

This book is dedicated to those who first saw it taking shape.

An Introduction to Roman Religion

John Scheid
Translated by Janet Lloyd

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to his will, and the rites practised offered all the picturesque elements likely to impress the minds of his clients. The formulae and practices of these charlatans were not so very different from those in use in public or private cults. The cures recommended by Aesculapius, for example, resemble those of the healers who touted for custom at crossroads; and the venerable public rites of *deuotio* and the burial of living Gauls and Greeks were, in the last analysis, also magical rites of a spectacular kind. In 186 BC, traditional Bacchic rites were transformed by a Campanian priestess, in order to make a particularly powerful – and, in the view of the authorities, fraudulent – impact upon the initiates. A number of myths circulating in the Augustan period represented the Roman priests of archaic times as invested with extraordinary powers similar to those possessed by ‘sorcerors’, as if to stress the efficacy of the traditional rites and the power of priests.

Chapter 9

The double life of the Roman gods

The Romans, like the Greeks, accepted the fundamental principle that the gods lived in the world alongside men and strove with them, in a civic context, to bring about the common good. They also believed that the deities surpassed the city and its mortal inhabitants by far, in fact were awesomely superior. In religion, however, human relations with the immortals came down essentially to an image of deities who were close, benevolent, and unwilling to make use of their superhuman powers in day-to-day life. The gods did occasionally reveal their true faces, either in particular rituals or when they were angered; and then their language was one of cataclysms, epidemics and devastation – in short, terror. But in ordinary life, they did not behave as absolute masters and tyrants, but as fellow-citizens and benevolent patrons. They did not demand dishonourable behaviour or humiliating devotion from mortals and, above all, they did not attempt to control men’s thoughts. In a passage discussing the behaviour one should adopt towards slaves, Seneca compares the gods to masters who act as patrons rather than as tyrants: ‘They (slaves) ought to respect you rather than fear you . . . Some may say “This is what he plainly means: slaves are to pay respect as if they were clients or early-morning callers!” Anyone who holds this opinion forgets that what is good enough for a god cannot be too little for a master’ (*Letters to Lucilius*, 47.18).

To be sure, the immortals had a right to the honours assigned to their extremely high rank in earthly society, but like other citizens of high rank – magistrates, senators and the

other dignitaries of Roman society – they were not much concerned with the intentions of those who honoured them and were content simply to expect and receive the homage due to them. These basic theological principles were not expressed solely in philosophical speculations. All rituals that the Romans celebrated day by day constructed the image of the *citizen gods*.

1 CITIZEN GODS, PATRON GODS, TERRIFYING GODS

As we have seen in connection with the major religious rituals, the deities owed their place at the heart of cities not to any epiphany – not, that is, to any personal manifestation on their part – but above all to a human decision, the will of the people, the senate, a magistrate or a mythical king. Within the family context, it was the will of the *paterfamilias* that decided on the adoption of a deity by his domestic community. When an unknown deity unexpectedly manifested himself or herself, even with the purpose of coming to the Romans' aid, like the famous Aius Locutius in the fourth century BC, his epiphany had first to be accepted by the public institutions; it had to receive, as it were, the approval of a majority vote in the Senate. One Christian writer could write with irony: 'Among you (pagans) a god's divinity depends on man's decision. Unless a god please man, he shall not be a god at all; in fact, man must look kindly on god' (Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 5.1).

Once they were members of the community, the gods kept quiet. Implicitly, every ritual recognised the benevolent and ordered services that they rendered to the Roman people. Certainly, every ritual declared that Rome was ruled by the magistrates and the gods together. But to participate actively in public decisions and to intervene in the destiny of the Roman people, a deity had first to be formally 'seized upon' by the magistrates. Like their mortal 'colleagues', the senators, the gods had to be consulted in the manner that custom prescribed. They had to participate in the taking of a public

decision but did not, *ex officio*, have the right to speak. Only when the magistrate had spoken could the gods respond. The gods – like the Senate, the priests and the assembly of the people – had to wait until the consul invited them to speak. And even then, they could not express their opinions freely: in general they were content to give a yes-or-no answer. For example, every time a law was passed by vote, an election took place, or a public decision was reached, Jupiter had to be consulted by taking the auspices. The rite clearly proclaimed Jupiter's rank, for he was expected to express himself before the other citizens and either authorise or not authorise the magistrate to proceed in his actions. The will of Jupiter was therefore superior to that of the Roman people. Does this mean that the sovereign god imposed his opinion and will upon the consuls? Not at all, at least not in normal times. As we have seen, in a consultation of the auspices, it was not the god who expressed himself: the consulting magistrate, helped by a few assistants, provided both the questions and the answers, to the point where both Cicero and Dionysius of Halicarnassus could conclude that the sign sought from the god could never have any meaning other than that which the magistrate ascribed to it. And even if Jupiter, exasperated by some tactlessness on the part of his fellow-citizens, manifested his irritation through a spontaneous and undeniable sign, it was still up to the magistrate in question to accept or reject it. Basically, it is fair to say that taking the auspices and the acceptance or rejection of an unexpected sign simply constituted a dramatic way of announcing that a decision taken in the name of the Roman people enjoyed the approval of the gods and did not violate their prerogatives. At the same time, these rituals, which could in no circumstances be omitted or taken lightly, tempered the power of a magistrate and forced him to take account of others who also communicated with Jupiter: his colleague or colleagues, the augur(s). So, despite appearances, the gods to some extent did control the power game, but they did so discreetly and were always represented by other human beings.

