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Roman Religion

A Sourcebook

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ACCEPTING NEW GODS, CULTS AND RITUALS

Throughout their history the Romans were willing to adopt new gods and religious practices, provided that such innovations were authorised by the state authorities.

8.1 CICERO, LAWS 2.19. No individual shall take gods for himself, either new or alien ones, unless they have been recognised by the state. Privately they shall worship those gods whose proper worship they have received from their ancestors.

While Cicero's statement indicates the openness of a polytheistic religion to change, it is important to note the proviso elucidated by the Greek historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus: those foreign cults that were *officially* accepted were *adapted* to traditional religion by the removal of undesirable features.¹ Thus it is misleading to speak in terms of the Romans' toleration of non-Roman religions, as will be seen in the measures enacted to suppress the cult of Bacchus or Dionysus in 186 BCE.² Rather we should think in terms of patrol and control by the state.

8.2 DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS, ANTIQUITIES 2.19.3. Notwithstanding the influx into Rome of innumerable foreigners who are under great obligation to worship their ancestral gods in accordance with the customs of their own countries, the city has never officially emulated any of these foreign practices, as have many cities in the past. But even though Rome has introduced certain rites on the recommendation of oracles, she celebrates them in accordance with her own traditions, discarding all mumbo-jumbo.

¹ One of the key words in Dionysius' statement is *officially*, as Wiseman (1984) 117-8 emphasized. However, even more critical is the translation of Dionysius' *eis zelon eluluthe*, as 'emulated' or 'imitated' rather than 'adopted.'

² See 9.2-9.7.

The third century Christian writer Minucius Felix opines that Roman receptivity to foreign cults contributed to their success in gaining an empire.

8.3 MINUCIUS FELIX, OCTAVIUS 6. Throughout the entire empire, in provinces and towns, we see that each local group of people has its own religious rituals and worships local gods. The Eleusinians worship Ceres, the Phrygians the Great Mother, the Epidaurians Aesculapius, the Chaldaeans Baal, the Syrians Astarte, the Taurians Diana and the Gauls Mercury. The Romans, however, worship all the gods in the world. Their power and authority have encompassed the whole world, and they have extended their empire beyond the paths of the sun and the confines of the ocean itself. All the while they practice their god-fearing valor (*virtus religiosa*) in the field and strengthen their city with awesome religious rites, chaste virgins and many a priestly dignity and title.

When they have captured a town, even in the fierceness of victory, the Romans respect the deities of the conquered people. They invite to Rome gods from all over the world and make them their own, raising altars even to unknown gods and to the shades of the dead.³ And thus, while the Romans were adopting the religious rites of all nations, they also earned for themselves dominion.

As Polybius observed, fear of the supernatural (*deisidaimonia*) kept the Roman state together. The ideology seems to have been: the more gods we worship and the larger the scale of that worship, the greater will be the chance of securing the gods' favor (*pax deorum*) and thus success.

The following excerpts show that religious innovations frequently coincided with a particular crisis, such as plague or a disaster in war. Although this could suggest that the existing deities were proving inadequate, the actual infiltration of a cult leaves little, if any, trace in the archaeological or literary record. What the sources attest is the presence but not necessarily the original arrival of a deity. Thus it is equally possible that the state authorities were sanctioning a cult that was already prevalent by officially accepting and modifying it to conform with Roman traditions.

Once a cult had gained a hold on the populace, it was the easier and wiser course for the authorities to accept and adapt it, rather than attempt to eradicate it completely. For the most part, this policy worked until the Romans were confronted with monotheistic religions.

The literary sources indicate that the agent of change was frequently the Sibylline books which prescribed expiations involving innovation.⁴ It is, however, important to note that these books were consulted on the advice of the Senate by the *quindecimviri de sacris faciundis*, the state board of priests in charge of rituals, who alone had access to them. During the republic, these prophetic books were thus under strict state control. Augustus transferred them to the temple of Apollo on the Palatine.

³ See 8.6 on the summoning of Juno from Veii.

⁴ *Sibylline books*: see 5.7 and 5.8.

Eight temples are reported to have been constructed after consultation of these books: the temple of Ceres, Liber and Libera dedicated in 493 BCE,⁵ Aesculapius in 291, Hercules the Guardian probably in the third century, Flora in 241 or 238, Mens (Mind) and Venus of Eryx in 215,⁶ Cybele who was brought to Rome in 204 and adopted as the Great Mother (*Magna Mater*), and Venus Verticordia (Turner of Hearts) in 114 BCE. Three of these deities, Aesculapius, Venus of Eryx and Cybele were identifiably non-Roman gods, of whom the last two were given temples within the *pomerium*, an evident innovation made at two critical junctures in the Hannibalic war.

An early arrival: the cult of Apollo

In 433/2 BCE, in a time of plague, the Romans vowed a temple to Apollo for the people's health. This temple was dedicated two years later (Livy 4.29.7) and was situated outside the *pomerium*, apparently because Apollo was a non-Roman deity. There was probably an earlier shrine on the site of this temple that is later referred to as that of Apollo Medicus (the Healer) (Livy 3.63.5 and 40.51.6). Since there were temples of Apollo at Veii and Cumae, the cult could have entered Rome from Etruria or southern Italy, gradually infiltrating to the point at which a public shrine was established. In this, as in most instances, the original arrival of a god cannot be discerned.

8.4 LIVY 4.25.3-4. That year a plague offered a respite from other problems. A temple was vowed to Apollo on behalf of the health of the people. The *duumvirs* did many things on the advice of the books to appease the anger of the gods and avert the plague from the people.⁷ Nevertheless the losses were severe, both in the city and the countryside, men and beasts being afflicted without distinction.

The first *lectisternium*⁸

In 399 BCE, again in a time of plague, the Romans introduced the *lectisternium*, originally a Greek practice, on the advice of the Sibylline books.

8.5 LIVY 5.13.4-7. Plague was rife, affecting all living creatures. Since no cause or end to this incurable disease was found, the Senate decided to consult the Sibylline books. The *duumvirs* celebrated over a period of eight days the first *lectisternium* ever held in Rome in order to win the favor of Apollo and Latona,⁹ of Hercules and Diana, and of Mercury and Neptune, spreading couches for them that were

⁵ Ceres, Liber and Libera were apparently original Italic fertility deities of crops and the vine. Later this triad was assimilated with the Greek Demeter, Dionysus and Kore (the Maid, Persephone); see Orlin (1997) 100-101.

⁶ *Eryx*: a town in Sicily.

⁷ *duumvirs*: a board of two priests who dealt with the performance of sacred rites (*sacris faciundis*); see Glossary.

⁸ *lectisternium*: literally a strewing or draping of couches on which the gods' statues were displayed outside the temples, as if at a banquet.

⁹ *Latona*: mother of Apollo and Diana.

as richly furnished as was possible at that time. The ritual was also celebrated in private houses.

The *evocatio* of Juno of Veii¹⁰

In 396 BCE, when the Romans were about to take the city of Veii, an important, wealthy Etruscan city to the north of Rome, they performed the ritual of *evocatio*, inviting their enemies' god to come over to their side. Camillus, the Roman dictator,¹¹ addresses the Veientine goddess Juno, offering her a temple in Rome in return for her desertion of Veii. By *evocatio* the Romans deprived the enemy of divine protection, while also adopting the gods of the vanquished into their own pantheon.

8.6 LIVY 5.21.1-7. A huge crowd set out and filled the camp. After taking the auspices, the dictator went out and ordered the soldiers to take up their arms. 'It is under your leadership,' he said, 'Pythian Apollo, and inspired by your divine will, that I am advancing to destroy the city of Veii. To you I vow a tenth part of the spoils. To you, Queen Juno, who now dwell in Veii, I pray that you will accompany us in our victory to our city, soon to be your city, where a temple worthy of your greatness will receive you.'

After these prayers, he attacked the city with vast numbers from every side, in order to distract attention from the danger that threatened the inhabitants from the tunnel.¹² The people of Veii were unaware that they had been betrayed by their own seers and by foreign oracles. They also were unaware that already some of the gods had been invited to share in the plunder, while others had been summoned to leave their city and were turning their eyes to the temples of the enemy for their new homes.

After the fall of the city, the goddess is taken to Rome and installed on the Aventine, an area outside the *pomerium*, as was appropriate for a goddess of non-Roman origin. With apparent skepticism, Livy reports various stories about her removal.

8.7 LIVY 5.22.3-8. When the wealth that belonged to men had been removed from Veii, they began to remove gifts to the gods and the gods themselves, but more in the manner of worshippers than plunderers. Young men were selected from the entire army. After ritually cleansing their bodies, they put on white robes and were entrusted with the task of carrying Queen Juno to Rome. With reverence they entered her temple, at first they scrupled (*religiose*) to lay hands on the image because it was one that, according to Etruscan practice, only a priest of a certain family was accustomed to touch.

