10: Roman Religion

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Roman religion neither existed as a discrete cultural practice in its own right nor could it be found hidden beneath other cultural practices. It was only in the very late Republic that there were attempts to coin cumulative descriptions like *sacra et auspicia* (Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.5), meaning "cults and divination," yet it is only Cicero who uses *religio* as a generic term encompassing a group's duty toward, and care of, the gods. Cicero's *religio*, however, encompasses neither the organizational infrastructure and degree of coherence of these activities, nor their shared symbolic language, nor any related metaphysical reflection. To talk about Roman religion, therefore, is to talk about a range of cultural practices conforming to *our* notion of religion; this notion has, to be sure, grown out of Roman thought and terminology, but it has been strongly influenced by Christian discourse and the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

It is no improvement to substitute the plural "religions" for the singular "religion."[1] This use of "religions" (or "cults"), which is fashionable at the moment, goes even further in suggesting the existence of a plurality of self-contained and neatly separated religious traditions or systems, on the model of early modern Christian denominations.[2] By contrast, this chapter aims to demonstrate both the internal pluralism and the characteristic lack of clear external borders in Roman religious practices within their ancient Mediterranean context. The coexistence of private or family religious loyalties to special groups like the Bacchanalian cults is part of a religious "division of labor" and represents a range of religious options and activities on different social levels. Only the political élite identified such activities as an alternative to a "religion of the Roman people" (Livy 39.13: *alterum iam prope populum esse*). The conflict of the Bacchanalian affair in 186 B.C. neatly illustrates how ancient religion could have a history of its own. The nature

of our extant sources makes any study of Roman religion before the third century B.C. a study of religious aspects of the social and political history of Rome. The discussion that follows concentrates on important aspects of "Roman religion" (as defined previously) from the late third century until the time of Caesar, with special emphasis on the last century B.C.

The Range of Religious Practices at Rome

When Cicero mentions both *sacra* and *auspicia* in the definition of "religion" quoted previously, he juxtaposes a vast range of diverse cultic practices with a fairly clear-cut ritual, a special set of *divinatory* practices, known as "the auspices." However, Cicero's combination of these two Latin terms can hardly be considered an ethnographic inventory, especially because it comes from a member of the augural college, the priesthood entrusted with the supervision of auspices. If, on the other hand, one concentrates on the interrelationship between religious and political practices or on the prominence of religion in the textual remains of Late Republican literature, Cicero's description is entirely accurate. "Augural law" was the most spectacular field for the interlacing of religious and political strategies and for the religious foundations of the Roman élite's rules governing political decisions.[3] Practices that frequently seem to us to involve manipulation of religion in fact constitute the ingrained religious traditions of a society that simultaneously produced radically skeptical accounts of religion.

Divinatory practices are a universal phenomenon. Techniques to learn about the future, conceptualized as something predefined by the gods or by fate, are widespread and ease the burden of making decisions by indicating their outcome in advance. Divination could appear in a variety of forms and was usually an attempt to overcome uncertainty in situations where a difficult decision was to be made. At the same time, risks could also be reduced in other ways. Sometimes it seemed important to relate one's own actions to the cosmic order. Geomancy or astrology, with their purported knowledge about this cosmic order, offered techniques to determine places or times for inoffensive "intrusion" into the natural order of things. Finally, divination could be a means of seeking the approval of the gods. At Rome, the politically dominant cult practices conform to this latter type. A Roman would ask for Jupiter's consent for an action on the very morning of the

proposed action. The answer would be sought mostly in the behavior of birds, known as "translators" (*interpretes*) of Jupiter's will. Lightning bolts could also demonstrate Jupiter's assent. There are certainly elements of Etruscan traditions present here, but the rich and complicated Etruscan system of lightning types and direction, interpreted by the professional priesthood of the *haruspices*, was reduced by the Romans to the mere appearance of lightning in the sky.