In any case, to get himself heard, the only option for Jupiter (or, come to that, for the mass of the Roman people) was secession and violent demonstration. Jupiter could reject his role of *patronus* of the Roman people and allow disasters to fall upon his 'clients'. Prodigies and catastrophes conveyed the gods' wrath to the magistrates and prompted them to seek the reason for it. For divine anger was caused by some offence, not by the tyrannical will of an absolute sovereign. It indicated some forgetfulness, an omission, an insult to the dignity of the deity, not a loss of faith: a magistrate had celebrated a rite incorrectly, or had forgotten to celebrate it, or had committed some sacrilege. An inquiry then established the cause of the anger and the breakdown of 'peace with the gods' (*pax deorum*) and prescribed the rituals designed to repair the offence, if necessary with the aid of the Sibylline Books. In this way, rituals associated with the anger of the gods allowed the Romans to account for their misfortunes in a rational way: it was a question of the public rituals being violated. Dramatic events of this kind also progressively helped them to glimpse their destiny. For it was at such times that the Romans regularly reflected upon and redefined the limits of their Empire and their interests, and introduced new deities into their 'pantheon'. This kind of reflection, also, would be initiated and controlled by a magistrate assisted by the Senate and the priestly colleges. In short, the example of divination in all its forms shows that, notwithstanding their superiority, in the city of Rome the gods were under the control of the magistrates. And this control could be every bit as binding as what was called in the Greek world *heimarmene*, the destiny imposed upon mortals and immortals alike. There can be no doubt that the power to converse with the gods, to request their advice and weigh it up, or – to be more precise – the power to speak for them, conferred an extraordinary prestige upon the Roman aristocrats.

Legitimate as it was, this power and this magisterial role were not unlike that sought by sorcerors and magicians. These claimed that, by powerful secret methods, they could

establish with a deity an intimate relationship from which they themselves derived knowledge and power. But unlike the power of the magistrates, that of the sorcerors was considered ambiguous by their fellow-citizens, because they suspected that it had been obtained by force, with intent to do harm. The power that the magistrates brought to bear upon the immortals was, by contrast, regarded as the result of a pact freely concluded between the city's two partners, with a view to furthering the wellbeing of all. At any rate, when a Roman turned to a sorceror to resolve a problem, it was because he reckoned that the latter possessed direct access to a particular deity, access more reliable than the prayers and vows that one could make privately in a sanctuary.

The same image of the gods is conveyed by other practices we can observe, for example consecration. As we have seen, here too the decision of the magistrates and priests was paramount. We know that deities could be expelled from their sanctuaries if the state decided that it had another use for the space where they resided. All that was required was a rite of exauguration, evocation or liberation. Similarly, an object dedicated by private individuals, but not by public order, was not sacred. In their own way, customs such as these also defined the gods' status in the city.

But in the case of the residences of the gods, the traditions are richer. Although the temples and sanctuaries built by public decision fit in with this image of the deities, other types of sacred places do not: groves, deep caves, fathomless pools, the sources of rivers and so on. All these amazing natural phenomena were immediately stamped with the mark of divinity and they struck terror into mortal beings. In places such as these, the gods revealed their other face, the one that corresponded to their superhuman nature. But once again, by performing the appropriate rites it was possible for mortals to take over at least a part of these places – to establish a sanctuary there or to clear it for fields – an activity that seems to have been commemorated by the festival of the Lucaria (19 and 21 July).

