

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Lecture 36 – Religion - Rome

CLCS4007

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State Cults

Roman Pantheon

“Let this one god be **Jupiter** in the ether, **Juno** in the air, **Neptune** in the sea, **Salacia** in the lower depths of the sea, **Pluto** on earth, **Proserpina** in the lower depths of the earth, **Vesta** on the domestic hearth, **Vulcan** in the metal-worker’s forge; in the sky, let him be the Sun, the Moon, the stars; among the seers, **Apollo**; in commerce, **Mercury**; in the person of **Janus** let him appear as the initiator, in **Terminus** as the terminator. Let him be **Saturn**, in respect of Time; in wars let him be **Mars** and **Bellona**; **Liber** among the vines, **Ceres** among the crops and **Diana** in the woods; and **Minerva** in respect of the natural talents...” – **Augustine** *The City of God* 4.11.

Minor Deities

“...to the goddess **Cloacina** (the Purifier; a cloaca is a drain), or to **Volupia** (whose name has the same root as ‘*voluptuous*’) or to **Lubentina** (a name derived from *libido*), or to **Vaticanus** (who presides over the wails – *vagitus* – of infants), or to **Cunina** (who takes care of their cradles – *cunae*). But how can I give a list, in one passage of this book, of all the names of their gods and goddesses? The Romans had difficulty in getting them into the massive volumes in which they assigned particular functions and special responsibilities to the various divine powers. they put the goddess **Rusina** in charge of the rural countryside; they consigned the mountain ranges (*iuga*) to the care of the god **Iugatinus**; the hills (*colles*) to the goddess **Collatina**, the valleys to **Vallonia**...” - Augustine *The City of God* 4.8.

Latin name	Greek name	Temple from	Area(s)	Festival	Priest/ess
Aesculapius	Asclepius	292 BC	Health		
Apollo	Apollo	431 BC	Health; prophecy	Ludi Apollinares	
Bacchus	Dionysus	As Liber, see Ceres	Wine, ecstasy		
Ceres	Demeter	493 BC (with Liber, Libera)	Corn	Cerialia April 19	<i>Flamen; Priestess for Greek cult</i>
Diana	Artemis	490s BC			
Dis Pater	Hades		Underworld	Ludi saeculares	
Fortuna	Tyche	Regal period	Fortune, luck		
Juno	Hera	See Jupiter	State, child- birth		
Jupiter	Zeus	509 BC (with Juno, Minerva)	State, warfare	Ludi Romani, plebeii (?)	<i>Flamen</i>
Magna Mater	Cybele	191 BC		Ludi Megalenses	<i>Priestess</i>
Mars	Ares	388 BC	War, agriculture	Salian dances	<i>Galli Flamen</i>
Mercury	Hermes	495 BC	Commerce		
Minerva	Athena	See Jupiter	Crafts		
Neptune	Poseidon	3 rd century	Sea	Neptunalia July 23	
Quirinus		293 BC		Quirinalia Feb 17	<i>Flamen</i>
Saturn	Cronus	497 BC		Saturnalia Dec 17 (etc.)	
Venus	Aphrodite	295 BC	Sex		
Vesta	Hestia	Regal period	The hearth	Vestalia June 9	<i>Vestal Virgins</i>
Vulcan	Hephaestus	3 rd century	Metal- working	Volcanalia Aug 23	<i>Flamen</i>

The Capitoline Temple

- Located on the Capitoline Hill - dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus ('The Best and Greatest') along with the goddesses Juno and Minerva.
- The 'Capitoline triad' - here from Praeneste - begun in "Regal period" rebuilt several times over the centuries



(reconstruction & remains in Capitoline Museum)

Vesta



“[After the Capuans had started a fire in the Forum (210 BC), it was said that the enemy] were attempting to destroy the temple of Vesta, with its eternal flame and divine guarantee of Roman rule hidden in its inner shrine.” – **Livy 26.27.14.**



Titus, as Caesar, AV Aureus. 74 AD.
TI·CAESAR IMP·VESPASIAN, laureate head right / VESTA, circular shrine of Vesta.
Calicó 793



Domitian, as Caesar, AV Aureus. 73 AD.
CAESAR AVGV F DOMIT COS II, laureate head right / VESTA, the Temple of Vesta: Calicó 940, Cohen 614v.