Roman divination was not restricted to augury performed by magistrates and priests (augurs), and the area of signs, as well as the range of persons taking the auspices (*auspicium privatum*), was said to have been larger in earlier times.[4] The analysis of entrails continued to be practiced as part of sacrifices. It constituted, however, not a technique to learn about the future but rather a system that expressed the risk of communication between men and gods – and at the same time overcame such risk through the same process. A visible interest in astrology started in the late second century B.C., and by the end of the first century B.C., the basic astrological tenets of the planetary week seem to have become common knowledge.[5] The interpretation of dreams is already presupposed in Plautus (*Rud.*, *Mil.*). An important and rather underrated phenomenon must have been the *vates* or prophets, whose memory has been reduced to some derogatory remarks in the surviving texts of the mainstream tradition.[6] But the concept of *vates* in Augustan poetry and especially in the early works of Horace or Propertius cannot be understood without a reconstruction of its institutional background, which consisted of figures who addressed the Roman public, although not in any official capacity, on topics concerning both the future and ethics.

By contrast, the auspices were fully integrated into the constitutional framework of the Republic. Their legal basis (namely the *leges Aelia et Fufia*) had been elaborated during the latter half of the second century B.C., when written "constitutional guidelines" were first envisaged at Rome. Politically relevant roles were restricted to the highest echelon of magistrates (with *imperium* and *auspicium*) and, in certain functions, to the augurs as a body (to give judgment and advice) or as individuals (for the observation of special signs and advice). In practice, the technique of the interpretation of signs itself seems to have been fairly easy, despite a rather large body of rules that were apparently no longer applied. When he observed the flight and the cries of birds before sunrise, the observing magistrate used a formula (*legum dictio*) to specify in advance what the relevant signs would be. Even this exercise was frequently replaced by the so-called *tripudium*. A person in charge

of caged hens observed whether the animals were greedy or reserved when they picked at the fodder offered to them. The reaction of the birds was open to effective manipulation, as contemporary Romans were well aware. Likewise the observation of a lightning flash was no matter of empirical "scientific validation": the very announcement that such a sign was anticipated constituted the factor relevant for religion and politics. Hence a political opponent's declaration that he was looking for hindering signs was taken already as the effective realization of the celestial veto of the proceedings at hand.

The obligatory "taking of auspices" by the presiding magistrate before important actions (popular assemblies, voting, elections, departing for warfare) gave divine approval to these actions while at the same time laying them open to auspical critique and obstruction. Given the range of legitimate participants and of actions involved, augural law complicated the processes of political decision making. Thus, augural practice enabled the formalization of opposition and dissent in a way that overrode majority votes in a consent-oriented élite. However, the effectiveness of the veto should not be overrated. Even augural dissent was usually ignored in legislative decisions. Here, the auspices were just one of the ways to opt out of the procedures for making a political decision. The augural delegitimization of a newly elected magistrate was, however, decisive. Divine consent for the leading figures of the community and for their most important actions was no less important than were majorities of human votes. Augury constituted a system for enforcing societal consent and for temporalizing dissent. Furthermore, prodigies (i.e., supernatural events observed as spontaneous signs of divine anger) enlarged this "system" by further variants, which were open to interpretation by every Roman citizen but were also filtered by priesthoods and magistrates and had to be dealt with by means of special ritual procedures.[7]

It is the methodological option of any nontheological approach toward religion to "explain" religious practices as social practices without any reference to the existence of superhuman beings (gods) and without any judgment on their existence. Hence, the reconstruction of social functions is not a surprising disclosure but rather the consequence of this methodological option. Such a determination of functions is open to criticism on account of its lack of a basis in the sources and its consequently limited explanatory value.

It seems useful, before turning to other types of religious practices, to put divination into a broader context by describing other types of public ritual. From the Middle Republic onward, religion – first the

building of new temples,[8] then the financing of games[9] – developed into an area of primary importance for the public display of wealth and its use to benefit the community as a whole. Obviously, the resulting prestige for the individual and for his descendants reflected and enlarged the prestige of the offices that regulated the access to these opportunities. The ritual of the triumph was the most important one. The triumph originated in the rendering of honor to Jupiter and corresponded to the ceremonies of departing for war. In time, the triumphal procession turned more and more into a magnificent presentation of booty and feats of war, ending with donations and spectacles for the populace.[10] The right to wear triumphal dress, to erect triumphal arches and statues, and to be buried within the city wall perpetuated this prestigious moment. I suspect that the list of the triumphators, the *fasti triumphales Barberiniani*, was the first of the lists of officeholders to be publicly displayed in stone.[11]