When one of the youths, whether divinely inspired or in youthful jest, asked, 'Juno, do you want to go to Rome?', the rest all cried out that the goddess had nodded her assent. There is an additional story that her voice was heard to say

¹⁰ *evocatio*: a summoning forth or calling out.

¹¹ *dictator*: an official who was specially appointed as commander-in-chief, though only for a period of six months. His power overrode that of the two consuls.

¹² *tunnel*: the Romans were digging a tunnel under the walls of the city.

that she was willing. In any event, we are told that she was moved from her abode with contrivances of little power and was light and easy to transport, as if she followed of her own accord. She was brought undamaged to the Aventine, her eternal home to which the vows (*vota*) of the Roman dictator had summoned her. There Camillus later dedicated to her the temple that he had vowed. Such was the fall of Veii, the wealthiest city of the Etruscans....

Macrobius (c. 400 CE) reports the ancient formula for *evocatio* recited by a Roman commander in charge of a siege. Apparent at the end of this formula is the *do ut des* principle.

8.8 MACROBIUS, SATURNALIA 3.9.7-8. Whether you are a god or goddess who hold under your protection the people and city of Carthage, and you also, greatest god, who have taken this city and people into your protection, I pray, venerate and ask your indulgence that you abandon the people and city of Carthage, desert their structures, temples, sanctuaries, their city, and depart from them. I pray you to afflict that people and citizenry with fear, terror, and oblivion, to abandon them and come to me and my people. I pray that our places, temples, sanctuaries and city may be more acceptable and more honorable to you, and that you may be propitious to me, the people of Rome and my soldiers so that we may know and perceive it. If you will do this, I vow that I will build temples to you and celebrate games in your honor.

The importation of Aesculapius

Because of a plague, the Romans consulted the Sibylline books which advised bringing Aesculapius, the Greek god of healing, from Epidaurus in Greece. Envoys were eventually sent to Greece. The god is said to have approached them in the form of a snake and, when nearing Rome, indicated the Tiber island as the location for his temple (292 BCE). Again a foreign deity was installed outside the *pomerium*.

8.9 LIVY 10.47.6-7. Although the year had been successful in many respects, it was hardly a consolation for one misfortune, a plague that devastated both the city and countryside. It was now a calamity more like a portent, and the [Sibylline] books were consulted to discover what end or remedy the gods might offer for the misfortune. The advice discovered in the books was that Aesculapius should be summoned to Rome from Epidaurus; but nothing was done about it in that year because the consuls were engaged with the war, except that a one-day *supplicatio* to Aesculapius was held.¹³

8.10 ANON. ON FAMOUS MEN 22.2-3. Because of plague and on the advice of the oracle, the Romans sent ten ambassadors under the leadership of Quintus Ogulnius to summon Aesculapius from Epidaurus.¹⁴ When the Roman envoys arrived there and were marvelling at the huge statue of the god, a serpent glided from the temple, an object of veneration, not of horror. To the amazement of all, making its way through the midst of the city to the Roman ship, it curled

¹³ *supplicatio*: see Glossary.

¹⁴ *Ogulnius*: also the sponsor of the Ogulnian Law giving plebeians access to priesthoods.

itself up in the tent of Ogulnius. The envoys sailed to Antium, carrying the god.¹⁵ Here, through the calm sea, the serpent made for a nearby temple of Aesculapius and, after a few days, returned to the ship. When the ship was sailing up the Tiber, the serpent leaped down from the ship onto the nearby island, where a temple was established. The pestilence subsided with amazing speed.

The importation of Venus Erycina to the Capitoline hill

During the Hannibalic War, several expiations were recommended by the Sibylline books after the Roman defeat at the battle of Trasimene and the death of Flaminius. One was the building of a shrine to Venus Erycina. The epithet derives from Eryx, a town in northwest Sicily where the principal deity, Astarte, was the Carthaginian equivalent of Venus. This area had been an important stronghold of the Carthaginians during the First Punic War (264-241 BCE) and had only been conquered by the Romans with great difficulty. In 217, the fear was that this part of Sicily might defect from Rome. This importation would seem to be another instance of *evocatio*, even though not explicitly mentioned as such in the scanty sources. Since her temple was located on the Capitoline hill (Livy 23.21.10), Venus Erycina is the first known example of a foreign deity to be brought inside the *pomerium*.

8.11 LIVY 22.9.9-10. The books were duly inspected and the board made its report: first, the offering made to Mars, in view of the present war, had been incorrectly performed, and must be performed afresh and on a greater scale; secondly, Great Games should be vowed to Jupiter and a shrine to Venus Erycina and to Mens (Mind);¹⁶ thirdly, public prayers should be held and a *lectisternium*.¹⁷

An outbreak of non-Roman *religio* in Rome¹⁸

In 213 BCE the continuing war resulted in religious hysteria in Rome and the abandonment of Roman ritual. The Senate ordered the praetor to collect all written prophecies and rituals, and to forbid sacrifice in 'a new or foreign rite.'

¹⁵ *Antium*: a coastal town in Italy, about forty miles south of Rome.

¹⁶ *Mind*: the vowing of a temple to the abstract deity Mind seems to reflect the need for a new strategy after the disastrous loss at Trasimene, that of delay advocated by Quintus Fabius Maximus who became dictator after the death of Flaminius (for the preceding part of this excerpt which also involves Fabius Maximus, see 7.11).

¹⁷ This *lectisternium* marks the first appearance in a Roman religious festival of twelve gods who have their counterparts in the twelve Greek Olympian gods: six couches were displayed: one for Jupiter and Juno, a second for Neptune and Minerva, a third for Mars and Venus, a fourth for Apollo and Diana, a fifth for Vulcan and Vesta, a sixth for Mercury and Ceres (Livy 22.10.9).

¹⁸ *religio*: note the recurrence of this word in this and the ensuing excerpts from Livy. It can mean 'superstition' or 'religiosity,' with the general implication that awe and fear of the supernatural are involved, for good or ill.

The 'foreign superstition' was evidently orgiastic and was perhaps an outbreak of Bacchic worship or that of the Magna Mater, or even of both cults.

8.12 LIVY 25.1.6-12. The longer the war dragged on and success and failure kept changing both the situation and men's attitude, so superstition (*religio*) of a mostly foreign nature (*externa*) invaded the state.¹⁹ The result was that either the gods or men suddenly seemed to have changed. Roman rituals were now being abandoned not only in secret and within the confines of men's houses, but also in public places, in the Forum and on the Capitol. There was a mob of women who were not following the ancestral mode of worship either in their sacrifices or in their prayers to the gods. Phony priests and fortune-tellers (*sacrificuli et vates*) had taken hold of men's minds....²⁰

At first good men's indignation was expressed in private; then the matter came to the notice of the Senate as a matter of official complaint. The aediles and the three city commissioners were seriously reprimanded by the Senate because they were not stopping it.²¹ After they had tried to remove that crowd from the forum and scatter the paraphernalia required for the sacrifices, they had narrowly escaped violence. Now that the trouble seemed too strong to be quelled by the lesser magistrates, the Senate assigned to Marcus Aemilius, the urban praetor,²² the task of freeing the people from such superstitions (*religiones*). In an assembly, he read the decree of the Senate and also issued an edict that whoever had books of prophecies or prayers or a ritual for sacrifice should bring all these books and writings to him before 1 April, and that no one should sacrifice in a public or consecrated place in a new or foreign rite.

The institution of games to Apollo

In the following year (212 BCE), Livy reports the results of the praetor's edict. Two oracles were published and, in response to the second, games to Apollo were authorized after consultation of the Sibylline books.

8.13 LIVY 25.12.8-15. Then the second prophecy was read out loud...: 'If you wish, Romans, to drive out the ulcerating sore of nations that has come from afar,²³ I propose that a festival of games be vowed to Apollo that will be graciously observed in Apollo's honor each year. When the people shall have given a part out of the public treasury, private citizens shall contribute on their own behalf and on that of their families. The praetor who is the chief judge for the

¹⁹ *superstition ... invaded the state*: compare this phrase with Livy's introduction to the bringing of the Magna Mater, see 8.15.

²⁰ *phony priests and fortune-tellers*: Livy uses the same terms in context of the outbreak of Bacchic worship in 186 BCE to indicate that these practices were not a part of the official state religion; see 9.2.

²¹ *three city commissioners*: minor officials charged with protecting the city from crime.

²² *urban praetor*: an elected official who frequently had charge of the city in the absence of the consuls.

²³ *sore of nations that has come from afar*: an allusion to Hannibal. Compare this prophecy with that given in 205 which resulted in the bringing of the Magna Mater (Great Mother) goddess to Rome, see 8.15.

people and the commons will be in charge of the conduct of that festival. The decemvirs shall offer the victims according to the Greek rite.²⁴ If you do this properly, you will always be glad and your state will change for the better. For the god who peacefully nurtures your meadows will destroy your foes.'

