castrate themselves with the sword and then run through the city, carrying the severed genitals, which they then throw into some house or other. They receive women's garments and ornaments from whichever house they throw the genitals into.

Lucian goes on to say that the *gallae* are not buried in the same way as other people of Hierapolis; rather, when they die, they are carried out of town by the other *gallae*, who pile stones on the corpse and return home, after which they do not return to the sanctuary for a period of time. Lucian gives this period as seven days, but whether this number is precise or not is a matter of speculation. Certainly there are purity issues surrounding having buried one of their own, as well as seeing a corpse, after which they wait a shorter time before they enter the temple. Lucian says that like other Near Eastern cults, including that of Kybele, they do not eat pigs, nor do they touch doves, an animal which is shown in the religious iconography of Atargatis very frequently.

### **Catullus: The Tragedy of Attis**

Gaius Valerius Catullus was probably born in or before 84 BCE, and seems to have died in 54 BCE. Catullus was part of a youth literary movement which embraced Hellenic ideals in favor of those considered uniquely Roman. The theme which unites many of Catullus' best-known poems is that of his disastrous love affair with the woman he calls Lesbia (*OCD* 1996: 303-4).

Writing in the galliambic meter, which was used primarily for hymns to Kybele, Catullus depicts the transformation of Attis, who in this case appears to be simply the prototype of the *gallae*, not the semidivine consort of the goddess. This is also one of a handful of instances where an ancient writer refers to the transformed servants of Kybele as "gallae," in the feminine, and with feminine pronouns.

The poem begins with Attis' journey to Phrygia and to the wilderness there, where, alone and "driven by raving madness," he severs his male genitals with a flint. He becomes aware that he has unmanned himself, and then she picks up the *tympanum* which Catullus refers to as Kybele's initiation. From this point, Catullus uses sometimes the feminine and sometimes the masculine gender to refer to Attis.

Attis then, playing on the *tympanum*, sings to the other *gallae* to assemble in the groves of Kybele, calling them "you who have through excessive hatred of Venus unmanned yourselves." This directly contradicts the implication of the rest of the poem that the divine madness sent by Kybele is responsible for the transformation of the *gallae*, not the desire to be chaste—unless this refers to hatred of Venus borne by Kybele herself, which does not

seem to be the case. Catullus then refers to Attis as *notha mulier*: false, illegitimate, or mixed-breed woman. After expending the energy of dancing and taking in no food (because of the journey, or do the *gallae* fast in their rites?) the *gallae* fall asleep. At sunrise Attis awakens, temporarily free from her state of ecstasis and able to appreciate the consequences of her actions. There she exclaims to her distant country—what country it is we are not told—her regret that she can never return there. Her experience of every "human form" (*quod enim genus figuraest ego non quod obierim? ego mulier, ego adolescens, ego ephebus, ego puer/ ego gymnasi fui flos, ego eram decus olei*. [what kind, what shape, have I not been? I, a woman, I was a young man, I a youth, I a boy; I was the flower of the gymnasium, I was the splendor of the oiled wrestlers.] Catullus 63: 62-65) has separated her from the neat categories of civilized society. Her regret comes to the ears of Kybele, who orders one of her lions to create the divine madness in Attis once again, driving him back to her other followers. When the lion comes upon Attis, he drives her back into the woods where she remains forever a *famula* (female servant) to Kybele. Catullus closes with a prayer that Kybele should inflict her divine madness on others rather than himself.

The use of gendered language in the poem reveals the ambiguous gender status of the transformed worshipers of Kybele as portrayed here. Attis him/herself seems to portray him/herself as a woman who has become so by virtue of becoming half a man. This reflects mainstream Roman society's view of the place of women, of course, and it is this view which must be borne in mind

when scrutinizing the poet's portrayal of the horror and sadness of the transformation. If written by the gallae, the only people who could understand the full meaning of the transformation, such a poem might as easily be neutral or full of joy.

It is also important to consider that this poem is probably strongly influenced by the same feelings behind the Lesbia poems. It can be read as an analogy for the way Lesbia controlled and manipulated the poet, and how her betrayal metaphorically unmanned him. Catullus sometimes used the imagery of madness to represent passionate love. The question which then arises is why Catullus would find the transformation of Attis a suitable metaphor for his tempestuous feelings for Lesbia.

### **Ovid: The Idaean Mother FAQ**

The *Fasti* (or calendar) of P. Ovidius Naso was begun shortly before his exile by Augustus in the year 8 CE. It was incomplete at that time, and books 7-12, if written in exile, have not survived. The *Fasti* bears the marks of Callimachean influence, but its content is supremely Augustan. It should be read as poetry written to explore a modern religious thinking which was undergoing change and revival, driven by Augustus' own recycling of traditional Roman religious discourse (*OCD* 1996: 1084-6).

In book IV of the *Fasti*, Ovid reports a conversation with the Muse which reads like a Frequently Asked Questions about the Idaean Mother and her worship. The comparison is particularly apt because "Frequently Asked

Questions" documents are rarely written by compiling actual queries from people expectant of an answer, but are usually formulated by people whose intent is to explain particular facts, and so it is with Ovid. The questions which he asks of the Muse, and to an extent the order in which they appear, enlightens as much as the answers. The introduction to Meter's festival echoes the tone of the exotic. The *gallae* are mentioned immediately, accompanied by a fanfare of foreign instruments; they carry the Mother herself on their "feminine necks." Legal disputes and other official business is brought to a halt by the din, and probably canceled outright in deference to the procession and the Megalesian games. Ovid's inquiry cannot wait, but sheer volume as well as the foreign character of the music and noise intimidate him, and he feels unable to ask the Mother his questions directly. He asks her to send someone else to whom he might address his questions, and Meter sends the Muses, for whom Erato speaks. Meter sends the Muses because Ovid has identified her with Rhea, mother of Jupiter; he continues in this syncretic vein.

The first question naturally arises from his descriptive introduction: the poet asks why the Mother is honored by such foreign din, which must have seemed strange to a Roman sense of decorum. Ovid's Muse answers by equating Meter with Rhea, claiming that the noise is in memory of how Meter/Rhea hid Jupiter on Mount Ida among the Kuretes and Korybantes, who made a continuous noise to mask his cries from the infanticidal Saturn. The noise during the festival of Ovid's time is dramatic reenactment of this important mythological role. Next the poet asks about the lions which draw her chariot and the towers

on her crown. The explanations for these are simple and take only about six lines-- she first tamed the lions and invented cities. Together these two assertions portray her as a goddess of civilization, for all that her worship may seem wild and primitive.

Ovid asks next about the castration of the *gallae*, as if the previous two questions were a delaying tactic while he got the courage to ask this one. Ovid's Muse recounts the story of Attis, in this case a Phrygian youth who was beloved of Meter and promised himself to chastity in her service. However, he fell in love with the naiad Sagaritis, whom Meter then destroyed by damaging the tree which preserved her life. Attis went mad and fled into the wilderness, dragging "his long hair in the filthy dust" and castrating himself, declaring that his genitals were the cause of his unhappiness. Ovid's Muse declares "His madness set a precedent, and his unmanly servants toss their hair and cut off their members as if worthless." The castration is assumed to be the result of continuing madness, albeit perhaps a divine madness, on the part of the *gallae* who follow Meter.

The poet next asks whether the Mother always dwelled in Rome, or if not, how she came to be there. The Muse explains that her true home is Troy, the land of Dindymus, Kubele, and Ida, names that are significant because they supply some of Meter's Roman epithets. Meter did not follow Aeneas to found Rome because she did not feel her presence was needed, but five hundred years later (as Ovid's Muse would have it) it was prophesied that she must be brought to Rome from Mount Ida. Attalus was king there at the time, and in Ovid's account, unlike in Livy's, he was reluctant, until the Mother made her



wishes known through an earthquake, informing him that "Rome is a worthy place for all divinities." Attalus replied that she would still be a Phrygian goddess since Rome claims Phrygian ancestry. All this legitimates the Roman state's claim of descent from Troy. Ovid also gives us the story of Claudia Quinta, who, people gossiped, was not chaste as her station demanded. She asked Meter to show her innocent or guilty of these charges by a sign. The Mother obliged her, for when the ship bearing her from Ostia to Rome became grounded, Claudia Quinta drew it out of the shallows with no apparent effort. Ovid describes the festival on the Mother's arrival just outside of Rome, where the Almo joins the Tiber River, and again the *gallae* are there, crying loudly, beating the drums, and playing the foreign Phrygian pipes.

