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MAGNA MATER IN LATIN INSCRIPTIONS.

By PROFESSOR A. VON DOMASZEWSKI.

In the stress of the second Punic war the Romans resolved to receive the Great Mother from Mount Ida among the gods of their state, but no sooner had the gift of their friend and ally, king Attalus of Pergamum, arrived in Rome, than they were seized with horror at the nature of the goddess and the character of her priesthood. The decree of the senate went forth forbidding Roman citizens to take part in the worship of the goddess. Only on one day in the year might the revolting procession of the priests leave the temple on the Palatine, when on the 27th of March the image of the goddess was bathed in the little river Almo.¹

Nevertheless, as a part of the Roman state-religion, the worship of the Magna Mater spread necessarily in the Roman municipalities of Italy and of the western provinces. The extension of the cult was based on the institutions, and was by no means spontaneous. For centuries the Magna Mater remained confined within the circle of the walls of Roman towns, a mere abnormality in the western world.

As the citizens were excluded by legal barriers, the municipalities, in order to practise the cult, were obliged to have recourse to the lowest orders of the state, namely the municipal slaves and the freedmen who came of that class. This origin from the *servi publici* is sometimes still recognisable in the names borne by the priests :²

Tergeste : Lucius Publicius Syntropus archigallus³ ; Quintus Publicius Charito sacerdos, et Gaius Publicius Hermes aedituus et Secunda cymbalistria.⁴

Verona : Veroniae Trofime sacerdoti.⁵

Mediolanium : Gaius Poblicius Olympus sacerdos.⁶

Augusta Emerita : archigallo Publicio Mystico.⁷

Nor was it otherwise at Rome itself, as may be seen from the inscriptions of Marcus Publicius Hilario, who as quaestor perpetuus of the dendrophori decorated the shrine on the Caelian.⁸ The archigalli, who, being eunuchs, can only have been of servile origin,

¹ Wissowa, *Religion*, 265.

² On the legal status of these priests, cf. Mommsen, *Römisches Strafrecht*, 859.

³ *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, v, 488.

⁴ *Ibid.* v, 519.

⁵ *Ibid.* v, 3438.

⁶ *Ibid.* v, 5881.

⁷ *Ibid.* ii, 5260.

⁸ *Ibid.* vi, 641, 30973, cf. also v. Domaszewski, *Abhandlungen zur röm. Religion*, 74.

did not obtain freedom and civic rights of the second class simultaneously with their office.

Capua : Virianus Ampliatus archigallus¹ was, as his name shows, a slave who had passed from the possession of one Virius into that of the community.

The freedmen of the municipalities seem generally to have named themselves after their former owners, for they bear the usual *gentilicia* of citizens.

Beneventum : Concordia coloniae liberta Januaria cymbalistra loco secundo.²

The other priests known to us from inscriptions also belong to the class of freedmen :

Pola : Gaius Laecanius Theodorus sacerdos.³

Mediolanum : Gaius Varius Elpidephorus sacerdos.⁴

Corfinium : Publius Marius Pharetra sacerdos, Acca Lucii filia Prima ministra.⁵

Interamnia : Titius Attius Titi libertus Atianus sacerdos.⁶

Brundisium : Lucius Pacilius Taurus sacerdos et Lucius Publilius Anitus pater eius et Publilia Lucii liberta Nice mater.⁷

Larium : Gaius Iulius Epaenitus religiosus et Lucio Raio Felici sacerdoti.⁸

Puteoli : Tiberius Claudius Felix sacerdos.⁹

Liternum : Hamas sacerdos.¹⁰

Nomentum : Phaedrus sacerdos.¹¹

Tibur : Gaius Iulius Spurii filius Julianus Proculus sacerdos.¹²

So in Rome itself : Laberia Felicla sacerdos maxima¹³; Marcus Plaetorius Herculanus sacerdos¹⁴; Aelia Antigona sacerdos¹⁵; Claudia Acropolis Augusti liberta sacerdos¹⁶; Gelene sacerdos¹⁷; Lucius Vettius Syntrophus religiosus¹⁸; Sextus Annus Celer religiosus¹⁹; Aelia Recepta tympanistria²⁰. Even the archigallus populi Romani is only a freedman, Gaius Camerius Crescens.²¹

Thus merely through its priesthood this religion was confined to the lowest classes of society. It remained, as Plutarch says, a

¹ *C.I.L.* x, 3810.

