



## Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment coversheet & feedback form

**THIS SHEET MUST BE THE FIRST PAGE OF THE ASSIGNMENT YOU ARE SUBMITTING (DO NOT  
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| <b>For completion by the student:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                               |                                                 |
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| Module code: CLAH7017                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Student ID number:<br>1603116 | Educational<br>support needs:<br>Yes/ <u>No</u> |
| Module title: Religious Life in the Roman Empire                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                               |                                                 |
| Assignment title: Paper 1: The Extent of Orthopraxy in the Roman Empire During the Principate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                               |                                                 |
| Word Count: <b>1,098</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                               |                                                 |
| Assignment due date: 08 April 2019                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                               |                                                 |
| This assignment is for the 1 <sup>st</sup> <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <sup>nd</sup> <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <sup>rd</sup> <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <sup>th</sup> <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <sup>th</sup> <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <sup>th</sup> <input type="checkbox"/> module of<br>the degree MA-Classical Studies |                               |                                                 |
| I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on<br>plagiarism.<br>Signed .....Gary Cunningham.....                                                                                                                                                                                |                               |                                                 |

**Assignment Mark**

|                                                       |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Marker's Provisional mark             |  |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Marker's/Moderator's provisional mark |  |
| External Examiner's mark (if relevant)                |  |
| <b>Final Mark</b>                                     |  |

**NB.** All marks are provisional until confirmed by the Final Examination Board.

**For completion by Marker 1 :**

Comments:

Marker's signature:

Date:

**For completion by Marker 2/Moderator:**

Comments:

Marker's Signature:

Date:

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| <b>External Examiner's comments (if relevant)</b> |       |
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| External Examiner's Signature:                    | Date: |

# **The Extent of Orthopraxy in the Roman Empire During the Principate**

**Gary Cunningham**

The absence of religious orthodoxy in the Roman Empire is well-established. For instance, a study of religious controversy in the Roman world failed to uncover any specific examples of disagreements pertaining to the nature of the gods. Instead, the disputes arose over the performance of the correct rituals.<sup>1</sup> Writing in the early first century C.E., Valerius Maximus tells us that proper religious observances were handed down from Roman ancestors who '*statae sollemnesque caerimonias pontificum scientia, bene gerendarum rerum auctoritate augurum observatione*' (Val. Max. 1.1-3). Cicero and Festus made similar statements concerning appropriate religious practices.<sup>2</sup>

Valerius presents us with a broad, mostly vague, summary of some of the primary components of Roman religion. Whatever the specifics were, they were apparently known by those in charge of the various rites. If what the ancient authors say is true then there were prescribed ways in which religious rites were to be conducted, and by whom. But was this the blueprint for religion throughout the Empire, and at all times? After all, Rome's conquests did not involve forcing the Roman gods upon the conquered.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Evidence Against Orthopraxy**

Until the 1990s, the concept of 'Romanisation,' originally proposed in the nineteenth century as a 'civilising process,' was the dominant view of the means by which non-Romans in the provinces

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<sup>1</sup> Beard 1998, cited in King 2003: 298.

<sup>2</sup> Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.5; Cic. *Har. resp.* 18; Festus. *De Verborum Significatione*.

<sup>3</sup> Ando 2008: 105.

adopted the 'language, material culture, art, urban lifestyle, and religion' of the Romans.<sup>4</sup> A problem with much of the evidence applied in scholarly inquiry, at least until recently, was the assumption that the habits of the provincial elite could be utilized to draw conclusions about the general population.<sup>5</sup> Among those contesting this generalisation is Mattingly, who (citing Bouquier-Redde), provides an example from Tripolitania of a 'tripartite division' of deities and religious practices between urban centres, the rural countryside, and the military.<sup>6</sup> Also challenging the Romanisation paradigm, Webster presents a model of creolisation, viewing the situation in the provinces as a cultural hybrid between the religion and material culture of the indigenous population and that of the Romans who may themselves have originated in other provinces.<sup>7</sup> With all of this movement, deities and religious practices became intermingled as people held onto the religions of their own traditions, thereby creating stability for themselves in an alien environment.<sup>8</sup>

Looking to Roman Carthage as another example, Rives depicts this province as an eclectic blend of people from across Roman territories, worshipping a diverse array of deities including, for instance, Aesculapius, Mercury, Isis, Caelestis, and Mithras.<sup>9</sup> Rives assures us that far from being chaotic, 'the collective religious identity' of the people was contained within the city's *sacra publica*.<sup>10</sup> And though we might expect colonies to retain the *sacra publica* of Rome, by the time Caesar re-founded Carthage as a Roman colony the town was large enough to have its own system of government, and its own *sacra*

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<sup>4</sup> Webster 2001: 209-11.