Ovid relates that the custom of giving alms to Meter's temple personnel comes from Metellus' refurbishment of the original temple of Meter in Rome, when the people donated small sums to help pay the expense. He adds that it is lucky to have or attend a banquet on this feast-day, because Meter changed her residence through good fortune, and good fortune can come to those who change their residence, if only temporarily, on her festival day. The Megalesia are said to be the first games of the year in deference to the fact that the Mother gave birth to the other gods, and they give her the honor of first place. He then attempts to explain the name of the *gallae* by claiming that they are named for a river, Gallos, whose waters make mad those who drink from it. When he asks why one of the sacramental food offerings for the goddess is greens and cheese, the Muse replies that this is what the ancients ate (i.e. before

civilization), and the ancient goddess has a preference for the ancient food.

### **Strabo: Classification of Curetes**

Strabo, geographer of the Augustan period, contributed to his contemporaries' understanding of the *gallae* by clarifying the relationship between them and other ecstatic practitioners. Other writers had a tendency to conflate the *gallae* with such other ecstatic figures as the *curetes*, the *korybantes*, and the *bacchae*.

Strabo writes (*Geography* 10.3.7):

The accounts which are more remotely related, however, to the present subject, but are wrongly, on account of the identity of the names, brought into the same connection by the historians—I mean those accounts which, although they are called "Curetan History" and "History of the Curetes," just as if they were the history of those Curetes who lived in Aetolia and Acarnania, not only are different from that history, but are more like the accounts of the Satyri, Sileni, Bacchae, and Tityri; for the Curetes, like these, are called genii or ministers of gods by those who have handed down to us the Cretan and the Phrygian traditions, which are interwoven with certain sacred rites, some mystical, the others connected in part with the rearing of the child Zeus in Crete and in part with the orgies in honor of the mother of the gods which are celebrated in Phrygia and in the region of the Trojan Ida. But the variation in these accounts is so small that, whereas some represent the Corybantes, the Cabeiri, the Idaean Dactyli, and the Telchines as identical with the Curetes, others represent them as all kinsmen of one another and differentiate only certain small matters in which they differ in respect to one another; but, roughly speaking and in general, they represent them, one and all, as a kind of inspired people and as subject to Bacchic frenzy, and, in the guise of ministers, as inspiring terror at the celebration of the sacred rites by means of war-dances, accompanied by uproar and noise and cymbals and drums and arms, and also by flute and outcry; and consequently these rites are in a way regarded as having a common

relationship, I mean these and those of the Samothracians and those in Lemnos and in several other places, because the divine ministers are called the same.

He goes on to say that he will nonetheless talk about the other varieties of ecstatic practitioner, although they don't relate to his subject matter (the *curetes* of Aetolia and Acarnania). He proposes that the name "curete" comes from the habit of dressing like girls (*corai* or *curae*) and dressing one's hair in a girlish manner, and that the dance of the more warlike *curetes* may have been taught by those who were more feminine, leading to the extension of the name. The Cretan *curetes*, however, are so called because they raised Zeus in his youth (*curotrophein*— to rear during youth).

Strabo says it is common to the Greeks and to foreigners to hold sacred rites in connection with a festival, which may include religious frenzy, music, and/or secrecy, and offers reasons for all these aspects. Religious frenzy is supposed to create a state of mind which is receptive to divine inspiration, secrecy creates reverence for the rites of the gods, and music lifts the spirits of the celebrants and gives them pleasure.

Strabo names a particular tribe of Phrygians given to worshipping Kybele with ecstatic rites, the Berecynthians. He says the Greeks call them *curetes* as well, although in this case the name does not come from the same story as the Cretan variety; they also call them *korybantēs*. Strabo does not use the name *gallae* in any form.

The poets, he says, provide him with examples of the conflation of different kinds of ecstatic practitioners with one another. He names Pindar as an

example, citing a dithyramb which likens the rites of Kybele with those of Dionysus, as well as Euripides' *Bacchae*, which is full of conflation of Dionysus' rituals with Kybele's (under the name Rhea) and those of the Cretan *korybantes*.

Strabo asserts that the Phrygians were colonists from Thrace, and that it is from there that their sacred rites came. Duridanov argues that linguistically the Thracians and the Phrygians are hardly similar (Duridanov 1976). There is little evidence pertaining to the origin of the Phrygians. But if Strabo, following Aeschylus, is correct in asserting that the Thracian rites to honor Cotys (who appears to have been a Thracian goddess attested only by Aeschylus but whose name survived as a line of Thracian kings during Ovid's lifetime) resemble those of the hypothetical Phrygian *gallae*, it is more evidence in the picture of a cross-cultic ecstatic tradition which was not at all unique to the *gallae*. Strabo goes on to specify that the music of Thrace in particular is Asiatic, just as the music of the Phrygian rites is often described.

The general sense of the passage of Strabo here in question is that of one trying to make sense of many threads of religious experience which are hopelessly entangled, so that neither historians of the time nor modern scholars will find it easy to make sense of the categories. In order to help shed some light on the distinctions between the groups, Strabo reluctantly proffers some unconvincing origin mythology for each, then concludes that while he cannot solve all the enigmas of the *curetes*, he can say in general that some of the things described in myths are like things which serve useful purposes in life and

some are more closely related to religious frenzies, magic, and divination. Into this latter category he places all the Dionysiac and Orphic ritual.

This text is to be read as a part of the Augustan reinterpretation of Roman religious thought. Augustus' massive political reorganization of Roman government, of which he was the first emperor, also created changes in the state religion which were reflected in literature and philosophy. These social changes led to new ways of categorizing things in Roman academic discourse. In this passage, Strabo is interested in defining the borders of theology, emphasizing that the myths about the *curetes* border on theology but are not themselves part of a systematic study of religious thought. He is primarily interested in creating meaningful categories in order to make sense, not only of the different types of ecstatic practitioner, but of the different types of study. Being a geographer, he naturally divides the types of ecstatic practitioner based on their location. This does not, however, allow Cretan *curetes* who find themselves in Phrygia to be suddenly *gallae*.

### **Livy: Immigration by Invitation**

Titus Livius, also writing under Augustan rule, wrote his *Ab urbe condita libri* (*Books from the Foundation of the City*) as a chronicle of Rome's rise to power. His tone is a complex one, both patriotic and critical of Roman society. He relied heavily on external works, such as the work of Polybius. In some cases his history appears to be a compilation of other sources. Polybius is his main source for events in the East, such as those dealing directly with the *gallae*

and with the arrival of the goddess Meter in Rome (*OCD* 1996: 877-9).

During the Roman siege of Sestos, a city in Asia Minor, two *gallae* "wearing their ritual dress" came to meet the Roman army and persuaded them to spare the city (Polybius 21.6, Livy 37.9.9). Then again a year later, in 189 BCE, two *gallae* met the army as they were preparing for battle near Pessinus and predicted victory (Polybius 21.37.4-7, Livy 38.18.9-10). Livy (following Polybius) describes the meeting fairly neutrally, although he does note their ritual garb and "fanatical" singing (Livy 38.18.9). The *gallae* were met with respect by the Roman army in both cases, and neither Livy nor Polybius describes the *gallae* in degrading terms. Perhaps if they had it would have reflected poorly on the Roman army to have paid respect to people of such marginal status, but this begs the question of why the Roman army listened to them in the first place. It may have been because the cult of Mater, with attendant *gallae*, had fairly recently (204 BCE) arrived in Rome under highly favorable circumstances.