² *Ibid.* ix, 1538.

³ *Ibid.* v, 81.

⁴ *Ibid.* v, 5862.

⁵ *Ibid.* ix, 3146.

⁶ *Ibid.* ix, 5061.

⁷ *Ibid.* ix, 6099.

⁸ *Ibid.* ix, 734.

⁹ *Ibid.* x, 1596.

¹⁰ *Ephem. epigr.* viii, 455.

¹¹ *C.I.L.* xiv, 3956.

¹² *Ibid.* xiv, 3534.

¹³ *Ibid.* vi, 2257.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* vi, 2258.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* vi, 2259.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* vi, 2260.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* vi, 2261.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* vi, 2262.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* vi, 2263.

²⁰ *Ibid.* vi, 2264.

²¹ *Ibid.* vi, 2183.

religion of women and eunuchs.¹ Freedman are named in the inscriptions as worshippers of the goddess :

Riva : Numisius Hermes, Numisia Tyche²
 Venusia : Gnaeus Trebatius Logus, Quintus Metilius Mario,
 Marcus Rossius Ampliatus.³
 Corfinium : Gaius Lucilius Arcestus.⁴
 Puteoli : Asclapiades.⁵
 Circei : Marcus Agileius Faustus.⁶
 Capua : Titus Flavius Onesimus.⁷

Women are mentioned as making offerings at Tergeste,⁸ Aquileia,⁹ Aeclanum,¹⁰ Auximum,¹¹ Puteoli,¹² Venafrum,¹³ Falerii,¹⁴ Capena.¹⁵

At Ostia, the busy port where so many lived who had been born and brought up in the faith of Magna Mater, the cult assumed ample proportions, and we derive much light from the great number of monuments.¹⁶ We see that from the time of Antoninus Pius, who throughout the empire loosened the bars of ancient Roman reserve towards foreign cults, the worship of the goddess came forward into publicity without however spreading beyond the classes which were already addicted to this faith in Italy. It was the great plague and the troubles which followed it that first brought the cult to a position of state importance. In the stress of the Marcomannic war began the sacrifice of the taurobolium for the welfare of the emperor.¹⁷

Far more significant, however, is the new position which the college of dendrophori, who had for ages been employed in the rites in the municipalities of Italy, now obtained. Before this time we have evidence of the dendrophori only at Regium Iulium, where soldiers of the fleet, that is to say, men who had once been slaves, had been settled by Augustus.¹⁸ Now, however, the inscriptions of this college furnish proof that the cult which had formerly in most places remained in concealment was a universal institution in the municipia of Italy.¹⁹ The college of dendrophori takes its place beside the older colleges of fabri and centonarii, and had

¹ Amatorius, 13, p. 756, C.

² *C.I.L.* v, 4985.

³ *Ibid.* ix, 414.

⁴ *Ibid.* ix, 3147.

⁵ *Ibid.* x, 1587.

⁶ *Ibid.* x, 6423.

⁷ *Ibid.* x, 3809.

⁸ *Ibid.* v, 520.

⁹ *Ibid.* v, 795a, 796.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* ix, 1100.

¹¹ *Ibid.* ix, 5848.

¹² *Ibid.* x, 1596, 1597.

¹³ *Ibid.* x, 4844.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* xi, 3080.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* xi, 3861.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* xiv, 40 : cf. *Rhein. Museum*, 49, 614, n. 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* x, 7, before A.D. 79. The inscription from Herculaneum, *C.I.L.* x, 1406, is evidence only of the state aid which Vespasian granted after the earthquake.

