The official introduction of Magna Deorum Mater Idaei, into the Roman pantheon in 204 B.C. followed a certain tradition of acceptance of other foreign deities. According to the prophesies of the Sibylline books, the powers of these new gods could have influenced the unfavorable events which Rome suffered from. Nonetheless, the sea voyage of Magna Mater and her welcoming to Rome were truly legendary ones, leaving a certain mark in the Roman history and art, and a significant change in the Roman culture. Showers of stones falling from the sky brought more fear, after a series of losses against the Carthaginians. The great Phrygian goddess came to Rome as a saviour, to bring an end to the great struggle in the Punic wars, on a ship symbolically called Navis Salvia, made out of pine wood and painted in fiery colours, as fabled by Ovid (4.273-74). Navis Salvia arrived at the port of Ostia on the fourth of April 204 B.C. where Cybele was greeted as a roman national goddess, accompanied by a fitting ceremony. The sacred stone, the idol of the Goddess was temporarily placed in the temple of Victoria on the Palatine. This symbolic act must have led the people of Rome to believe even more in the victory of Scipio in Africa. Two years after the arrival of the Goddess, at the battle of Zamma, the second Punic War was brought to an end.

Key words: Magna Mater, Punic Wars, Navis Salvia, Scipioni, Claudii, terracotta antefixa.

Behind the solemn event of dignifying an oriental deity by welcoming it into the Roman pantheon, many aspects of the Roman mentality and of their political and religious views are revealed. The coming of Cybele to Rome is connected to some very important historical episodes of the third century B.C., the time of the Second Punic war and the First Macedonian. The war losses after the second invasion of Carthage were greater than expected, while the city itself was facing the greatest danger of the time – Hannibal. After the defeat at the Trasimene Lake at 217 B.C., the Sibylline books were consulted, predicting victory if a foreign deity was introduced. This time, it was Venus Erycina from Sicily which contained both Punic and Greek elements, a step which helped the Romans in seducing the sympathies of the Greeks. The introduction of this cult is somehow also interwoven with the mythological interpretation of the Roman roots, and in accordance to the legend of their Trojan origin. During the course of the third and the second century, the Romans greatly accepted the legend of their eastern origin, which is in fact a product of Greek mythography. All the same, the Roman religion of the Republic also contributed to this process of Romanization. These prophesies helped the process of Roman penetration into the Hellenic world, and most certainly lead towards redefining the old Roman religion of the Republic. See Gruen 1990, 7, 9. 

1 In 293 B.C., after a horrible epidemic, Asclepius was accepted among the Roman gods (Livy, 10.47, 6-7), while in the middle of the same century, after the defeat at Trasimene Lake, Aspera and Persephone were also introduced (Livy, Per. 49). These prophesies helped the process of Roman penetration into the Hellenic world, and most certainly lead towards redefining the old Roman religion of the Republic. Also see Gruen 1990, 1.

2 This is the traditional opinion set by Graillot 1909, 30-32.

3 Ovid. (Met. 4.80-76); Millérvici 1990, 122-123.

4 Gruen 1990, 49.

5 Diódoros Siculus (4.51.4-7) mentions that Aeneas visited the temple of his mother Aphrodite on the mountain Eryx. The myth was known already in the fifth century B.C. and it is attributed to Hellanikos of Lesbos. For the companionship of Aeneas with Odysseus see Schrader 1906; also Hartnoll 1987 and Gruen 1990, 11-12.
this particular myth strengthened the current Roman national awareness, which was especially needed in this particular time, and additionally defined their identity by separating it from the Hellenic world. One of the main arguments according to what Rome believed to have a right to claim its eastern heritage in the form of the cult of Great Cybele was the Trojan origin, often used in the political and diplomatic relations with the East.

In 205 B.C. the population must have been in absolute horror when in South Italy showers of stones were reported and were taken as a very bad omen. Thus, the Sibylline books were once again consulted, predicting that the end of the war would happen only if the Great Mother from Ida was brought to Rome. There were news from Delphi as well, also foreseeing a great victory. Such problems were natural to resolve by the help of a foreign deity, even more if the deity was worshiped through the great stone of Pessinus, the black meteorite that also fell from the sky, according to legend. All sources about the arrival of Cybele to Rome are from latter times than the actual event, mainly connected to the royal Augustan house. Understandably, this episode of the Roman history has been mythologized and used as a tool for propaganda, especially in the Ovid’s Fasti. He tells us a rather romanticized version of the events of 204 B.C. The great Goddess was ready to depart Troad with Aeneas, but she stayed waiting for the right time of her summoning to Rome (4.251-64). Nevertheless, she protected Aeneas during his journey. In the ninth book of Aeneid (9.77-83, 9.107-22) in the war against Turnus the Goddess gives Aeneas peace of mind that his vessels are safe from burning, because they were made from the wood of one of her dwellings. When the time came and the Romans claimed their national heritage, Attalus was not particularly inclined towards this notion. But the Goddess distinctly expressed her wish, considering Rome to be quite fitting for her new dwelling. The earth shook, while the king, in fear, agreed for her departure to the West (4.265-70) The ship was made out of pine wood that was taken from the same woods Aeneas used for building the ship that led him to Italic shores.