In 205 BCE, Livy reports, the combination of the Second Punic War and some reported mysterious occurrences such as more than usually frequent showers of stones from the sky caused the Romans to consult the Sibylline Books. The oracle promised victory if the Romans brought the Magna Mater into their capital (Livy 29.10.4-6). To this end an expedition traveled to the shrine of Mater in Pessinus, stopping along the way to request the help of King Attalus I of Pergamon. Livy reports that their request was received favorably and the goddess was handed over with goodwill. "Goddess" here refers to a black stone

or meteorite which was held to be the seat of the Magna Mater, and by which she was supposedly worshipped at Pessinus.

The oracle also dictated how Mater was to be greeted upon her arrival in Rome. The Romans were to choose the best man in the city, who turned out to be Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica, son of a war hero and cousin to Scipio Africanus, who was so young as to not have begun a political career yet. Scipio Nasica was to receive her at the port at Ostia, and a delegation of matrons was to escort her to Rome (Livy 29.14.10-12). After the matrons of Rome passed the stone to the Temple of Victory on the Palatine, there was a celebration which included feasting and games in the goddess's honor (Livy 29.14.14). The Temple of the Magna Mater on the Palatine was completed in 191 BCE (Livy 36.36.3-5).

Roller points out that certain material evidence is inconsistent with this story. It is known, for instance, that Hannibal was already on his way out of Italy in 204 BCE, suggesting that the motivation for bringing the Magna Mater to Rome had much less to do with concern about the direction of the war and much more to do with political maneuvering, desire for a greater feeling of national confidence, and the impetus to celebrate Rome's legendary origins (Roller 1999: 266-8, 280-5). The arrival of the foreign goddess was the product of a Roman nationalist ideological current.

### **Pausanias: Two Origins**

Pausanias, who lived c. 150 CE, wrote a travel narrative entitled

*Description of Greece*, which is in fact a description of many objects and monuments from the Archaic and Classical period in Greece, and even then mostly in Achaia (*OCD* 1996: 1129). He attempted to contextualize these monuments historically and theologically, and so it happens that he provides occasional snippets of information regarding the cult of Kybele in Greece, and particularly some alternate explanations for the *gallae*.

In the *Description of Greece* 7.17.8, Pausanias offers the following myths as told about the origins of the cult of Kybele. One cites the poet Hermesianax, who says that Attis, who was a "eunuch from birth," taught the Lydians the rites of Kybele, but that Zeus sent a boar, which killed him and some of the Lydians as well. In memory of this, the inhabitants of Pessinus abstain from pork. In this legend, no mention is made of castration or the *gallae*.

Pausanias, however, goes on to offer what he calls a more current view of the origin of Attis. In this narrative, Zeus falls asleep, and from his nocturnal emission springs Agdistis, a hermaphroditic being with both male and female genitals. (The name Agdistis is commonly associated with or conflated with that of Kybele or Meter.) The gods feared Agdistis, and so cut off Agdistis' male organ, from which an almond tree grew. A nymph of the river Sangarios took one of the almonds, which impregnated her, and she gave birth to a boy, Attis, who was exposed at birth and raised by a male goat. When he was grown, he had superhuman beauty, and was sent by his relatives (it is not specified whether this means his birth relatives, the river and the nymphs, or his adopted relatives, the other goats) to Pessinus to wed the king's daughter. Agdistis, who



had fallen in love with him (and is now referred to in the feminine), appeared as his wedding songs were being sung, and Attis went mad and castrated himself, along with the bride's father. Agdistis, feeling regret at what she had caused to happen, asked Zeus to ensure that Attis' body would never decay.

### **Martial: Poetry and Polemic**

*What is a female slit to you, Baeticus Gallus?  
This tongue is supposed to lick male crotches.  
Why was your dick cut off with a Samian shard,  
if the pussy was so satisfying to you, Baeticus?  
Your head should be castrated: for though you are admitted  
because you have the groin of one of her priests [gallus],  
nonetheless you betray the rites of Cybele:  
in the mouth you are a male [vir].*  
(Martial *Epigrams* 3.81 Translation: Faris Malik)

Marcus Valerius Martialis was born in Spain between 38 and 41 CE and died between 101 and 104. He lived in Rome for a time, primarily under the patronage of the emperor Domitian, and under Nerva and then Trajan after Domitian's death. Much of his reputation rested upon Domitian's rule, and although he supported Nerva and Trajan, he could not regain his lost influence, and eventually returned to Spain. His epigrams are greatly influenced by Catullus and by the late Hellenistic epigram. As a working poet, he wrote at the behest of his patrons to praise their successes, woo their lovers, and polemicize their rivals. Much of his poetry must therefore be considered propagandistic in nature (*OCD* 930-2).

This epigram of Martial shows the kind of disdain that many Roman

writers had for the *gallae*. Although Martial at least for the sake of the joke has respect for the rites of Kybele, his poetic persona lacks any sympathy or respect for her priest.

It should be noted that Martial's epigrams to the eunuch Earinus, Domitian's favorite, are generally respectful. This should be viewed rather as a wise political move on Martial's part than an indication that eunuchs were particularly highly regarded. The eunuch, however, had more opportunity to elevate his status in society than had the *galla*.

Oral sex of any kind was considered polluting in Roman society, but in this poem there is a difference between performing oral sex on the male genitals and performing oral sex on a female. Performing oral sex on males is presented as something expected of a *galla*, because this act causes the mouth to stand in for the vulva, whereas the act of performing oral sex on a female requires (according to this poem) that the tongue stand in for the phallus. The poem assumes that there is something wrong with a *galla* performing as a male. This fact is important for constructing an understanding of how the *gallae* were viewed in late Roman society as regards their gender role.

### **Summary**

In the course of this first chapter I have described much of the pertinent material and textual evidence. The paucity of textual evidence from Phrygia which is intelligible to modern scholars renders conclusions about the Phrygian cult practices difficult. Key pieces of evidence from Phrygia include the Bayandir

figurine and the absence of the *tympanum* in religious representations. In Greece, the material culture is supplemented by some epigrams and the fourteenth Homeric Hymn. After Meter moved into Greece, the Phrygian material culture was rapidly Hellenized. The *gallae* appear marginalized from their first emergence in Greek literature, originally as synonymous with another marginalized figure, the *metragerytes*. If the *metragerytes* was also gender variant, however, this is not emphasized. Most modern scholarship holds that the name *gallae* arose from either a toponym or an association with the Galati, and thus represents an effort to emphasize the foreignness of their character and practices. There is a strong possibility, however, that the word bears some relationship to the GALA of Sumer.

While the cult of Kybele was familiar to much of Italy and the provinces, the Roman state officially adopted the goddess in 204 BCE as part of a nationalist movement. Aspects of the cult were substantially altered in emphasis and in content in order to render the cult more suitable for Roman sensitivities. One of these very same aspects of Mater's worship, the association with sex and fertility, was later criticized as "unroman." The *gallae* were still more marginalized in Rome and even systematically oppressed by laws passed by the senate.

Attis was most likely originally an archetype distilled from the position of high priest in the Phrygian cult, further supporting the presence of a powerful transgender priest group in Phrygia. The Greek and Roman tendency, however, was to view Attis as a singular historical figure or a semi-divine consort of

Kybele. Attis was misinterpreted (and I use this term consciously, because not only was Attis reinterpreted, but Greek and Roman authors frequently asserted that the reinterpretations represented authentic Phrygian practice and history) by Greeks and Romans because of a desire to use Attis as an explanation for the *gallae*, rather than the reverse.

The cult of Kybele, including and surpassing what is visible of the *gallae* in the historical record, spanned at least twelve hundred years, and stretched geographically from Anatolia to North Yorkshire ("Dig reveals Roman transvestite," *BBC News*, May 21, 2002). Over such a wide span of time and space, there was a great degree of variation in cult practices and the relationships between the *gallae* and society.

## Theoretical Insights and Challenges

In this chapter I will consider some of the questions I find most important about the *gallae*, and will review the evidence I provided in chapter one in light of the model I proposed in the introduction. In chapter three, I will present my conclusions and evaluate the model in terms of how well it elucidated the issues presented here.

Some of the important questions surrounding the *gallae* include the details of their history, why the transgender priest occurs in some form or another in several ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean societies, why they may have acted the way they did, what their relationship to their wider society was, how much of their behavior was attributable to biology, culture, and personal agency, and what the relevance of this study is for modern society.