¹⁹ This is particularly clear in the country districts of central Italy represented in *C.I.L.* xi, where there is no evidence whatever of the worship of the Magna Mater and yet the dendrophori appear in every municipium.

therefore like them come to be of some importance in the communal administration.¹ But it is a complete mistake to suppose that these dendrophori were originally *fabri lignarii*, of whom there is no evidence, and who are assumed to have chosen the Magna Mater of their own free will as their patron goddess. That is an incredible misconception of the organic growth of all Roman institutions. We have rather to see in the dendrophori the funeral guild that erected the pyre for cremation and disposed of the corpses which everybody at that time of great mortality would desire to avoid. The low-class priests of the Magna Mater were fitted for this office by the nature of the rites with which they mourned for Attis, and because they had originally been slaves of the municipalities.² Only a general decree for the whole empire can have created this uniform order.³ At the same time the social position of the priests of the goddess was changed.⁴ The priests are elected by the municipal council and confirmed by the college of *quindecimviri* at Rome.⁵ Hence they now bear the title *sacerdos quindecimviralis*.⁶

The cult attained a far higher importance owing to the oriental dynasty. Under Septimius Severus we see a *quindecimvir* himself performing the sacrifice of the *taurobolium* at Gabii.⁷ It is therefore highly probable that from this time onward the terrible rites on the Palatine were carried out in person by the *quindecimviri*, some of the highest priests of the Roman state. Yet it is only occasionally that the cult finds its way into the higher circles.⁸ The restoration of the state religion under Decius is observable in the new regulations for the college of dendrophori at Cumae.⁹ Nevertheless it would be quite wrong to speak of an extension of the cult among the population of Italy. They really refused to have anything to do with it down to the latest times.

The same is true of Spain, which was thoroughly romanised. Traces of the cult are scanty there, and the dendrophori are not found at all.

Lusitania : Olisipo.¹⁰

Baetica : Corduba.¹¹

Taraconensis : Emerita,¹² Vardulli.¹³

Balearic Islands : Mago.¹⁴

¹ The inscriptions relating to dendrophori in Italy are collected by Cumont, in Wissowa's *Enc.* v, 216.

² That gives its full importance to the inscription about the Lucar Libitinae, *C.I.L.* v, 5128.

³ The evidence does not begin until the end of the second century. The inscription of the reign of Septimius Severus, *C.I.L.* v, 4341, presupposes the existence of the college for a considerable time beforehand.

⁴ *Ibid.* ix, 981, 1540, 1153. *Sacerdos flaminica divae Iuliae Pia augustae et matris deum magnae*

Idaeae et Isidis reginae. Julia Pia must be Julia Domna, who is often called Pia.

⁵ The procedure is described in *C.I.L.* x, 3698; cf. Dessau, 4117.

⁶ *C.I.L.* v, 4400; ix, 1538; x, 3764, 4726 (before A.D. 186).

⁷ *Ibid.* xiv, 2790; cf. Dessau, 4118.

⁸ Cf. note 4 above, and *C.I.L.* ix, 1538-1542.

⁹ *Ibid.* x, 3699.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* ii, 178 (freedman), 179 (woman).

¹¹ *Ibid.* ii, 5521 (woman before A.D. 238).

¹² *Ibid.* ii, 5260 (woman).

¹³ *Ephem. epigr.* viii, 160 (freedman).

¹⁴ *C.I.L.* ii, 3706.

Even in Africa the cult attained no remarkable importance, and is characteristically confined in the main to the Roman colonies of earliest origin, where the institutions had carried the cult, while the colonies created without the *deductio* of Roman citizens show only occasional and late traces of it.

Provincia Byzacena : Mactaris.¹

Africa proconsularis : Carthago,² Thugga,³ Sicca Veneria,⁴ Lares,⁵ Zama maior,⁶ Tipasa.⁷

Numidia : Mascula,⁸ Thamugadi,⁹ Lambaesis,¹⁰ Thibilis,¹¹ Sigus,¹² Cirta,¹³ Rusicade,¹⁴ Milev.¹⁵

Mauretania Sitifensis : Sitifis,¹⁶ Mons.¹⁷

Mauretania Caesariensis : Caesarea.¹⁸

In Illyricum there must have been a lively faith in the Magna Mater on the coast of Dalmatia, for it appears in family shrines as a form of domestic worship : Salonae,¹⁹ Tragurium,²⁰ Delminium,²¹ Arba.²² In the interior of the continent, however, the traces are extraordinarily faint.