They spent one day interpreting this prophecy. On the next day the Senate passed a decree that the decemvirs should consult the [Sibylline] books in regard to making a festival and sacrifices in honor of Apollo. When the results of this consultation were reported to the Senate, the senators voted that a festival should be vowed and celebrated in honor of Apollo and that, after the festival had been held, the sum of twelve thousand asses should be given to the praetor for the celebration, and two full-grown victims.

A second decree was passed that the decemvirs should make the sacrifice according to the Greek rite and with the following victims: to Apollo an ox with gilded horns, and two white she-goats with gilded horns, and to Latona a cow with gilded horns.²⁵ When the praetor was about to open the festival in the Circus Maximus, he proclaimed an edict that during the festival people should make a contribution to Apollo according to their means. Such is the origin of the festival of Apollo, vowed and celebrated for victory, not for health, as most people think.²⁶ The people wore garlands as they watched the games, the matrons offered prayers, everybody feasted in the atrium with open doors, and the day was celebrated with every kind of ceremony.

The Apolline Games are made an annual event

A few years later Hannibal was still in Italy and his brother Hasdrubal was en route from Spain to invade from the north in an attempt to bring him reinforcements. In 208, because of plague, the Senate ordered that the festival of Apollo be made an annual celebration.

8.14 LIVY 27.23.5-7. The festival of Apollo was instituted in the consulship of Quintus Fulvius and Appius Claudius by Sulla the urban praetor (212 BCE). Thereafter all the urban praetors celebrated it, vowing it for a single year but not holding it on a fixed date. This year a serious plague descended on the city and the surrounding countryside, causing a lingering sickness that was not often fatal. Because of the plague, prayers were offered at the cross-roads throughout the city. Publius Licinius Varus the praetor was ordered to propose to the people a bill that these games be vowed in perpetuity for a fixed date.

²⁴ according to the Greek rite: note the apparent concession, since in the previous year there had been such concern about non-Roman ritual practices. Worship of Apollo according to the Greek rite was apparently offered as a substitute for the more exotic practices that the Senate clearly wished to control, if not eliminate.

²⁵ *Latona*: mother of Apollo; see 8.5 on the *lectisternium* of 399, where Latona is one of the honored deities.

²⁶ *victory*: Livy's emphasis on victory rather than health foreshadows the next two excerpts in which the games are made an annual fixture and the Magna Mater is imported to Rome to get Hannibal out of Italy.

The bringing of the Magna Mater to the Palatine hill

In 207 Hasdrubal was defeated and killed at the battle of Metaurus before he could reach Hannibal. But the latter still remained in southern Italy. In 205, the Romans were considering an invasion of Africa in the hope that this would cause Hannibal to withdraw from Italy. In the midst of this debate, the Romans consulted the Sibylline books which advised them to bring to Rome the Magna Mater (Great Mother), who is also known as the Mother of the Gods, the Idaean Mother, and Cybele or Cybebe.

This goddess was worshipped extensively in the area later known as Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and throughout the Greek world. One of her most important sanctuaries was at Pessinus in Phrygia, her priests were eunuchs, known as Galli, and her cult was orgiastic. In Livy's account of her arrival in Rome from Asia Minor, however, there is no sign of the orgiastic nature of her worship.²⁷ This foreign goddess was given a Romanised name, Magna Mater, her reception was celebrated with a *lectisternium*, an earlier imported Greek ritual, and new games that were given a Greek title, the Megalesia, all in an apparent attempt to present her as a Greek rather than an Asiatic deity.

There are several variants in the sources, including three different versions of her provenance. The antiquarian Varro, writing in the late republic, derives her from Pergamum (*On the Latin Language* 6.15), Livy reports that she was brought from Pessinus, and Ovid unequivocally states that the goddess was to be found on Mount Ida, near Troy. Livy reports that a 'sacred stone' was brought from Pessinus, whereas Ovid seems to imply an anthropomorphic statue.²⁸

The historical context of the Roman decision to receive the goddess officially in Rome is narrated by Livy.

8.15 LIVY 29.10.4-11.8. At this time sudden superstition (*religio*) invaded the state.²⁹ The Sibylline books had been consulted because it had rained stones that year more often than usual, and in the books a prophecy was found that, if ever a foreign enemy should invade Italy,³⁰ he could be defeated and driven out if the Idaean Mother of the Gods³¹ were brought from Pessinus to

²⁷ See 8.18 and 8.19 for descriptions of these orgiastic aspects.

²⁸ Most modern sources, including BNP 2.44, combine the ancient testimony, asserting that the stone brought to Rome in 204 was black, although it is not until the Christian authors, Arnobius (*Against nations* 7.49) and Prudentius (*Crowns of the martyrs* 10.156), that the stone is referred to as being black. For Ovid's reference to 'her image,' see 8.18 with n. 50.

²⁹ Livy's introduction to this episode is almost identical to the account of foreign *religio* in 213 BCE.

³⁰ *if ever a foreign enemy should invade Italy*: a more explicit allusion to Hannibal than that in 213 BCE, see 8.13.

³¹ *Idaean Mother of the Gods*: the official title of the Magna Mater in later republican times was *Mater Deorum Mater Idaea* (Mother of the Gods, Idaean Mother). The epithet *Idaean* refers to Mount Ida near Troy, and thus has connections with Aeneas, see Wiseman (1984) 117-123.

Rome.³² The effect upon the Senate of the discovery of this prophecy was all the greater because the envoys who had taken the offering to Delphi declared that they had had a favorable response when they sacrificed to Pythian Apollo, also that they had been granted a response by the oracle to the effect that a much greater victory was awaiting the Roman people than the one of the spoils from which they were bringing their offering.³³...

The envoys on their way to Asia went up to Delphi, where they consulted the oracle, inquiring what hope it foresaw for them and the Roman people of bringing their mission to a successful conclusion. The answer, so it is said, was that they would get what they wanted through the help of King Attalus,³⁴ and that when they had brought the Goddess to Rome it would be necessary for them to make sure that she was hospitably welcomed by the best man in the City. The envoys then visited Attalus in Pergamum. He received them courteously, escorted them to Pessinus in Phrygia, gave them the sacred stone that the inhabitants said was the Mother of the Gods, and told them to take it back to Rome.³⁵ Falto was sent in advance by the other envoys to announce that the Goddess was on the way and to tell the people that the best man in the state must be sought to welcome her with due ritual and hospitality.³⁶

In the following year, after reporting the prodigies and their expiation, Livy returns to the theme of the bringing of the Magna Mater. With elaborate ceremony the goddess was received from the 'best man' by the matrons, brought to Rome and installed in the temple of Victory on the Palatine hill, the second known instance of a foreign deity being brought within the *pomerium*. The Romans invaded Africa, and Hannibal was recalled from Italy and finally defeated at the battle of Zama in 202 BCE. The installation of the goddess on the Palatine had apparently fulfilled both parts of the oracle.

8.16 LIVY 29.14.5-14. There followed discussion of the reception of the Idaean Mother after the recent news that she was already in Terracina,³⁷ in addition to the fact that Marcus Valerius, one of the ambassadors, had arrived in advance, announcing that she would soon be in Italy.... Publius Scipio... was the young

³² *Pessinus*: site of a temple of Cybele in Phrygia. That the Idaean goddess was to be brought from Pessinus presents an long-recognized anomaly, since Pessinus is in Phrygia, more than 240 miles to the east of Mount Ida near Troy.

³³ *offering to Delphi*: Earlier in the year, the Romans had sent ambassadors to Delphi with a gift from the spoils of their victory over Hasdrubal at the Metaurus (Livy 28.45.12).

³⁴ *King Attalus*: king of Pergamum, an ally of the Romans in the First Macedonian War (215-205 BCE).

³⁵ *the sacred stone*...: Livy's scepticism is apparent in his comment 'the inhabitants said ...' Compare Ovid's reference to 'her image,' in 8.18 with n. 50.

³⁶ *hospitality*: the Latin *hospitium* implies reciprocity of guest and host, thus underscoring the foreignness of the newly imported goddess.

³⁷ *Terracina*: a town on the west coast of Italy, some 70 miles south of Rome.

man, not yet of an age to be quaestor, whom they judged to be the best of good men among the citizen body.³⁸...

Publius Cornelius was ordered to go with all the matrons to meet the goddess at Ostia.³⁹ He was to receive her from the ship, carry her to land and hand her over to the matrons for them to carry. After the ship had reached the mouth of the river Tiber, he sailed out into the salt water, just as he had been ordered, and received the goddess from her priests and carried her to land. The leading matrons of the state, among whom the name of Claudia Quinta is outstanding, received her. Claudia's reputation, previously dubious according to tradition, has made her chastity more famous because of her scrupulous performance of her religious duties.