<sup>5</sup> Webster 2001: 209; Mattingly 2002: 539.

<sup>6</sup> Brouquier-Reddé 1992; Mattingly 2002: 540.

<sup>7</sup> Webster 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Rüpke 2013: 16.

<sup>9</sup> Rives 1995: 1.

<sup>10</sup> Rives 1995: 13.

*publica*.<sup>11</sup> Rives also suggests that that the Roman policy of extending citizenship to people of the provinces was at least partly to blame if 'the civic model' of Roman religion was destabilized.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Extent of Orthopraxy**

In situations of such religious heterogeneity, it is difficult to imagine how a consistent set of observances could have been nurtured, not to mention enforced. But even in Roman Carthage there was a need to establish and maintain a 'collective religious identity.'<sup>13</sup> In order to do this, it was necessary to maintain control over the various cults in order to prevent the fracturing of individuals into sub-groups with religious identities that worked against the collective allegiance to Roman authority.<sup>14</sup> To this end, it seems that the local government of Carthage established the cult of Ceres in 44 BCE, possibly to advance the cohesiveness of religious authority.<sup>15</sup>

Rives uses the law codes of the Roman colony at Urso (and to a lesser extent those of Salpensa and Malaca, all in modern Spain) as the presumed model for municipal government in Carthage and other colonies.<sup>16</sup> The codes lay out the requirements for *pontifices*, *augures*, *haruspices*, and *tibicenes*. It also prescribes games in honour of the Capitoline Triad and Venus, and specifies the quantity of public funds to be spent on those games. Decisive religious authority was held by the *ordo decurionum*, the group of men comprising the local council.<sup>17</sup>

During the Principate, modes of worship, to include festivals, processions and sacrifices, were often performed for the benefit of the Emperor and his family. In this way it was ensured, hopefully, that the

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<sup>11</sup> Rives 1995: 12.

<sup>12</sup> Rives 1995: 9.

<sup>13</sup> Rives 1995: 13.

<sup>14</sup> Rives 1995: 13.

<sup>15</sup> Rives 1995: 21.

<sup>16</sup> Rives 1995: 28-9; *Lex Ursonensis*: CIL II<sup>2</sup>. 5 1022 = ILS 6087; *Lex Salpensana*: CIL II 1963 = ILS 6088; *Lex Malacitana*: CIL II = ILS 6089.

<sup>17</sup> Ando 2008: 32.

benevolence of the gods would be bestowed upon the imperial family.<sup>18</sup> This is a rather unique situation that exemplifies an assemblage of orthopraxy in Rome and in the provinces, even if specific universal rituals are absent.<sup>19</sup>

From time to time, the Romans acted to curtail certain cults such as those of Bacchus or Isis. This was done mainly out of a concern for breaching the social order.<sup>20</sup> Writing in the first century BC, Livy puts these words into the mouth of the consul S. Postumius Albinus (second century BCE):

*'Nothing is more deceptively alluring than a depraved cult...Indeed, the greatest experts in all divine and human law judged that nothing served to destroy our religion as much as when sacrifice was performed according to foreign rather than our native ritual' (Liv. 39.16, trans. Yardley).<sup>21</sup>*

Similarly, Christians who refused to sacrifice to the Roman gods were at various times punished because of the threat they posed being, as Rives puts it, 'outside the religion, as the Romans conceived of religion.'<sup>22</sup>

In the Roman cosmic scheme, what the gods wanted were specific forms of worship. Failure to do provide them could result in catastrophes such as military defeats or natural disasters. Orthopraxy did exist in Roman religion during the Principate, to the extent that it was possible at any given place and time, through the prescribed social structure, to honour the gods through the observances handed down from generations past. A diverse realm of beliefs and practices were tolerated, but only until they represented a severe threat to established social order.

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<sup>18</sup> Nicols 2004: 37.

<sup>19</sup> Gradel 2002: 7.

<sup>20</sup> King 2003: 300.

<sup>21</sup> Yardley 2018: 253-4.

<sup>22</sup> King 2003: 300.

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