Moesia : Tomi,²³ Troesmis,²⁴ i.e. in a Greek region.

Dacia : Drobetae,²⁵ Apulum.²⁶

Pannonia : Aquincum,²⁷ Siscia,²⁸ Emona.²⁹

Noricum : Celeia,³⁰ Noreia.³¹

At the last place only is there evidence of a sacerdos, in the third century.

The cult is completely absent in Raetia, Gallia Lugdunensis, Belgica, and Britain, because the thing essential for its extension, the Italian municipal system, is absent.

Germania inferior : in the region of the Colonia Agrippinensium.³²

Germania superior : Kreuznach³³; Mogontiacum³⁴ (recognisable here as a municipal cult, because the freedman Victorius Salutaris is named after the Vicus Salutaris).³⁵

¹ Cagnat, *Année épig.* 1892, 18 (Probus).

² *C.I.L.* viii, 12570 (dendrophorus).

³ *Ibid.* viii, 15527 (dendrophorus).

⁴ *Ibid.* viii, 1649 (sacerdos libertus), 15848.

⁵ *Ibid.* viii, 1776.

⁶ *Ibid.* viii, 16440.

⁷ *Ibid.* viii, 4846.

⁸ *Ibid.* viii, 2230.

⁹ *Ibid.* viii, 17907 (dendrophori).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* viii, 2633.

¹¹ *Ibid.* viii, 5524.

¹² *Ibid.* viii, 5707, 19125.

¹³ *Ibid.* viii, 6955 : cf. 6940, 6941 (dendrophori).

¹⁴ *Ibid.* viii, 7956 (dendrophori).

¹⁵ *Ibid.* viii, 19981.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* viii, 8457 (dendrophori).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* viii, 8656.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* viii, 9401, 21070 (dendrophorus).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* iii, 1952f, 8675, 8676, 8823 (dendrophori), 2920a.

²⁰ *Ibid.* iii, 9707.

²¹ *Ibid.* iii, 13972.

²² *Ibid.* iii, 3115.

²³ *Ibid.* iii, 763 (dendrophori).

²⁴ *Ibid.* iii, 7505 (woman).

²⁵ *Ibid.* iii, 8016 (woman).

²⁶ *Ibid.* iii, 1100 (veteran), 1001 (veteran), 1002 (woman), 1217 (dendrophori).

²⁷ *Ibid.* iii, 3471.

²⁸ *Ibid.* iii, 10858 (dendrophori).

²⁹ *Ibid.* iii, 10738 (dendrophori), 743548 (woman).

³⁰ *Ibid.* iii, 5194, 5195 (woman).

³¹ *Ibid.* iii, 5021.

³² *Ibid.* xiii, 7865 (consacrani).

³³ *Ibid.* xiii, 7531 (woman).

³⁴ *Ibid.* xiii, 6664.

³⁵ *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, 9, 129, ff.

In the region of the Limes : Cannstadt.¹ The inscriptions of two centurions at Baden-Baden² and the Saalburg³ are very remarkable. The army by its nature knows nothing of the cult of castrated priests, and so there must have been personal reasons for these centurions. Perhaps they had come from the town-guard of Lugdunum.⁴ For at Lugdunum, the great emporium of the world's trade, as at Ostia, the cult of the Magna Mater had struck deep root. There too under Pius the sacrifice of the taurobolium is offered for the welfare of the emperor;⁵ it is repeated under Commodus,⁶ and acquires increased importance under Septimius Severus.⁷ From this germinating point⁸ the faith spread over Aquitania and Gallia Narbonensis. In Aquitania under Commodus, and again under Gordian, Lactora is a centre of the cult,⁹ which here receives state recognition.¹⁰ Then it is found at Convennae¹¹ and at Burdigala.¹² But in Gallia Narbonensis the cult developed with quite another significance. Here it may really be described as a new and universal religion of the country, overcoming victoriously all other cults. The numerous municipalities of Roman origin, which revered the Magna Mater as one of the goddesses of the Roman state, afforded a favourable soil for this development. Under Septimius Severus the worship of the Magna Mater at Narbo takes the place of the cult of the emperor.¹³ Attis had triumphed over divus Augustus exactly in the spirit of the oriental dynasty. Thus the cult is found at Forum Iulii¹⁴; Reii¹⁵; Massilia¹⁶; Arausio¹⁷; Vasio¹⁸; Lucus Augusti¹⁹; Alba²⁰; Vocontii²¹; Valentia²²; Vienna²³; Tolosa²⁴; Arelate²⁵; Nemausus.²⁶ Similarly in the adjoining alpine provinces :