It was not only in public religion that the tension between the two faces of the gods was evident. It was also clear in the religious practices of magicians and sorcerors, who used it to show their own power or the efficacy of their rites, by placing themselves or their clients in front of the 'true' face of the deity. The reformed Bacchic cult that became widespread at the beginning of the second century BC and provoked the scandal of the Bacchanalia (186 BC) also resorted to this way of representing relations with the gods. Dionysus played this role in the Greek world. Every year, his arrival on the day of his festival showed the other face of the gods, liberating citizens and their wives from all social rules and establishing an absolute power over them. This annual epiphany was an ancient venerable tradition, part of the legitimate public cults. According to our sources, until the second century there was nothing of the kind in Rome. But then it seems that the leaders of Bacchic communities used the terror aroused by direct contact with the deity to establish a hold over the minds of young Romans that the Roman authorities deemed criminal and accordingly repressed. Two centuries later, the clergy of Isis similarly abused the credulity of a *matrona* by leading her to believe that she was about to meet the god Serapis in person.

To be sure, it would not be too misleading to suggest that the elite also played upon the irrational fears of the common people, so as more easily to bend them to its will. But the same can be said of all religions. All are based on a deeply rooted conviction in people's minds (*all* minds) that the gods exist and that one needs to behave in accordance with that reality. Roman tradition on the relationship of humans with the gods set the highest value on reason, the sense of law so characteristic of a civic culture. In this context terror before the immortals played a marginal role. That, at least, was what the rituals and the theological treatises proclaimed. For this religion and the elite that controlled it were, in fact, struggling against an irrational terror of the gods and superstition, far more than they were using that terror in order to govern more easily.

2 FUNCTIONS, HIERARCHIES, COLLABORATIONS

So far we have approached the gods in a very general way, either as the 'patrons' of the Romans or, on the contrary, as terrifyingly superior immortals. However, the rituals and customs of the Romans tell us much more about divine nature. They show that the Roman gods are innumerable, that each has a function and a precise profile, and that, individually, they are not all-powerful. This is a polytheistic system and, despite those who see an evolutionary progression from polytheism to monotheism, its deities were not moving towards monotheism. Even religious currents linked with deities of creation, or superior in some other sense, accept the existence of other deities. Gods such as Isis and Baal, supreme within their own religious systems, were venerated as such in Rome; this, as long as those cults lasted, made it possible to experiment with a different type of relationship with the divine and between gods. Even as late as the fifth century, Christian thinkers, ardent defenders of monotheism, could still not get rid of the mass of 'pagan' gods. They ridiculed them but placed them among the demons.

2.1 The profiles of the Roman gods

Each of the Roman gods possessed a precise profile. The term '*the sacred*', in the modern sense, meant nothing to the Romans; and no more did the abstract notion of '*the divine*'. The once heated debate over the Latin term *numen* is now over. Nowadays nobody considers, as did the 'primitivists' (Ludwig Deubner, Herbert J. Rose, and their successors) that *numen* means 'a diffused sacredness'. Instead, *numen* is now translated, depending on the context, as the 'will or power of a deity'. And the formula, or rather the deity, *Siue deus siue dea* ('god-or-goddess') that used to be invoked in support of the theory of a 'diffused sacredness' is now interpreted quite differently; it is now believed to have constituted a precaution designed not to offend a deity whose name was unknown because he or she was a foreigner and was not yet

revealed to the Romans. So this was not a deity that was both 'god-and-goddess', but simply one that was either 'god-or-goddess'. The terms ('god'/'goddess') are exclusive and do not convey the sexual indifferentiation supposedly characteristic of a primitive representation of the divine.

As the Romans saw it, there were countless gods. They filled the whole known world. Some had made themselves known to the Romans, bore a traditional name, possessed a residence and a cult. These were part of the Roman public or private order. Other deities lived in foreign lands. If the Romans were active in those lands it seemed to them inevitable that they should enter into relations with these, either setting up a cult for them on the spot, or inviting them to take up residence in Rome. Moreover, even in Roman territories, certain deities were presumed to be present, even if they had not deemed it necessary to reveal themselves to the Romans. This is a very interesting category of deities, for it throws light on the Romans' concept of the gods. When faced with a serious situation, for example a war or the destruction of a religious site, the vows that were expressed and the expiatory sacrifices that were offered were targeted at all the deities involved in the event in question. We thus learn that, as well as the patron deity of a particular sanctuary and the other gods and goddesses who helped to manage it or assisted the patron deity in their function, the place might also contain other deities, such as the famous 'god-or-goddess' who, in one document, is even accompanied by another 'god-or-goddess-who-protects-this-place'. We also discover that deities, even the greatest of them, cannot do everything. So, according to the vows formulated when Emperor Trajan went off to war on 25 March 101, the Capitoline triad helped the emperor to return victorious, but to make it quite clear that it was no less than victory that the Romans were expecting, a special prayer was addressed to 'Jupiter the victor'. Mars the victor was also invoked; and so that there should be no doubt at all, a third deity, whose very name expressed the result expected from the support of Mars – Victoria.