Despite the fact that a small number of ritual forms dominated the literary record, and probably also the public's perception, it is important to note the varied forms of religious ritual in the areas considered so far. The *supplicationes* ("supplications"), for instance, were used as a crisis ritual in the Middle Republic. As a reaction to a military catastrophe or as preparation for a difficult war, a day could be declared when the whole adult population was encouraged to approach and pray in the temples (all opened up for the event) in order to implore the goddesses and gods of Rome to restore their harmonious relationship with the people of Rome.[12] The same ritual of processions to all the temples could be employed to offer thanks. This variant came to be used as an instrument to honor generals, especially in the Late Republic. In reaction to a written report about a major victory or about the end of a war, supplications to the immortal gods were declared "in the name of the general."[13] The length of the supplications corresponded to the appreciation felt for the victory and for the victor himself: in the third and second centuries B.C., supplications lasted from a maximum of three days to an exceptional five days, while in the years from 45 to 43 B.C. no fewer than three supplications of fifty days each were held.

The major games developed out of a few ancient horse races (*Equirria*, *October equus*), and they were influenced by the dramatic spectacles of Greek origin staged in southern Italy. The number of games and their length multiplied during the decades surrounding the beginning of the second century B.C. All these games were staged in rather provisional settings in the valley of the Circus Maximus as well as on the Campus Martius. By contrast, the first stone theater, built in

the middle of the first century B.C. by Pompey, was not intended as a permanent structure for specific games but as part of a vast building project with a significance of its own (the Theatre of Pompey included a temple of Venus).[14]

Fortunately, the archaeological record has not only preserved traces of these massive projects but can also supplement the élite-oriented literary discourse on matters of private religion. Thousands of votive objects made of clay illustrate areas of religious activity that have barely left any literary traces and frequently not even any epigraphic record. For the fourth to first centuries B.C., several votive deposits have been found in central Italy (with a remarkable decline or shift toward specifically local types at the end of the period).[15] Typically, a wide range of objects, often miniatures, has been found. The distribution of similar or identical types points to the role of artisanal mass production, but it also indicates the wide range of individual needs cared for by every single cult. Specialties notwithstanding, it is nearly always impossible to determine which god was being invoked merely on the basis of the votive objects found. In imitation of practices in mainland Greece, which influenced Italian production even before Republican times, central Italy especially favored the use of reproductions of parts of the human body. Legs and feet are most common, followed by arms, eyes, breasts, and genitals. Representations of inner organs (e.g., intestines or the uterus) might even include abnormalities and ulcers, but we must realize that all these objects do not document individual anatomical findings but are instead the results of mass production that have been chosen as interpretations of a person's own health problems.[16]

The special areas of individual rather than collective risks and anxieties include illness, economic success or failure, childlessness, the risks of childbirth, and occasionally long-distance travel. Vows (*vota*) thus form an important thread in the religious practices of all parts of Roman society, finding archaeological expression both in small-scale objects of everyday use and in temple buildings worth hundreds of thousands of sesterces, promised at the turning point of a battle. Even close to the very center of Roman religion, around the Via Sacra and the Forum Romanum (at the place later occupied by the Meta Sudans), deposits of votives used right into the second century B.C. have been found (Figure 10.1).