The women passed the goddess from hand to hand,⁴⁰ from one to another in turn, as the whole citizen body poured out to meet her. Incense burners had been placed in front of the doors along the route and, as they burned the incense, people prayed that she might enter Rome willingly and propitiously. On 12 April, they carried the goddess to the temple of Victory which is on the Palatine,⁴¹ and it was a festal day. The people flocked to the Palatine bringing gifts for the goddess. There was a *lectisternium* and also games that were called the Megalesia.⁴²

Ovid's account of the bringing of the Magna Mater to Rome is markedly different from that of Livy. In the historian's version the Sibylline oracle offered the hope of defeating Hannibal and getting him out of Italy. Ovid, however, makes no reference to the Hannibalic War, nor to Pessinus as her origin. Rather he locates her in the area of Troy and focuses on the tradition of Rome's Trojan origins as portrayed in Vergil's *Aeneid*. Ovid presents the episode as a dialogue between himself and the Muse Erato to whom he attributes the answers to his questions, thus distancing himself from the fabulous aspects of his narrative.

8.17 OVID, FASTI 4.247-273. 'Instruct me too, guide of my work,⁴³ from where was she sought and from where did she come? Or was she always in our city?'

'The Mother always loved Dindymus, Cybele, Ida and the kingdom of Troy.⁴⁴ When Aeneas carried Troy to the Italian land, the goddess almost followed

³⁸ *Publius Scipio*: Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica, consul in 191 BCE, was the cousin of Publius Scipio Africanus, consul in 205, who invaded Africa in 204 and defeated Hannibal at Zama in 202.

³⁹ *Ostia*: a town at the mouth of the Tiber.

⁴⁰ *the goddess*: presumably the sacred stone acquired in Pessinus.

⁴¹ *temple of Victory which is on the Palatine*: this location was not only within the *pomerium* but also close to the site on which Romulus had founded Rome. The goddess' own temple, adjacent to that of Victory, was dedicated in 191 BCE (Livy 36.36.3).

⁴² *Megalesia*: the name is derived from *Megale Meter*, the Greek for 'Great Mother.' On the Megalesian games, see 6.5 and 6.6.

⁴³ *guide of my work*: Ovid is here addressing the Muse Erato.

⁴⁴ *Dindymus, Cybele, Ida*: mountains in the area near Troy that were sacred to Cybele.

the ships that carried the sacred objects,⁴⁵ but she felt that the fates did not yet demand the presence of her divinity in Latium.⁴⁶ So she remained in her accustomed place.

Afterwards, when mighty Rome had already seen five centuries and had raised her head above the conquered world,⁴⁷ the priest consulted the fateful words of Euboean prophecy.⁴⁸ They say that this is what he found: "The Mother is absent. Roman, I order you to seek the Mother. When she comes, she must be received by chaste hands." The obscure oracle puzzled the senators with its ambiguity: who was the absent Parent, and where she was to be sought? Apollo was consulted and he replied: "Summon the Mother of the Gods, she is to be found on Mount Ida."

Nobles were sent. At that time Attalus was the ruler of Phrygia. He refused the request of the men from the western land. Let me tell you a miracle. The earth trembled with a long rumbling and the goddess spoke in her shrine: "It was my own wish that I be sought. Let there be no delay. Send me: I'm willing. Rome is a worthy place to which every god should go." Trembling at the sound of these words, Attalus said: "Go forth. You will still belong to us. Rome traces her origin to Phrygian ancestors."

Ovid gives the itinerary of the voyage to Rome. At Ostia the ship is met by crowds of people from Rome, but becomes grounded in the shallows of the river and cannot be moved. Claudia Quinta performs a miracle. Ovid's detailed account is in sharp contrast to the terseness of the Livian version.

8.18 OVID, *FASTI* 4.304-47. Astounded at the portent, the men stood and trembled. Claudia Quinta traced her descent from Clausus of old,⁴⁹ and her beauty was not unequal to her noble birth. She was chaste, though not reputed so. An unfair rumor had wronged her, and she had been accused on a false charge

⁴⁵ *sacred objects*: an allusion to Aeneas' bringing Troy's gods to Rome, see Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.68 and 2.296-7.

⁴⁶ *fates*...: an allusion to a prominent theme in Vergil's *Aeneid*.

⁴⁷ *five centuries and had raised her head above the conquered world*: although five centuries (*saecula*) are not to be taken literally, the reference to Rome raising her head above the conquered world hardly fits with Livy's dating of the bringing of the Magna Mater to the last years of the Second Punic War when Hannibal was still in Italy. The Livian date is corroborated by Cicero, *On old age* 45. Ovid is evidently indulging in poetic exaggeration.

⁴⁸ *fateful words of Euboean prophecy*: an allusion to the Sibylline books. Euboea, an island off the north east mainland of Greece, sent out a colony to Cumae in Italy where there was a temple to Apollo which also housed the Sibyl from whom the Elder Tarquin is said to have bought the Sibylline books.

⁴⁹ *Clausus of old*: the Sabine Attus Clausus who is said to have come to Rome in the late sixth century BCE. He was the founder of the famous Claudian family into which the empress Livia had been married before her marriage to Augustus. Her son, the future emperor Tiberius, was thus a member of the Claudian family. Hence, Ovid's emphasis on Claudia's family origin.

When she had stepped forth from the line of chaste matrons and taken the pure river water in her hands, three times she sprinkled her head, three times she raised her hands to the heavens On bended knee she fixed her gaze on the image of the goddess⁵⁰ and with dishevelled hair uttered these words: 'Fruitful Mother of the gods, be kind and accept the prayers of your suppliant on one condition. I am said not to be chaste. If you condemn me, I will confess my guilt. Convicted by the judgment of a goddess, I will pay the penalty by my death. But if there is no basis for the charge, by your action you shall give proof of my innocence. Chaste as you are, yield to my chaste hands.'

She spoke and, with a slight effort, drew the rope. The goddess was moved, followed Claudia's lead and, by following, restored her reputation. ...

A white-haired priest in a purple robe washed the Mistress and her sacred objects in the waters of the Almo.⁵¹ Her attendants howled, the frenzied flute blew, and unmanly hands beat the drums of bull's hide.⁵² With joyful face and attended by a throng, Claudia walked in front, her chastity at last believed, though barely, because of the goddess' testimony. The goddess herself, seated in a wagon, was borne into the city by the Capena Gate; fresh flowers were scattered upon the yoked oxen. Nasica received her.⁵³

The poet Lucretius, writing in the late republic, describes a procession in the goddess' honor, explaining her different attributes and interpreting her as an allegory of Earth.⁵⁴

8.19 LUCRETIVUS, *ON THE NATURE OF THINGS* 2.600-628. The earth also has the capacity to produce shining crops and fruitful orchards for the races of men, and to supply rivers, leaves and fruitful pastures for the breed of wild beasts that roam the mountains. That is why the earth has uniquely been called the Great Mother of the Gods, the Mother of Beasts and Creator of our human body.

She it is who the ancient and learned poets of the Greeks celebrated in song, as seated in a chariot driving her twin-yoked lions.... They yoked her to wild beasts, because children, however fierce, must be conquered and tamed by the devotion owed to their parents. They surrounded her head with a turreted crown because the earth, being fortified in special places, supports cities. Thus adorned with this emblem, the image of the divine Mother is carried through the mighty lands with awesome effect.

⁵⁰ *image of the goddess*: the Latin *imago* would seem to imply an anthropomorphic statue.

⁵¹ *Almo*: a tributary of the Tiber.

⁵² *her attendants* ...: allusions to the cries of her eunuch priests and the music that were typical of the goddess' orgiastic worship. These several lines suggest an annual ritual purification of the goddess' statue which was not an official part of her cult until the reign of Claudius.

⁵³ *Nasica received her*: Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica; see n. 38. The Latin *Nasica accepit* forms a terse and abrupt conclusion to this account of the advent of the Magna Mater, apparently in deliberate contrast to the detail given by Livy.

⁵⁴ See also Ovid's description of the procession in 6.6.

She it is whom the different nations call the Idaean Mother by the ancient custom of their ritual. As her retinue, they give her an escort of Phrygians because they claim that it was in that area that crops were first created to spread throughout the world.⁵⁵ They assign eunuchs (*galli*) as her priests, because they wish to demonstrate that those who have violated the divinity of the Mother and proved themselves ungrateful to their parents must also be considered unworthy to bring living offspring into the shores of light.

Taut drums resound in their hands and all around there is a clash of hollow cymbals. Horns blast with their raucous tone and the hollow flute goads the mind with its Phrygian strain. They carry before them emblems of the violent frenzy. These have the power to terrify the ungrateful hearts and impious minds of the mob with fear of the the goddess' divinity.

So when she is first carried through the cities and silently bestows on mortals a wordless well-being (*salus*), they strew all her path with bronze and silver, enriching her with much largesse. They shower her with rose blossoms which overshadow the Mother and her retinue.