As I discussed in exploring the history of the ancient *gallae*, evidence suggests that some institution of transgender priesthood occurs not only in ancient Greece and Rome, but in several ancient Near Eastern societies.

In Sumer, the GALA were a special class which had transgender traits. They wore women's clothing and spoke in the *eme-sal* dialect, which was used chiefly to represent the speech of female divine figures. Intercourse with men

was considered a characteristic of theirs. This is not by itself conclusive, since certainly homosexual men have sex with other men but do not identify as women. In concert with the other evidence, however (e.g. dressing in women's clothing, speaking in a primarily female dialect, and the textual evidence which praises Inanna as a deity capable of making women into men and men into women), it seems suggestive. A detail which is easily overlooked but perhaps most telling is that they were categorized with female, not male, temple personnel in texts which listed temple figures and their roles. Their office seems to have been to portray the grief and other potentially destructive emotions of Inanna, as if it came from the goddess' own mouth. (Roscoe 1996)

The ritual of the men of Lallupiya, described in the section of Chapter 1 entitled "Echoes of Sumer" shows some transgender behavior and some common characteristics with the *gallae*, but it does not seem to provide any evidence for a distinctive class of people for whom transgender behavior was the norm. While this could be due to a lack of surviving evidence, according to the evidence we have now and the model I am proposing, the men of Lallupiya are an example of non-transgender people who practice transgender behavior in a ritual context. This is quite different from the *gallae*, for whom transgender behavior seems to have been an identifying characteristic and a part of their daily lives, to the extent of permanent body modification.

In Phrygia, the evidence for a native transgender priesthood appears to be limited to the one figurine from Bayandir. The figurine does seem to represent a gender-variant individual, but one much different from the *galla*.

This figure seems solemn and static. There is no evidence of association with music or dance, as we might expect from the presumed progenitors of the *gallae*, or for that matter the inheritors of the GALA. The use of silver as a material indicates that either this group had a lot of prestige, or this individual had a lot of prestige. Since the *gallae* in Greece and Rome never had the opportunity to attain that kind of social status, this suggests that the Phrygians probably had a much different attitude towards the transgender priest from that of the Greeks and Romans.

The characteristics of the Greek and Roman *gallae* and the cult of Kybele which are missing from the Phrygian evidence probably came from a number of different sources. Although lions were shown with the goddess in certain Phrygian cult locations, they were not her primary animal until her cult was Hellenized, after which she was often shown seated with a lion in her lap in a style reminiscent of the Potnia Theron of early Iron Age Greece. The *tympanum* is common in Near Eastern art and ritual, and has interesting parallels in Neo-Hittite rituals which also have elements of gender transgression and ecstatic music and dance (Taylor 2005). The *gallae* seem to represent a kind of temple personnel which is common in Near Eastern goddess cults, the lamentation priest, who express through their speech, music and dance the negative emotions of the deity (Roscoe 1996). Certain elements of the cult of Kybele, however, are identifiably and uniquely Greek or Roman. While Attis as a personal name and a title for a priest exists in the Phrygian cult, divine or semidivine Attis as the consort of the goddess arises from a Greek

misinterpretation of the Phrygian rituals (Roller 1999: 238-58). The Romans adapted the Pergamonian strain of Kybele's worship by making the goddess a part of their national identity, charging her with protection of the city, and identifying her with their legends of the foundation of Rome by Aeneas. They also transformed her into a fertility goddess, which was not formerly one of her aspects. This required emphasizing the sexual characteristics of her rites, which Roman commentators often decried as immoral and un-Roman.

Why would the institution of the transgender priest survive in so many different forms in so many different cultures in the Near East and the Mediterranean? It served the important function of allowing a space for innately gender-variant individuals to express themselves without disturbing the social order, offering these people a sense of community where otherwise they would have none. In Catullus' *Attis*, the poet imagines an individual who, by virtue of her experience as a man and her transformation into a half-woman, has cut herself off from the entire social order. Rather than wandering alone and friendless in the wilderness, transgender people, who tend to feel alienated because most of the rest of society has no reference point for understanding their experiences, could find in the religious community a place to belong— a place which not only offered them a way to express their gender differences, but also a position with a certain prestige. The amount of prestige inherent in this position varied, of course, with the local attitudes towards gender variance and transgression. Nonetheless, even a position with very low prestige offered one a place within society, without which humans cannot function as fully human.



### **Why a New Model?**

Ancient commentators were intensely interested in explanations for the behavior of the *gallae*. The profusion of myths about Attis, in which Attis acts as a prototype for the *gallae* and creates a precedent for the transformation of their bodies, attests to this interest. Modern scholarship is often silent on this issue, preferring silence or a non-explanation such as "insanity" or "religion" to an explanation which has a large conjectural component. Because the cult of Kybele, the *gallae*, and reactions to both had such a large part to play in the history of the Near East, and because understanding the *gallae* may provide important insights into cross-cultural gender transgression, a theoretical model of the *gallae* will prove helpful. Even if new evidence necessitates the model's revision, its existence in the first place may help shed light on the evidence as it arises.

Many ancient explanations for the physical transformation of the *gallae* hinge on the notion of "insanity." Attis is repeatedly said to be insane, either by divine power or by inward emotion. The *gallae* are said to be driven mad by the goddess. Insanity is a very culturally-dependent notion, one fraught with problems of power dynamics and social inequality. As Foucault demonstrated in *Madness and Civilization*, the construction of insanity in any society is grounds for exclusion of certain people from participation in the social sphere. People are said to be insane when they seem incapable of following the standards of behavior for their society and this is believed to be due to a flaw in their ability to

reason. Insanity, being itself liable to social construction, is not an adequate explanation for a social phenomenon such as that of the *gallae*. That the ancient commentators called the *gallae* "insane" represents a value judgment, an assertion that the behavior of the *gallae* is not that of ordinary people in their society, and a way of distancing the behavior of the *gallae* from themselves. It also contributed to the marginalization of the *gallae*. Walter Burkert provides an example of a modern scholar's uncritical acceptance of this explanation with the assertion: "It is clear that the act [ritual genital transformation] was performed in a state of mind when the man [sic] could not give reasons for what he did." (Burkert 1979: 105) But the insanity model offers the modern scholar only insight into how outsiders viewed them, not into the motivations of the *gallae* themselves. In addition, it is not supported by the ethnographic parallels. Modern transsexuals have no higher rate of mental illness than the general population (Cascio 2002), and *hijra* undergo a long period of apprenticeship before deciding to undergo physical transformation (Nanda 19990: 26-29).

Another explanation invoked by both ancient and modern commentators assigns the full responsibility for the actions of the *gallae* to religious belief. Religion does not exist independently of people, so removing agency from people and assigning it to religion creates a problem of circularity. We would have left to explain why the religion of the *gallae* had developed such that it required them to act in ways that were drastically different from other people in their own society.

Removal of the genitals for religious reasons, in whole or in part, seems

to constitute a statement of one of several kinds. It is a rejection of the sexual act (i.e. early Christian eunuchs), or symbolic of ritual purity and cleanliness (i.e. circumcision in the Jewish faith), or it is a sacrifice of personal fertility to the deity, perhaps in exchange for fertility of the earth (as postulated regarding the *gallae* by A.B. Cook and H.J. Rose in the 1920s [Nock 1925: 25, 25 n. 4]). The *gallae* did not appear to reject sexuality, or statements by Greek and Roman commentators that they enjoyed sex or acted in the capacity of prostitutes, sacred or otherwise, would have been ineffective even as slander. *Gallae* were not considered ritually more pure than non-*gallae*— in fact, quite the opposite. In *De Dea Syria*, Lucian describes some of the ritual restrictions surrounding the *gallae*, particularly stressing the fact that participants in their initiation ritual do not enter the temple (*DDS* 50). He also mentions that the *gallae* are buried outside the bounds of the city (*DDS* 52). Finally, since fertility was not an aspect of Meter's cult until it became part of the state religion of Rome, and the *gallae*, along with their bodily transformation, predate this event, it is unlikely that the removal of the genitals was seen as a sacrifice for the sake of fertility. Sacrifices of more conventional animals, such as bulls, goats, and sheep (*DDS* 54), were an integral part of Kybele's rites. If the removal of genitals was done to commemorate some historical Attis, as classical commentators appear to have believed, any number of less painful and dangerous acts would have served as well, such as castrating an effigy.