Despite the term "crisis ritual," the rituals under discussion formed part of a sequence rather than being isolated events. Biographies of individual Romans reveal sequences of actions, typically starting with familiarity with the deity concerned (as a result of individual or family

FIGURE 10.1. Excavation of the Neronian Meta Sudans between the Palatine, the Flavian amphitheater, and the arch of Constantine. It has brought to light remnants of Republican cult deposits that demonstrate the presence of individual votive religion in the center of the city. (Photo by J. Rüpke.)

tradition), prayers, and consultations, the fulfilling of the vow and its documentation, the resulting publicity, and the propensity for a new engagement with the divine. Such sequences, while not restricted to any individual god, would normally be enacted within the circle of gods available in the person's familiar surroundings. However, special traditions, publicity, success, and an inviting local environment (baths, for instance) did favor the growth of certain cults of regional or even supraregional importance. Lavinium and the sanctuary at Ponte di Nona attracted thousands of worshippers on a regional scale. At Rome, on an island in the Tiber, a sanctuary of the healing god Aesculapius (Greek Asklepios) was established; the date of the transfer of this cult from Epidaurus in Greece is 293 B.C.[17] Together with famous oracular cults (again Lavinium, later on Praeneste with its great centre of Fortuna), such healing cults formed a religious infrastructure that transcended political boundaries.

Other areas of individual worship are less accessible to us. When Cato the Censor wrote *De agricultura* (*On Agriculture*) shortly before

the middle of the second century B.C. he produced a normative text on the investment in and managing of an Italian farm. Religion was part of the enterprise, a technical and social necessity for the farmer. Cato and some antiquarian writers offer us a glimpse of the minimal daily routine of burning scraps of food in the hearth and praying to the tutelary spirits of the house (*lares*) or to the head of the family (*genius*). Rituals surrounding childbirth, name giving, coming of age, marriage, death, and burial are hardly ever described, and then only in texts written several hundred years after the supposed practice was current. Archaeology, for example in Ostia, does not encourage the view that any architectural structures like house altars, let alone sumptuous ones, were common in middle- and lower-class homes.[18] It is always reasonable to expect a broad range of attitudes toward religious traditions and their traditional obligations, even in a premodern society, and it is difficult to determine exactly what these attitudes were during the Republic.

It is even more difficult to determine the level of participation of the populace in public ritual. Judging by occasional literary references and institutional features, the New Year's festivities on January 1 (*kalendae Ianuariae*), the festival of the *Saturnalia* in December, and other celebrations that encouraged local festive activities in families and neighborhoods must have had a high level of participation. The splendor and the material rewards of watching a triumph must also have produced a huge number of spectators. But for simple reasons of space, nearly all other centrally staged rituals could not accommodate more than a tiny percentage of the Roman populace as witnesses. When the calendars of religious groups from imperial times can be reconstructed, we find that hardly more than one or two dates from the "official" calendar have been integrated.

Without any doubt, religious groups already existed during the Republic; indeed, the literary and archaeological evidence of the Bacchanalia proves the existence of group formation based primarily on religion as early as the third century B.C. (Figure 10.2).[19] The formation of comparable Orphic circles in Greece happened parallel to the formation of the Greek city-states (*poleis*). Evidence for professional associations, usually united by and often named from a common cult, also comes from Republican times. The historiographical tradition attributes their original foundation to Numa. Later tradition tended to see all these groups as delegates of central religious organization,[20] but their actual structures seem to follow the contingencies of local coherence and of individual initiatives and interests. Although only a few names are known from the second and third quarters of the first

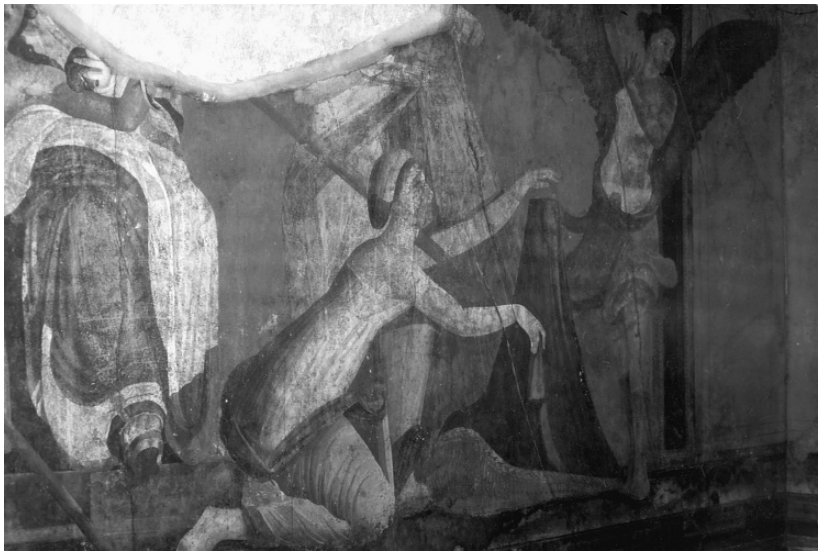

FIGURE 10.2. Fresco with Dionysiac scenes, from the Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii. The Dionysiac scene recalls the presence of Greek and Hellenistic cults in Italian cities, including Rome. (Photo by J. Rüpke.)