The above testimony of Ovid and Lucretius indicates that by the late republic the Magna Mater had assumed many aspects of the original cult of Cybele. Statuettes of the goddess' consort Attis⁵⁶ discovered in the foundations of the temple of the Magna Mater on the Palatine (191-114 BCE) show that the cult of Attis must have arrived some time during the second century BCE, perhaps even as early as the Magna Mater herself, though it was evidently not officially adopted in 205/4 at the time of the state's adoption of the Magna Mater and the initiation of the Megalesia. The authorities had apparently tried to control the cult at the time of its official adoption by adapting it to Roman customs, but they had not been able to prevent the infiltration of the exotic aspects of the cult of Cybele, Attis and her eunuch priests.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus cites the cult of the Magna Mater as an example of the control exercised by the state over the admission of foreign cults, noting that no Roman was allowed to be a priest of Cybele, nor were Romans allowed to participate in her procession wearing non-Roman dress.

8.20 DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS, *ANTIQUITIES* 2.19.3-5. But even though Rome has introduced certain rites on the recommendation of oracles, she celebrates them in accordance with her own traditions, discarding all mumbo-jumbo. The rites of the Idaean goddess are an example of this. For the praetors perform sacrifices and celebrate games in her honor every year according to the laws of Rome. Her priest and priestess are Phrygian; and it is they who carry her image through the city, begging alms, as is their custom, wearing medallions on their chests and beating tambourines, while flute-players play hymns in honor of the Mother.

⁵⁵ *crops*: the Latin *fruges*, fruits of the earth, yields an etymological word-play with the epithet *Phrygius*, Phrygian.

⁵⁶ *Attis*: for the story of the castration of Attis, inspired by a frenzy induced by Cybele, see Catullus 63 and Ovid, *Fasti* 4.223-244. On the statuettes, see BNP 1.97-8, 2.47-8.

It is contrary to the law and decree of the Senate that any native-born Roman walk in procession through the city wearing multi-colored clothes, begging alms, being escorted by flute players, or celebrate the goddess' orgies in the Phrygian manner. So careful are the Romans with regard to religious practices that are not indigenous. So great is their abomination of empty display that lacks decorum.

In the reign of Claudius (41-54 CE) restrictions on Roman participation were removed and the *quindecimviri* now took part in her procession. A new festival was instituted, the *Hilaria*, lasting from 15 to 27 March. On the final day of this festival, the cult statue of Cybele was ritually bathed in the river Almo, a ceremony mentioned earlier by Ovid in his description of the goddess' cult (see 8.18). Also incorporated into the goddess' worship was the *taurobolium*, an initiation ceremony in which the sacrificant was drenched with the blood of a bull. The date of the origin of this ceremony, however, is unknown, the ancient literary source being the Christian writer Prudentius who gives the supposed words of a Christian martyr contrasting his own martyr's blood with that of the pagan sacrifice.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ For details, see Turcan (1996) 49-50, BNP 2.160-2 and *OCD* 3 s.v. Cybele.

BECOMING A GOD

One of the most fascinating features of Roman religion is the deification of a human being, either after his death or during his lifetime. No simple origin or pattern for the deification of prominent Romans can be discerned. The extant sources indicate that the deification of Julius Caesar and subsequent imperial cult have their origins in Rome's contacts with the eastern Mediterranean world, but also in Roman tradition itself. As we have seen, the wearing of funeral masks and impersonation of deceased ancestors implied that the dead lived on, thus marking an important step towards deification.¹ As Beard, North and Price have remarked, 'Every narrative of Roman apotheosis tells, at the same time, a story of uncertainty, challenge, debate and mixed motives.'²

Many peoples of the near east were accustomed to regard their rulers as gods, a well-known example being the Egyptian Pharaohs. When Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE) overthrew the Persian Empire, the conquered peoples expected him to accept the divine honors that they traditionally accorded their rulers. Stories circulated that Zeus in the form of a snake had entered the bed of Alexander's mother Olympias and that the oracle of Zeus Ammon in Egypt greeted him as the son of Zeus.³ Such stories were, of course, politically advantageous.

The biographer Plutarch, writing several centuries after Alexander's death, remarks:

11.1 PLUTARCH, *LIFE OF ALEXANDER* 28.1-6. Alexander generally conducted himself haughtily towards the barbarians, like a man fully persuaded of his divine birth and parentage, but with the Greeks it was within limits and somewhat rare that he assumed his own divinity It is clear that Alexander himself was not conceited or puffed up by the belief in his divinity, but used it for the subjugation of others.

¹ See 3.26 on the funeral of a Roman noble.

² BNP 1.148.

³ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 2-3 and 27.

The desire to worship an individual as if he were a god was not confined to the politics of kings and military conquerors. A passage from *Acts of the Apostles* (mid-first century CE) relates how, when the apostle Paul had healed a man who had been lame from birth, the people of Lystra in southwest Asia Minor (modern Turkey) thought that he and his disciple Barnabas were gods who had come down from heaven. The official priest of Zeus was with difficulty prevented from offering the customary blood sacrifice in their honor.

11.2 ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 14.10-18. The man leaped up and began to walk. There was a crowd watching what Paul did, and these people called out in the local language: 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of humans.' So they called Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes since he was the chief speaker.⁴

And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was outside the city, brought bulls and garlands to the gates, wanting to hold a sacrifice with the crowd. But when Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes, and rushed out into the crowd, saying: 'Why are you doing this? We are human beings too, of a nature like your own, preaching that you should turn away from these empty ways to the living god....' But even with these words, they had difficulty in stopping the crowds from performing the sacrifice to them.

God-like status for a day: the Roman triumph⁵

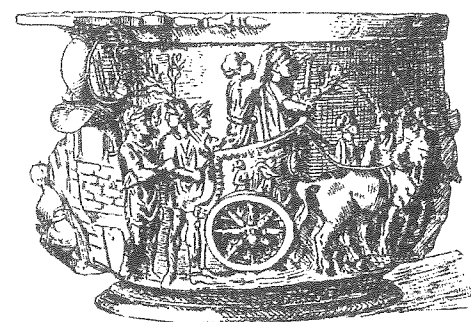
Nowhere is the elevation of a prominent Roman individual to the level of the gods more evident than in the Roman triumph, when the triumphing general 'impersonated' Jupiter, albeit only for one day.⁶ Pliny (*Natural History* 33.111) notes that on festal days the face of the statue of Jupiter himself was painted with red lead and likewise the body of the triumphing general.

11.3 ZONARAS, EPITOME 7.21. Dressed in triumphal garb, with bracelets on his arms and a crown of laurel on his head, and holding a branch in his right hand, he summoned the people. Then he praised the soldiers who had served under him, both collectively and in some cases individually, and gave them gifts of money and honored them also with military decorations.... Much of the booty was also distributed to the soldiers who had served in the campaign. However, some triumphing generals also gave it to the entire populace, defraying the expenses of the triumph and making the booty public property. If any was left over, they spent it on temples, porticoes, and other public works. When these ceremonies had been completed, the general mounted his chariot. This chariot, however, was not like a racing chariot or a war chariot; it was constructed to resemble a round tower. The general did not stand alone in the chariot, but, if he had children or relatives,

⁴ Hermes (Roman Mercury) was the messenger of the gods; Zeus (Roman Jupiter) the king of the gods. Asia Minor, though at this time part of the Roman empire, remained hellenized; hence the equation with Greek rather than Roman gods.

⁵ See 7.19, for an account of the triumph of Lucius Aemilius Paullus.

⁶ Cf. the nobles' impersonation of their ancestors by the wearing of masks at funerals; see 3.26 with n.33.



A Roman triumph: drawing of scene on a silver cup found at Boscoreale near Pompeii, showing the future emperor Tiberius mounted in a chariot with a slave holding a crown over Tiberius' head.

he took the girls and male infants in the chariot with him and put his older male relatives on the chariot horses. If there were a large number of relatives, they rode in the procession on horses, as out-riders for the general. None of the other people in the triumph was mounted; all marched along wearing laurel wreaths. However, a public slave rode in the chariot with the general, holding above his head a crown with precious gems set in gold. The slave kept saying to him, 'Look behind!' – a clear warning to consider the future and events yet to come, and not to become haughty and arrogant because of present events. ...

Thus arrayed, they entered the city. At the head of the procession were the spoils and trophies.... When the men ahead of him had reached the end of the procession, the general was finally escorted into the Roman Forum. He ordered some of the captives to be taken to the prison and executed. He then drove up to the Capitol, where he performed certain religious rites and made offerings. He then dined in the porticoes nearby. Toward evening he was escorted to his home to the accompaniment of flutes and Pan's pipes.

