

ORATION V

INTRODUCTION TO ORATION V

THE cult of Phrygian Cybele the Mother of the Gods, known to the Latin world as the Great Mother, Magna Mater, was the first Oriental religion adopted by the Romans. In the Fifth Oration, which is, like the Fourth, a hymn, Julian describes the entrance of the Goddess into Italy in the third century B.C. In Greece she had been received long before, but the more civilised Hellenes had not welcomed, as did the Romans, the more barbarous features of the cult, the mutilated priests, the Galli, and the worship of Attis.¹ They preferred the less emotional cult of the Syrian Adonis. In Athens the Mother of the Gods was early identified with Gaia the Earth Mother, and the two became inextricably confused.² But Julian, in this more Roman than Greek, does not shrink from the Oriental conception of Cybele as the lover of Attis, attended by eunuch priests, or the frenzy of renunciation described by Catullus.³ But he was first of all a Neo-Platonist, and the aim of this hymn as of the Fourth Oration is to adapt to his philosophy a popular cult and to give its Mysteries a philosophic interpretation.

¹ For the Attis cult see Frazer, *Attis, Adonis and Osiris*; for the introduction of the worship of Cybele into Italy, Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*.

² See Harrison, *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens*,
³ Catullus 63.

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The Mithraic religion, seeking to conciliate the other cults of the empire, had from the first associated with the sun-god the worship of the Magna Mater, and Attis had been endowed with the attributes of Mithras. Though Julian's hymn is in honour of Cybele he devotes more attention to Attis. Originally the myth of Cybele symbolises the succession of the seasons; the disappearance of Attis the sun-god is the coming of winter; his mutilation is the barrenness of nature when the sun has departed; his restoration to Cybele is the renewal of spring. In all this he is the counterpart of Persephone among the Greeks and of Adonis in Syria. Julian interprets the myth in connection with the three worlds described in the Fourth Oration. Cybele is a principle of the highest, the intelligible world, the source of the intellectual gods. Attis is not merely a sun-god: he is a principle of the second, the intellectual world, who descends to the visible world in order to give it order and fruitfulness. Julian expresses the Neo-Platonic dread and dislike of matter, of the variable, the plural and unlimited. Cybele the intelligible principle would fain have restrained Attis the embodiment of intelligence from association with matter. His recall and mutilation symbolise the triumph of unity over multiformity, of mind over matter. His restoration to Cybele symbolises the escape of our souls from the world of generation.

Julian follows Plotinus¹ in regarding the myths as allegories to be interpreted by the philosopher and

¹ 5. 1. 7; 3. 6. 19; 1. 6. 8; cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 152c; and Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, δ μῦθος . . . λόγου τινὸς ἔμφασίς ἐστὶν ἀνακλῶντος ἐπ' ἄλλα τὴν διάνοιαν.

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the theosophist. They are riddles to be solved, and the paradoxical element in them is designed to turn our minds to the hidden truth. For laymen the myth is enough. Like all the Neo-Platonists he sometimes uses phrases which imply human weakness or chronological development for his divinities and then withdraws those phrases, explaining that they must be taken in another sense. His attitude to myths is further defined in the Sixth¹ and Seventh Orations. The Fifth Oration can hardly be understood apart from the Fourth, and both must present many difficulties to a reader who is unfamiliar with Plotinus, Porphyry, the treatise *On the Mysteries*, formerly attributed to Iamblichus, Sallust, *On the Gods and the World*, and the extant treatises and fragments of Iamblichus. Julian composed this treatise at Pessinus in Phrygia, when he was on his way to Persia, in 362 B.C.

¹ Cf. 206 D. Myths are like toys which help children through teething.

ΙΟΥΔΙΑΝΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟΣ

ΕΙΣ ΤΗΝ ΜΗΤΕΡΑ ΤΩΝ ΘΕΩΝ

Ἄρα γε χρὴ φάναι καὶ ὑπὲρ τούτων; καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀρρήτων γράψομεν καὶ τὰ ἀνέξοιστα ἐξοίσομεν¹ καὶ τὰ ἀνεκκλήτητα ἐκκαλήσομεν; τίς μὲν 159 ὁ Ἄττις ἦτοι Γάλλος, τίς δὲ ἡ τῶν θεῶν Μήτηρ, καὶ ὁ τῆς ἀγνείας ταυτησὶ τρόπος ὁποῖος, καὶ προσέτι τοῦ χάριν οὕτωσιν² τοιοῦτος ἡμῖν ἐξ ἀρχῆς κατεδείχθη, παραδοθεὶς μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀρχαιοτάτων Φρυγῶν, παραδεχθεὶς δὲ πρῶτον ὑφ' Ἑλλήνων, καὶ τούτων οὐ τῶν τυχόντων, ἀλλ' Ἀθηναίων, ἔργοις διδαχθέντων, ὅτι μὴ καλῶς ἐτόθασαν ἐπὶ τῷ πελοῦντι τὰ ὄργια τῆς Μητρός; λέγονται γὰρ οὗτοι περιβρίσαι καὶ ἀπελάσαι τὸν Γάλλον ὡς B τὰ θεῖα καινοτομοῦντα, οὐ ξυνέντες ὁποῖόν τι τῆς θεοῦ τὸ χρῆμα καὶ ὡς ἡ παρ' αὐτοῖς τιμωμένη Δηῶ καὶ Ῥέα καὶ Δημήτηρ. εἶτα μῆνις τὸ ἐντεῦθεν τῆς θεοῦ καὶ θεραπεία τῆς μήνιδος. ἡ γὰρ

¹ ἐξοίσομεν Cobet adds, ἀνέξοιστα καὶ MSS, Hertlein,

² οὕτωσιν Hertlein suggests, οὕτωσιν MSS.

HYMN TO THE MOTHER OF THE GODS

UGHT I to say something on this subject also? And shall I write about things not to be spoken of and divulge what ought not to be divulged? Shall I utter the unutterable? Who is Attis¹ or Gallus,² who is the Mother of the Gods,³ and what is the manner of their ritual of purification? And further why was it introduced in the beginning among us Romans? It was handed down by the Phrygians in very ancient times, and was first taken over by the Greeks, and not by any ordinary Greeks but by Athenians who had learned by experience that they did wrong to jeer at one who was celebrating the Mysteries of the Mother. For it is said that they wantonly insulted and drove out Gallus, on the ground that he was introducing a new cult, because they did not understand what sort of goddess they had to do with, and that she was that very Deo whom they worship, and Rhea and Demeter too. Then followed the wrath of the goddess and the

¹ The Phrygian god of vegetation who corresponds to the Syrian Adonis. His name is said to mean "father," and he is at once the lover and son of the Mother of the Gods. His death and resurrection were celebrated in spring.

² The generic name for the eunuch priests of Attis.

³ The Phrygian Cybele, the Asiatic goddess of fertility; *the chief seat of her worship was Pessinus in Phrygia.*

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