century B.C.,[21] they show the range of religious diversity outside the cults cared for directly by the Roman élite. For example, Favonia M. f. and Casponia P. f. Maxima were public priestesses of Ceres, and C. Vergilius C. l. Gentius and A. Calvius Q. l. served as functionaries in the funerary center of Libentina.

Apart from the extremely scanty epigraphic and very partial archaeological record, the bulk of our knowledge about popular religion during the Republic stems from literary sources that (a) date from imperial or even late imperial times and (b) intend to entertain (Gellius, Macrobius), to interpret canonical works (Servius), or to utter polemics against paganism (Tertullian, Arnobius, Augustine). Most of the basic data involved go back to late Republican and Augustan antiquarian sources, but the authors are not impartial observers and are in fact themselves a very special part of the religious history of the Late Republic.

Rome, as a growing commercial and political center in central Italy, had never been isolated. This circumstance is attested, in different ways, by the presence of Greek artisans and myths, by oriental motifs, and by the fifth-century B.C. treaties with Carthage. However, the three Punic Wars dramatically increased the intensity and the scope of

external contacts. In addition to commercial, military, and political aspects, these encounters also had a cultural dimension. While absorbing (and pillaging) an attractive and in many ways superior culture, the Roman élite had to define and assert its place in an enlarged Mediterranean world (*oikumene*). One way was to find a place within the large and complex mythological framework offered by Hellenistic Greeks, who themselves worked toward the ideological integration of an "empire" of independent cities and states. The legendary groups that were said to have dispersed in the aftermath of the Trojan War, that of Aeneas foremost among them, offered numerous genealogical lines and were part of the Greeks' own thinking, transferred to Rome by means of Greek-educated marginal men like Livius Andronicus, Naevius, and Ennius, who produced Latin epics (for the *symposia* of the rich) and Latin drama (for the religious festivals of the citizens).[22]

Yet the transfer of the Greek form of interstate communication based on the establishment of common mythological links was not successful in the long run.[23] Mythological epic did not flourish before Virgil, nor did drama fare too well after the end of the second century B.C. (even in the form of the *fabula praetexta*, which dealt with subjects of Roman history) against the mime as competitor. Likewise, the traditional Roman mechanism of establishing foreign cults, through peaceful transfer or *evocatio deorum* from captured towns, came to a definite halt during the latter part of the second century B.C. Instead, Roman senators – many of whom were also priests – started to elaborate local Roman traditions, both by writing narrative histories and by organizing and systematizing political and ritual practices. The legislation on augury and its uses (*obnuntiatio*) and on the election of priests (*rogatio Licinia* and *lex Domitia*) formed one side of the coin, while antiquarian literature dealing with religious traditions formed the other.[24]

Beginning with Varro, the intellectual pressure of Greek philosophy and theology led to the apologetic creation of "three types of theology."[25] The idea of a civic theology (*theologia civilis*) was used to provide a systematic theoretical framework for the actual and contingent practices of Roman cult. Hence, the "documentation" of Roman cult, as given in Varro's *Antiquitates rerum diuinarum*, aimed to bring it into line with the requirements of a proper system. Rome's multifaceted polytheism had to be organized according to the principle of functional clarity. The *di selecti* and *di certi*, the "selected" and "certain" deities, were those to whom an explicit function could be attributed and who could be invoked in prayer and cult. Without any doubt, the Romans' conception of gods tended to multiply deities and their

specific attributes instead of integrating different aspects into more and more complex personalities for individual gods. Yet the characteristic dryness of the seemingly limitless Roman "pantheon," as noted by generations of scholars, is due to the specific literary and rhetorical intentions felt by the authors of our most important sources, who were writing Roman religion in the face of Greek philosophy and rationality.[26]