In light of this, removal of the genitals would seem to be something different. In order to see what religious significance the ritual transformation

had, one must look for its results. The obvious result of the removal of male genitals was that the *gallae* acquired a different social status— they became members of a specialized group of ritual technicians, and they wore women's clothing and adornments. The author of *De Dea Syria* is particularly emphatic about the relationship between the bodily transformation and the change in garments. He states that the *gallae* at Hierapolis throw their genitals into a house and receive women's clothing from whichever house they throw them into (*DDS* 51). A sacrifice can be anything of value; there is no need for it to be a part of one's own body by which one's social role is determined unless some kind of statement about the body and the social role is being made.

In "Priests of the Goddess," Will Roscoe argues that the *gallae* found becoming third-gender people (according to his model) a relief from the sometimes intolerable stress of the male role in Greek and Roman society. One would think that the people who really needed relief from the stresses of their gender role were those of the female assigned gender, since women had a distinctly subaltern role, particularly in Greece. Although stories exist of females who took on masculine attributes, such as the Amazons, and of isolated actual gender changes from female to male, there is not a corresponding religious group wherein people of a female assigned gender took on a male gender identity and role. Those stories which do exist of female to male gender change often involve details which we can today interpret as manifestations of an intersex condition involving ambiguous genitalia. Diodorus Siculus provides two examples: the story of Herais who appeared female in every respect but

was said to have a complete set of male genitals suddenly protrude from the abdomen, and that of Callo, who was born without a vaginal orifice, and later grew a hypospadiac penis and testicles from the pubis (Brisson 2002: 32-36). Aside from a few details, these could easily be representations of one of a number of intersex conditions, the biology of which is outside the scope of this thesis. Diodorus takes a highly rationalist stance on these two events, using them to make the point that "prodigies" should not be viewed with superstition, but treated medically. A further curiosity is a fragment of text (Adler number xi, 9) which states "Gyges, the king of the Lydians, was the first to "eunuchize" women so as to enjoy them in an ever-youthful state." (ὡς πρῶτος Γύγης ὁ Λυδῶν βασιλεὺς γυναῖκας εὐνούχισεν, ὅπως αὐταῖς χρῶτο ἀεὶ νεαζούσας. Translation by James L. P. Butrica.) The most likely explanation is probably that of partial infibulation, or surgical closure of the labia, if this comment has any basis in reality whatsoever. However, there is no suggestion of gender role shift. No evidence exists for a social phenomenon on the scale of the *gallae* of persons of female assigned gender taking on a male social role and identity as part of an institution, whether religious or otherwise.

To return to Roscoe's suggestion that the social pressures of the male gender role were great enough that it was necessary that they cut off their genitals and dress as women, it may be helpful to examine some of the other available options. If it is only that the rigid social expectations of the male gender role are untenable, it is less difficult to endure the social consequences of violating the social expectations than to self-castrate and live a marginal

existence. By analogy, transsexual people are often told by non-transsexual people that the only motive for gender transition is to escape rigid gender roles. This does not tend to fit with transsexual people's experience, as the travails of transition are inevitably greater than those of living non gender-normatively. (Iran's policies towards transsexuality are a notable exception; gender transition was approved by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, while the penalty for homosexuality is currently death [passed in 1991]. This situation did not obtain in ancient Greece and Rome.) The *gallae* risked death from the act of transforming their bodies, only to remain non gender-normative and marginalized in their new role. If the aim of self-transformation for the *gallae* was to escape social pressures, it seems to have been less than successful on the whole.

I do not, however, aim to oversimplify the range of possible motivations for the *gallae*. Some *gallae* may very well have taken that path to escape an intolerable situation, and some may very well have been incapable of following the social norms by reason of some problem in thinking, but neither of these things by themselves can describe a social movement, only individual situations and choices.

### **The *Gallae* and Marginality**

In Phrygia, the only solid evidence for a transgender priestly group we have is deeply connected to symbols of high status. The Bayandir figurine, made out of solid silver and depicting an individual with a solemn appearance

and rich ritual garb, seems to indicate that this individual, and perhaps the entire group to which the individual may have belonged, was accorded high status in Phrygian society. The *gallae* in Greece and Rome, however, were marginal figures.

Three main factors contributed to the marginal status of the *gallae*. The first is their gender variance itself. Beyond the fear of difference which is common to many people, their gender-variant status kept them from engaging in the social roles into which men and women were required to fit in Greece and Rome. The *gallae* had rejected the male role as unsuited to them, an action which, to some observers, showed that they were unsuited to it. Roman law made it impossible for them to take up their male role again once they had left it. Though they could take on the role of women in many respects, they would never be capable of childbearing, and this made them ineligible for marriage in Greek and Roman society. There was no acceptable role for them within the larger society, largely because there was no role for women who could not bear children and had a history of living in a male role.

Closely connected with the fact of their gender variance is the resulting continued existence of the *gallae* in a liminal state. Arnold van Gennep (1961) set forth a model of the ritual process which is still useful to anthropologists and ritual theorists today. He identified three stages of ritual: the preliminal state, when participants are separated from their group identity, the liminal state, when participants are no longer in their former state but have not yet taken on their new identity, and the postliminal state, when participants are reintegrated

into society in their new role. According to Victor Turner's elaboration on van Gennep's model (Turner 1995), liminality without resolution results in marginality (if not totalitarianism). The *gallae*, having been separated from men by their participation in an ecstatic and unorthodox cult, and having left their former role forever by the ritual of transforming their bodies, are not offered any way of reintegrating into society. The only role offered them is membership in a distinctly marginalized group. The *gallae* cannot be permitted, in the larger structure of their societies, to have a role in interrelationship with other people, except as itinerant devotees of the goddess. They cannot have a role as a lover, as distinct from merely participating in sexual acts, because their sexual ambiguity renders uncertain for whom they would be suitable partners. They could not marry because they could not produce children. Roman law forbade them from owning property because of their liminal gender status. It seems likely that in Rome at any rate they often did not remain in a close relationship with their kin; at least, where mentions of *gallae* occur they usually do not have family names, and they are absent or invisible in such things as funeral stelae, where mention of family is often made. The symbolism of the wilderness is appropriate for the *gallae* even in the heart of the city, because they are outside what other Greeks and Romans experience as society.

This is not to say that they did not form their own society in the margins. But their interrelations with non-*gallae* must always have been tenuous at best, full of questions and uncertainties, because their new status in society was never confirmed. Transsexuals in modern societies experience pressures to



choose whether to conform to the stereotypes of their new gender role, blending in and avoiding identification as a transsexual, or to be visible as a transsexual and seek community with other transsexuals, although this may endanger their integration into society and cause them to be marginalized.

The third factor contributing to the lack of status of the *gallae* was their characterization as foreign, non-Greek, non-Roman. This happened in spite of the fact that the cult of Kybele underwent significant changes when it entered Greece, and that many of the seemingly exotic characteristics of the cult, such as the oriental music, the *tympanum*, and perhaps the ecstatic dance, appear not to have been associated with the worship of Matar Kybele in Phrygia before the cult's Hellenization. It happened again in Rome, in spite of the fact that the Roman state made a deliberate decision to bring the cult into Rome (or to make official in the capital a cult already present throughout the empire), and that when they did so, they made changes to the cult's iconography and structure in order that it might better suit them. For instance, they added the pine cone to symbolize Kybele's Idaean origins, since Mount Ida was an important part of Roman mythological history. In Greece, Kybele was characterized as a foreign goddess and her worship as strange and exotic perhaps because it removed some of the feeling of danger from the ecstatic practices. It would have been easier to deal with worshippers who did mysterious and threatening things as part of their religious practice if it was emphasized that these activities were not a part of the Greek cultural milieu. In Rome, as part of Magna Mater's usefulness to the Roman state, certain aspects of her worship were adopted as Roman,

indeed as part of the very essence of Roman nationhood, and other aspects of the cult were rejected as "foreign." Such contradictions are not unheard of in the discourse of nationalism, wherever and whenever it occurs.