The Imperial Cult

“This practice began with Octavian [=Augustus] and it has been carried on under other emperors, not only with regard to the Hellenic peoples, but to all others in so far as they acknowledge Roman rule. In Rome itself and in Italy generally, no emperor, however greatly venerated he may have been, has so far ventured to do this. However, even there other divine honours are conferred after their death upon those emperors who have ruled virtuously, and in fact shrines are built in their honour.” – **Dio Cassius 51.20.6-8.**

Priesthoods and Rituals



- Four principal colleges of priests,
 - Pontifices,
 - Augures,
 - quindecemviri sacris faciundis (15 to attend sacred matters),
 - septemviri epulonum (7 masters of the feasts).

“... after the death of the man who had taken the opportunity of civil disturbance to seize it for himself, I received the priesthood, in the consulship of Publius Sulpicius and Gaius Valgius, and such a concourse poured in from the whole of Italy to my election as has never been recorded at Rome before that time”
– *Res Gestae* 10.2.

“All these *Salii* are a kind of dancers and singers of hymns in praise of the gods of war. Their festival falls about the time of the Panathenaea, in the month which they call March...” – **Dionysius 2.70.**

“...he [Tullus Hostilius, Rome’s fourth king] might himself give out a ceremonial of war, and that wars might not only be waged but also declared with some sort of formality, he copied from the ancient tribe of the Aequicoli the law, which the *fetiales* now have, by which redress is demanded. When the envoy has arrived at the frontiers of the people from whom satisfaction is sought, he covers his head with a bonnet – the covering is of wool – and says: ‘Hear, Jupiter; hear, ye boundaries of’ – naming whatever nation they belong to; – ‘let righteousness hear! I am the public herald of the Roman People; I come duly and religiously commissioned; let my words be credited.’ Then he recites his demands...” – **Livy 1.32.**

The *Flamen Dialis*

“Many ritual duties are imposed on the *flamen Dialis*, and likewise a variety of taboos... there is a rule against the *flamen Dialis* riding a horse; likewise there is a rule against him seeing ‘the levy arrayed’ outside the *pomerium*, that is the army equipped for battle. Likewise it is never lawful for the *Dialis* to take an oath; nor is it lawful for him to wear a ring, unless it is perforated and quite plain...if a man in chains enters his house, he must be freed and the chains taken up through the *impluvium* [the opening in the roof of the atrium of a Roman house] onto the roof and let down into the street outside... He never enters a place where there is a tomb, he never touches a dead body; he is not, however, prohibited from attending a funeral.” - **Aulus Gellius** *Attic Nights* 15.1-25.

Correct Actions

“In reference to the remedies derived from man, there arises first of all one question, of the greatest importance and always attended with the same uncertainty, whether words, charms, and incantations, are of any efficacy or not?... it is a general belief that without a certain form of prayer it would be useless to immolate a victim, and that, with such an informality, the gods would be consulted to little purpose. And then besides, there are different forms of address to the deities, one form for entreating, another form for averting their ire, and another for commendation. We see too, how that our supreme magistrates use certain formulae for their prayers: that not a single word may be omitted or pronounced out of its place, it is the duty of one person to precede the dignitary by reading the formula before him from a written ritual, of another, to keep watch upon every word, and of a third to see that silence is not ominously broken; while a musician, in the meantime, is performing on the flute to prevent any other words being heard.” – **Pliny NH 28.10-11.**

Religion and Politics

“He [Caesar] brought forward an agrarian law too, and when his colleague announced adverse omens, he resorted to arms and drove him from the Forum; and when next day Bibulus made complaint in the senate and no one could be found who ventured to make a motion... Caesar's conduct drove him to such a pitch of desperation, that from that time until the end of his term he did not leave his house, but merely issued proclamations announcing adverse omens.” – Suetonius *Divus Julius* 20.1.

Human Sacrifice

“they themselves, not many years before, had buried alive two men and two women, two of them Greeks, two Gauls, in the place called the Forum Boarium. It certainly seems strange that they themselves should do this, and yet rebuke barbarians on the ground that they were acting with impiety.” – *Plutarch Roman Questions* 83.

“Our own age even has seen a man and a woman buried alive in the Forum Boarium, Greeks by birth, or else natives of some other country with which we were at war at the time...The prayer used upon the occasion of this ceremonial, and which is usually pronounced first by the Master of the College of the Quindecimviri...” *Pliny NH* 28.12.