Mechanisms of Integration

The picture of Roman religion during the Republic offered so far has concentrated on diverging lines of development, although the intellectual efforts of contemporaries who elaborated unifying schemes, such as Cicero and Varro, have also been mentioned. These were not the earliest attempts to make religion manageable. The forcible reduction of religious options implemented by the persecutions of groups such as the Bacchanalians, philosophers, Jews, astrologers, and devotees of Isis are but the extreme end of the spectrum.[27] In the discussion that follows, three areas of internal religious organization will be highlighted: priesthoods, the calendar, and the sacral topography of the city of Rome.

There were many priests and priestly groups (*sacerdotes*, *collegia*, *sodalitates*) that engaged in some annual rituals.[28] With the exception of the female *Vestales* and perhaps the *flamen Dialis*, for whom religious duties constituted a full-time job, these priests performed their religious duties as a merely part-time or even spare-time activity. Prosopography serves as a good indicator of the public importance of the various priesthoods. No members of the Republican Arval brethren or Sodales Titii are known by name. Of the approximately twelve *minor flamines*, each of whom cared for the cult of special deities, only two can be tentatively identified for the whole time of the Republic, *a flamen Carmentalis* in the fourth century B.C. and a *flamen Floralis* in the third (Figure 10.3).[29] Of all the Salii, only six are known, and those only due to exceptional events or to numismatic self-advertisement. The first known Lupercus (a priesthood restricted to equestrians under the Empire) would have entered the college in about 60 B.C. By contrast, for most years after the beginning of the Second Punic War, between one-third and two-thirds (sometimes more) of the members of the augural college are known; the rate for the *pontifices* never drops below one-third.

From the second half of the third century B.C. onward, the pontiffs assumed a central position in the organization of Roman public cult. Their duties included supervision of the full-time priesthoods of the Vestal Virgins and the priests of Jupiter (*flamen Dialis*), Mars, and Quirinus, and probably also of the twelve lesser *flamines*. The growing importance of their traditional knowledge of processional law, their judgment in matters of the sacred or profane status of land, which affected property rights, and their right to regulate the calendar by intercalation formed the basis of their duties and of their increasing prestige.[30] In fact, their prestige paralleled that of the augurs; monthly meetings on the Nones (augurs) and the Ides (pontiffs) completed the parallel. Even the scribes of the pontiffs were accorded, as *pontifices minores*, the prestige of a priesthood. In 196 B.C., the task of performing ritual meals at the temple of Jupiter (*epula*) was excluded from the agenda list of the pontiffs and given to the newly founded priesthood of the "three men for the meals" (*tresviri epulonum*). Enlarged to seven (and even ten members during the last years of Caesar), this was the fourth college to be counted among the "major colleges" by the Imperial Period. Yet such an equality between the priestly colleges – reflected in the careers, ritual roles, and political powerlessness of the priests – was in no way prefigured during the Republic. The partially hierarchical position of the pontiffs contrasted with the sphere of operation of the augurs and with the very special task of the *decemviri sacris faciundis* ("ten [later fifteen] men for the performance of rites"), whose only function was to inspect the Greek hexameters of the Sibylline books at the request of the senate. On the basis of the answers found in these books, the ten men proposed ritual remedies against fearful prodigies. The Roman calendar was characterized by weak astronomy and strong practical usefulness. By the beginning of the third century, it had been developed into an instrument (*fasti*) that effectively controlled the time slots for political and juridical activities outside the senates meetings. It took account of the sacral allotment of time to certain deities (the *feriae*), in the same way that land was allotted as divine property, but the Roman *fasti* never served as a liturgical timetable. The drive to fix Roman traditions in writing led, however, to the employment of a written scheme for the annual pattern of religious festivals and the associated juridical designation of each day. In addition to explanations of the *feriae*, the annual commemorative and festival days of temple foundations were inserted. This initiative took the form of a private calendar painted on a wall, created in connection with the building program of a censor, Marcus Fulvius Nobilior. Nobilior's calendar was

figure 10.3. *Denarius* of C. Servilius, Rome mint, 57 b.c. The reverse probably alludes to the first *flamen Floralis*. (Kestner Museum, Hanover, Inv. 3050: *RRC* 423/1; photo by Christian Tepper, courtesy of Kestner Museum.)