A selection of the public Roman deities

Deity	Function	Epithet	Patronage
Jupiter	Sovereignty	<i>Optimus maximus</i> (the best, the greatest)	The state
Juno	Defence, childbirth	<i>Regina, Lucina</i>	The state, women
Minerva	Technology		The state, artisans, doctors
Aesculapius	Healing		Doctors
Apollo	Good order, purification, prophecy	<i>Medicus</i>	
Bellona	The efforts of war		
Bona Dea	Healing		<i>Matronae</i>
Carmenta	Inspired speech		Women
Castores (Castor and Pollux)	Warrior activities		Knights
Ceres	Growth	<i>Mater</i> (venerable)	<i>Matronae</i>
Consus	Storage		
Dea Dia	Clear light		Harvests
Diana	Procreation	(<i>Nemorensis</i>)	Women
Dis pater	Underworld		
Dius Fidius	Oaths		
Faunus	Borders of cultivated land		
Fides	Good faith		
Flora	Flowering		

Fons (m.)	Springs		
Fortuna	Chance	(Many)	Slaves, women
<i>Genius</i> (or Juno for women)	The power of action of an individual, thing or place	(Constructed with the genitive of the being in question)	Individuals, communities, places
Great Mother	Warding off catastrophes in this life	Idean, Cybele	Romans—'Trojans', workers in wood
Hercules	Success in heroic activities	<i>Victor</i> (victorious)	Entrepreneurs
Isis	Safety	(Many)	Sailors
Janus	Beginnings	<i>Pater</i> (venerable)	
Juturna	Clean water		Water suppliers
Lares	Areas of land		
Liber	Germination	<i>Pater</i> (venerable)	(Adolescents)
Mars	Warrior violence	<i>Pater</i> (venerable)	Army
Mercury	Journeys		Merchants
Mithras	Hope of support, especially in this life	Inuictus (unconquered)	The military, imperial employees
Neptune	Underground streams, the sea	<i>Pater</i> (venerable)	Seafarers
Ops	Abundance		
Pales (f.)	The health of flocks		Shepherds
Portunus	Reaching land	<i>Pater</i> (venerable)	
Proserpina	Underworld		
Quirinus	Civic community		The people
Robigo	Wheat-rust		

Salus	Physical and moral welfare	(Public)	
Saturnus	Unbinding, loosening		
Silvanus	The wild	<i>Sanctus</i> (pure)	Slaves
Tellus	Place of growth		
Venus	Irresistible charm	<i>Victrix, genetrix</i> (victorious, mother)	Couples, Romans
Vesta	Hearth	<i>Mater</i> (venerable)	Romans
Volturnus	Tiber?		
Vulcan	Dangerous fire		Ostia

Roman polytheism was not solely based on the fact that there were innumerable gods. Rather, its principle lay in the limitation of divine functions and the ability of human beings to increase the number of gods by constantly splitting up the actions attributed to them. At any rate, a deity possessed or was given divine colleagues, helpers and servants (*ministri* – the term goes back to Augustine) in order to cover a wider field of action. Making divine the deity's 'power of action' (*numen*) represented the abstract side to this process. The world of the gods was thus indefinitely extendable yet could, at the same time, be reduced to just a few units, depending upon whatever was needed. Very little information exists to help us to understand the reasons and rules that dictated an increase or a decrease in the number of gods in different contexts. In a way, this was what piety was all about: skilfully seeking out all the deities involved in a particular situation, knowing all the deities implicated in a particular action. The theology spelt out by ritual might thus be defined as a traditional kind of speculation on the mysteries of action. What is certain is that this mass of gods both great and small did not represent – as has sometimes been argued – an accumulated

historical silt, a fossilised remnant left by an evolution from functional gods to personal ones. Quite simply, this was how polytheism normally worked.

2.2 *The functions of the Roman gods*

Each of the deities possessed a precise function (sovereignty, technology, warrior violence, plant growth, etc.) and exercised this in a wide variety of fields. Georges Dumézil has shown that in Rome the fundamental nature of Mars was no different when he mounted guard on the edge of a field or the edge of a (state) territory; he had simply moved from one place to another. There was nothing to prevent him defending the people or an individual against an aggressive disease, but that did not make him a god who specialised in healing and the pursuit of physical wellbeing. He simply remained the violent defender of the people as a whole or of the individual. So it is perfectly logical that Roman deities are never on their own. Very rarely does one come across a ritual or a sanctuary in which a deity is invoked in isolation. In the functional polytheism of the Romans, the gods stand side by side and collaborate with one another. This is why it is always dangerous to assimilate one deity to another, as if they were to all intents and purposes the same. For such assimilation tends to deny the particular distribution of divine functions as it is evidenced in ritual. The speculations on the ultimate nature of the divine in which philosophers of antiquity sometimes indulged have nothing to do with the Roman religion of ritual and sanctuaries and amount rather to an attempt to reduce polytheism to monotheism. The same applies to many superficial modern studies of female deities, which often present them as more or less interchangeable mother-goddesses or fertility goddesses. Fertility is, in any case, a concept so vague and so general that it could well encompass the whole of religion and all the deities. But what else could one expect of such a vague concept? How could it possibly help to reconstruct and understand rites very few of which explicitly evoke 'fertility'? To be sure, people approached a whole