Incorporating New Cults

Evocatio

“The formula to call forth the gods of a besieged city runs as follows: ‘To any god, to any goddess, under whose protection are the people and state of Carthage, and chiefly to you who are charged with the protection of this city and people, I make prayer and do reverence and ask grace of you all, that you abandon the people and state of Carthage, forsake their places, temples, shrines, and city, and depart there from; and that upon that people and state you bring fear and terror and oblivion; that once put forth you come to Rome, to me and to mine; and that our places, temples, shrines, and city may be more acceptable and pleasing to you; and that you take me and the Roman people and my soldiers under your charge; that we may know and understand the same. If you shall so have done, I vow to you temples and solemn games.’ With these words victims are to be sacrificed, and the import of the entrails examined to see if they indicate a fulfilment of the above.” - **Macrobius *Saturnalia* 3.9.7-9** .

Magna Mater

- ▣ In 204 BC – raining stones (seen as bad omen) – Sibylline books consulted.
- ▣ Black stone of Magna Mater brought from Pergamum – meet at Ostia by Scipio Nasica I and a procession of Roman Matrons – games begun in 194 BC.

“They brought the goddess into the temple of Victory... Crowds of people brought gifts for the goddess to the Palatine, and there was a *lectisternium*, and games which were called the Megalesia.” – **Livy 29.14.**



Faustina the Younger
Denarius – (reverse) -
MATRI MAGNAE,
Cybele seated left, lion at
her feet – **RIC 706.**

“...yet the city [Rome] has never officially adopted any of those foreign practices, as has been the experience of many cities in the past; but, even though she has, in pursuance of oracles, introduced certain rites from abroad, she celebrates them in accordance with her own traditions, after banishing all fabulous clap-trap. The rites of the Idaean goddess [Magna Mater] are a case in point; for the praetors perform sacrifices and celebrated games in her honour every year according to the Roman customs, but the priest and priestess of the goddess are Phrygians, and it is they who carry her image in procession through the city, begging alms in her name according to their custom, and wearing figures upon their breasts and striking their timbrels while their followers play tunes upon their flutes in honour of the Mother of the Gods. But by a law and decree of the senate no native Roman walks in procession through the city arrayed in a parti-coloured robe, begging alms or escorted by flute-players, or worships the god with the Phrygian ceremonies. So cautious are they about admitting any foreign religious customs and so great is their aversion to all pompous display that is wanting in decorum.” – **Dionysius of Halicarnassus 2.19.**

Conservatism?

- ▣ Temples built in second century BC appear less foreign or exotic in origin.
- ▣ Temples of Latin deities established in early second century BC – Vediovis (healing deity), Faunus (Pan), Fortuna Primigenia; Juno Sospita (saviour).
- ▣ Increased use of Greek artists and artisans.



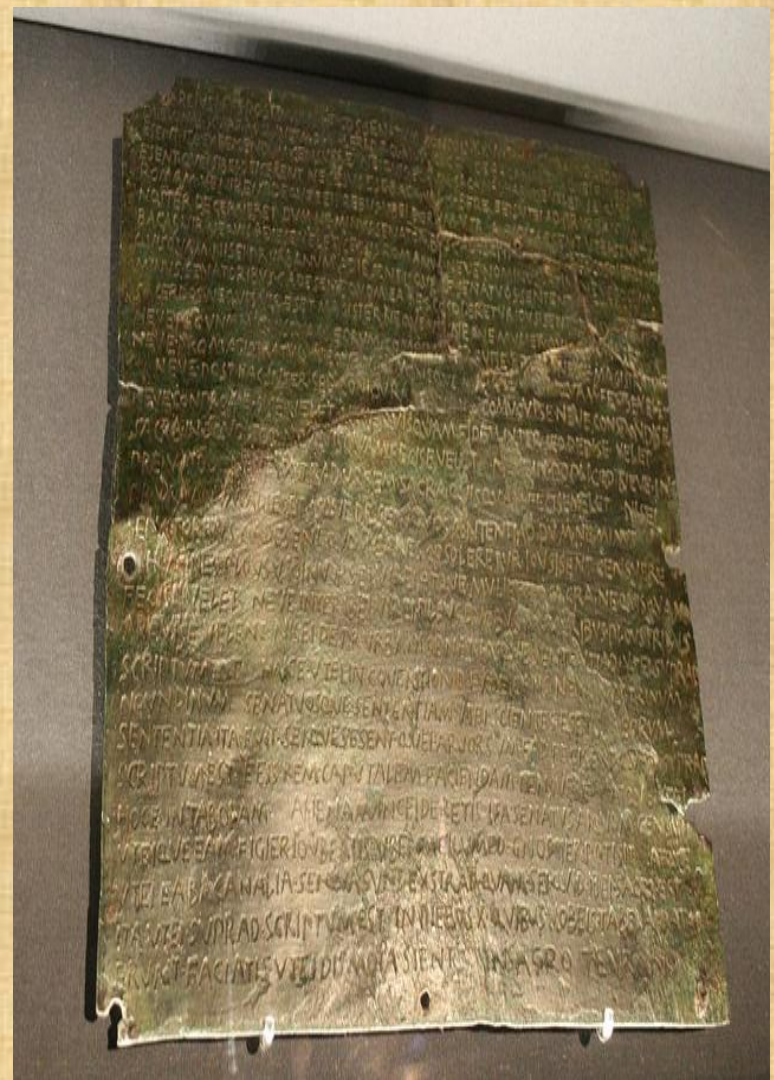
Temple Hercules Victor (c. late 2nd century BC – Forum Boarium.