copied and used as a complex historical document. However, a conscious calendar policy and calendar religiosity, using the calendar and calendrical dates as a means of propaganda and reflection, did not arise before the last decade of the Republic, with Caesar's introduction of the "Julian calendar" and the subsequent proliferation under Augustus of decorative calendars carved on marble.[31]

Finally, attention is due to the role of religion in the categories and implementation of property rights with regard to land. Roman law distinguished public and private property. Public property could be allotted to deities and could thus become "sacred" (*sacer*), private property could at most attain some of the character and protection of "religious" property by being used for tombs, and walls could attain the special protection of being *sanctus* ("hedged," Gai. *Inst.* 2.3–9). Thus, property law required the senate's involvement every time a new cult was instituted, insofar as the cult intended to build or dedicate a temple or any sacred spot (e.g., an altar or a grove). Nobody was allowed to give public property to the gods without the permission of the Roman people or the senate. Generals were free to designate parts of their booty for the building of a temple for a god of their own choice, but to find a spot in Rome (and to be assigned the job of formally dedicating the building and its precinct), the general had to obtain the consent of the senate.[32]

No master plan of Rome's sacral topography existed; the proliferation of temples followed the pattern of public building in general (Figure 10.4). In the Late Republic, the focus (and the possibilities) shifted from the Forum, the Palatine, and Capitol Hill to the Campus Martius. Location had no ethnic implications. Aesculapius was placed outside the sacral boundary proper (the *pomerium*), but Mater Magna (the goddess of the orgiastic cults of Cybele) received a temple on the Palatine. As in a few other cases, the sanctuary of Dea Dia, the agricultural goddess of the Arval brethren, was located far outside the city, but these shrines did not connect to form a sacral ring around the city. The processional route of the *Amburbium* ("around the city") is simply not known. What we do know about other "border rituals," such as the *Terminalia* ("festival of the boundary markers") and the *Compitalia* ("festival of the crossroads"), is that they were connected with a specific place on the border, but there is no evidence that any "perfect circles" existed.

Public law, as far as divine property was concerned, was shaped by the dynamics of social differentiation and by its architectural consequences. Private building and garden projects encroached upon sacred groves, many of which had already become obscured by the time Varro was writing.[33] On the other hand, private architecture imitated sacral buildings. In general, the élite were those most often present at religious rites, and public priesthoods were at the same time private banqueting circles offering a context for leading Romans to meet, to discuss, and to sacrifice on private grounds.[34]

The Place of Religion in Roman Society

The Romans claimed – in the persona of Cicero – to be "the most pious of all peoples." The most obvious correlate is the large number of cults – cults that had been imported from everywhere. Yet there was nothing like an organized Roman pantheon, no parallel to the Homeric circle of gods, who unified the religions of Greek cities by means of literary communication. Roman religion served the ruling class and enabled the communication of the élite and the people at games, in supplications, and during crisis rituals. Religious rituals sometimes helped express social divisions as well as differentiate Romans along lines of gender, age, and juridical status. They sometimes served the (never totally) internal procedures of the Roman nobility in the distribution and the use of power. If there are orders, they are partial. If there was a religion

figure 10.4. Temple B at the Largo Argentina has been identified as the temple of "Today's Luck" (*Fortuna Huiusce Diei*) vowed by Q. Lutatius Catulus at the battle of Vercellae in 101 b.c. The image of the goddess was about 8 m high (i.e., about half the diameter of the temple). Rivalry between competing generals led to variations in choice of deity and type of cult. (Photo by J. Rüpke.)

of the city ("*polis*" religion),[35] it was not one organizing superstructure but a sectorial analytical tool.