number of deities in their quest for children, for a good harvest and for the reproduction of their herds, but to reduce religion to those requests is to oversimplify what was at stake and what was expected. The religion of the ancients was not just a matter of harvest festivals and festivities to celebrate sowing and reproduction. Above all, such a levelling down of functions destroys the essential kernel of the cult: the ritual construction of the world of the gods, in short the very essence of Roman polytheism.

Associations between deities could be either temporary, such as those mentioned above, or else permanent. Some cults and sanctuaries incorporated two or three titular deities. The temple on the Capitol provided a home for Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, each in a separate *cella*; and, near the Forum Boarium, twin sanctuaries were dedicated to Mater Matuta and Fortuna. But it is not certain whether associations such as these remained unchanged. According to the ancients, the first Capitoline triad consisted of Jupiter, Mars and Quirinus, and this is indeed attested by both rituals and myth. Furthermore, a 'divine court' always surrounded the main patron deity of a sanctuary. Some of these guest deities helped the principal deity to carry out his or her function correctly, to see that the cult was properly conducted (in particular Vesta and Janus) and to manage the cult site. Other deities were invited for their prestige. Jupiter, for instance, might be associated with a cult for honorific reasons. Under the Empire, the situation became even clearer when the *genius* of the emperor and the deified emperors were honoured at the same time as the patron deities of other temples: such associations were expressed by the construction of secondary shrines and altars in most cult sites.

3 *DIUI, THE GENIUS OF AUGUSTUS, THE NUMEN OF AUGUSTUS AND THE 'CULT OF THE EMPERORS'*

3.1 *Diui and diuiae*

After Caesar's assassination, within a few decades it became customary to elevate emperors on their death to the level of

the gods – or, to be more exact, of the demi-gods. Julius Caesar was deified by a law that laid down divine honours for the dead man. Under the Empire, the Senate announced the apotheosis of Augustus on the day after his funeral. Once deified, the deceased could no longer receive funerary honours, nor could his image be carried in funeral processions. Before the reign of Caligula, deification was restricted to emperors, that is to say those known as ‘Augustus’. In fact, before AD 38 only Augustus and had been deified; Tiberius had been denied the honour; Caligula’s sister, Drusilla, was next. Under the Principate of Augustus, an intermediate category had been created for deceased princes, in particular for the young Caesars, Gaius and Lucius (AD 2 and 4), Germanicus (19) and Drusus (23). Their funerals were solemnly celebrated and an official annual funerary cult was addressed to them. Furthermore, their images were carried, along with those of deities, in the processions for the opening of the Games, their names were cited in prayers, and the so-called ‘prerogative’ *centuriae* of the *comitia centuriata* were called after them. All these honours raised the dead princes above the ordinary dead, but did not quite turn them into *diui*. After the deification of Drusilla, the honours of apotheosis were also conferred upon members of the imperial family, their children and close relatives.

***Diui* and *diuæ* who received cults in Rome (44 BC–AD 240)**

Julius Caesar
Augustus
(Drusilla)
(Livia)
Claudius
(Claudia Augusta, daughter of Nero)
(Poppaea Augusta)
Vespasian
Titus

► (Julia Augusta, daughter of Domitian)
Nerva
(Marciana Augusta, sister of Trajan)
Trajan
(Matidia, mother-in-law of Hadrian)
Plotina, wife of Trajan
Hadrian
Sabina, wife of Hadrian
Faustina, wife of Antoninus
Antoninus
Lucius Verus
Faustina, wife of Marcus Aurelius
Marcus Aurelius
Commodus
Pertinax
Septimius Severus
M. Antonius (Caracalla)
Julia Domna
Severus Alexander
(Julia Maesa)

(List established on the basis of the evidence of the Arval Brethren. The *diuæ* with names in parenthesis are not specifically named in the inscriptions but are included to make up the total number of *diui* and *diuæ* to that indicated by the inscriptions.)