Suppressing Foreign Cults

Cult of Bacchus

- ▣ Suppression of rites of Bacchus in 186 BC – Livy 39.8-18.
- ▣ “Low-born” Greek from Etruria introduces the cult (described as magician).
- ▣ Tales of debauchery, orgies, corruption, poisoning and murder - P. Aebutius, under care of step-father T. Sempronius Rutilus and mother Durnia; 7,000 implicated in “conspiracy” – destruction of Bacchanalian shrines throughout Italy.
- ▣ Influence of drama, reworking and embellishment by Livy?

“...No one of them shall have a place devoted to the worship of Bacchus: and if there are any who say that they have a need for such a place, they shall appear in Rome before the urban praetor; and when the pleas of these men have been heard, our Senate shall make a decision regarding these matters, provided that not less than 100 senators are present when the matter is discussed... No man shall be priest of, nor shall any man or woman be master of, such an organisation; nor shall anyone of them have a common fund; nor shall anyone appoint any man or woman to be master of such an organisation or to act as master; nor hereafter shall anyone take common oath with them, shall make common vows...No one in a company of more than five persons altogether, men and women, shall perform such rites; nor in that company shall more than two men or three women be present...”



*Senatus consultum de
bacchanalibus*

Vienna Kunsthistorisches
Museum - ILS 18 = ILLRP511

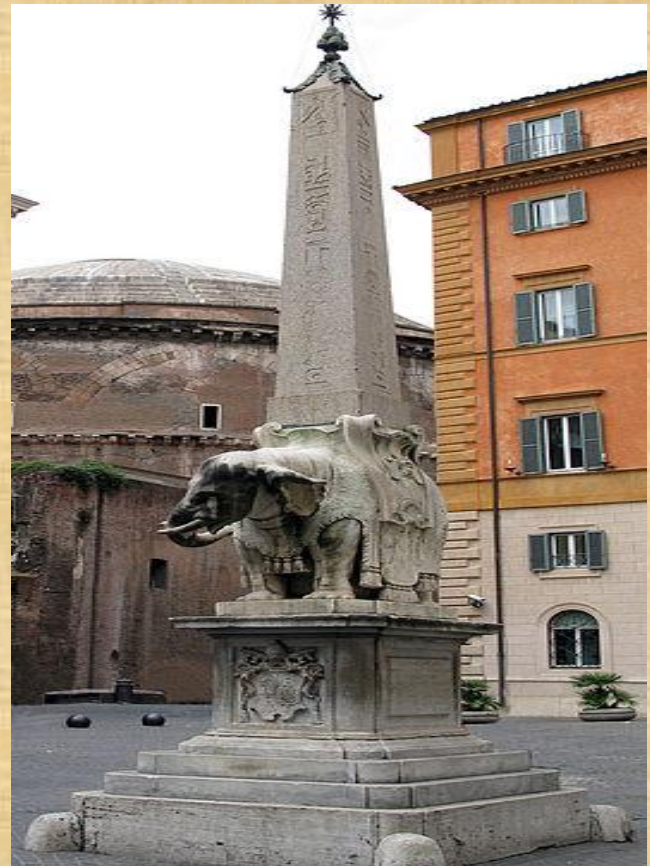
Villa of Mysteries (c.60–50 BC)



- ▣ Outskirts of Pompeii – Dionysus, Ariadne, Silenus, two satyrs.

Cult of Isis

“But it seems to me that that decree passed the previous year [53 BC], near its close, with regard to Serapis and Isis, was a portent equal to any; for the senate had decided to tear down their temples, which some individuals had built on their own account. Indeed, for a long time they did not believe in these gods, and even when the rendering of public worship to them gained the day, they settled them outside the *pomerium*.” – **Dio Cassius 40.47.**



Obelisk set up by
Dioceltian.