Given the extraordinary expansion of Roman power in Italy and throughout the Mediterranean, combined with the extension of Roman citizenship in Italy, Roman religion appears as a medium of communication rather than a medium of separation in politics. The ritual of appropriating foreign gods (*evocatio deorum*) established links with political entities that had been defeated or destroyed.[36] In the area of divination, foreign specialists (*haruspices*) who came from the leading families of Etruscan cities were used as advisers. The one official oracular collection consulted by the senate, the Sibylline books, was written in a foreign language (Greek) and was of foreign origin. By acknowledging and expiating prodigies beyond the borders of Rome and Latium, religion established links and claimed control over independent Italian communities.[37] At the same time, Roman citizens were not as free as citizens of Greek *poleis* to take part in "secret cults." Religion did not have to be indigenous, but it had to be practiced in public. No unified Roman religion existed, but there were no independent religions either. To talk about "Roman religion" is to talk about cultural practices that fit our notion of religion. Yet a study of these practices still seems a worthwhile exercise, for understanding Rome better and also Praeneste, Lavinium, Pompeii, and Brundisium.

Notes

1 Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price (1998) used the title *Religions of Rome* for their masterly two-volume history.
2 Rüpke (2010). For a history of the term "religion," see Smith (1998).
3 Jerzy Linderski's (1986) brilliant, though surprisingly nineteenth-century *Staatsrecht*-oriented, synthesis on augury is titled "The augural law."
4 See Cic. *Div.* 1.28; Livy 4.2.5; Festus *Gloss. Lat.* 316.18–20L; Auson. *Opusc.* 16.12.12 Prete. Overview: Belayche et al. (2005).
5 Barton (1994, 32–7).
6 Wiseman (1992).
7 Belayche et al. (2005).
8 See Ziolkowski (1992); see also Ceccarelli (2011) for Latium.
9 Bernstein (2007).
10 Rüpke (1990, 217–34; 2006).
11 See Rüpke (1995b).
12 For the history of the rite, see Février (2009, part II). For the *pax deorum*, see, e.g., Livy 31.8–9.
13 Livy 41.17.3; Cic. *Phil.* 14.22.
14 Sear (2006, 56–61).

15 They are published in a series of their own: *Corpus delle stipi votive in Italia* (Rome: Bretschneider). An overview of the material is given by Comella (1981). For the rite, see Rüpke (2007, 154–65); partly accompanied by inscriptions: Bodel and Kajava (2009).
16 See Forsén (1996) for Greece.
17 See Livy 10.47.6–7; Ov. *Met.* 15.622–744.
18 See Bakker (1994).
19 Pailler (1988).
20 Livy 2.27.5: *collegium mercatorum;* 5.50.4: *collegium Capitolinorum*.
21 See Rüpke (2008); Clesipus Geganius, L. Septumius, and P. Cornelius P. l. Surus are known as *magistri Capitolinorum*, a Pupius A. f. as *magister of the pagus Ianicolensis*, L. Tullius and T. Quinctius Q. f. of other *pagi*, and Caltilius Caltilae l. as *magister* of the *vicus Sulpicius. CIL* VI 32455 attests people leading the care of a sanctuary, perhaps of Jupiter Fagutalis on the Mons Oppius.
22 Wiseman (2000).
23 See Scheer (1993); Erskine (2001).
24 Rüpke (2012).
25 Summarily, Mansfeld (1999); Rüpke (2007, 119–34).
26 Rüpke (2012).
27 See Orlin (2010).
28 Richardson and Santangelo (2011).
29 Cic. *Brut.* 36; *RRC* 423/1. Complete documentation: Rüpke (2008).
30 *Lex Acilia* of 191 B.C.; see Rüpke (2011, 68–86).
31 This hypothetical historical reconstruction and deconstruction of the supposedly "Numaic calendar" is fully argued in Rüpke (2011).
32 Aberson (1994); Orlin (1997).
33 Cancik (1986).
34 Rüpke (2002).
35 For a general criticism of the concept applied to Rome and a historical account of its genesis, see Bendlin (2000).
36 Gustaffson (1999); Ferri (2010).
37 Rosenberger (2005).