The 'divine connections' of Scipio Africanus

Two stories told about Scipio Africanus, the victor over Hannibal in 201 BCE, reflect a combination of Greek and native Roman influences. The legend of Scipio's miraculous conception gave him an affinity with Alexander the Great whose history would have been well-known to Romans in the late third and early second century.⁷ Scipio also is said to have cultivated a special relationship with Jupiter Capitolinus.

11.4 AULUS GELLIUS, ATTIC NIGHTS 6.1.1-6. The Greek historians recorded that the mother of the elder Scipio Africanus⁸ had the same experience as Olympias, wife of King Philip and mother of Alexander the Great.⁹ For Gaius Oppius and Julius Hyginus¹⁰ and other writers on Africanus' life and achievements relate

⁷ See 11.1 with comments.

⁸ *elder Scipio Africanus*: the victor over Hannibal, as opposed to Scipio Aemilianus, victor in the Third Punic War and destroyer of Carthage, who is also known as Africanus.

⁹ Philip II of Macedon ruled 359-336 BCE.

¹⁰ *Gaius Oppius and Julius Hyginus*: historians whose work no longer survives.

that his mother had long been believed sterile and that her husband had also given up hope of children. Then, when her husband was absent and she was sleeping on her own, a huge snake was suddenly seen lying by her side, in her room and in her bed. When those who saw the snake shouted out in terror, it glided away and could not be found. Scipio himself consulted the *haruspices* and they, after sacrificing, replied that children would be born. Not long after the snake had been seen in her bed, the woman began to show and experience the signs of pregnancy. In the tenth month, she gave birth to Publius Africanus, the man who defeated Hannibal and the Carthaginians in the Second Punic War.

But it is much more because of his achievements than because of this portent that Scipio is also [sc. as well as Alexander] thought to be a man of godlike excellence (*virtus divina*). It also is worth noting that the authorities mentioned above record that this same Africanus used to go up on to the Capitol in the latter part of the night and order the shrine of Jupiter to be opened for him. He would remain there for a long time, as though he was consulting with Jupiter about matters of state. The custodians of the temple were often amazed that Scipio was the only man at whom the temple dogs never barked or rushed, though they always were enraged at anybody else.

The Roman victor Flamininus is honored as 'Savior' by the Greeks¹¹

In 200 BCE, less than two years after the war against Hannibal, the Romans invaded the eastern Mediterranean, an area where the peoples were accustomed to revering their conquerors as gods. Flamininus, victorious over Philip V of Macedon in 196, was granted rituals in the Greek city of Chalcis that were still performed in Plutarch's own time three hundred years later.

11.5 PLUTARCH, *LIFE OF FLAMININUS* 16.3-4. Even in our own day a priest of Titus [Flamininus] is elected and appointed and after sacrifice and libations in his honor, they sing a set hymn. Because of its length I shall not quote it in its entirety, but only the closing words of the song: 'we revere the trust (*pistis*) of the Romans, cherished by our solemn vows. Sing, maidens, to Zeus the Great, to Roma,¹² to Titus and the trust of the Romans. Hail Paeon Apollo.¹³ Hail Titus our savior.'

The deification of Romulus

Livy, writing in the early years of Augustus' regime, reports the story of Romulus' mysterious death and his subsequent deification, a tradition that

¹¹ *Savior*: this title refers to protection, well-being and safety in this life, not to any hope of redemption or an afterlife.

¹² *Roma*: the cult of the goddess Roma began in Smyrna (modern Izmir in Turkey) in 195 BCE at the request of this city, which was seeking a way of advertising her ties with Rome. This cult was not adopted in Rome itself until the reign of Hadrian.

¹³ *Paeon Apollo*: Apollo is here addressed as healer and thus savior.

goes back at least as far as the poet Ennius (239-169 BCE). Livy's account has unmistakable allusions to the assassination of Julius Caesar and the subsequent proclamation of his deification by Octavian, his great-nephew who ultimately became Augustus. Close reading of Livy's account, especially the cumulative effect of such comments as 'I believe,' 'it is said,' 'as the story goes,' and 'it is amazing...' implies his skepticism about these stories.

11.6 LIVY 1.16. After these immortal deeds, Romulus was holding an assembly of the people on the Campus Martius to review the army when suddenly a storm arose with loud claps of thunder, enveloping him in a cloud so dense that it hid him from the view of the people. Thereafter Romulus was no longer on earth. The Roman people finally recovered from their panic when a bright and sunny day returned after the storm. When they saw that the king's seat was empty, although they readily believed the assertion of the senators who had been standing nearby that he had been snatched up on high by the storm, they nevertheless remained sorrowful and silent for some time, stricken with fear as if they had been orphaned. Then, on the initiative of a few men, they all decided that Romulus should be hailed as a god, son of a god, king and father of the city of Rome.¹⁴ With prayers they begged his favor (*pax*), beseeching him to be willing and propitious toward the Roman people and to protect their descendants forever.

There were some even then, I believe, who privately claimed that the king had been torn in pieces by the hands of the senators. This rumor also spread, though in obscure terms. Men's admiration and their current panic, however, gave currency to the other version. And it is said that it gained additional credence because of the device of one man. For, when the state was troubled by the loss of the king and in a hostile mood towards the Senate, Proculus Julius,¹⁵ a man of authority as the story goes (he was after all vouching for a matter of importance), addressed the people. 'My fellow citizens,' he said, 'Today at dawn Romulus, the father of this city, suddenly descended from the sky and appeared before me. Overcome with fear and awe, I stood there, begging him with prayers that it might be lawful (*fas*) for me to gaze on him. And he said, "Depart, and proclaim to the Romans that it is the gods' will that my Rome be the capital of the world. So let them cultivate the art of war, let them know and teach their descendants that no human strength has the power to resist the arms of Rome." With these words,' Proculus concluded, 'Romulus departed on high.'

It is amazing what credence was given to this man's story, and how the grief felt by the people and the army for the loss of Romulus was alleviated by belief in his immortality.

¹⁴ *as a god*: the deified Romulus was given the name Quirinus.

¹⁵ *Proculus Julius*: here allusion to the Julian family, Caesar and his adopted son Octavian, becomes explicit. Compare the accounts of Octavian's actions after Caesar's death (see 11.7-11.9) with those here attributed to Proculus Julius. The name Proculus Julius can hardly be coincidental.

The deification of Julius Caesar

At the time of his assassination on the Ides of March 44 BCE, Julius Caesar was *pontifex maximus*, augur, consul for the fifth time, and dictator for life (*dictator perpetuus*), an accumulation of offices that illustrates the close connection between politics and religion. The claim that the Julian family was descended from Venus had been memorialised in the newly-built temple of Venus Genetrix (Venus the Mother) and on coins. Caesar had celebrated four triumphs, over Gaul, Egypt, Pontus and Africa, and had also been granted the privilege of wearing the costume of a triumphing general on all public occasions. This honor had earlier been granted to Lucius Aemilius Paullus, the victor over Perseus of Macedon, and to Pompey after his victories in the east, thus extending the association of the human and the divine beyond the day of the actual triumph.

That there were at least plans to deify Julius Caesar during his lifetime is suggested by Cicero in a speech delivered in late 44 BCE, where he makes bitter reference to the 'deified Julius' (*divus Julius*) being granted a priest (*flamen*) and other honors pertaining to divine status (*Philippic* 2.110).

The biographer Suetonius reports Caesar's death and subsequent deification.

- 11.7 SUETONIUS, LIFE OF JULIUS 88.** He died in the fifty-sixth year of his life and was received into the number of the gods, not only by the words of those who decreed it but also by the conviction of the common people. For at the games which Caesar's heir Augustus established in honor of his deification and celebrated for the first time, a comet blazed for seven days in a row.... It was believed that it was the soul of Caesar who had been received into heaven. For this reason a star is added to his statue on his forehead.

Pliny the Elder has preserved a statement from Augustus' own Memoirs, written some twenty years after the event, concerning the appearance of a comet at games held soon after Julius Caesar's death.¹⁶

- 11.8 PLINY, NATURAL HISTORY 2.93-4.** On the very days of my games [in honor of Venus Genetrix] a comet was visible for seven days in the northern region of the sky.... The common people believed that this star signified that the soul of Caesar had been received among the spirits (*numina*) of the immortal gods. Therefore, the emblem of a star was added to the head of a statue of Caesar that I dedicated soon afterwards in the Forum.

The historian Dio reports the same event.

- 11.9 DIO 45.7.1.** However, when a certain star appeared in the north towards evening throughout all these days, some called it a comet, claiming that it portended the usual things. The majority, however, did not believe this, but attributed it to Julius Caesar, saying that he had been made immortal and was

numbered among the stars. Octavian derived confidence from this and set up in the temple of Venus a bronze statue of Caesar with a star above his head.

In 42 BCE the triumvirs Antony, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus and Octavian began the construction of a temple to the deified Julius in the Roman Forum. This temple was dedicated by Octavian soon after his victorious return from Egypt in 29 BCE.