Diui and, after Matidia, *diuæ* were allotted a temple, a *flamen*, *sodales* and a public cult. This was celebrated on the anniversary of the dedication of their temples (for example, 18 August for the deified Julius), the anniversary of their apotheosis (17 September for Augustus), or on anniversaries of their great exploits (for example, in the case of Augustus, the capture of Alexandria on 1 August, or his return from the east during the Augustalia of 12 October) or simply on their birthdays. The cult of these *diui* was celebrated not only in Rome but throughout the Western provinces, in the cities and in their provincial *consilia*. In the Greek world, honours equivalent to those of the gods were offered to the living emperor. The forms of the cult varied according to the rank of the city: they were not necessarily the same in the Roman

colonies and the *municipia* as they were in foreign (*peregrini*) cities, for the latter were totally free to organise their cults as they wished. In provincial cults and in cities of the Empire, worship of Augustus was generally associated with worship of Rome (the goddess Roma), but in some places shrines gathered together the whole imperial family or all the deified emperors.

After the deification of Severus Alexander, between 235 and 238, apotheosis continued to be granted to emperors and empresses right down to Theodosius, provided, that is, they did not suffer the reverse and their memory was not 'damned' (subject to *damnatio memoriae*).

3.2 The Genius of the emperor

The cult of the *diui* was not the only one that related to the emperor. In Rome and in Latin-speaking countries, there were also other cult figures. By the beginning of the Principate of Augustus, sacrifices were offered to the *genius* of Augustus, a personification of his innate qualities. The cult of a *genius* was a traditional cult that could relate to individuals as well as to things or places (see below). The *genius* of Augustus (or of *the* Augustus, the 'August One') was represented dressed in a toga with the features of the emperor in question and carrying a horn of plenty (*cornucopia*) and a *patera* (offering bowl). Gradually it also became customary to venerate the 'Juno' of the empress, represented as a *matrona* carrying a horn of plenty. Creating this kind of cult, extended to the public persona of the emperor domestic forms of cult (such as that of the *genius* of the *paterfamilias*), or forms previously reserved for particular Roman surroundings (the *genius* of Rome or some other place). Augustus exploited this ambiguity, for he was always keen to resort to categories of the family and to the symbolism of the powers of the *paterfamilias* in order to define his own relations with the citizens. The Roman people also celebrated the anniversaries and birthdays of the emperor's family, the *domus Augusta*, and the major events associated with it.

After 12 BC, when Augustus was elected *pontifex maximus*, he reintroduced the cult of the Compitalia, which had been banned since the fifties BC (or rather, he allowed the celebration of the Games linked to this cult). Between 12 and 2 BC he created sanctuaries at the crossroads (*compita*) in every district of Rome (Pliny cites 265 of them). These were designed to contain statues of the two Lares Augusti and also one of the *genius* of Augustus. The Lares were the deities of an area of land, or in this case the town district; but by slightly twisting the scholarly interpretation which suggested that the Lares were also the spirits of the dead, the implicit message was that this crossroads cult was addressed to the deceased members of Augustus' family. In this way the latter were elevated above the ordinary dead, at least in the minds of Romans capable of appreciating this kind of interpretation – that is to say, the Roman elite. The cult was entrusted to annually appointed *uicomagistri* chosen from the elite of the district concerned, who were assisted by *uicoministri*, of servile rank. This crossroads cult, celebrated at the time of the Compitalia, in early January, was the public cult of the Roman town districts and promoted the cohesion and self-esteem of the local inhabitants. By once again allowing the town quarters to celebrate their own cults and games, and even providing them with shrines, Augustus was deliberately promoting his own popularity at the same time as spreading new forms of public cult. A similar type of cult was introduced in the colonies and *municipia*, where *Augustales* and *seuiri Augustales* were made responsible for the cult of the *Lares Augusti*. The ancient *Augustales* were generally of modest origin but nevertheless constituted an order that ranked immediately below the *decuriones* in the local community. However, they could not aspire to celebrate the public imperial cult of a city: that was a role that fell to the *flamen* of Augustus (and of Rome) or else to the local magistrates.

3.3 The numen

The famous name of 'Augustus' was in theory linked to the domain of the sacred. The adjective 'august' designated 'the

full supernatural power' possessed by a sign sent by Jupiter or some other deity (as in the term *augustum augurium*). Without turning him into a god, this epithet too elevated him above other mortals by underlining the quasi-divine good fortune that he had displayed in the Civil Wars. One particular cult underlined this extraordinary capability. As soon as the name Augustus was introduced, the cult of the *numen* of Augustus began to spread. This cult of the divine power of Augustus (or the 'August One') was combined in Roman cities and in the provinces with a cult devoted to Rome and Augustus. Like the 'constitutional settlement' of 27 BC which gave Augustus power equivalent to the Roman people's (though without substituting his power for theirs), the cult of Rome-and-Augustus granted the emperor the same honours as those of the goddess who personified Rome. Similar reasons prompted the introduction into the hymn of the *salii* of the names of emperors and a few of their intended (but prematurely deceased) heirs, and also the annual proclamation of public vows for the wellbeing of the emperor and his family (on 3 January), vows similar to those aiming for the wellbeing of the *respublica* (1 January). It should be emphasised, however, that all these privileges were invented gradually over a period covering half a century, and were instituted either by a law or by a *senatusconsultum*, often in response to considerable popular pressure. Moreover, some of them were declined by Augustus.