The true motive of the acceptance of Cybele will always be a puzzle to the modern historians. The over-taking of such an important eastern cult in these conditions must have given hope to the common people, while it also reflected the Roman respect and affection toward eastern traditions. However, there are opinions that Cybele came to Rome when victory was already at hand as opposed to Graillot’s traditional opinion. Gruev’s argument in favor of this position is the fact that in the resolving battle at the river Metaurus at 207 B.C. the Roman army won; Carthaginians were greatly forced out of the Italic land by the time the cult was being considered, bringing a certain relief from the prior tension. These events certainly changed the course of the war. The next step was the attack of Africa that would have driven Hannibal completely out of Italy. In 205 B.C. after the battle in Hispania, young Cornelius Scipio has been appointed governor of Sicily that served as a departure point towards Africa. Burton takes this discussion further, and as he puts it examines whether Gruev’s recontextualization, his preference for Ovid’s account, and his extension of the episode’s significance to the realms of domestic politics and international diplomacy are at all feasible. He considers the historical facts of Mago’s help to Hanibal’s army as well as the low population rate in order to suggest that the atmosphere in Rome was still in the spirit of uncertainty and anxiety.

Another very important question is where was the black meteorite, the fetish of the Great Phrygian Goddess, taken from. There are discorances in the ancient sources about the exact location in Asia Minor where the cult was officially handed over to the Romans, so we are left with three versions. Livy (29.10.5, 29.11.7) tells us that Attalus gave the idol of Magna Mater from Pessinus, an information given to us by other ancient writers as well such as Cicero (De Har. Resp. 27-28); Diodorus Siculus (34/35.33.2); Strabo (12.5,3) and Valerius Maximus (8.15,3). Varo (De lingua Lat. 6.15), on the other hand, states that the Goddess was delivered from Pergamum, which could actually be closer to the true event, having in mind that Attalus’ power did not reach as far as Pessinus, as Gruen concluded. Gruev considers that the most believable account of the event was given to us by Ovid. According to him, Attalus transferred the black meteorite from the temple on Mount Ida before it was officially given to the Romans. After all she was known in Rome as Magna Deorum Mater Idaei. This way, the legend of the Trojan heritage of the Romans gains greater importance and logic during the negotiations. Naturally, the issue about the exact location continued to be heavily discussed among the contemporary researchers of this subject.

The arrival of Cybele was, in either way, a turning point in Roman history that served as a platform for
political display as well. Among the crew on the ship towards the Goddess, there were honourable representatives of all important Roman families that had powerful political influence of the time. The role of these ambassadors as mediators between the Goddess and the plebs brought them even more favorable positions among the people. On their way towards Atallus, amicus of Rome and the official that delivered the Goddess to the hands of the Romans, the delegation stopped at Delphi and got an advice that the Goddess should be given in the hands of the best man at Rome (vir optimus Romanae). The young Cornelius Publius Scipio, future Nasica, son of Gnaeus Scipio, got this honor out of clear political reasons, but also out of symbolic ones. Although he was not yet a powerful political figure, and did not hold a public office, his ancestors enjoyed quite a respectable reputation. Scipio was appreciated and suited for this position also for his chastity that a youth of barely twenty would be expected to have. Scipio Africanus, young Nasica’s uncle and a man that never brought decisions without consulting the temple of Jupiter on the Palatine first, was at this time already preparing for the invasion of Africa, so the election of his nephew would grant even greater favor of the Goddess for the Scipioni and assure better chances for victory. But, Scipioni were not the only ones who got the honors of receiving Cybele. It seems that the Goddess found herself between the struggle of the political opponents; gens Claudii and gens Scipioni. The chaste Claudia Quinta, descended from Atta Clausus, whose name is linked to Attis, assured this honor for the Claudii as well. The act of agreement of both families, and the equal given honors, was a symbolic one, portraying the roman greatness and solidarity. The legend of the introduction of the cult to Rome was again used in medieval times for political reasons and to glorify a certain family. On the sculptural frieze of Andrea Mantegna, an amateur archaeologist himself, very interested in the Classics, both protagonists of our story are portrayed, kneeling Claudia, and dignified Scipio behind her, as if they were made of marble. A scarf curling down from the shoulder of Claudia Quinta is emphasized, possibly in reference to the means by which she drew the ship of the goddess forward. As ordered by Francesco Cornero, the brother of Cardinal Marco Cornero, Mantegna painted this picture to celebrate the Cornelian antecedents of the Cornero family.

