BOOK REVIEWS

PHILIPPE BORGEAUD: *Mother of the Gods: From Cybele to the Virgin Mary.*

Borgeaud’s *Mother of the Gods* is an English translation of his *La Mère des Dieux.* The book is easy to read, beautifully poetic in tone, and yet of high scholarly quality. Copious notes (sixty-five pages) are provided at the end of this slim volume of 132 pages of text. The text can be easily read without the notes for the most part, but just occasionally the text requires a very close reading, being a little dense and overpopulated with a profusion of names and places.

Chapter 1 launches the enquiry into the emergence of Cybele in the iconography of the Phyrgian Mother from Anatolia at the beginning of the sixth century. Chapter 2 looks at the assimilation of the figure of the Mother with other Greek deities such as Ge and Rhea, and alludes briefly to the private rituals of feminine piety in conjunction with this movement. The most important question for Borgeaud concerns how the cult of the Mother of the gods came to be related to the juridical and political processes of Athens, with the stelae of the written laws placed in front of her sanctuary (the metroon), which was situated next to the bouleuterion, the headquarters of the Council of Five Hundred on the Agora at the end of the fifth century. Borgeaud shows the Mother’s progressive assimilation to a Phrygian foreigner, while at the same time retaining her political role as guardian of the written laws.

In Chapter 3, Borgeaud deals with several narratives about Attis/Atys, in some of which he is in divine passionate relationship with the Mother. Here in particular he is careful to point out the variants and inconsistencies in the way in which the myth has developed. Chapter 4 follows the arrival of the Idaean Mother of the Gods in Rome at the end of the third century, where the myth of the Phrygian goddess is retold with Greek mediation. The discussion continues into Chapter 5, following the threads of the connection of the galli with the Gauls and the Celts and the foreign cult in Marseille. Chapter 6 covers the cult of Attis in the Imperial Period and the criticism by early Christian writers of the openly homosexual behaviour of the galli. In this chapter and the next Borgeaud investigates the emerging early Christian engagement with both Cybele and Attis. In Chapter 7, Borgeaud comes finally to the question of a possible connection between Cybele and Mary, Mother of God. He finds some common themes in the image of the enthroned Mary and her experience as the loving and suffering mother, but warns of the danger in incorrectly affording the Virgin Mother the status of a god. It is at this crucial end stage of the argument that Borgeaud appears to vacillate, arguing against a strong link between Cybele and the Virgin Mary, but then suggesting that the Mother of the Gods assumes “the loving protective stance” of the Mother of God (131).

The careful scholarship exhibited in Borgeaud’s book is a joy. One example will suffice. In Chapter 1, which sets the groundwork for much that follows, Borgeaud...
begins with the Greek imagination about the legendary Phrygian kingdom of Midas, and Cinyras of Cyprus and the cults of their respective goddesses, the Phrygian Mother and Aphrodite of Paphos, to whom the kings were dedicated in the cities they founded. Even the oldest Phrygian monuments (from the end of the seventh and beginning of sixth centuries B.C.E. on the high plateaus) that name the Mother and use lion symbols, were already much influenced by Hellenistic style. Tracing back even further behind the Greeks and their stories of the destruction of the temple of the goddess Cybebe at Sardis before the Persian wars, Borgeaud writes of the old Anatolian goddess Kubaba, the goddess and city-guardian of Carchemish. He notes that the name Cybele, so close to Cybebe, is also used by the Phryians to refer to the Mother (Matar), as Matar Kubileia or Kubeleia (“Cybelian Mother”), proposing that the epithet for the Mother develops as the name for a goddess in her own right.

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Lori Branch explores the complex interrelationship between secularism, religion, and critical discourse through an erudite and painstakingly researched analysis of the concepts of spontaneity and ritual. She begins by setting out the theoretical groundwork for her study and a summary of the overall argument; this helps to contextualise the focused chapters which follow and indicates their specific contributions to the overall thesis. The most important implications of her study are identified as “the ways it prompts us to question our inherited narratives about the emergence of secularism; to consider secularization as a process of rationalization that takes place first of all within religious discourses and practices themselves; and to see the ideologies of both spontaneity and secularism as indispensable supports of what we have come to think of as modern subjectivity” (7–8). These constitute an ambitious claim. However, through the close analysis of key texts ranging from John Bunyan’s Grace Abounding and The Pilgrim’s Progress to William Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads and Ecclesiastical Sonnets, Branch constructs a detailed argument that substantiates her argument about “secularization as a process of rationalization” that begins initially in a religious context.

Chapter One examines the acrimonious seventeenth-century debate over liturgy and spontaneous prayer. Branch suggests that the language of this debate “continually and anxiously appealed to discourses of evidence, exchange and emotional experience” (8). It thus becomes a case study of “the process by which rationalistic, empirical, and economic modes of reasoning — what we may call a secular rationality — produce the rationale of spontaneity and free prayer when they are mapped onto traditionally religious concerns” (8). The following chapters elaborate this “central insight into spontaneity as epistemological-economic proof of religious, moral value” (9). Chapter Two examines Bunyan’s autobiography and classic text on pilgrimage, suggesting that he had a “rationalized faith” which sprang from commitment to an “ideology of spontaneity,” though this was redeemed by the retention of “a hope for love and relation outside exchange” (89).

Ironically, though, Branch suggests in Chapter Three that it was not “Puritan or Dissenting enthusiasts who pushed the logic of spontaneity to its most ‘desperate consequences’” (89), but consciously secular philosophers, like John Locke’s student, the Earl of Shaftesbury. Chapter Four traces the popularisation of “the gospel of the