3.4 The 'imperial cult'

The partisans of Augustus were, without doubt, behind the introduction of these religious novelties and privileges, but it should not be forgotten that the birth of what is called the 'imperial cult' (quite improperly, as the emperor was never officially venerated as a god during his lifetime) was not promoted and imposed solely from above. Recent research has shown that this worldwide movement frequently originated among the people, in the cities and provinces – for it offered a way, through religion, of conceptualising the development

and success of an altogether new type of political power. In Rome itself, the origin of this movement was no different. Following the rule, instituted right at the beginning of the Principate, that nobody could hold greater power or honours than those of Augustus, the emperor and his family were granted honours equal to those enjoyed by the gods. The motive of this elevation, in Rome, in Italy and in the provinces alike, was a desire to define in this way the exceptional power gathered into the hands of Augustus and his successors. It was power that could be understood and thought of as the epiphany of a divine power in the hands of a mortal.

4 DOMESTIC AND FAMILY DEITIES

4.1 The Lares

Every family (*domus*) honoured its own gods, some of which went by the same name everywhere (the Lares, the *genius*, the Penates), while the names of others depended on particular family traditions. Thus each family honoured its own Lar (in Greek, *heros*), the deity that protected the land on which the family lived. As well as regular worship (on the Kalends, the Nones and the Ides of the month), the Lar received offerings at all family feasts and banquets. Up to the beginning of the common era, the Lar was addressed in the singular but, no doubt under the influence of the *Lares Augusti*, the plural of the word later came to be used. In their domestic shrines (*lararia*) set up in the communal rooms of homes, the Lares, from the beginning of the Empire on, were represented as two young men dancing and pouring wine from a horn into a *patera*. The cult of the Lares involved the entire household, the slaves as well as the *domus*.

4.2 The *genius*

Much the same applies to the cult of the *genius* of the *paterfamilias*. The *genius* (in Greek, *daimon* or *tukhe*) was the personification of the active force of a being, a thing or a place, as it was constituted at the moment of its birth or

creation. To judge by the *lararia* of Pompeii and according to certain stories, the *genius* of a place or a person could be represented by a snake; but it was also represented as a man dressed in a toga, sometimes carrying a horn of plenty and a *patera*. In a domestic context, people swore by the *genius* of the *paterfamilias* and honoured that *genius* on the birthday of the master of the house. Around the beginning of the Empire, it became customary also to revere the Juno of the mistress of the house, the feminine equivalent of a *genius*. Gods and goddesses, we should not forget, likewise possessed a *genius* or a Juno.

4.3 The Penates and other domestic deities

Alongside the Lares and the *genius*, the Penates were also honoured. These were in some senses vague deities lodged in the innermost part of a house, but they could be separated out into a number of individual deities particularly revered by the family. To judge from the evidence of Pompeii, they would number between two and eight and sometimes included some of the major gods. Vesta, the hearth goddess, had no cult place of her own in households, except possibly in the flames of a sacrifice or those of the cooking fire. Nor did the Roman colonies and *municipia* have sanctuaries for Vesta: clearly the only hearth that really mattered to Roman citizens was that of the Roman Forum.

It was not unknown for particular family members to be deified after death. Cicero commented ironically on Caesar's apotheosis, but thought seriously of deifying his daughter Tullia. His project was no fancy, for in Rome (*CIL*, 6.7581) and also in the provinces (*CIL*, 13.8705, Upper Germany) we know of inscriptions that attest the private deification of dead women.

Leading families also maintained cults that extended beyond the family context. They were responsible for the upkeep of local or even public temples situated on their land, which they had to throw open to all on the god's festival day. The myth of the Potitii and the Pinarii, the two families in

charge of the Ara Maxima (in the Forum Boarium), provides a clear picture of the situation. The old families of the Roman aristocracy thus celebrated what were known as family (gentilician) cults, as they involved a whole *gens*, but which were nevertheless public. The best-known are the family cult of the *gens* Julia (Venus, Veiovis) and that of the *gens* Aurelia (Sol).