Ovid describes the voyage of Navis Salvia to Rome in detail, which began in perfect safety and was safe until it reached the waters of Tiber. As shown on the map (fig. 1), Navis Salvia passed Troad, and went down along the Sigean shore, then from Lesbos, straight to the Cyclades, all across the Sicilian Sea and arriving at the port of Ostia, where it faced some troubles, and ran aground the shallow waters of Tiber. Bremmer compares this legend with the one from Erythrai about the statue of Heracles that sailed from Phoenician Tyre on a wooden raft and was anchored at a cape between Erythrai and
Chios. According to him, every major historical event is always bound to have a previous difficulty or a delay of some sort, just because of its greatness and the difference that it brings. Livy (14,5-14) on the other hand accounts us with the atmosphere of her reception at Rome, and does not fail to accentuate the affection that the Goddess received from the aristocracy. It does come to mind that Livy was justifying the reputation of Cybele, as a goddess that brings indecency with her rituality, by justifying the one of Claudia Quinta. However, the Goddess came together with her eunuch priests, the Galli, which brought to Rome the frenzies, unknown to the Roman streets until then.26

The Great Goddess herself was a protectoress of naval travel. We already mentioned that Ovid tells us that Cybele granted the ships of Aeneas safety from burning. She is depicted as a protectoress of sea voyaging on the relief in the British Museum (fig. 2), most likely from Cyzicus or Samothrace.27 Cybele is ruling on a throne, in front of her stand the bearded deity and Hermes, accompanied by smaller figures of two warriors. On the opposite corner, right above Cybele, there is a ship and a person sitting on a rock. This is most probably a depiction of the ritual needed to silence the power of nature over which Cybele ruled - the frenetic dance personified through the figures of the Corybantes. The obligation to appease the gods in order to have a safe naval travel, leads us towards Samothrace and the local Theoi Megaloi. The Argonauts, before they continued their journey, were initiated in their mysteries. Enough evidence, both literary and iconographic, was already given that Cybele was equaled with the Goddess of Samothrace.28 This geographic position on the strait from the Aegean into the Sea of Marmara gives us a clear idea of the dangers and the reason why the sailors sacrificed to the Gods and performed the appointed rituals, if they wanted to continue safely towards the Black Sea.29 Cybele, among her other capacities, was connected with thermal springs and holy curative rivers besides which her shrines were usually build. In Dorylaeum in Phrygia the Goddess had an epithet Θερμηνή which demonstrates that her iatric capabilities were in connection with thermal waters. The epithet σωτερία is also often found with the Goddess’s name and additionally speaks in favor of her healing and protective qualities. This is also the case with the cognationes from Dalmatian Solona.30 It can be supposed that the local population was aware of these powers of the Great Mother and that the river Iadro was another reason for gathering the cogna-

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27 Vermaseren 1977b, 69.
28 Lucian (De Dea Syria 15); Diodorus Siculus (3,55,7) and Dionysus of Halicarnassus (Antiquitates romanae 1,6,2-4); See also Welch 1986.
29 See Bonnechere 2003, 171.
30 Medini 1985.

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Fig. 2. Relief from Cyzicus (after Vermaseren 1977b, 69)

Figs. 3-6. Terracotta antefixa from Rome, 2, 3 century A.D. (after Vermaseren 1977a, 202, 203, 397, 429)
tions and setting shrines devoted to the Goddess in the Salona region. The soteriological aspects of the cult satisfied the needs of communities to protect the prosperity and welfare of its members. One of Cybele’s divine duties was deflection of illnesses and misfortunes, while the iatric content of the cult is in complete compliance with the needs of the society, in this case, within a narrow community.

Considering the Roman iconographical heritage, the image of Magna Mater on a boat is a known motif; however not a very common one, seen only on monuments from Rome and, of course, from Ostia’s Campus Magnae Matris as a location with tradition in the history of the acceptance of the Goddess in Rome. Navis Salvia itself became a sacred ship, worshiped in a shrine at the port of Ostia. There is a serial of terracotta antefixa from the second and third century A.D. depicting the arrival of the Goddess (figs. 3–6). The boat is shown with a mast, yards, and also a sail decorated with thyrsi. The statue of Magna Mater is placed on a high-backed throne and flanked by lions. Bellow the boat, we see antithetical dolphins. On the famous altar from the first century, found at the foot of the Aventine, the legend of Claudia Quinta is illustrated, and the miraculous way of how she pulled the ship along Tiber (fig. 7). The miracle is also shown on one of the three medallions struck during the third consulship of Antoninus Pius, posthumously honoring Faustina the Elder as a diva on their obverse with scenes of Roman history on their reverse. Here, we have additional gallery of women holding torches, among which Claudia Quinta is recognized in the slightly larger figure facing the Goddess and pulling the ship along. These medallions were named “programme type” and because of their smaller circulation, had greater value, especially appreciated among the aristocracy, celebrating their glorious past and the nine-hundredth anniversary of the “birthday” of Rome. So, we see that, in a very respectable way, the Great Phrygian Goddess found her way in one of the legendary episodes of the founding of Rome, and was celebrated as such long throughout history.

Fig. 7. Altar from the Aventine (after Roller 1999, fig. 74)
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SAŽETAK

PUTOVANJE MAGNE MATER MOREM U RIM

Aleksandra NIKOLOSKA


Ovaj rad analizira povijesne, arheološke i ikonografske dokaze, s namjerom da prikaže najbolje od putovanja brodom Magne Mater u Rim i utjecaj koji je imala u rimskom svijetu.