At different times throughout their history, the *gallae* were treated differently. They usually had a certain status among a minority of people because of their liminal state of being. They were said to be able to divine the future, and the "madness" of their ecstatic dancing was sacred and powerful. These are attributes commonly assigned to those who are thought to be in a liminal state. Ritual specialists, such as the shaman of Siberia, go into a liminal state between the borders of life and death and come back to the world of the living with extraordinary knowledge. The cult to which the *gallae* belonged was at some times a fringe cult and at others a vital part of state religion, but the position of the *gallae* fluctuated within much narrower bounds. They were at some times held in awe while being kept in the fringes of society, and at some times they were despised and barely tolerated even there. The group continued to exist nonetheless, so it must have fulfilled some need for the society or for the individuals, if not both.

### **Commonalities and Differences: Modern Analogy**

Because we have only evidence from the outsider's perspective on the *gallae*, the visible commonalities and differences between the *gallae* and modern transsexual people are in the ways in which they were treated by society, and not in their inmost motivations and experiences of their identities.

Both the *gallae* and modern transsexuals experience the crossing from one gender role to a different one, which involves the three phases of life-crisis ritual described by Arnold van Gennep. Both end up marginalized with respect to the larger social structure, although to varying degrees. Both groups often experience negative reactions from others based specifically on perceptions of their body as "wrong" or in violation of standards which are seen as "natural." The *gallae* and modern transsexual women are both grouped by outsiders with homosexual men, although this may not accurately describe their own experience, and they certainly show outward signs of difference from homosexual men (i.e. cutting off their genitals).

There are, however, certain differences between *gallae* and modern transsexual women. *Gallae* seem to have been in charge of their own transformation, to the extent of transforming their bodies by their own hands, while transsexuals have the guidance and limitations of the medical community. Class was probably not very much a limiting factor in becoming a *galla*, while financial resources can be an obstacle for many transsexuals. Most transsexuals strive to reintegrate into the social structure as completely as possible, with a few exceptions, while the *gallae* created a community of their own. Finally, the meaning of the transgender experience is construed differently. The *gallae* constructed a shared religious meaning for their experiences, while modern transsexuals tend to construct individual meanings for their experiences but often frame them in terms of psychological exploration and self-actualization, using the discourse created by the psychological

community.

### **Reenvisioning the Gallae**

The institution of the transgender priest, wherever it is found, provides a special space for a minority of people who are engaged in a particular aspect of normal human experience—that of being transgender. Leaving aside questions of causality, which cannot be satisfactorily addressed at the present time, transgender identity appears as a driving motivation for a minority of people, seemingly without regard to cultural differences. Cultural differences, however, affect how the individual and society construct meaning for the experience of being transgender.

I believe that the *gallae* in particular arose from a culture in which transgenderness was seen as a powerful form of liminality which benefitted the society in some religious or spiritual way. I do not see sufficient evidence to prove that this society was originally Sumer rather than Phrygia, but thanks to Taylor's evidence I find it a compelling explanation. Because the institution of the transgender priest fulfilled a social need, it was persistent in the Near East, and spread easily to the Mediterranean.

The Greek social structure, however, did not integrate the transgender priest figure without resistance. The social structure depended on clear, inflexible gender roles, and the transgender priesthood seemed to threaten these roles, even while it acted as a "pressure valve," allowing people who could not fit the rigid social roles a means of escape. Without this pressure

valve, the inevitable presence of people who did not fit Greek gender roles would have created a much larger disruption to the social structure. However, the *gallae* did not only serve to allow the system to continue, they acted as a constant challenge to the social order by being persistently visible in the margins of society.

When the Roman elite brought the cult of Kybele into Rome, they were officially recognizing a minority cult which was already present elsewhere in Italy and the provinces. By doing so they were able to exert a greater amount of control over this possibly dangerous influence. Indeed, when the cult became a state institution it underwent radical changes in iconography and emphasis. Those aspects of Kybele's worship which served the Roman state were praised and honored, and those which did not were sometimes ignored and sometimes viciously disparaged. Laws against Romans becoming *gallae* prove that some Romans did feel drawn to become *gallae*, against great societal pressure to the contrary.

The people who became *gallae* would have had a variety of reasons for doing so. For some, these reasons would be primarily social, economic, or religious. As evidenced by the extremely gendered nature of the *gallae*, though, and particularly their transformation of their own bodies, most of them probably had transgender feelings or identification as part of their motivation. Ethnographic analogy with the *hijra* and modern transsexuals supports this assertion. Social and economic motivations alone do not explain the *gallae* as a social phenomenon which persisted for over a thousand years, with slight

variations but with an identifiable core of common features. Purely religious explanations fail to account for individual agency both in the shaping of religious practice and in the decision to engage in particular kinds of practice.

It is, then, appropriate to view the *gallae* not as men engaging in unusual religious practice, but as transgender people constructing meaning for their identities and experiences. They engaged in this task as marginal people in Greek and Roman society, negotiated their role as best they could from that position of marginality, and found within religion not only meaning but also a space for self-expression which would have been denied them elsewhere.

### **Back to the Ancient World**

This chapter returns to the evidence for the *gallae* in the ancient world in order to reexamine it in light of the model used. In it I will show the model's strengths and weaknesses, how it helps reframe the evidence, and what questions are left unanswered. Specifically, I find that this model helps to create an understanding of the nature of the relationship between the marginalized *gallae* and gender-normative members of the larger society. It offers an explanation for why the institution of the transgender priest existed in several different cults in the region of the Mediterranean and the Near East. It offers a perspective which does a better job of balancing the agency of the individual with social pressures than existing wholly religion-oriented models. This model also provides a standpoint from which to examine critically the ancient texts which characterize the *gallae* as foreign, alien, insane, or depraved. It is not, nor

is it meant to be, unbiased, apolitical, disciplinarily pure, or least of all the final word on the subject of Meter's transgender priests.

### **Parallels Among the Gods**

The transgender priests existed in many forms throughout the Mediterranean and Near East, from the GALA of Sumer, the related *kalaturru* and *kurgarru* of Babylon, the *sinnishanu* or *assinu* of Assyria, perhaps the *qedeshim* of Canaan, the Scythian *enarees*, and the *gallae* proper, whether serving Kybele, Atargatis, or Agdistis. It is not unlikely that the *hijra* of India share in this tradition. The transgender priests are not the property of one specific deity, although the deities they serve often share commonalities. Inanna/Ishtar, Atargatis, Agdistis, Kybele, and Bahuchara Mata are all powerful female divinities, associated with the wilderness, wild animals, and forces of nature, and considered to have the power to inflict a "divine madness" and in some cases, to change people's gender at will. For instance, the following lines are from a poem of devotion to Inanna, written by a woman priest named Enheduanna circa 2300 BCE:

*To destroy, to build  
to lift up, to put down  
are yours, Inanna  
To turn man into woman  
woman into man  
are yours, Inanna (Meador 2000: 127)*

In another portion of the poem already cited in Chapter 1, in the section entitled "Echoes of Sumer," the poet provides an image of the "manly woman" as someone whose behavior and manner is inconsistent with his assigned gender. For this he is outcast. It is not the typical role of the woman in which he is suffering, a role which is represented by the woman at the window holding her child, but the society's rejection of the gender variant person. His ritual transformation into a special kind of man is a way to provide space for this expression, and feels like the lifting of a curse to the poet. The second transformation, that of a man to a woman, however, is seen as a punishment and described in less detail.

Like Kybele, Bahuchara Mata is another example of a goddess called mother with very little of the maternal about her; in fact, according to myth, she cut off her breasts to avoid sexual contact (Roscoe 1996: 296).

While these divinities share certain commonalities, they are not identical. The institution of the transgender priest either arose separately in their cults or had some common influence, but it did not remain a signature of one particular cult. There is nothing in particular in the nature of a female divinity who is powerful and linked with wilderness symbolism which necessitates transgender priests. There might, however, be something in the nature of these deities which provides room for the idea of a sacred transgender person.