Superstitio and **Magic**

- ▣ *Religio* – positive quality – often denotes traditional honours paid to the gods by the state – following the customs of the community.
- ▣ *Superstitio* – often used as a slur – irregular practices - excessive devotion, often with desire for inappropriate knowledge.

“*religio* honours the gods, *superstitio* wrongs them.”
– Seneca *De Clementia* 2.5.1.

- ▣ Magic a mixture of medicine, religion and astrology, often seen as being eastern in origin – used to meet human desires, control the gods and obtain knowledge of the future.

Chaldaeans

“... During the Consulship of Marcus Popillius Laenus and Gnaeus Calpurnius, the praetor for foreigners, Gnaeus Cornelius Hispanus, issued an edict ordering the Chaldaeans to leave the city and Italy within ten days. The praetor felt that they deceived frivolous and silly people with their dishonest interpretations of the stars and cultivated a money-making air of obscurity with their lies.” – **Valerius Maximus *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 1.3.3.**

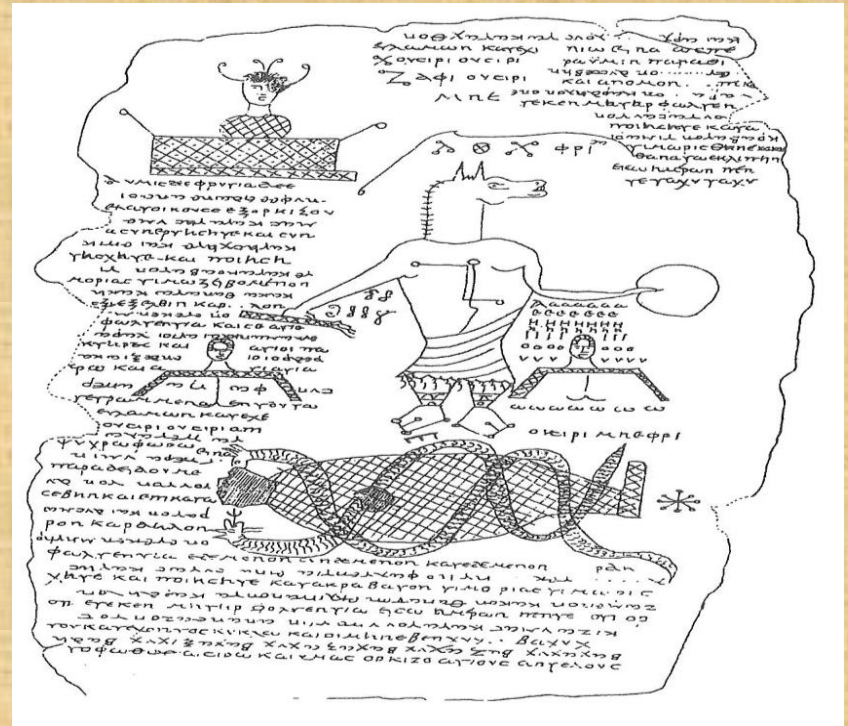
“In the consulships of Faustus Sulla and Salvius Otho [AD 52], Furius Scribonianus was sent into exile on the grounds that he had consulted and looked into the death of the emperor... The expulsion of the astrologers from Italy was ordered by a drastic and impotent decree of the senate. ” – **Tacitus *Annals* 12.52.**

- ▣ Anxieties in Roman literary sources about the power of magic – *Lex Cornelia de sicariis and veneficis* (81 BC).
- ▣ Thessalian witch Erichtho – undid the laws of nature, feed on corpses, foretold future through necromancy – “he knew about the mysteries of cruel magicians which the gods above abominate...” – **Lucan *Pharsalia* 6.430.**

“After he finally had assumed the office of pontifex maximus on the death of Lepidus... he collected whatever prophetic writings of Greek or Latin origin were in circulation anonymously or under the names of authors of little repute, and burned more than two thousand of them, retaining only the Sibylline books and making a choice even among those; and he deposited them in two gilded cases under the pedestal of the Palatine Apollo.” – **Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 31.1.**

Binding–Spells

“When I had rounded off the case for the defense on behalf of Cotta’s Titinia in a very important private suit, he [Curio] was speaking against me on behalf of Servius Naevius. All of a sudden he forgot his entire case and said that this had been caused by Titinia’s spells/poisons [*veneficia*] and incantations.” – **Cicero Brutus 217.**



“Sethian” circus-competition curse tablet, Rome – c.4th century BC – found terracotta sarcophagus on Via Appia. Wishes death upon Cardelus.

Useful Reading

- ▣ Beard, M., North, J., and Price, S. (1998) *Religions of Rome, 2 volumes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.