4.4 The Di manes, funeral ceremonies and the cult of the dead

Another type of domestic cult, whose correct celebration was of concern to the whole community, was the funerary cult. In every family, the father or son buried the family dead. In a ceremony observed by more or less all families, the bodies of the deceased were taken to a cemetery situated outside the city, stretching along the roads leading out of town and particularly clustering near the gates. At country houses, the cemetery was found at the boundary of the occupied land or at the side of a nearby road. The funeral rites were celebrated in the necropolis, in front of the tomb. The reasons determining the general trends of the changing mortuary practices are not clear. After a period in archaic times when cremation was favoured, the prevailing fashion in the sixth century BC came to be burial. In the first century BC, cremation again became widespread – before giving way to burial once more in the second half of the second century. These variations did not depend on any particular shift in belief, but were somehow linked to developments within traditional practice. In any case, the various changes may be less significant than they seem, given that, even in cases of cremation, it was still customary to bury what was left of the body, so that a tomb existed according to sacred law. All that changed was the way of destroying the corpse and reducing it to imperishable bones. Sometimes that task was left to fire, sometimes to the earth. We should remember that cremation, even if just a symbolic cremation (when, for example, the body had actually been cremated abroad), was always a central element in the funerals of emperors. Elsewhere, in the provinces, funeral procedures varied.

At any rate, it was the funeral ritual that transformed the corpse, whether cremated or not, into one of the deceased. It went to join the *di manes*. These existed as a group, but were generally invoked as the *di manes* of some particular individual, as can be seen from countless tomb inscriptions. The funerary sacrifice offered in front of the funeral pyre (or the open tomb in cases of burial) proclaimed the new status of the dead person. The victim (usually a pig) and the offerings made to the deceased and to his *manes* (wine, oil, perfumes) were burnt in a holocaust on the pyre or in a fire next to the tomb. The relatives of the deceased did not share this meal, thereby marking the distance that now separated them from the dead. The grieving family, for its part, seems to have sacrificed to the Penates and then eaten their share of this sacrifice. In this way, the first meal that the deceased consumed took the form of smoke, as it did for the gods. Where there was a cremation, the symbolism was even clearer, since the body itself was transformed by the same fire that made the foodstuffs edible for the immortals. Meanwhile the mortals ate the meat that was their share of the victim offered to the Penates. When the fire was extinguished, the bones and ashes were collected up, washed in wine, and placed in an urn, which was deposited in the tomb. At different periods, a variety of offerings might accompany this burial: personal objects, or crockery used in the banquet, as a sign of the status of the deceased; and rites were probably performed annually, to confirm that status.

During the communal festival of the dead (the Parentalia, 13–22 February) and on particular anniversaries, a family would gather by the tomb and offer a sacrifice on the ground, in front of it. The ‘pyre’ on which the sacrifice was burnt as a holocaust recalled the pyre of the day of the funeral. Offerings took a variety of forms, ranging from a cup of wine to an animal victim, and generally included libations of perfume (which explains the glass and earthenware flasks often found in tombs) and wreaths. Some tombs were equipped with channels that made it possible to pour libations straight into the interior.

During the period of mourning, the family of the dead person was considered ‘soiled’ (*funestatus*) and its members adopted a degraded and dishevelled appearance. They wore dark clothes and stopped combing their hair and shaving, and carried out no public functions. But once the funeral rites had been celebrated, the mourning family gradually returned to normal life. On the eighth day a banquet, the *nouemdialis cena*, brought together the relatives and their guests. In leading families, the guests might include the whole Roman people and the banquet would be extremely lavish, even accompanied by gladiatorial games. During the festival of the dead, in February, the entire town went into mourning for ten days, for all the citizens had their own dead to commemorate and all, in their own ways, celebrated a funeral sacrifice such as that described above.

The dead who had not been buried in accordance with the rules, in particular those who had not been buried at all, were supposed to be dangerous for the living. In the month of May, a special festival was consecrated to them (the Lemuria, 9, 11 and 13 May). The father of the family offered their wandering spirits (*lemures*) a minimal banquet without any attempts at communication. At midnight, he tossed some beans over his shoulder, declaring ‘By the beans I redeem myself and my family.’

This set of rites varied from one period to another, and from one place to another. Only the obligation to bury one’s dead, according to the official rules, applied to one and all. But although the ritual was very similar for all families, particularly in the same period and the same region, it was never absolutely identical. Each *paterfamilias* decided for himself which customs to observe and, in doing so, would obey family traditions rather than prescriptions laid down by the priests. Because these rituals produced countless variants while remaining within the framework of a common tradition, there is very little explicit information on funerals and the festivals of the dead. As a result, many aspects of the cult of the dead are still unclear. The public decisions taken on the

occasions of the funerals of Gaius Caesar and Lucius Caesar (AD 2 and 4) and of Germanicus (19) recorded in recently discovered inscriptions are therefore particularly precious, for they illuminate many aspects of the funeral rites.

PART V
Exegeses and Speculations