In the hymns to Inanna, her ability to change the gender of a person is often linked to her power to destroy. Kybele's power to change a person's



gender is identified with her power to inflict divine madness. In the second myth of Attis proposed by Pausanias, Kybele's mere appearance at the wedding feast is enough to trigger this divine madness and the subsequent self-transformation. Divinities whose cults allow expression of sacred transgenderism must have the capacity for breaking down distinctions, in these cases by powerful destructive force which obliterates externally, or by madness which erases distinctions within the mind. Inanna also has the general characteristic of unifying opposites; she herself is both creative and destructive at once, a fact which is heavily emphasized in devotional literature addressed to her. Kybele represents both the wilderness, by her association with wild animals and places, and civilization, by her taming of beasts, her mural crown, and her status as protector of cities. The characteristics of unifying opposites and erasing distinctions signify liminality. Divinities whose cults have room for the sacred transgender take their power from liminality. This is also true of Dionysus, whose ecstatic followers were sometimes grouped with the *gallae* under the heading of *curetes* and *korybantes*.

Although the cults share similar qualities, it is not the religion which makes the transgender person; it simply makes the transgender person a priest. In Inanna's transformation of the "manly woman" into a liminal ritual practitioner and in the assertions of the *hijra* that they have "always felt like women" (Nanda 1998), the preexisting discomfort with their assigned gender on the part of many to-be transgender priests is visible. Although by happenstance the voices of the *gallae* do not survive to make this plain, the parallels with the *hijra* and

the GALA are persuasive.

To the scholar bearing this evidence in mind, the actions of the *gallae* look quite different. It is not as easy to accept uncritically the writings of ancient Greek and Roman outsiders who decried the *gallae* as insane or perverse. The currently favored theoretical approach, which places entire emphasis on religion as the motivating factor for the ritual transformation, also seems to deny individual needs and agency while being unconvincing for other reasons. Even the relative absence of interpretation with which many scholars (e.g. Vermaseren) prefer to approach the *gallae* seems dehumanizing to the point of distortion. The reactions of outsiders to the transgender identity expressed by the *gallae* reveal a subtly different story.

### **The Outsider's View**

Ancient texts represent the *gallae* as foreign, when many of them were native Greeks and Romans, as alien, when they must have had motivations just like any other group of people, as insane, when that term is of little use in describing a cultural phenomenon, and as perverse, when hypersexualized aspects weren't introduced until the Romans began shifting the cult's emphasis onto fertility.

"The priest and priestess of the goddess are Phrygians," wrote Dionysios of Halikarnassos in the late first century BCE, "... But by law and decree of the Senate no native Roman walks in procession through the city arrayed in a multi-colored robe, begging alms or escorted by flute players, or worships the

goddess with Phrygian ceremonies" (Beard 1996: 176). It is axiomatic in the social sciences that laws only exist to outlaw things that people actually do. The powerful elite had their own reasons for bringing the cult of Kybele to Rome, and as Lynn Roller argues, contrary to the assertions of Dionysios, the Romans knew full well what they were getting involved in from the start (Roller 1999: 284-5). The ecstatic rites of the *gallae* were not an unpleasant surprise. These did appeal to native Romans, as the elites who were most directly involved with bringing Kybele to Rome must have expected. It was later considered expedient to separate the "foreign" aspects from the Roman ones, and to exert some control over the participation of native Romans in the foreign rites, but this may have as much to do with politics as with a desire for decorum. The families of Claudia Quinta, the "chaste matron" who supposedly miraculously moved the boat which carried the goddess to Rome, and Publius Scipio, the "best man" who officially received her, initially received a significant political boost from the popularity of Kybele. As the political situation changed, perhaps it became necessary for the Senate to put a brake on the number of native Romans who participated in the more ecstatic forms of worship. While the existence of the *gallae* and their ecstatic rites were certainly familiar to the Romans when the goddess was invited to Rome, the number of native Romans who wanted to join the *gallae* may have surprised the elite. They responded by making it illegal for native Romans to participate in the "Phrygian ceremonies" (including initiation as *gallae*). This effectively emphasized the divide between the Romans and that which disturbed them. Strange and frightening behavior is less threatening if it

is associated only with the foreigner and is not something that could occur in one's close associates, servants, friends, and family. (I am reminded of an acerbic Irish nun of my brief acquaintance who asserted that there were no Irish homosexuals. When offered the example of the openly gay Irish poet Cathal Ó Searcaigh, she responded that he was necessarily either not Irish or not homosexual. This tangential anecdote illustrates to me the powerful need to keep behavior one finds incomprehensible at a distance, whatever mental gymnastics are required.)

Martial's epigram to the *galla* Baeticus is one example of the tendency of Roman authors to portray the *gallae* as sexually perverse. While the *gallae* need never have been exactly chaste, the emphasis on sex and fertility in the rites of Mater were a Roman addition to the cult (Roller 1999: 280). Conflation of the outspoken sexuality of the *gallae* with their "foreign rites" is therefore unjustified. If their reputed sexual behaviors were then perfectly "Roman," the question becomes what exactly made them so offensive. Baeticus' alleged participation in oral sex is neither appropriate for a man nor for a woman within Roman *mores*, a fact which emphasizes a liminal gender status. However, in this case, oral sex on male genitals is more expected than oral sex on female genitals, because in the former the mouth substitutes for a vulva and in the latter the tongue substitutes for the phallus. Martial highlights the liminal gender of the *galla* by calling attention to his surprise that Baeticus is still "a man in the mouth." The persona of the poet appears affronted that a *galla* would still choose intercourse with women, defying the expectation of intercourse with

men. This is echoed in a certain confusion commonly expressed about gay transsexual men and lesbian transsexual women in the 21st century CE; namely, regarding the assumption that transsexual women "are really" gay men, and will be attracted to men, and that transsexual men "are really" lesbians, and will be attracted to women.

### **From the Outside In**

What evidence we have from Phrygia suggests that the transgender priests there were of high status in society. The cult of Matar was the state religion, and the kings of Phrygia were intimately connected with her worship. The one Phrygian representation of a transgender priest which has been found is made of rare and costly materials and depicts the individual wearing robes like those of the goddess herself, with an expression best described as solemn and dignified. While extant Phrygian texts from this period cannot yet be read in their entirety, and scholars have not yet been able to translate any ritual texts pertaining to cult activities, the Bayandir figurine in association with analogous Near Eastern material from Sumer seems to indicate a culture which has some respect for the liminal power of transgender people.

Kybele becomes more apparently a liminal goddess in the early Greek cult. She is a goddess of the wilderness who is also a goddess of civilization, as evidenced by her association with taming wild animals such as lions and birds of prey. The *tympanum* first appears in her iconography at this time. While Roller has used these two facts in conjunction to postulate that the liminal,

ecstatic character of the goddess's cult did not come into existence until it entered Greece, another reasonable suggestion is that since Matar was the center of Phrygian religious life, her cult attributes were not seen as liminal until her cult was Hellenized. The *tympanum*, for instance, may not be depicted on Phrygian cultic monuments because there it was a normal part of everyday life, whereas in Greece it was seen as exotic and thus identified as a characteristic of Kybele's foreign worshippers.

The Roman naturalization of the cult of Kybele may have been calculated to bring the group under the state's control. The religion was already familiar in the countryside, and the effect of bringing the rites of Kybele into Rome was to alter the iconography and the power structure, and to standardize the Roman forms throughout the empire. The *archigallus*, as an outsider in a position of authority over the *gallae*, probably acted as a form of state control as well. It seems that there was enough need for the *gallae* that they could not simply be legislated out of existence, although much of Roman literature is highly unfavorable to them. The conclusion that the *gallae* were necessary because of the widespread if not universal need for some way to deal with individuals who do not fit the existing gender roles is a reasonable one in light of the evidence.