- 11.10 DIO 47.18.4-19.2.** They [the triumvirs] laid the foundations of a shrine to Julius Caesar as a hero in the forum on the spot where he had been cremated, and had an image of him together with one of Venus carried in the procession at the Circus games....¹⁷ And they forced everyone to celebrate his birthday by wearing laurel and by merry-making.... Moreover, they forbade any likeness of him to be carried at the funerals of his relatives, just as if he truly was a god.... And they ruled that no one who took refuge in his shrine to secure immunity should be dragged away from there – a distinction that had never been granted to any of the gods except those worshipped in the time of Romulus.

The aftermath of Caesar's deification: from Octavian, son of a god, to the deified Augustus¹⁸

Sometime after mid-November 44 BCE, Cicero noted that Octavian had taken an oath in a speech to the people, swearing in the name of 'his hopes of attaining his father's honors' as he stretched out his hand towards Caesar's statue (*Letters to Atticus* 16.15.3). Subsequent events illustrate that Octavian's ambition was not confined to emulation of Caesar's political honors. Since Caesar was now officially a god, Octavian, his adopted son and heir, became the son of a god (*divi filius*) and styled himself as such on coins. Soon after Caesar's assassination, Sextus Pompey, son of Pompey the Great, issued coins depicting his father as Neptune. He held triumphal spectacles and mock naval battles, representing himself as adopted son of Neptune. During his struggle with Sextus Pompey, Octavian took up the theme, representing himself as the god Neptune, a nice variant on the concept of *evocatio*. Thus, the conflict between Caesar and Pompey was replayed, with their heirs presenting themselves as the adopted sons of gods.¹⁹

After the defeat of Sextus Pompey and the enforced retirement of Lepidus, a clash between Antony and Octavian became increasingly inevitable. At first Antony had represented himself in the guise of Hercules. But after the battle of Philippi and his first visit to Asia Minor, he chose to style himself as Dionysus, issuing coins depicting himself with a crown of ivy. After 37 BCE, when he was openly living with Cleopatra who had borne his children, he played Osiris to her Isis. Octavian responded by developing an association

¹⁶ Ramsey and Licht (1997) 48-57 present a convincing case that the comet heralding the apotheosis of Julius Caesar appeared during funeral games celebrated in honor of Caesar by Octavian at the festival of Venus Genetrix in late July 44 BCE.

¹⁷ *hero*: the Greek equivalent of *divus*, showing the distinction between *deus* and *divus*; see n. 18.

¹⁸ Price (1984) 220: 'the category of *divus* (deified, divine) emerged to distinguish the emperor from gods (*deus*) and mortals.'

¹⁹ For details, see Zanker (1988) 53-57 and BNP 2.223-5.

with Apollo, vowing a temple to that god on the Palatine hill that he ultimately dedicated in 28 BCE.

Octavian acquired three major priesthoods before he had reached the age of thirty, becoming pontifex in 48, augur in 41/0, and one of the board of fifteen (*quindecimviri sacris faciundis*) c. 37 BCE. He waited, however, for Lepidus' death in 12 BCE, before assuming the office of *pontifex maximus* that Lepidus had seized after Caesar's death. Nonetheless, Augustus' accumulation of religious offices added to his political *auctoritas*, as also did his promotion of the cult of the deified Julius and the building of the temple of Apollo.

After the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra and his return to Rome, Octavian took the name Augustus. The historian Florus, writing in the late second century CE, remarks 'as if the name alone had already conferred divinity on him' (Florus 2.34.66). On the assumption of this title, Augustus himself wrote:

11.11 ACHIEVEMENTS OF AUGUSTUS 34. In my sixth and seventh consulships [28 and 27 BCE], after I had put an end to the civil wars, when I had attained supreme power by universal consent, I transferred the state from my own power to the control of the Roman Senate and people. For this service of mine I was named Augustus by decree of the Senate, and the doorposts of my house were publicly wreathed with laurel, a civic crown was fixed over my door, and a golden shield was set up in the Julian senate house which, as attested by the inscription, was given me by the Senate and Roman people on account of my courage, clemency, justice and piety.²⁰

Ten years after he assumed this title, Augustus held a religious festival that is known as the Secular Games. There was a tradition in Rome that games should be held to commemorate the end of a *saeculum*, a period of either 100 or 110 years that supposedly represented the longest period of human life. Augustus fixed the end of the current *saeculum* in 17 BCE, and the poet Horace composed the *carmen saeculare* (Secular Hymn) for the occasion. An inscription survives giving details of the rituals enacted at this festival which included formal sacrifices to a multiplicity of gods, dramatic performances (*ludi scaenici*), banquets, choral singing and circus games.²¹

In his *Achievements*, Augustus briefly refers to the Secular Games, noting that he celebrated them as head of the college of *quindecimvirs*.

11.12 ACHIEVEMENTS OF AUGUSTUS 22. On behalf of the college of *quindecimviri*, as its president (*magister*), with Marcus Agrippa as my colleague,²² I produced the Secular Games.

²⁰ *civic crown*: a wreath made of oak, a tree sacred to Jupiter.

²¹ For excerpts from this inscription, see BNP 2.140-44.

²² Marcus Agrippa had been Augustus' naval commander in the campaigns against Sextus Pompey and against Antony and Cleopatra. In 21 BCE, he had married Augustus' daughter Julia, and became the father of two sons whom Augustus adopted as his heirs.

At the end of his life Augustus listed the religious offices he held.

11.13 ACHIEVEMENTS OF AUGUSTUS 7. I was *pontifex maximus*, augur, belonged to the colleges of fifteen (*quindecimviri*) and of the seven in charge of feasts (*septemviri epulonum*), was an Arval Brother, *sodalis Titius*, and a *fetialis*.²³

Suetonius, writing of Augustus' assumption of the office of *pontifex maximus*, notes that he took control of the Sibylline books, purging and transferring them from the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline to the temple of Apollo that he had constructed on the Palatine.²⁴

11.14 SUETONIUS, LIFE OF AUGUSTUS 31. After he had finally assumed the office of *pontifex maximus* ... he collected whatever prophetic writings of Greek or Latin origin were in circulation anonymously or under the names of unreliable authors and burned more than 2,000 of them, retaining only the Sibylline books and making a review even of these. He deposited them in two gilded cases under the pedestal of the Palatine Apollo....

Ovid writes of Augustus' assumption of the office of *pontifex maximus*, alluding to his kinship with Vesta.²⁵

11.15 OVID, FASTI 3.419-28. To [Augustus] Caesar's countless titles—which did he prefer to earn?—was added the pontifical office. The divinity (*numina*) of eternal Caesar presides over the eternal fire [of Vesta]. You see the pledges of empire close by. Gods of ancient Troy, worthy prize for him who carried them, whose burden kept Aeneas safe from the enemy, a priest born of Aeneas' line tends your kindred divinities.²⁶ Vesta, guard his kindred head.²⁷ Tended by his sacred hand, live well you fires. Live undying, both flame and leader, I pray.

When he finally assumed that office, Augustus imported the cult of Vesta into his own home on the Palatine, making a part of his house public property (Dio 54.27.3). Ovid honors this new Vesta of the Palatine at the end of the fourth book of the *Fasti*, hailing Augustus as one of three gods within his Palatine house.²⁸

11.16 OVID, FASTI 4.949-54. O Vesta, win the day! Vesta has been received in the home of her kinsman. This is what the Senate has justly decreed. Phoebus

²³ The college of Arval Brothers was revived by Augustus; for the Arval hymn, see 4.3. The office of *sodalis Titius* is obscure. On the fetial priests, see Glossary.

²⁴ Some scholars would date the transfer to the dedication of the temple in 28 BCE.

²⁵ *kinship with Vesta*: Augustus claimed descent from Venus through his adoptive father Julius Caesar, and thus through Venus from Jupiter. Vesta (Greek Hestia) was the daughter of Saturn, hence sister of Jupiter.

²⁶ *gods of ancient Troy... kindred divinities*: the Vestal fire and Penates that Aeneas is said to have brought from Troy; see Vergil, *Aeneid* 2. 293-7.

²⁷ *kindred head*: an allusion to the Julian connection with Troy, through the parents of Aeneas, Venus and Anchises, the latter being a prince of Troy.

²⁸ The original temple of Vesta remained in the Forum. Augustus established another shrine in his own house so that he would not have to live in the official house of the *pontifex maximus* in order to perform his new duties.

[Apollo] holds a part, a second part has been given over to Vesta, what remains, he himself [Augustus] holds as the third party. Long live the laurels of the Palatine! Long live the house wreathed with oak boughs! A single house holds three eternal gods.

Ovid bids Vesta admit the gods that Aeneas brought from Troy, while also alluding to Augustus' position as pontifex maximus, his political position and his divinity.