Alpes maritimae : Vintium.²⁷

Alpes Graiae : Tarantasia.²⁸

Until well on in the christian period the Magna Mater remained the chief goddess.

At Rome itself the days of festival on the Palatine were not received into the list of feasts observed by the Roman state until

¹ *C.I.L.* xiii, 6443.

² *Ibid.* xiii, 6292.

³ *Ibid.* xiii, 7458.

⁴ *Rangordnung*, 75.

⁵ *C.I.L.* xiii, 1751.

⁶ *Ibid.* xiii, 1752.

⁷ *Ibid.* xiii, 1753 (women), 1754 (women), 1755.

⁸ *Ibid.* xii, 1782.

⁹ *Ibid.* xiii, p. 65.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* xiii, 520, cf. 511.

¹¹ *Ibid.* xiii, 83 (woman).

¹² *Ibid.* xiii, 572 (woman), 1118 is a forgery.

¹³ *Ibid.* xii, 4323, 4321, 4329. The other monuments, as usual, are of women, 4322, 4324-4326.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* xii, 251.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* xii, c. 357 (woman), 358.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* xii, 405, 411 (dendrophori).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* xii, 1222, 1223, 1567.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* xii, 1311.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* xii, 1567-1569.

²⁰ *Ibid.* xii, 1567.

²¹ *Ibid.* xii, 1567.

²² *Ibid.* xii, 1567, 1744 (dendrophori), 1745.

²³ *Ibid.* xii, 1827, 1878 (dendrophori), 1917 (dendrophori).

²⁴ *Ibid.* xii, 5374.

²⁵ *Ibid.* xii, 5697, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.* xii, 5953 (dendrophori).

²⁷ *Ibid.* xii, 1.

²⁸ Cagnat, *Année épigr.* 1904, 140.

at the death of Callienus the last gleam of Romano-Greek culture had disappeared. The next emperor, Claudius Gothicus, adopted into the state calendar the whole March festival of the priests of the Magna Mater. An emperor Claudius is mentioned as the author of this innovation by Lydus,¹ who means by this the son of Drusus. But, as was observed long ago, this contradicts the whole development of the cult, which emerges but slowly from obscurity. The forgery in the *Vita Claudii*, 4, 2 is misleading: "Nam cum nuntiatum esset viiii kl. Aprilis ipso in sacrario Matris sanguinis die Claudium imperatorem factum." That this date is forged is shown by a domestic account-book relating to the sale of sheep in a Strassburg papyrus.² The first year of Claudius did not begin in Egypt until after the 28th August, A.D. 268. Therefore Claudius cannot have been recognised as emperor in Italy as early as March of that year. But the impudent forger who gave the biographies their final form knew that Claudius had included the *dies sanguinis* among the state festivals, and he represented him as being elected emperor by the senate on that day.³ Elsewhere too he has made the days of the Magna Mater the plaything of his absurd inventions, e.g. in his ingenious conversation with the praefect of the city, which contradicts the certain date given by the chronographer.⁴ Severus Alexander, on whom he has emptied his whole cornucopia of tomfooleries, is made to partake of pheasants on the day of the Hilaria.⁵ But these inventions point to the true home of this bungling scribbler, who must have written not at Rome but in Gallia Narbonensis, where in his time the Magna Mater was the goddess of the country.

¹ Lydus de Mensibus, 4, 59.

² Strassburg Pap. i, 32.

³ How should he have known such a precise date, when he knew scarcely anything else about the emperor?

⁴ It is true that even Mommsen, *Hermes*, 25, 257, has changed the text of the chronographer in deference to the fabulist.

⁵ *Vita Severi Alexandri*, 37, 6.