Though the internal motivations of the *gallae* are opaque, we can better approach an understanding of their experiences by examining the effects of their behavior. It is known that the *gallae* removed their male genitalia. Thereafter, they dressed, adorned themselves, and spoke as women, and engaged in ritual behavior (such as shaking the hair) one effect of which was to

emphasize the femininity of their appearance. This behavior seems inexplicable to many, including ancient commentators. Even Catullus, in a poem in which he strives to imagine the experience of a *galla*, cannot identify with her, and resorts once again to explaining her behavior as divine madness. Since the effect of the *gallae*'s transformation was that they lived in a role as near to female as the social structure would allow, modern scholars ought to consider that perhaps the desire to live in that role was a powerful motivating force.

### **Conclusions: Strengths and Weaknesses**

The model of the *gallae* as transgender people helps to reinterpret the texts regarding them. It fits the available evidence and provides new insights into the parallels between the *gallae* and other Near Eastern transgender priesthoods which does not rely on direct transmission. It frees the scholar from the necessity of relying on non-explanations such as "insanity" for the behavior of the *gallae*. Further, it incorporates unique insights from ethnographic parallels with a modern subaltern group, which contributes to multivocality in the field of classical studies, itself a worthy pursuit. For all these reasons, this model is a beneficial contribution to the study of the cult of Meter Kybele and her *gallae*.

However, there are several things this model does not do. It is not conclusive. In the absence of the preserved thoughts of the *gallae* themselves concerning their transgender behavior, we cannot know what meaning they ascribed to it. It is not free from outside influences, such as those of psychology

and gender theory; on the contrary, it builds on theories which are well-accepted but unproven even in these other disciplines. It is also not unbiased or apolitical. I do not believe there is anything to be gained by obscuring bias where it is unavoidable. Much scholarship has been done on the topic of the *gallae* from a standpoint of ignorance and even prejudice regarding gender transgressive behavior which masquerades as unbiased. This occurs not through malice or intellectual dishonesty but because the scholars themselves may not be aware that they are biased in this regard, or that an interdisciplinary understanding of transgenderism could legitimately inform their work.

#### **Afterword: Modern Gallae, a Variety of Transsexual Experience**

It is always a mistake for scholars to feel they can go about their research in isolation. Not only will the politics of the time always leave their mark on the work, but the academic is not alone in the endeavor of constructing meaning from the past.

Some transsexual women, coming across references to *gallae* either through scholarly research of their own or by chance, have noticed the parallels between the *gallae* and their own lives. This has led certain of them to identify with the *gallae* and with the religion of Meter Kybele, and in the process of making meaning out of their experiences, they have begun reconstructing the religion in a way which makes sense to them. This process involves filtering out information which they feel has been overly tainted with the transphobia (hatred or fear of transgenderism) of ancient authors both pagan and Christian as well



as that of modern scholars whose work seems to them to suppress the richness of transgender experience.

The Maetrum of Cybele, a community of women (some transsexual and some not) in upstate New York, was founded by the Reverend Battakes Cathryn Platine. In the tradition of modern pagan reconstructionism, which emphasizes a balance of intuitive self-reflection and historical research, they rebuild the religion of the goddess as a living mystery religion with application to their own lives. This leads them to different conclusions than many people engaged in a similar pursuit from within the classical academic community. For instance, their efforts to discover where the ancient *gallae* of Rome made their home have led them to locate the Phrygianum at the site called the Nymphaea on the Mons Vaticanus (McMahon 2004).

The practitioners of this faith include transsexual women who have not had surgery (modern Gallae) and non-transsexual and post-operative transsexual women (Mellissae, after the female-assigned priests of Mater in Rome). The Mellissae are said to more fully embody the Magna Mater. The Mellissae who have undertaken the physical transformation of their bodies and the Gallae who wish to or are in the process of doing so follow the protocols set forth by the modern medical community.

Modern gender transition is a life-crisis ritual much more protracted than that of the initiation of the *gallae* in ancient times. The first phase, separation, begins when a transsexual person recognizes the disharmony they perceive between their experience of their gender identity and the role-set associated

with their assigned gender. It is fully realized in the process of "coming out," or disclosing these feelings to others, at which point the transsexual person often begins to take on outward behaviors and symbols of their intended status. The liminal stage begins when the individual ceases to "pass" as a member of the gender assigned to them at birth, a period often structured by the individual or by gender therapists as the "real life test," or full-time cross-living. The term "real life test" comes from the medical practitioners under whose supervision the transition occurs, to a greater or lesser extent. The real life test is the standard period of living as fully as possible in one's identified gender role often required by these supervising initiators. The role of the therapist is often nurturing and adversarial by turns. Their aim is to prevent individuals from making gender transition who are not ready or whose motivations are suspect, and to this end they create obstacles, tests, and challenges for the liminars. During this period of full-time cross-living, the goal is to successfully function in society as a member of the gender by which one identifies, but in practice, without body modification, a high degree of success in this is rare. Individuals in this stage are often confronted with confused reactions from others, to whom they may appear as neither male nor female, or some socially unacceptable combination of both.

This period gives one access to an outsider subculture of people who, with varying degrees of optation, violate or transgress the norms of binary gender opposition, exist between or outside the binary extremes, or explore and even play with the extremes in a parodical fashion. Here, gender divides are

regarded as artificial, and are broken down through the conscious use of artifice. Other social divides are often blurred or manipulated either coincidentally or as part of the attempt to obliterate gender categories. Not all transsexuals choose to partake of this outsider community. Those who do describe an attraction to the feeling of being understood and accepted, as well as a shared unspoken experience which is unlike that of the majority of individuals in the mainstream social structure. This is sometimes accompanied by a feeling of "gender euphoria," a term which arises in opposition to the psychological diagnosis of gender dysphoria and describes the elation of *communitas*.

Many transsexual people undergo medical body modifications which serve the purposes of allowing transsexuals to integrate more thoroughly into society and helping them experience something closer to congruence between their internal gender identities and their physical bodies. The process of medical transition may take anywhere from six months to ten years or more. Those who do not undergo medical transition, whether because of economic, ideological, or personal health factors, often spend more time in the outsider community and may never wholly leave it. Those who do undergo medical transition may choose to leave the outsider community, or may even be rejected from it, as they begin to blend more easily with the mainstream social structure.

The end of the liminal state occurs at different points for different individuals, but can be stated generally as the point at which the transsexual person is regarded by the majority of people he or she interacts with in the

social structure as a member of the gender of identity. The individual may hold a job which would have been difficult if not impossible to obtain or maintain as a liminal person. Usually, transsexual people in this stage no longer think of their transsexuality as of paramount importance in their day-to-day lives; some no longer think of themselves as transsexual people at all.

The desire to remain in a position of community with other transsexual people, in order to make the state of *communitas* more easily accessible, may lead some transsexual people to create spaces such as the Maetreum. Others prioritize blending into the social structure, even when that makes it more difficult to make connections with other transsexuals. Balancing the need for community based on common experience with the need to fit into the social structure (even if that need is only economic) is one of the more subtle challenges facing many transsexual people today, just as it was for the *gallae* in ancient Greece and Rome.

## Primary Texts

Antiphanes	fr. 154
Athenaios	<i>Deipnosophists</i> [ <i>Sophists at Dinner</i> ]
Pliny the Elder	<i>De Rerum Naturae</i> [ <i>Natural History</i> ]
Ovid	<i>Fasti</i> [ <i>Calendar</i> ]
Clement of Alexandria	<i>Protreptica</i> [ <i>Address to the Greeks</i> ]
Firmicus Maternus	<i>De errore profanarum religionum</i> [ <i>On the Errors of the Pagan Religions</i> ]
Livy	<i>Ab Urbe condita libri</i> [ <i>Books From the Foundation of the City</i> ]
Pausanias	<i>Description of Greece</i>
Arnobius	<i>Adversus Nationes</i>
Diodorus Siculus	<i>History</i>
Lucian of Samosata	<i>De Dea Syria</i> [ <i>On The Syrian Goddess</i> ]
Catullus	"Attis" ( <i>Carmen</i> 63)
Strabo	<i>Geography</i>
Polybius	<i>History</i>
Martial	<i>Epigrammaticus</i> [ <i>Epigrams</i> ]

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