11.17 OVID, *FASTI* 1.528-30. Vesta, admit the Trojan gods. The time will come when the same individual will protect you and the world, and when the sacred rites will be conducted by one who is himself a god.

Augustus was not formally deified until after his death, although he received cult honors during his lifetime in areas outside of Rome, and his Genius and Lar were worshipped in the city itself.²⁹ Following the precedent set by the triumvirs in the deification of Julius Caesar, deification required a decree of the Senate after submission of the proposal usually by the successor of the deceased emperor. Tacitus tersely notes Augustus' deification.

11.18 TACITUS, *ANNALS* 1.10. But when his burial had been completed according to custom, a temple and deification were decreed in his honor.

The historian Dio, writing in the early third century CE, remarks on the beginnings of imperial cult.

11.19 DIO 51.20.6-8. Augustus meanwhile, among other business, allowed precincts in Ephesus and Nicaea to Roma and to his father, Caesar, naming him the Hero Julius. These were the leading cities of Asia [Minor] and Bithynia at this time. He ordered the Romans living among them to honor these divinities. But he permitted foreigners (whom he styled Greeks) to consecrate precincts to himself, the Asians in Pergamon and Bithynians at Nicomedia. That is where this started and has been continued under other emperors, not only among Greek nations, but among all others subject to Roman rule. In Rome itself and the rest of Italy, no one, no matter how worthy of renown, has dared to do this. However, when they die, even in Rome those that ruled with integrity are granted various divine honors and *heroa* [hero's shrines] are built to them.

Deification of later emperors

In contrast to Augustus, who had allowed the people in the provinces to establish a cult in his honor that was often combined with that of the goddess Roma, Tiberius declared himself opposed to such practices.³⁰

11.20 SUETONIUS, *LIFE OF TIBERIUS* 26. Tiberius forbade temples or priesthoods to be established in his name. He then forbade statues and busts to be set up without his permission, permitting them on one condition alone, that they

²⁹ *Genius*: a special guardian spirit, almost a divine double, of an individual, usually male, often the *pater familias* himself.

³⁰ Of the emperors in the first century CE, Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian were not deified.

not be placed among images of the gods but only among the adornments of temples. He vetoed a proposal that oaths be sworn to ratify his actions, as well as a proposal that the name Tiberius be given to the month of September and that of Livia to October.³¹

Claudius was the first emperor since Augustus officially to be granted divine honors.

11.21 SUETONIUS, *LIFE OF CLAUDIUS* 46. Claudius was buried with the solemn pomp appropriate to an emperor, and was enrolled among the gods. The main omens of his death included the rise of a long-haired star, known as a comet, lightning striking his father's tomb, and a high death rate among magistrates of all ranks.

11.22 SUETONIUS, *LIFE OF NERO* 9. Nero started off with a show of filial dutifulness, giving Claudius a lavish funeral. He delivered the funeral oration in person and deified him.³²

The Pumpkinification of Claudius, a satire written probably by Seneca the Younger, Nero's former tutor and subsequent advisor, illustrates not only the political nature of deification but also the skepticism with which many must have regarded the Senate's decision to deify him.

This skit on the question of Claudius' admission to Olympus parodies the procedure of the Senate, the gods and Claudius himself. The gods are divided on the issue which is finally decided by the deified Augustus who rejects Claudius' claim after listing his crimes. Although this satirical treatment of the gods might seem sacrilegious or blasphemous to the modern mind, such a presumption underscores the complexity of the concept of *divus*.

11.23 SENECA? *PUMPKINIFICATION OF CLAUDIUS* 9. Jupiter finally realised that the senators were not allowed to express opinions or take part in debate so long as non-members were loitering in the senate house. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'I gave you permission to ask questions, but all you have done is to talk absolute rubbish. I require you to obey the rules of the Senate. What will this man (whoever he is) think of us?' So Claudius was sent out, and Father Janus was the first to be asked to give his opinion. He was the consul designate, scheduled to hold the office for the afternoon of the following first of July,³³ and a shrewd fellow who always looks 'backwards and forwards at the same time.'³⁴

³¹ *Livia*: the mother of Tiberius and widow of Augustus, who was later deified by her grandson, the emperor Claudius. Months had earlier been named after Julius Caesar (July) and Augustus (August).

³² Subsequently, however, Nero neglected and then abolished the cult which was soon restored by Vespasian.

³³ *consul designate*...: the consul designate had the right to speak first in a senatorial debate. Here Seneca is also criticizing the short-term appointments to the consulship which contrasted with the year-long elected terms of the republic.

³⁴ *backwards and forwards*...: a quotation in Greek from Homer, describing one who can see both the past and the future. The allusion is particularly apt, since the Roman god Janus was represented with two faces, each facing in opposite directions.

He spoke eloquently at some length because he lives in the Forum,³⁵ but the stenographer couldn't keep up with him. Therefore I'm missing this out, so as not to misquote what he said. He had a lot to say about the greatness of the gods, declaring that the honor should not be handed out to every Tom, Dick and Harry. 'At one time,' he said, 'it was a great thing to be made a god, but now you have made the distinction a farce. So that my remarks don't seem to be directed at a particular individual, rather than the issue, I propose that from this day onwards no one shall be made a god from those who eat the fruits of the earth or whom the fruitful earth nourishes.³⁶ Anyone who, contrary to this decree of the Senate, is named or depicted as a god shall be handed over to the evil spirits and given a thorough beating amidst the new gladiators at the next public spectacle.'

Vespasian, who became emperor after Nero's death in the so-called year of the four emperors, had a sense of humor that suggests a cynicism about his deification.

11.24 SUTONIUS, *LIFE OF VESPASIAN* 23. Not even the fear of imminent death stopped him from joking.... At the approach of death, he said: 'O dear! I think I'm becoming a god.'

Dio describes the stage managing of a funeral in honor of the emperor Pertinax who had died several months earlier in 193 CE. This passage shows how Septimius Severus, who had become emperor after a military coup, was using the traditional funeral and symbolic deification of Pertinax to legitimise his claim to the throne.³⁷

11.25 DIO 75.4.2-5.5. Despite the lapse of time since his death, his funeral was celebrated as follows. A wooden platform was constructed in the Roman Forum near the Rostra. On it a shrine of gold and ivory was set up.... Inside there was a bier of the same materials.... and on the bier was a wax effigy of Pertinax laid out in the dress of triumphing general....

When the whole procession [of images of the famous Romans of old] had passed by, Severus went up on the Rostra himself and read out a eulogy of Pertinax.... [the bier was then taken to the Campus Martius]. There a pyre had been built in the form of a three-storey tower.... The funerary offerings were thrown inside this pyre and the bier placed onto it. Severus and members of his family then kissed the effigy of Pertinax....

Finally the consuls set fire to the structure and, when this was done, an eagle flew up from the pyre. In this way Pertinax was made immortal.

³⁵ The temple of Janus was close to the Forum, the traditional place for the delivery of speeches (hence forensic oratory).

³⁶ Seneca is again quoting Homer.

³⁷ See 3.26 for Polybius' description of the traditional funeral of a Roman noble.

MAGIC, THE OCCULT AND ASTROLOGY

12.1 PLINY THE ELDER, *NATURAL HISTORY* 30.12. It is certain that magic has left traces also among the Italic peoples, in our Twelve Tables, for example, and in other sources.... It was only in the 657th year of the city when Gnaeus Cornelius Lentulus and Publius Licinius Crassus were consuls [97 BCE] that a senatorial decree was passed banning human sacrifice, which shows that these monstrous rites were still performed down to that time.¹

12.2 PLINY THE ELDER, *NATURAL HISTORY* 28.19. There is no one who does not fear being spell-bound by malevolent prayers.²

Two excerpts from the eighth of the Laws of the Twelve Tables indicate concern about the effects of spells and incantations that we would call 'black magic.' The casting of spells on the crops of a neighbor was expressly forbidden and the death penalty was prescribed for spells cast upon another human being.³

12.3 ROL 3.474-475. If any person has sung or composed against another person a song (*carmen*) such as was causing slander or insult to another.... he shall be clubbed to death.

No one shall take away the harvest of a neighbor by reciting spells.⁴

Pliny the Elder, writing in the mid-first century CE, reports how a freedman who was more successful in farming than his neighbors was prosecuted for sorcery, evidently under the Law of the Twelve Tables.

¹ For an example of human sacrifice during the Hannibalic War, see 7.15.

² *spell-bound*: the Latin word is *defigi*, the technical term for invoking curses by means of tablets (*defixiones*).

³ The vocabulary of these laws is particularly significant. The Latin *carmen* means a song, poem, or ritual formula which was usually 'sung.' Compare the word 'chant' and its derivative 'enchant,' from the Latin *cantus*, a song, especially an oracular song or incantation. Another reference to this prohibition uses the phrase *malum cantum incantare*, to intone an evil incantation.

⁴ *reciting spells*: the verb *excantare* literally means to enchant away.